

Chapter: 01

HHISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES OF FOOD PACKAGING

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ABSTRACT

The chapter offers a comprehensive journey through the evolution of food packaging, from ancient practices rooted in prehistoric methods to the modern innovations that have reshaped our consumption habits. It explores how early civilizations devised ingenious ways to preserve and transport food, and how the Industrial Revolution ushered in transformative packaging methods.

Keywords: *Food Packaging, Industrial Revolution, food safety, food-preservation.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Food packaging is a ubiquitous presence in our daily lives, a seemingly mundane aspect of the modern food industry that often goes unnoticed. Yet, it is a product of centuries of innovation and adaptation, a reflection of the dynamic relationship between humans and the sustenance they consume. We embark herein a journey through time to uncover the historical perspectives of food packaging, tracing its origins, evolution, and the profound impact it has had on the way we produce, distribute, and consume food [1-3]. In general, food packaging encompasses the art and science of enclosing food products to protect them from external influences such as contamination, spoilage, and physical damage [2]. It also serves as a means of preserving the nutritional value and flavor of food over time, extending its shelf life. However, food packaging goes beyond mere protection and preservation; it plays a pivotal role in marketing, branding, and conveying essential information to consumers. Whether it's a simple leaf wrapping a piece of meat, an ornate ceramic jar containing grains, or a modern vacuum-sealed plastic pouch, food packaging is a multifaceted concept that has evolved alongside human civilization [4-6].

Throughout history, the development of food packaging has been closely intertwined with the progress of human society. The earliest forms of packaging were born out of necessity as our ancestors sought ways to store and transport food, enabling them to migrate, trade, and thrive in various environments. As civilizations advanced, so did food packaging methods and materials. From the majestic amphorae of ancient Rome to the airtight cans of the Industrial Revolution, each era brought forth innovations that not only improved food preservation but also revolutionized economies, trade networks, and culinary practices. The significance of food packaging in history extends beyond mere practicality; it reflects cultural values, technological achievements, and the enduring human quest for convenience and efficiency [4,7-10]. The purpose of this chapter is to unravel the historical tapestry of food packaging, to shed light on the ingenious solutions and pivotal moments that have shaped the way we

interact with food. By tracing the origins and evolution of food packaging, we aim to provide a comprehensive understanding of how this seemingly ordinary aspect of daily life has played an extraordinary role in shaping human culture and society.

2. HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES

The history of food packaging is a captivating journey that spans thousands of years, tracing the evolution of human civilization, technological progress, shifting consumer preferences, and an increasingly sophisticated understanding of food safety and preservation. This narrative of food packaging unfolds in several distinct epochs, each marked by its unique packaging methods and materials [2-8]. The packaging of food products has undergone a remarkable evolution in tandem with the advancement of technology, spanning from the rudimentary practices of the Stone Age to the industrial revolution that reshaped the landscape of food packaging. This transformation is a testament to human ingenuity and our constant pursuit of innovative solutions to preserve, protect, and transport the sustenance upon which our societies thrive. As we explore into the annals of history, we witness the gradual emergence of novel packaging techniques, materials, and methods, each epoch reflecting the unique challenges and opportunities of its time [11-13]. From the early utilization of natural materials to the advent of mechanized production, this journey through time illuminates the profound impact of food packaging on the way we consume, distribute, and perceive our nourishment (Table 1).

Table 1: Time span of industrial development in Food Packaging [3-6]

Description	Timespan
The first manufacturing production of tinplate was introduced in England (1699) and in France (1720). Afterwards, the Dutch navy start to use such packaging to prolong the preservation of food products.	17 th Century
Beginnings of industrialization in Europe; emergence of metal cans for food preservation.	18 th Century
Rapid industrial growth; widespread adoption of canning technology; introduction of glass containers; early branding and labelling practices. Nicolas Appert, in response to inquiries into extending the shelf life of food for the French Army, employed glass bottles along with thermal food treatment. Glass has been replaced by metal cans in this application. However, there is still an ongoing debate about who first	19 th Century

introduced the use of thin plates as food packaging. The use of paper board was launched and corrugated materials were patented. First cereal packaged in a folding box by Quaker Oats. The crown cap for glass bottles was patented by William Painter	
Expansion of the canning industry; introduction of aseptic packaging; rise of paper and cardboard cartons; emergence of plastic materials.	Early 20 th Century
Widespread use of plastics in packaging; development of vacuum packaging; growth in convenience packaging (e.g., TV dinners). Development of the two-piece drawn and metal cans in the US, along with the ring-pull opener and the Tetra Brik Aseptic carton package.	Mid-20 th Century
Introduction of barrier films for extended shelf life; innovations in microwaveable packaging; increasing focus on recyclable materials. The barcode system was introduced in the retail and manufacturing industry. PET plastic blow-mold bottle technology, which is widely used in the beverage industry, was introduced. The application of digital printing on food packages became widely adopted.	Late 20 th Century
Advancements in smart packaging; sustainable packaging trends; heightened emphasis on eco-friendly materials; integration of digital technologies in packaging solutions.	21 st Century

2.1 Ancient Origins (Prehistoric Times - 19th Century)

In the earliest days of human existence, food packaging was a rudimentary affair. Prehistoric humans ingeniously employed natural materials such as leaves, animal hides, and gourds as containers to carry and store food. These early efforts laid the foundation for the essential concept of food protection. As human societies advanced, so did their food packaging techniques. Ancient civilizations, like the Egyptians, embraced the use of papyrus or reeds to wrap food items. Pottery and clay containers emerged as an enduring solution for food preservation. During this period, food preservation techniques, such as pickling and salting, were also devised, further expanding the repertoire of food packaging methods.

Prehistoric Methods

In the early epochs of human history, food packaging was not a field of science or technology but a primal necessity for survival. Prehistoric communities devised

ingenious methods to encase and safeguard their food, harnessing the materials readily available in their natural surroundings. One of the earliest methods involved the use of natural containers, such as leaves, gourds, and shells. These organic materials provided a protective barrier against environmental factors, preserving food from contamination and spoilage. Leaves, skill-fully woven or folded, served as rudimentary wrappers for fruits, vegetables, and meats, effectively shielding them from dirt and insects. Shells, particularly those from molluscs, were transformed into sturdy containers, offering an early example of packaging durability.

In addition to natural containers, prehistoric humans developed preservation techniques as a means of extending the longevity of their food. Drying and smoking emerged as prominent methods, leveraging the power of desiccation and smoke's antimicrobial properties. Through drying, foods like fruits, herbs, and meat were laid out in the sun or hung over a smoky fire, dehydrating them and inhibiting the growth of bacteria and fungi. Smoking, a more intricate method, involved exposing food to the smoke of burning wood or herbs, imparting both flavor and preservative qualities. These early preservation techniques not only prolonged the edibility of food but also allowed communities to stockpile sustenance for lean times, facilitating nomadic lifestyles and fostering cultural evolution.

Earliest Evidence of Food Packaging

The archaeological record provides glimpses into the earliest evidence of food packaging, offering valuable insights into the practices of ancient civilizations. Pottery, among the most enduring materials used for food storage and transport, has left behind a wealth of evidence. Ancient pottery fragments reveal the artistry and utility of containers used by early humans to hold grains, liquids, and other foodstuffs. These ceramic vessels, often adorned with intricate designs and symbols, were capable of sealing food, protecting it from contaminants, and maintaining freshness. Moreover, the development of woven baskets stands as a testament to the ingenuity of early societies. These baskets, skilled crafted from plant materials like reeds and vines, offered a portable and reliable means of transporting harvested foodstuffs. Their flexibility and strength made them indispensable in agricultural communities for gathering and carrying crops. The ancient origins of food packaging were rooted in the resourcefulness of prehistoric humans. Through the use of natural containers, preservation techniques like drying and smoking, and the creation of durable vessels such as pottery and woven baskets, these early practices laid the foundation for the sophisticated packaging methods we employ today. The earliest evidence of food packaging provides a glimpse into the essential role it played in the survival and progress of ancient civilizations.

2.2 Medieval and Renaissance Period (5th - 16th Century)

The Middle Ages witnessed notable progress in food packaging. Wooden barrels, ceramic jars, and glass bottles became integral to the storage and transport of various foodstuffs. To preserve the contents of containers, wax seals were introduced, adding a layer of protection. During the Renaissance, innovations like canning began to take shape. Nicolas Appert, a French confectioner, is often credited with the early developments of canning, while Louis Pasteur's work on pasteurization in the 19th century greatly enhanced food preservation through packaging.

2.3 Industrial Revolution (18th - 19th Century)

The advent of the Industrial Revolution ushered in transformative changes in food packaging. The invention of tinplate and the introduction of the can opener in the early 19th century revolutionized food preservation. This led to the widespread use of canned goods, making it possible to store and transport food over long distances without spoilage. Additionally, glass containers, particularly bottles, gained prominence for packaging beverages and preserved foods. Concurrently, paper and cardboard became staple materials for packaging dry goods and perishables alike.

2.4 Early 20th Century

The early 20th century brought further innovations in food packaging. Glass jars with vacuum seals improved food preservation, extending the shelf life of products. The century also witnessed the rise of plastics. Materials such as polyethylene, polypropylene, and PET emerged, enabling the creation of a diverse array of packaging options that offered versatility, durability, and convenience.

2.5 Mid to Late 20th Century

Convenience packaging emerged as a defining trend in the mid to late 20th century. Innovations like aluminum foil, plastic wrap, and microwave-safe containers revolutionized how food was stored, reheated, and consumed. The era also witnessed the surge of single-serving and pre-packaged foods, a response to the changing dynamics of modern life and dining habits.

2.6 21st Century

In the 21st century, the trajectory of food packaging has been shaped by sustainability concerns. Consumers and businesses alike have become increasingly conscious of the environmental impact of packaging materials. This has prompted the development of biodegradable and compostable packaging options, as well as a concerted effort to reduce the reliance on single-use plastics.

3. EMERGING TRENDS

Paper stands as one of the earliest adaptable packaging materials, with historical roots dating back to China in the 1st and 2nd centuries B.C. In this era, Mulberry tree barks were ingeniously employed for wrapping food items. Over the subsequent 1500 years, the art of papermaking underwent continuous refinement and development, eventually making its way to the Middle East. With continued advancements in technology and products, the packaging industry will continue to evolve.

The continued evolution and emerging trends [6,12,13] are referred to:

- more environmentally friendly packaging options
- continued push for increased automation
- increased design and branding capabilities
- focus on e-commerce packaging

As we navigate the 21st century, food packaging continues to evolve. Innovations like active packaging, which includes the use of oxygen absorbers and moisture scavengers to extend shelf life, have gained prominence. Smart packaging, featuring integrated sensors and indicators to monitor freshness and safety, is on the rise. Digital printing techniques allow for customized and informative packaging, while 3D printing is being explored for personalized food packaging solutions. Further, the history of food packaging is a testament to human ingenuity, adaptability, and the relentless pursuit of ensuring food safety, convenience, and accessibility. From its humble origins in natural materials to the cutting-edge technologies of today, food packaging has come a long way and continues to evolve in response to the dynamic demands of the modern world.

4. CONCLUSION

The historical journey through the evolution of food packaging reveals a compelling narrative of human ingenuity and adaptability. From prehistoric methods like natural containers and preservation techniques to the early use of paper in China, this chapter illustrates how food packaging has played a pivotal role in shaping civilizations, preserving sustenance, and facilitating cultural and technological advancements. These historical perspectives underscore the enduring significance of packaging in our relationship with food and serve as a crucial backdrop for understanding the contemporary challenges and innovations in this field.

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