

Chapter: 04

BRIEF OVERVIEW OF THE IMPORTANCE OF INTELLIGENT FOOD PACKAGING

AHMAD FARAZ*

*Correspondence-Assistant Professor, Glocal School of Science and Technology,
Glocal University, Saharanpur, U.P. – 247121, India

FIRDOS

Student, Glocal University, Saharanpur, U.P. – 247121, India

SHIKHA BHARTI

Student, Glocal University, Saharanpur, U.P. – 247121, India

SAKSHI

Student, Glocal University, Saharanpur, U.P. – 247121, India

MOHD BABU KHAN

Glocal School of Science and Technology,
Glocal University, Saharanpur, U.P. – 247121, India

AYUSHI

Student, Glocal University, Saharanpur, U.P. – 247121, India

Email: ahmadfaraz53@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

This chapter delves into the critical role that intelligent food packaging plays in the modern food industry. As consumers become increasingly conscious of the quality, safety, and sustainability of their food choices, the importance of intelligent food packaging, driven by cutting-edge chemistry, has never been more pronounced. This chapter explores the multifaceted significance of intelligent food packaging, emphasizing its ability to enhance food preservation, safety, convenience, and consumer engagement.

Keywords: *Food packaging, food preservation, food industry.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Food packaging plays a pivotal role in determining the overall quality of food products, especially during their journey through transportation, storage, and eventual consumption. It serves several critical functions, often referred to as the "four thumb rule," which encompass protecting the contents, conveying essential product information, facilitating convenient transport and access, and ensuring containment [1-4].

In recent years, the field of food packaging has undergone a transformative evolution, embracing two major concepts: active packaging and intelligent packaging [5]. Active packaging is designed to extend the shelf life of food products and maintain their quality over time, while intelligent packaging is geared towards monitoring the condition of both the food and its surroundings through the use of indicators. This development has brought about innovative solutions that enhance food safety and consumer experience. In this chapter, we will explore the surface chemistry of intelligent packaging components designed to monitor and indicate food quality [6]. We will delve into how these materials interact with the food, ensuring that they effectively perform their dual roles of providing convenience and communicating critical information to consumers. This multifaceted approach to food packaging represents a significant step forward in ensuring the safety and quality of food products in an ever-evolving marketplace [7].

2. TECHNOLOGICAL COMPONENTS

The intelligent packaging system incorporates various technological components schematically presented in Fig. 1.1.

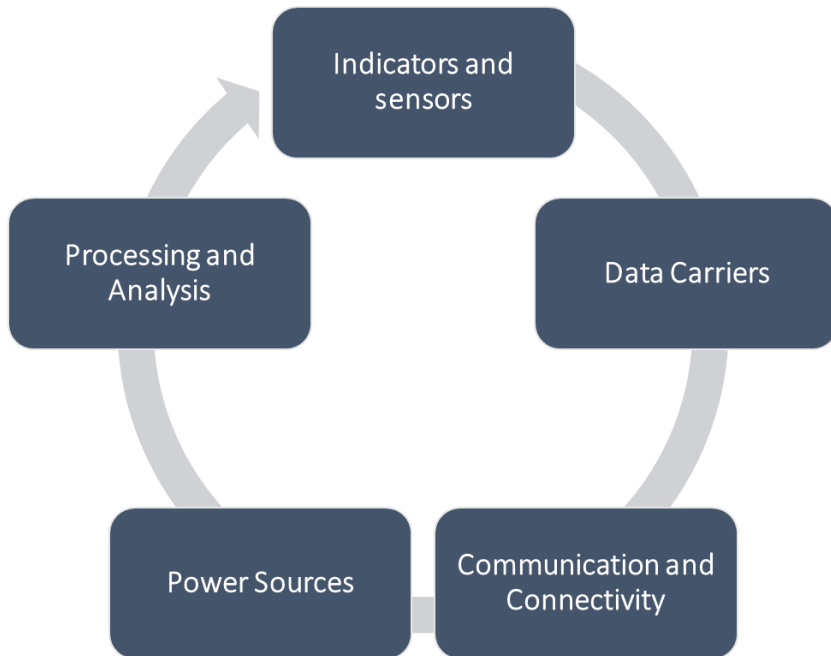


Fig. 1.1: Schematic presentation of intelligent food packaging system through various technological components.

2.1 Indicators and sensors

- **Time-Temperature Indicators (TTIs):** These indicators change color or provide visual cues to indicate whether a specific temperature or time threshold has been exceeded. They are crucial for monitoring temperature-sensitive products like perishable foods [8].
- **Gas Sensors:** Gas-sensitive indicators can detect changes in gas composition inside the packaging. They are essential for assessing the freshness of products and identifying potential spoilage.
- **Moisture / Humidity Sensors:** These indicators measure the moisture levels within the packaging to assess whether the product's moisture content is within the desired range.
- **Microbial Sensors:** Sensors designed to detect microbial activity can provide early warnings of potential food spoilage or contamination, enhancing food safety.

- **Pressure Sensors:** Pressure sensors can monitor changes in pressure within packaging, providing insights into factors like packaging integrity or the presence of gas leaks.

2.2 Data Carriers

- **QR Codes and Barcodes:** These are commonly used to track products along the supply chain. Consumers can also scan these codes to access detailed information about the product, including its origin and expiration date.
- **Radio-Frequency Identification (RFID):** RFID tags enable real-time tracking of products throughout the supply chain. They provide data on location, handling, and storage conditions, helping to ensure product quality and safety.
- **Near Field Communication (NFC):** NFC technology allows for communication between packaging and smartphones. Consumers can tap their smartphones on the packaging to access information about the product's freshness and origin.

2.3 Communication and Connectivity

- **Wireless Connectivity:** Many intelligent packaging systems are equipped with Wi-Fi, Bluetooth, or other wireless communication technologies to transmit data to smartphones, tablets, or dedicated monitoring systems.
- **Mobile Apps:** Dedicated mobile applications enable consumers to interact with the packaging, access product information, and receive real-time updates on product quality.
- **Displays:** Some intelligent packaging includes built-in displays that show real-time information, such as temperature or freshness indicators, to consumers.

2.4 Power Sources

- **Batteries:** Some intelligent packaging components require power sources, typically small batteries or thin-film batteries, to operate sensors, indicators, and communication devices.

2.5 Processing and Analysis

- **Microprocessors and Microcontrollers:** These components are responsible for processing data collected by sensors and indicators, making decisions based on predefined algorithms, and transmitting relevant information.

Intelligent food packaging, also known as Smart Food Packaging, represents a significant technological advancement in the realm of packaging materials. These innovative materials not only serve as protective barriers for food products but also actively monitor and communicate crucial information about the food and its surrounding environment [9]. The primary aim of intelligent food packaging is to provide valuable insights into food quality and safety to all stakeholders along the food supply chain. One of the remarkable capabilities of intelligent food packaging is its ability to offer real-time assessments of the freshness and shelf life of the packaged food items. This is made possible through the utilization of cutting-edge features, such as thermochromic inks that can visually indicate the temperature of the food product. Furthermore, intelligent food packaging can provide a comprehensive view of the temperature history through the integration of time-temperature indicators.

In response to the growing interest and demand for intelligent food packaging solutions within the food sector, this chapter aims to provide a comprehensive overview of the integrated intelligent devices within food packages. It delves into the intricate workings of these systems, shedding light on their pivotal role in enhancing food safety, ensuring quality assurance, and optimizing supply chain management [10]. As the food industry increasingly embraces intelligent advancements, understanding the core components and functionalities of intelligent food packaging becomes imperative for stakeholders seeking to remain at the forefront of this dynamic and evolving landscape. However, it is essential to recognize that the development of state-of-the-art intelligent food packaging systems is not without challenges. Achieving a high degree of sophistication that ensures reliability, efficiency, and cost-effectiveness simultaneously poses significant hurdles. Overcoming these obstacles necessitates continuous research and innovation in the field of intelligent food packaging.

3. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, intelligent food packaging, also known as Smart Food Packaging, presents a transformative leap in packaging technology by actively monitoring and communicating crucial information about food products and their environment. With features such as real-time freshness assessments through thermochromic inks and time-temperature indicators, it promises enhanced food safety and quality assurance throughout the supply chain. However, addressing the complexities of reliability, efficiency, and cost-effectiveness in these systems remains a challenge. As the demand for intelligent food packaging solutions grows, understanding these integrated devices becomes essential for industry stakeholders seeking to navigate the evolving landscape and uphold the highest standards of food safety and quality while optimizing supply

chain management. Intelligent food packaging holds the promise of a technologically advanced and consumer-centric future for the food industry.

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