

Single-Serve Instant Beverages and Traveler Health: Sachet-Filling Optimization for Safety and Quality

Sayyed Mohammadreza Sedehi^{*1}, Abdolah Alinejad², Narges Dehghanniri³, Motahareh Sadat Dehghan Niri⁴, Niloofar Darroudi⁴

¹ School of Mechanical Engineering, College of Engineering, University of Tehran, Tehran, Iran.

² San Faravar Sepehr Manufacturing Group (Bargaz), Gonabad, Iran.

³ Master of Health, Safety and Environmental Management (HSE), Environmental Health Expert, Yazd City Health Center, Health Assistant, Shahid Sadoughi University of Medical Sciences, Yazd.

⁴ Faculty of Engineering, University of Gonabad, Gonabad.

***Corresponding Author:** Sayyed Mohammadreza Sedehi, School of Mechanical Engineering, College of Engineering, University of Tehran, Tehran, Iran. Email: mrsedehi@ut.ac.ir, Phone: +989180881303.

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Abstract

This study presents a novel approach to enhancing traveler health and food safety by optimizing sachet-filling machine parameters for single-serve instant beverage packaging. Three main variables were investigated under controlled experiments: metallized film thickness (55, 75, and 95 μm), sealing temperature (125, 135, and 145 $^{\circ}\text{C}$), and filling speed (slow, medium, and fast). Packaging performance was evaluated through three mechanical indicators package distortion, adhesion to the cutter, and seal integrity which are directly linked to hygienic and safety outcomes. Excessive distortion can compromise package stability and facilitate contamination, poor adhesion may lead to surface irregularities that harbor impurities, and weak seals increase the risk of microbial ingress and moisture penetration. Results indicated that increasing film thickness from 55 to 95 μm reduced cutter adhesion but caused higher distortion. Higher sealing temperatures (145 $^{\circ}\text{C}$) improved adhesion, but combined with higher filling speeds, seal integrity deteriorated. Optimal conditions were identified at 75 μm film thickness, 135 $^{\circ}\text{C}$ sealing temperature, and medium filling speed. These settings minimized distortion and adhesion while ensuring strong sealing performance. The findings highlight how mechanical packaging characteristics act as proxies for safety assurance, offering a practical basis for industrial processes that reduce contamination risks and support consistent, hygienic single-serve packaging for travelers

Keywords: Packaging, Metallized film, Food materials, Instant beverage

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Introduction

In recent years, the consumption of instant beverages, particularly coffee-derived and blended products, has grown into one of the most dynamic sectors of the food and beverage industry. This growth is driven by their fast preparation, diverse flavors, and convenient portability ¹⁻⁵. Sachet packaging has emerged as a cost-effective and hygienic method for delivering such products. It plays a crucial role in maintaining product quality, shelf life, and consumer safety ⁶⁻⁹. In addition to protecting against microbial contamination and moisture, this type of packaging prevents direct exposure of the product to environmental degradative agents. As a result, it preserves

sensory quality and nutritional value until consumption ¹⁰. Consequently, the choice of packaging materials and the optimization of the associated manufacturing process not only affect product quality but also influence production efficiency, final cost, and consumer satisfaction ¹¹. These factors highlight the importance of understanding both material properties and process parameters in achieving reliable packaging performance. Metallized films, typically composed of polymer and metal layers, have become one of the most widely used materials in packaging powdered and instant beverage products. Their popularity stems from superior barrier properties against

moisture, oxygen, and light [12,13](#). The thickness of these films is a critical parameter that governs mechanical and thermal performance. Variations in thickness directly impact package weight, flexibility, and barrier properties [14](#). Previous studies have shown that optimal thickness must balance sealing strength, processability, and material cost. Excessive thickness can increase energy demand and material costs during sealing, while insufficient thickness raises the risk of tearing or seal failure [15,16](#).

The heat-sealing process in sachet packaging is one of the most critical steps in production lines. It is also energy-intensive [17,18](#). The energy and heat required for a strong seal depend on the thermodynamic properties and thickness of the film [19](#). Industrial investigations indicate that increased film thickness generally requires higher temperatures and longer dwell times to ensure sufficient heat transfer to the inner layers. This may lower machine productivity and increase energy costs [20,21](#). Conversely, thinner films reduce energy consumption due to lower heat requirements. However, they may compromise mechanical integrity of the seal, leading to leakage or seal failures during storage and distribution [22](#). From an economic perspective, film thickness affects raw material costs and production efficiency. While thinner films reduce material usage and costs, they may increase the risk of product returns due to packaging failures [23](#). Therefore, many recent studies have focused on identifying the optimal thickness that balances cost, quality, and productivity [24-26](#). Despite extensive research, previous studies primarily focused on one or two parameters, such as seal integrity or energy consumption. Few works have addressed the combined effects of multiple machine parameters on comprehensive performance indicators. To fill this research gap, the present study introduces a novel approach by optimizing sachet-filling parameters to ensure traveler health and maintain the safety and quality of instant beverage products. Controlled experiments and multivariate correlation analysis were employed to evaluate the effect of film thickness on five key performance indicators: package weight, optimal sealing temperature, machine energy consumption, seal quality and strength, and ease of use. This integrated approach enables the identification of optimal conditions that not only ensure product safety and packaging quality but also provide practical guidance for industrial applications. The outcomes of this study can contribute to improved quality, reduced costs, enhanced energy efficiency, and the design of user-centered machinery.

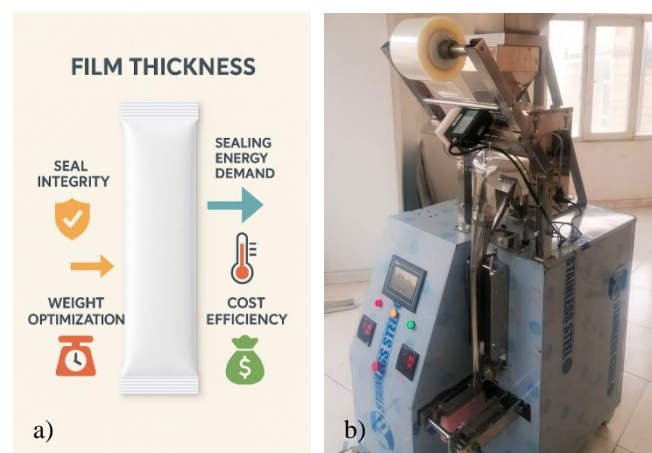


Figure 1. (a) Schematic illustrations of the sachet-filling process and (b) the equipment used .

Materials and Methods

For this study, metallized rolls of 55 μm (cream-colored) and 95 μm (purple-colored) thickness were utilized. Due to their multilayer metal–polymer structure with superior barrier properties, these films were considered suitable options for enhancing product shelf life and reducing the penetration of moisture and oxygen [27-30](#). The instant coffee-mix powder was supplied by Bargaz Company, located in Gonabad, and was formulated with standardized proportions of instant coffee, sugar, and non-dairy creamer. Sachet samples were produced using a vertical form-fill-seal packaging machine manufactured in Iran. This machine is capable of precisely controlling key parameters, including metallized roll thickness, sealing temperature, filling speed, and sealing jaw pressure, thus allowing for controlled and repeatable experimental conditions. All tests were conducted in the industrial lines of Sun Faravar Sepehr Company using advanced quality control equipment to evaluate seal integrity and package consistency.

The optimization pathway consisted of several main stages. First, a set of designed experiments was implemented using the Taguchi method for three primary factors film thickness, sealing temperature, and filling speed in order to assess the main effects and interactions on performance indicators such as distortion, cutter adhesion, and seal quality. Data collected included sachet weight, sealing temperature, packaging quality, cycle time, machine energy consumption, and raw material costs. These datasets were subsequently analyzed using statistical methods, including Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) and main-effect as well as three-dimensional surface plots, to identify critical factors and optimal operating ranges for each response. Next, considering the multi-response nature of the study, a Desirability Function approach was employed to integrate the performance

indices and determine optimal conditions. For responses where “smaller is better” (distortion and cutter adhesion), the desirability function was defined such that lower values received higher scores. Conversely, for responses where “larger is better” (seal quality), higher values corresponded to greater desirability. The overall desirability was computed using the geometric mean of individual responses, and optimization involved selecting the combination of film thickness, sealing temperature, and filling speed that maximized the overall desirability index. This methodology enabled the identification of operational conditions that simultaneously minimized cost, reduced distortion, and improved seal quality. The outcomes were validated against real production line data. Finally, the proposed optimization pathway from

experimental design and data acquisition to statistical analysis and desirability function computation provides an evidence-based decision-making framework for the industrial production of instant beverage sachets. Moreover, it offers a comprehensive scientific and practical guideline for optimizing similar packaging processes within the broader food and beverage industry. The response variables (Distortion, Cutter Adhesion, and Seal Quality) were evaluated on a five-point ordinal scale, where 1 represents the lowest level (minimal distortion, weak adhesion, or poor sealing) and 5 represents the highest level (severe distortion, strong adhesion, or excellent sealing). This scoring system allowed the qualitative observations to be quantified for statistical analysis (Table 1).

Table 1. Experimental design

Sample	Thickness (µm)	Temperature (°C)	Filling Speed	Distortion	Cutter Adhesion	Seal Quality
1	55	125	Slow	2	5	4
2	55	135	Medium	3	4	4
3	55	145	Fast	1	3	2
4	75	125	Medium	3	4	4
5	75	135	Fast	2	3	3
6	75	145	Slow	4	3	3
7	95	125	Fast	4	2	3
8	95	135	Slow	5	2	2
9	95	145	Medium	4	2	2

Effect of Metallized Roll Thickness

The analysis of data and the plots presented in Fig. 2 indicate that metallized film thickness plays a pivotal role in controlling package distortion. As shown in panel (a), reducing thickness from 95 to 55 µm led to a noticeable increase in distortion, since thinner films possess lower resistance to mechanical stresses during sealing and filling. However, panels (b) and (c) reveal that reduced thickness improved cutter adhesion and sealing quality. This effect arises from more uniform heat penetration and sealing pressure, which enhance bonding between layers. These results underscore the importance of selecting an optimal thickness in packaging design to simultaneously reduce waste and improve seal integrity.

Experimental data analysis confirmed that metallized roll thickness has a significant influence on package distortion. Decreasing thickness from 95 to 55 µm intensified the mechanical stresses within the film layers, resulting in greater deformation in the samples. This outcome highlights the geometric sensitivity of

packaging to the mechanical resistance of the film ³¹. On the other hand, thinner films had a remarkable positive effect on cutter adhesion and sealing quality. As illustrated in the three-dimensional surface plot (Fig. 2-b), thinner films facilitated more uniform heat and pressure distribution, thereby improving interlayer bonding. This effect complements the distortion results, demonstrating that reduced thickness provides a qualitative advantage, although it may introduce geometric challenges in package shape ³². The combined analysis suggests that the optimal film thickness should balance the trade-off between minimizing distortion and enhancing seal quality. The heatmap data (Fig. 2-c) further confirm this balance by identifying critical regions where sealing performance and package geometry achieve optimal levels. From an industrial perspective, these findings emphasize the necessity of designing metallized films with appropriate thickness to achieve simultaneous improvements in package quality and geometric stability ³³.

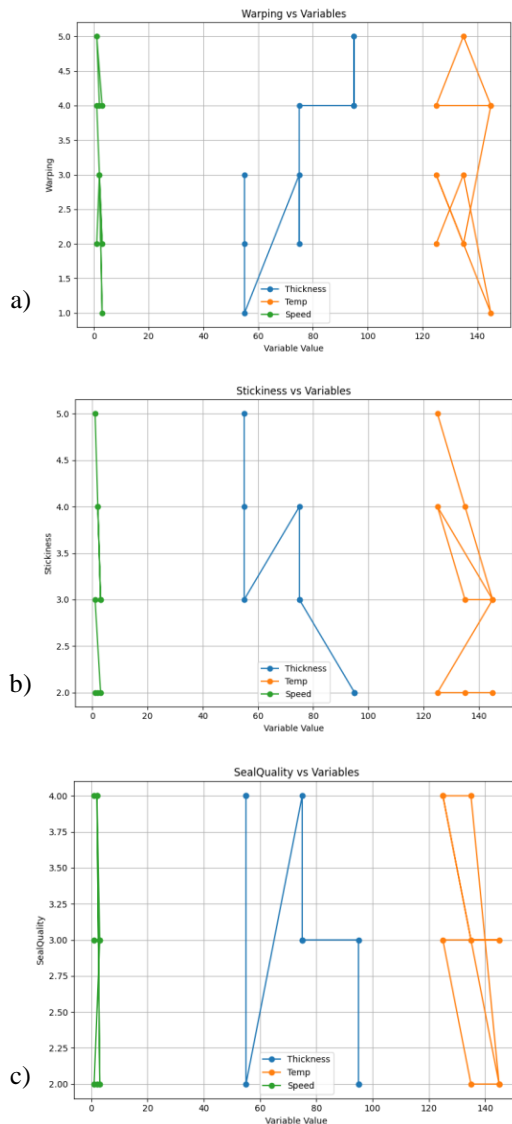


Figure 2. Linear interaction analysis results

Filling speed exhibits a nonlinear influence on the three evaluated responses. The line and scatter plots in Fig. 3, where speed effects are represented by different colors, reveal that increasing speed from slow to medium enhances sealing quality (Fig. 3-c) and reduces cutter adhesion (Fig. 3-b). This occurs because a more uniform material flow inside the sachet enables balanced pressure distribution at the sealing zone. However, at higher speeds, a significant increase in distortion (Fig. 3-a) and deterioration in seal quality were observed, which can be attributed to the imbalance between the internal material pressure and the mechanical resistance of the film. These findings highlight the practical importance of optimizing filling speed in packaging industries to achieve high seal quality while minimizing distortion. This effect is accompanied by reduced local stresses and the prevention of unwanted wrinkling ³⁴.

As the results indicate, when the filling speed is increased excessively, distortion and seal degradation rise dramatically. This phenomenon reflects the dynamic

limitations of the packaging machine and the reduced heat-contact time on the film at higher operating speeds. A simultaneous analysis of distortion and seal quality suggests that the optimal speed range lies at medium levels. Overall, both experimental data and simulations demonstrate that filling speed must be adjusted to balance material pressure and heat transfer at the sealing interface. These insights hold direct applications for industrial production lines, where determining the appropriate speed not only improves product quality but also reduces the risk of defects and packaging failures ³⁵⁻³⁸.

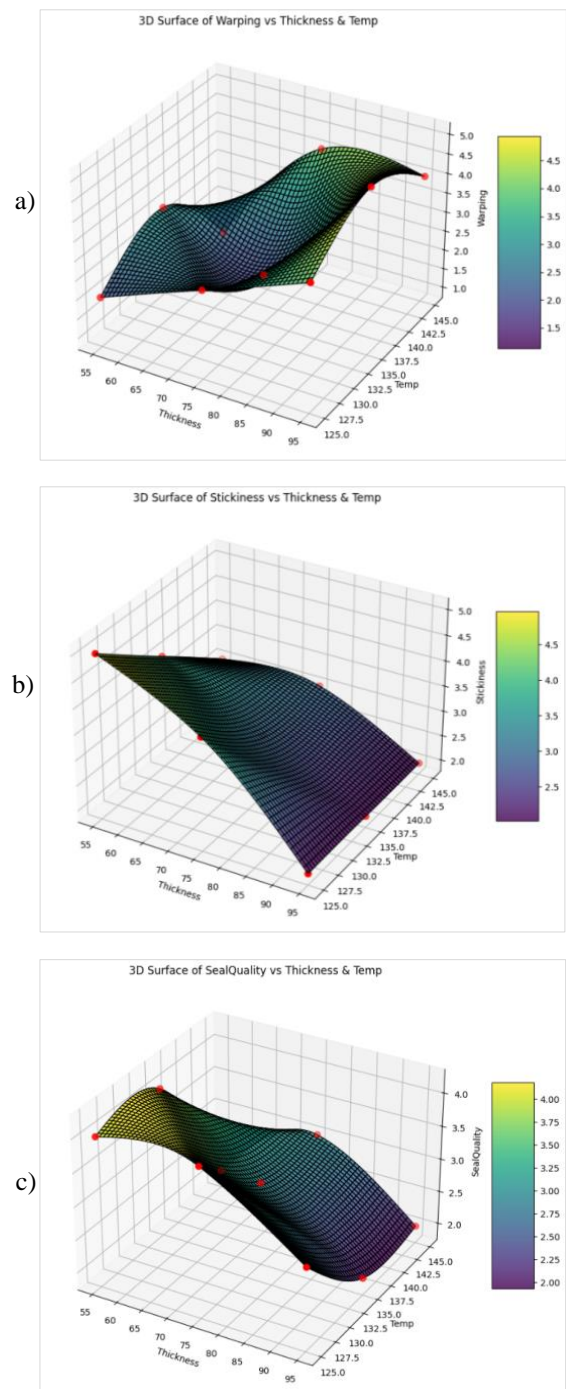


Figure 3. 3D interaction analysis results

Sealing temperature exerts a significant influence on seal quality and cutter adhesion, while its effect on package distortion is relatively limited. The three-dimensional surface plots in Fig.3 and the heatmaps in Fig.4 clearly illustrate the interaction of sealing temperature with film thickness and filling speed. An increase in temperature leads to higher cutter adhesion and reduced seal quality, as excessive heat may decrease the film's viscosity and hinder the formation of adequate mechanical bonding between layers ³⁹. These plots also highlight the critical regions where sealing performance deteriorates. From an industrial standpoint, precise control of sealing temperature is crucial for maintaining final product quality and minimizing production waste. The combined analysis of experimental data and 3D plots indicates that the optimal sealing temperature lies within a range that balances adhesion and seal quality. Scatter plot results further demonstrate that lower sealing temperatures, when combined with appropriate film thickness and filling speed, can yield minimal distortion and maximum seal quality. These findings emphasize the importance of accurate sealing temperature control in industrial production. Based on this dataset, it is possible to define an operational temperature window that ensures geometric stability of the package, optimizes seal quality and cutter adhesion, and minimizes product waste ^{40,41}.

The three-dimensional surface

plots and heatmaps (Fig.3 and 4) reveal the complex interactions among the factors. An appropriate combination of medium film thickness, medium filling speed, and lower sealing temperature resulted in minimal distortion and maximum seal quality. These findings confirm that multi-response optimization using the desirability function can provide a practical strategy for designing packaging processes with minimal waste and superior quality. Therefore, selecting optimal operational conditions not only enhances production line efficiency but also ensures that the final product meets industrial quality standards. The combination of medium thickness, medium speed, and lower temperature consistently achieved the lowest distortion and the highest sealing quality. Analysis through the multi-response desirability function demonstrated that optimal conditions can simultaneously improve product quality and reduce production costs ⁴²⁻⁴⁴. Simulation results and experimental data were integrated to establish a practical decision-making framework for industrial production lines. Heatmap and surface plots identified critical and optimal regions, enabling prediction of product behavior under different operational scenarios. Ultimately, the proposed optimization pathway including experimental design, data

collection, statistical analysis, three-dimensional simulation, and desirability function calculation provides a comprehensive framework for the industrial production of instant beverage sachets. After identifying the best and worst process conditions, visualizations corresponding to these states are presented to clearly illustrate performance variations across different parameter levels.

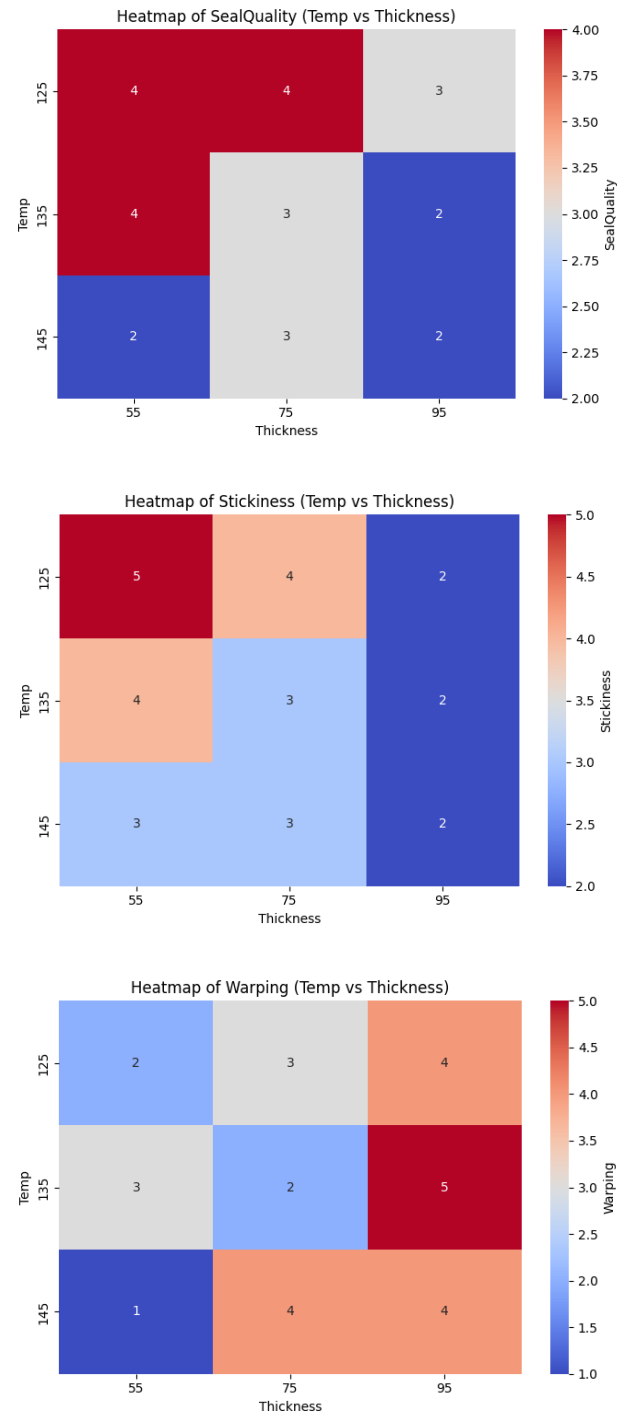


Figure 4. Heatmap interaction analysis results

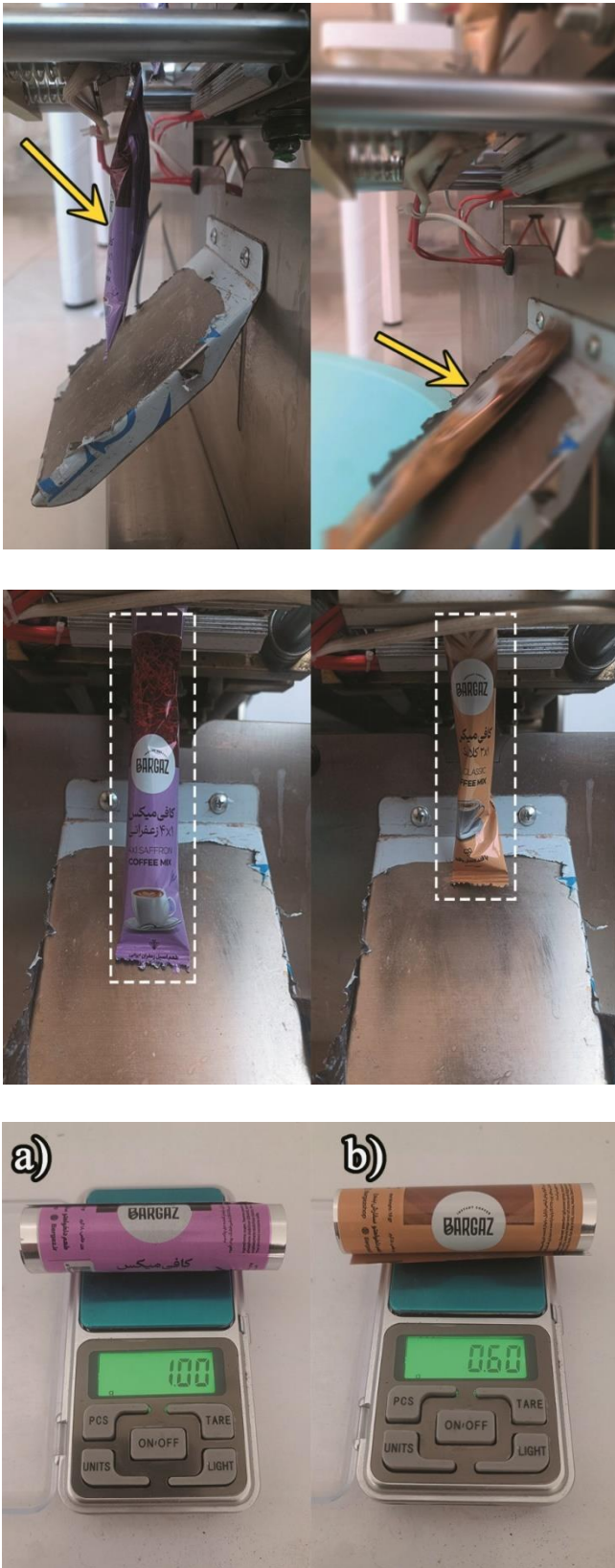


Figure 6. Overweight for thicknesses: a) 95 μm and b) 55 μm

Metallized film thickness not only affects the technical and economic aspects of the production process but also carries significant environmental implications. Increasing film thickness directly results in higher consumption of raw materials, greater energy demand

during the sealing process, and ultimately a larger carbon footprint. Additionally, the increased weight of thicker packaging leads to higher fuel consumption during transportation and distribution, thereby exacerbating greenhouse gas emissions. Conversely, the use of thinner films (e.g., 55 μm) offers considerable economic and environmental advantages by reducing the consumption of natural resources and energy, although challenges such as increased distortion or a relative decline in seal quality may also arise. Therefore, selecting the optimal thickness must adopt a holistic approach that balances packaging quality and durability with minimized energy and material consumption. The development of advanced technologies that allow for reduced film thickness without compromising performance could steer the packaging industry toward sustainability and lower environmental impact ⁴⁵⁻⁴⁹. Fig. 7 illustrates a comparison of the performance of two metallized films with thicknesses of 55 and 95 μm across seven key indicators: weight, energy consumption, distortion, adhesion, operational speed, cost, and environmental compatibility.

The statistical analysis demonstrates that film thickness, sealing temperature, and filling speed all significantly affect the performance indicators of sachet packaging. As shown in the heatmap (Figure 3), film thickness has the strongest impact on distortion, with thinner films experiencing higher mechanical stress and consequently more deformation. Cutter adhesion is primarily influenced by sealing temperature, where higher temperatures improve layer bonding but can reduce seal quality when combined with higher filling speeds. Seal quality is most sensitive to filling speed, with medium speed offering the optimal balance between adhesion and integrity. The confidence intervals of the model coefficients indicate that the estimates are stable with 95% confidence, confirming that observed variations are due to actual factor effects rather than random sampling. This statistical evidence reinforces the qualitative trends observed in the line and surface plots and provides a robust foundation for process design decisions. By integrating ANOVA, heatmaps, and confidence intervals, engineers can identify critical factor levels and focus multi-response optimization on minimizing distortion, reducing cutter adhesion, and maximizing seal quality. This combined approach offers both a scientific and practical framework for process adjustments and ensures consistent, high-quality packaging performance in industrial production.

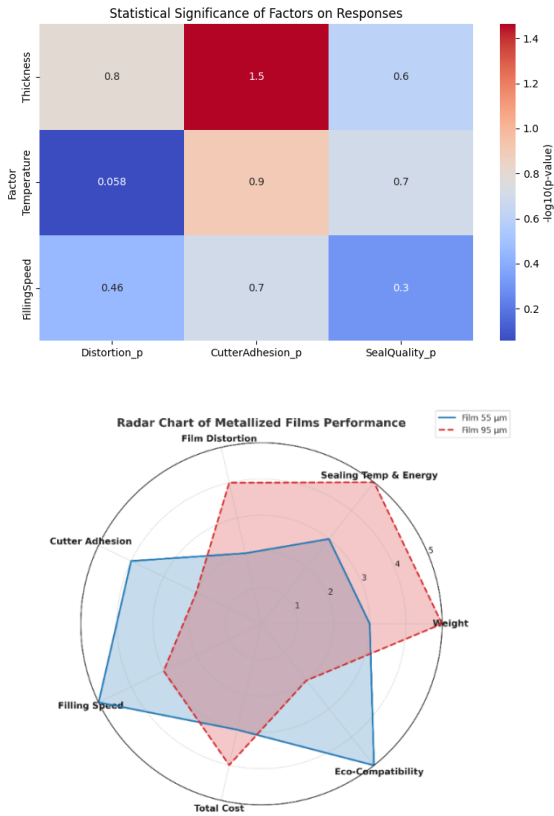


Figure 7. Chart of aggregated results for 95 and 55 μm thicknesses

Results

The findings of this study indicate that the three main process variables metallized film thickness, sealing temperature, and filling speed play a decisive role in both packaging quality and the safety of single-serve instant beverage sachets. Data analysis revealed that increasing the film thickness from 55 to 95 μm, while reducing adhesion to the cutter, led to higher package distortion and, under certain conditions, a decline in seal integrity. Higher sealing temperatures (145 °C) decreased adhesion; however, when combined with high filling speeds, seal quality deteriorated. In contrast, a medium sealing temperature (135 °C) combined with 55 μm film thickness and medium filling speed produced a balanced condition that maintained both seal quality and safe, reliable single-serve packaging.

The four key outcomes of this research are as follows:

- Film Thickness:** Increasing thickness from 55 to 95 μm reduced cutter adhesion but increased package distortion and negatively affected overall packaging reliability.
- Sealing Temperature:** Higher temperatures (145 °C) reduced adhesion, yet at high filling speeds, seal integrity and product safety decreased.
- Filling Speed:** Medium filling speed combined with medium temperature provided optimal sealing

quality and product safety, whereas high speed led to reduced quality and higher risk of compromised packaging.

- Optimal Conditions:** The combination of 55 μm thickness, 135 °C sealing temperature, and medium filling speed was identified as optimal, controlling distortion, reducing adhesion, ensuring safe and reliable single-serve packaging, and maintaining high sealing quality.

Highlights

What Is Already Known?

Sachet-filling machine parameters (metallized film thickness, sealing temperature, and filling speed) play a crucial role in packaging quality and product safety, yet their combined effects have rarely been evaluated simultaneously. Previous studies have mainly focused on single variables, without providing a comprehensive optimization approach for ensuring traveler health and product safety.

What Does This Study Add?

This study identifies the optimal conditions (55 μm film thickness, 135 °C sealing temperature, and medium filling speed) that minimize package distortion and cutter adhesion while ensuring high-quality sealing and safe single-serve beverage packaging. Findings demonstrate that precise adjustment of combined parameters significantly enhances packaging reliability, reduces health risks, and safeguards traveler safety in instant beverage consumption. The study provides a reliable foundation for designing future industrial processes in single-serve packaging with a focus on safety, quality preservation, and consumer protection.

Authors' Contributions

All authors equally contributed to this study.

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Conflicts of Interest Disclosures

The authors declared no conflict of interest.

Consent For Publication

All authors expressed explicit consent for the publication of this manuscript.

Ethics approval

Written informed consent was obtained from the patient for the publication of the article and any associated images.

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The extent of AI use

None.

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