A study of Science of Brand Growth applied to Baby care marketing strategies via Gen Z mothers needs

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Abstract

For all generations, the baby arrival represents a new cycle of consumption, which includes a wide range of baby care products, such as diapers, shampoos and liquid soaps. In this context, the objective of this study is to understand the baby care consumption behavior of generation Z mothers, to develop marketing strategies suited to their needs. The research, with a qualitative approach, includes semi-structured interviews and baby care advertisements. Content analysis was used to process data, using the pillars of Science of Brand Growth as categories (Mental, Physical and Prototypicality). The main results indicate that Gen Z Mothers do not gave a strong connection with any brand, they are pragmatic, want clear and objective information about the product, and they are active in the digital channels, tending to be influenced specially by health professionals, followed by family, friends and famous digital influencers . Finally, consumption practice involves self-esteem and well-being, through qualities, innovations, experiences, personalities, characteristics and technology aspects, with price no longer being the main purchasing factor.

Keywords: Consumer Behavior; Gen Z Mothers; Baby Care

Track: Consumer Behavior

1. Introduction

Although new babies who have recently arrived in the world cannot speak, express their opinion and have decision making power over their parents' purchases, they are already part of the consumer universe, especially in the infant hygiene segment, which has become to be more "premium" (Medeiros, 2014). According to information from Euromonitor (2017), declining birth rates in developing countries and awareness about child hygiene are the main factors that may be driving the market consumption growth, because with the reduction in the number of children, parents showed an increase in their financial status and were able to purchase more sophisticated products. Keeping this market consumption growth and knowing that the parents have more purchase power than ever before in mind, huge companies in the children's hygiene segment have been working for years to win new consumers and retain those already present. One of the marketing strategies of these companies is to prioritize affective approaches, emphasizing moments of leisure and intimacy with the child (Medeiros, 2014). However, despite the emotional side not losing strength, it is possible that the purchasing practice of these parents, especially mothers has undergone changes over the years due to changes in the parenthood transition and that the purchasing decision currently involves other factors.

From an academic point of view, it is possible to highlight that several disciplines, such as psychology, sociology, economics, marketing and management, do not reach a single consensus on the relation between brand and consumption, due to constant changes in consumption practice (Lassoued, 2015), because it is perceived that since the inception of the term " Baby Care" in the 1950s to the present day, major changes have occurred in the care relation with babies of different parental generations, just look at generation Z, which has experienced the exponential growth of the technology and look for more purpose in their purchase.

Therefore, the research problem is constructed by the intersection of these points, observed from practices, including questions such as: What as mothers' current consumption practices? How does the construction of trust and connection between consumer and brand?

2. Literature Review

For scientific and academic purposes, the literature generally suggests consulting bibliographic databases, as they contain better quality information, therefore, articles, studies, theses and dissertations were searched in different catalogs such as Ebsco, Emerald, and Scopus, among others. Since a significant number of references (articles, dissertation and theses) had been obtained, it was necessary and appropriate to read the summaries of these findings in order to

choose which texts would be used to develop this research. 70% of the summaries of the 214 references found, that is, 150 documents available in the databases contained the research objective, the research problem, the hypothesis, the methodology that was used, the description of the data, the results and the conclusion, constituting sources of information for decision making. Furthermore, the authors of this study, from the beginning of the investigation, were concerned with systematizing the sources of information consulted so that it was not necessary to redo the bibliographical survey and that copyrights were also guaranteed and in the end, 38 articles, theses and dissertations were used, as they were more aligned and fit the objective of this study.

3. Theoretical framework

3.1 Maternity & Generation Z

Mothers continue to be, even today, the main caregivers of children, as Cardoso (2011, p.240) explain saying that "Children are more children of Mothers than Fathers". It is worth highlighting that this gender imbalance in parental care, although socially unfair and debatable, ends up creating its own justification, since the greater involvement of mothers means that studies attribute to them higher averages than those of fathers, mainly in terms of parental knowledge and skills (Fernandes, 2012).

Motherhood is, therefore, a time when many women experience profound changes in their daily lives, abandoning some activities and adopting new practices – like the different aspects of caring for a baby – and has the temporal order of day and night changed (Jackson et al., 2006). Furthermore, Jackson et al. (2006, p.64) observed that generation Z mothers not only buy different products or consume more after having a baby, changing their lifestyle, but they also give new meaning to the daily activity of shopping with the arrival of motherhood (Jackson et al., 2006). In general, the objects that people from generation Z acquire, through consumption, are related to self-esteem, well-being and status in the group (Ceretta & Froemming, 2011). Furthermore, another sphere that is of great interest to this generation are digital platforms, mainly YouTube, where videos of influencers which give tips and advice on topics related to family and consumption are found, with millions of followers (Casas, 2019).

3.2 Relation between Consumer and Brand

Brodie et al. (2013) recognize that consumer engagement is a multidimensional and dynamic concept, including cognitive, emotional and behavioral aspects, which play vital roles in the process of relational exchanges and can emerge at different levels of intensity over time. In the

context of brands, intimacy expresses the degree of proximity connection and bond that the brands share with consumers (Thorbjornsen et al., 2002). According to Ukpebor e Ipogah (2008), a powerful brand influences consumers attitudes and creates a strong product association through the brand. Consumers make purchasing decisions based on their qualities, innovations, experiences, personalities, characteristics and technology (Tharmi, Senthilnathan, 2011).

3.3 Science of Brand Growth

The Science of Brand Growth (SoBG) was proposed in 2010 by Byron Sharp, and has been used in business, especially in the Baby Care environment, being the strategic marketing base of huge companies operating in this segment. This justifies its use in this study, in dialogue with the literature and other scientific references, because based on the aspects mentioned so far, huge companies develop marketing strategies considering studies reports in terms of behaviors, choice attributes and influences on decision making of purchasing and brand experimentation. It is a methodology deeply rooted in the laws of brand growth, dual systems theories and Top-Down and Bottom-up practices. In summary, the laws of brand growth are the evidence-based implications, as it is believed that the majority of consumers are "light users" with low purchasing frequency, but they are essential for the sustainability of brand growth, as they form a much larger contingent than the "heavy users" of the category, who are more difficult to reach. Another important point is that, in all products categories, consumers vary between brands, we can use more than one brand, not presenting exclusive loyalty.

In dual systems theory, it is believed that decision-making ends up being automatic as we tend to think about the category first and prefer the most familiar product prototype and the most reliable option (Harvard, 2003). Finally, we have concepts of Top-Down and Botton-up marketing strategies are one in which the company seeks consumers and develops products or services to meet their needs (Aitken & Campelo, 2011).

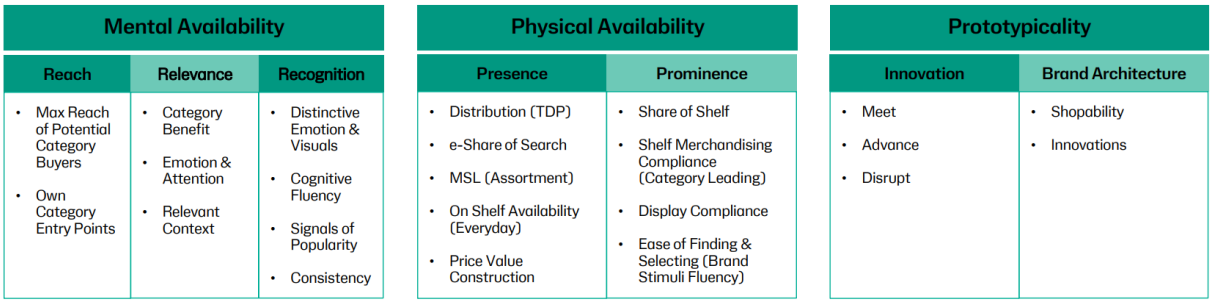
The SoGB was summarized in three pillars that were translated for business.

a) Mental availability: media strategies can be built to reach all potential buyers in the category, implementing, planning and optimizing media to ensure that reach is managed and maximized, with an efficient ROI (Return of investment). It also allows the creation of distinctive brand assets and building recognition/memory. In addition, content consistency is sought over time in different consumers' touch points, in other words, messages must coincide with the physical availability (Sharp, 2010).

b) Physical availability: the need to ensure strategies to make brand physically and virtually present is observed, being one of the crucial factors in reaching all potential buyers, also ensuring clarity in defining the ideal portfolio and product distribution channel, that is, what and where consumers want to buy. Furthermore, it is possible to make brands prominent (be bigger) and appear bigger along with consistent distinctive assets, so that buyers/consumers combine key visuals and words with communication and choose the brand (Sharp, 2010).

c) Prototypicality: which is a measure of how representative a product is in a category. An original model in which all other products are standardized, that is, the product must be synonymous with the category, as prototypicality is essential to build mental availability with consumers. The pillar is related to innovations that can be classified into 3 types: Meet, which is the knowledge of the category prototype, which delivers what consumers expect; Advanced, which adds incremental value to the category prototype and new benefits visible to consumers, which is an important type of innovation for category-leading brands and; Disruptive, which radically changes the value and benefits of the category prototype and delivers new products to consumers (Sharp, 2010).

Image 1.0 – Pillars of the Science of Brand Growth (SoBG) translated for business (Authors)



4. Objective

To obtain answers to the research questions, this study's main objective is to understand the current Baby Care practices of Generation Z mothers with focus on the consumption of infant hygiene products, especially shampoo and liquid soap, and how this understanding can be used according to the SoGB in marketing strategies.

5. Methods

For this study, was opted for a qualitative research, which allowed us to obtain an understanding of the reasons, opinions and motivations for carrying out the practices of Generation Z mothers. This study was carried out through 6 in depth individual interviews, considering generation Z mothers from the higher and middle classes in the Southeast region of Brazil, with children up

to 3 years of age. Recruitment occurred through the snowball technique, where individuals selected invite new participants from their network via email and/or sending a message on the main social media such as Instagram, Facebook and TikTok.

For the selected Mothers and after initial acceptance, a conversation was schedule via Zoom platform with a maximum of 45 minutes. In relation to data collection, interviews were used with a semi-structured script and a dynamic via WhatsApp with simultaneous voting on some advertisements from 1940 to 2020, as a way of understanding which advertisement attracted the most attention and generated possible purchase intention. The semi-structured script was constructed thinking about SoGB pillars (Mental, Physical and prototypicality) identifying beliefs, objectives, felling and principles in relation to purchasing and choosing the brand. Content analysis was used to search for themes or categories in the speeches in two stages: inventory (where common elements are isolated) and classification (where elements are divided and organization is imposed).

6. Results and Discussion

In general, for the generation Z Mothers, the first feeling that appears when caring for and cleaning the baby is insecurity, as they are convinced that they do not have knowledge and know-how. Therefore, they initially need support from family members from previous generations, that is, generations X or Y. This initial support was fundamental for new mothers from generations Z to feel more confident over time in relation to baby care and end up realizing that good hygiene is not just the act of "cleaning" and/or using a good brand shampoo or liquid soap, but rather the moment of connection between mother and child, through fun, affection and love, in other words, the bath routine end up becoming a way of seeing the world in a lighter way, as it is a moment on which maximum care is passed on to the baby, sending back a "thank you" in the form of a smile.

Therefore, the simple act of cleaning the baby is understood in a broader sense, ranging from the purchase of a product involving self-satisfaction to connecting with the child through the creation of a unique moment of mutual exchange.

An important point for these generation Z mothers, already mentioned above, is the act of purchasing, which is understood as self-satisfaction for being able to provide their baby/child with the best they can give. This self-satisfaction does not come from the product being more expensive, but rather, a set of factors that involve quality, safety, skin protection, smell and the moment of usability during and after use, for example: The shampoo must bring fun during

bath time, it must be fresh on the hair and not harm the eyes. As for liquid soap, it should be gentle to the skin, protect and even have a calming effect on the baby after bathing.

Most of the respondents use products such as liquid soap and neutral children's shampoo that do not harm the eyes as a rule in the hygiene procedure. However, some mothers of this new generation are looking for more practicality and increasingly use products known as "head-to-toe". This practicality that mothers seek does not only come from the products they choose, but from the hygiene process as a whole. In other words, mothers include other items in their bath routine, such as: toys and songs featuring children's characters, as a way of playing, connection and making this routine more peaceful and enjoyable for them.

Therefore, these points should be explored in the marketing strategies via SoGB, mainly in the pillar of product prototypicality and physical availability, ensuring that key elements that are important for choosing the brand are present in all point of contact for these Mothers such as packaging (icons, format, ingredients free from parabens, do not irritate the eyes and more functional like head to toe) and distribution of Promotional material for the POS that translates the moment of bathing and brings the moment of connection between mother and child/baby exploring the products attributes (performance).

During the field, some behaviors of mothers were identified that generated practical interpretations of what and how to perform good hygiene of babies/children due to the instructions, principles and rules coming from previous generations and also health professionals since the contact in the maternity ward.

As a form of acting, the mothers get skill and competencies specially through health professionals, mainly during consultations and when leaving the maternity, but also on social media, as doctors are more connected in the digital world, followed by mothers, friends, support networks and, finally, digital influencers. The mothers strictly follow the stipulated procedures for fear that if they don't comply, they may not be a good mother.

This is a another aspect related to the SoGB, mainly in relation to the pillar of mental availability, because as support, the marketing of different companies can be use on the communications strategies defined for health professionals (nurses, pharmacists and doctors) via training in the maternity/hospital/pharmacies itself, care classes during bath time for parents, classes on baby/child skin care, delivery of products kits (samples), demonstrative videos via digital influencers and other points.

Furthermore, when asked about the act of purchasing, it was observed that the purchase is not planned as in previous generations, that is, they buy products to clean their children when they are close to finishing and generally from the same brand. Among the most mentioned brands,

we have Johnson's Baby and Granado, but generation Z mothers have no connection with the brands, but they know that they are the most traditional (Johnsons Baby) and Natural (Granado) brands and that both have quality and receive recommendations from pediatricians, family members and influencers. As places to purchase, we see pharmacies gaining prominence, as they have more specialized products, mainly focused on skin care. What was also observed is that when these mothers think about buying a hygiene product in large amounts or trying something new through recommendations, they end up opting for online shopping (e-commerce) or Cash Carry channel.

Here, we see another pillar of the SoGB which is physical availability, one of the most important points, as there is no point in communicating if the product is not present at the time of consumer purchase, and, in an even more a visible way, if it is not a purchase planned by them. That is, companies create their strategies to be wherever the shopper/consumer/mother is, ensuring wide distribution of products and the greatest possible number of purchase occasions, in terms of areas and channels.

In addition to the points above, the study sought to understand, through advertising campaigns from different generations, which ones generate greater connection or greater engagement and at the same time those that convey the sensation of generating product experimentation.

Image 2.0 – Advertising campaigns 1940 - 2021

According to the mothers in the study, the campaign with the greatest engagement in terms of generating curiosity for experimentation is from Dove Baby (product focus), as it shows the transparency of the product. This type of campaign meets the needs of this new generation, which is more practical and focused on the characteristics of the product as previously noted. Another campaign that was mentioned in a positive way was Granado (moments), as it brings the moment of lightness of bathing and the connection with mother.

The campaign that brought the least engagement and generated dissatisfaction in all mothers in the study was the old ad from Granado (He wants he needs). Here we clearly see that older ads no longer make sense for generation Z, as they contain elements that over the years have lost strength and space to the detriment of others such as: practicality, formulas and differentiations,

and all new campaigns aim to this " practicality" which is one of the characteristics used in marketing mental availability strategies.

7. Final remarks

The objective of this study was to understand the current baby care practices of Gen Z mothers, and how this understanding can be used in accordance with the SoGB and applied in marketing strategies. After the qualitative interviews we see that generation Z mothers are initially very dependent on previous generations, especially when talking their child's first bath using products such as shampoo or liquid soap. Furthermore, these mothers are also dependent on recommendations, mainly from doctors/health professionals, as they carry out all procedures and steps as recommended by these specialists.

These mothers were born connected to technology and use this "support" to get recommendations, tips, and learn new things through different digital platforms and influencers, Most of the mothers in the study mentioned groups of other mothers on Facebook and Instagram who talk about brands and products in general.

We were able to relate these findings to the application of the SoGB in relation to prototypicality and mental availability, In the prototypicality of the product, ensuring that key elements are present from packaging and in terms of mental availability, ensure communication for mothers and health professionals, guaranteeing the consistency of the message/claim to generate awareness with strong links between their needs with the brands.

These mothers' purchases aren't made on a planned way. They make the purchase when the products are close to being finished, but they generally end up always buying the same brand (unconsciously), as they seek quality and performance in the products. What we also see in this new generation is the lack of connection with brands, whether traditional or not. However, they always seek to understand in a practical way the best they can offer to babies/children and this can be the key to building the trust and connection that companies strive to achieve. Marketing needs to ensure broad distribution, covering the largest possible number of purchase occasions, with physical availability being a pillar that describes this point.

This study presents a marketing contribution, as it addresses what generation Z mothers are looking for, allowing consumer health companies to connect through the SoGB. Another point is that the study can be used as a tool to predict future consumption trends, since the latest generations follow observable historical patterns.

Academically speaking, we see some values being modified and some understanding about mothers consumption being reconstructed, such as the act of purchasing is not just a process, it

is understood as self-satisfaction until the connection with the baby/child through the creation of a unique moment of exchange mutual contribution that contributes to future researches.

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