

A study on the Relative Importance of Packaging Elements of Baby Care Products in Sri Lanka : A Comparative Study between different Demographic Variables

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Abstract

Baby care category has been profitable throughout the years and gained the interest of global players in Sri Lanka amidst the emergence of several local companies. Previous research on FMCG products identified that a 1% shift in packaging will result in 88.9% shift in consumer purchase intention, signifying the role of packaging in buying behavior. But there is mild research done with regards to the Baby Care Category and especially in the Sri Lankan context. This research focuses on the gap of identifying the importance of the different packaging elements of baby care products and also includes a comparative study of demographic factors (gender, income and level of education) with each of these package elements for clearer insights.

A field survey was conducted with an internet questionnaire to obtain data from a sample of Colombo residents. Further insights were gathered by discussing with buyers (at point of sale) and retailers of mother and baby outlets. Descriptive statistics and ANOVA were performed to analyse the data. The results revealed that a weak positive importance was laid on “Graphics” (Color and Artwork) and on Packaging “Dimensions” (Design and Shape) of the package. The dimension of “Information” was placed relatively a higher importance in the buying decision. These findings aligned with the insights from buyers and retailers; buyers being more concerned on baby’s safety prioritized ensuring product reliability. Certifications, labels, precautions and instructions on the package which guide them, evidently are part of the dimension of Information. The results further revealed that the identified importance laid on the three dimensions of packaging elements did not significantly vary on any of the demographic factors; gender, income and level of education. Baby care being a sensitive area for parents (unlike generic products), the importance placed on information was much higher due to its role played in assurance, consequently comparative lesser importance was placed on how colorful, big and stylish the packaging is, as the priority was absolute amongst buyers across diverse demographic differences.

Keywords: Packaging, Packaging elements, Packaging influence, Baby care products, Demographic factor cross analysis.

INTRODUCTION

Packaging has been a vital area in converting a sale. It was estimated through researches done that 73 percent of purchase decisions are made at the point of sale (Connolly and Davidson 1996); Frontiers, 1996 cited in Rettie and Brewer, 2000), which reflects the role of packaging in a consumer's conversion.

Baby care sector, having a different purchase dynamic and being a very sensitive and area of thorough concern, different from FMCG, have not been focused in previous studies. Packaging has been playing multiple roles, obviously being a tool of customer attention grabber and purchase converter; thus, the important question arises on what component of packaging of the product that really impacts the consumer's behavior with relation to baby care.

To provide striking insights, the analysis on the packaging elements are further subject to being tested on different customer demographic factors including Income level, Education level and Gender (of the buyer) to understand the volatility in findings amongst these demographic variables, to obtain insightful understanding on the decisiveness of demographic differences in buyers towards appeals in the packaging. This was considered in the study to provide a more holistic view on a relative understanding of packaging elements.

With a range of products to choose from the shelf, what will attract and appeal to the consumer at the point of sale is a challenge today. Researches carried out by Rundh (2009); Shah, Ahmad and Ahmad (2013) suggest that the instance where manufacturers reach a stalemate on consumer satisfaction where the parity becomes smaller and smaller, the package comes in as the final and most valued tool in determining consumer purchase decision. Though research has been carried out on packaging elements pertaining to the FMCG sector, no literature is available on the baby care sector (for example, Wang, 2013; Ehsan & Samreen Lodhi, 2015; Silayoi & Speece, 2007; Sultan, 2016; Underwood, et al., 2001; Garber et al., 2000; Plasschaert, 1995; Schoorsman et al., 1997; Karimi, et al., 2013; Ruto, 2015; Adam & Ali, 2014; Hota & Charry, 2014; Seyedsalehi, 2015; Ahmed, et al., 2014; Rundh, 2009). The purpose of this study is to identify the importance placed in each element of packaging of specifically baby care products by Sri Lankan buyers with a comparison of demographic differences.

RESEARCH PROBLEM

This study is directed on identifying which elements of packaging are considered as more important and less important when a customer buys baby care products in the Sri Lankan context and examining whether the importance placed in the packaging elements differs based on demographic differences in buyers.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

To what extent consumers consider graphics in packaging when they buy baby care products in Sri Lanka.

To what extent consumers consider dimensions in packaging when they buy baby care products in Sri Lanka.

To what extent consumers consider information in packaging when they buy baby care products in Sri Lanka.

Does the importance placed in the packaging elements differ based on demographic differences in buyers?

LITERATURE REVIEW

As cited by Otterbring et al. (2013), “many customer decisions are unplanned (Hausman, 2000; Kollat and Willett, 1967; Park et al., 1989) and made at the point of purchase (Bucklin and Lattin, 1991; POPAI, 1996; Rundh, 2005)”. According to Silayoi and Speece (2007) cited in Connolly and Davidson (1996), an “estimated 73 percent of purchase decisions are made at the point of sale”, which indicates the role of consumer conversion specifically at point of purchase. The pack design is the “salesman on the shelf” (Pilditch, 1972 cited in Rettie and Brewer, 2000).

Silayoi and Speece (2007) stated that when buyers have not even thought about the product/brand much before entering the store, this intention to purchase is determined by what is communicated at the point of purchase. At the point of purchase, what is first exposed to the buyer is the package of the product, which creates the primary impression at the shelf. Point-of-purchase decisions heighten the potential for product packaging to communicate information to consumers and influence product choice (Clement, 2007 cited in Wang, 2013). This fact is made evident by Silayoi and Speece (2007) in their research where they state that “the package becomes a critical factor in the consumer decision-making process because it communicates to consumers at the time they are actually deciding in the store.”

Further the following was cited in the research of Wang (2013) “Previous studies have indicated that packaging is a marketing communication vehicle (Silayoi and Speece, 2007; Hellstro and Nilsson, 2011) used to capture consumer attention (Thalhammer, 2007), which affects the product selection process (Hall et al., 2004). Therefore, product packaging provides an opportunity to communicate with and influence the consumer at the point of purchase (Atkin et al., 2006; Wigley and Chiang, 2009)”.

Moreover, research suggests that in the current competitive world where companies are concerned on attracting new customers, retaining existing customers and expanding the market amidst the competitive pressures, to achieve their objective, one method that companies apply is stylish packaging with high-quality (Ranjbarian, 1999 cited in Karimi et al., 2013). When designing a package, it is important to understand the influence these elements have on customers (Silayoi and Speece, 2007 cited in Otterbring et al., 2013)

Most impulse buying occurs because of product display, and attractive packaging plays an important role in product display (Ghani and Kamal, 2010 cited in Wang, 2013). As cited in Otterbring et al. (2013), “Packaging plays a key role in customers’ purchase decisions (Deng and Kahn, 2009; Hanzae and Sheikhi, 2010; Kuvykaite et al., 2009; Orth and Malkewitz, 2008; Rettie and Brewer, 2000; Silayoi and Speece, 2004, 2007; Underwood and Klein, 2002)”. Even though researches have stated how packaging has its impacts on buyers, the extent of influence is volatile between products and cultures. As research has also identified that “many cross-cultural researchers assert that knowledge developed in one culture should be confirmed before using in new cultural contexts (Malhotra et al., 1996 cited in Silayoi and Speece, 2007). This is where the need to understand the extent to which packaging and specifically which elements of packaging influences the customer when buying baby care products in the context of Sri Lanka, where the relevance of insights of one culture has to be confirmed on another culture prior to implementing it, as the behaviour of people is different from culture to culture. On identifying the elements of packaging for the research, the classification used in the study conducted by Ruto (2015) was utilized, which consisted of three dimensions namely, Package Graphics, Package Dimension and Package Information.

Graphics (Colour and Artwork)

The initial attractiveness of a package is derived from the aspect of the colour of the package. Branding is a story narrated by colour, not just in the creation of visual attractiveness, but in communicating the essence of the product (Ruto, 2015). Ruto (2015) has also indicated that a recent study conducted placed consumer preference of colour at close to 85%, which indicates the significance of the role that colour plays in consumer choice. Evaluation of attributes is of less importance in low involvement decisions, so graphics and color become critical (Grossman and Wisenblit, 1999 cited in Karimi, Mahdih and Rahmani, 2013). Consumers also learn color associations, which lead them to prefer certain colors for various product categories (Grossman and Wisenblit, 1999 cited in Silayoi et al., 2004). In addition to a package’s colour, an important graphical element is the ‘art’ embedded in the package. Hence art/painting has been used in packaging by marketers to convey its influence into products, according to Ruto (2015).

The element of art in a package has been useful in making the package catchy and appealing to a viewer, thereby tempting the buyer to have a look at the package (product) and influencing his/her intention to purchase.

Dimensions (Shape and Size)

The shape of the package has been a very keen and decisive element at the point of sale to outstand among the product clutter. Not only the shape affects how the products are displayed or stacked on the shelf, but also influences the buyer to go for the product or not. It was also identified by Prendergast and Marr (1997) that consumers who look for good deals, the size of packaging provides the impression to the consumer on value for money (cited in Karimi, Mahdiah and Rahmani, 2013). As simply, when there are two products of the same size but one has a larger package, the buyer usually picks the larger package perceiving that there is a larger quantity/larger product, hence a greater value for the money spent (Ruto, 2015). In addition, this could imply that when product quality is hard to determine, as with generics, the packaging size effect is stronger (Silayoi et al., 2004).

Information

As cited by Ruto (2015), the foundation of it all is to ensure that the information displayed on the package or label is true and relevant, so that the consumer feels a sense of trustworthiness in the overall presentation of the product (Rochchiand Stefani, 2006; Sevilla, 2012). Consumers with their high involvement with the products tend to look at product information and make appropriatedecisions accordingly and the product information could change their attitude of buying the product (SilayoiandSpeece, 2004 cited in Adam and Ali, 2014). Research has shown that there is a significant relationship between consumer purchase decision and theinformation on packaging (Karimi et al., 2013 cited in Adam and Ali, 2014). Product information influences the perception of quality and preference (Dransfield et al., 1998; DimraandSkuras, 2003 cited in Wang, 2013). Written information on the package can assist consumers in making their decisions carefully as they consider product characteristics (Silayoi et al., 2004).

METHODOLOGY

Population relevant for this study was individuals in Sri Lanka who buy baby care products. The sample of the study consisted of 200 respondents taken from the population who live in the Colombo district due to ease in access as well as due to the respondents' high exposure to a numerous number of baby care brands. Respondents were obtained through Convenience Sampling using personal contacts of the researchers. Descriptive research approach was used since the purpose of the study was to measure the relative importance of the different packaging

elements when buying baby care products. The following dimensions of the package elements were identified from the previous studies, ‘Graphics’(Grossman & Wisenblit, 1999; Karimi et al., 2013; Ruto, 2015; Silayoi et al., 2004), ‘Dimensions’(Holmes&Paswan, 2012; Ruto, 2015) and ‘Information’ (Karimi et al., 2013; Ruto, 2015; Sharif, Salehi and Zahmatkesh, 2013;Silayoi et al.,2004). Accordingly, respondents were asked to evaluate a total of 23 statements related to the three dimensions of the packaging elements; 11 statements for Graphics adopted from Ruto (2015), 6 statements for Dimension adopted from Ruto (2015) and 6 statements for Information adopted from Ruto (2015), where a 5 point likert scale was used ranging from 1-‘strongly agree’ to 5-‘strongly disagree’. Data was collected in December 2016 through a pre-tested questionnaire supplied to respondents through internet forms.

Internal consistency was tested using Cronbach’s Alpha on the measurement for the three dimensions, and the values obtained for ‘Graphic’, ‘Dimension’ and ‘Information’ were respectively 0.954, 0.919 and 0.860. Validity of the measurements was tested through tests for Uni Dimensionality (confirmed), Convergent Validity with KMO and Bartlett Test of Sphericity (confirmed with KMO value > 0.5 and Bartlett test <0.5), Average Variance Extracted (confirmed, value >0.5), Composite Reliability (confirmed, >0.7) and Discriminant Validity (confirmed).

Sample Profile: Table 17 shows the sample profile of the study.

Factor	Classification	Sample	Sample Split
Gender	Male	87	43%
	Female	113	57%
Age	<20	0	0%
	20-29	155	77.5%
	30-39	45	22.5%
	39<	0	0%
Marital Status	Married	200	100%
	Unmarried	0	0%

	Widowed	0	0%
No of Children	0	0	0%
	1-3	200	100%
	4-6	0	0%
	7 and above	0	0%
Monthly Income	<20,000	11	5.5%
	20,000-39,999	32	16%
	40,000-59,999	47	23.5%
	60,000-79,999	27	13.5%
	79,999<	83	41.5%
Level of Education	Ordinary Levels	21	10.5%
	Advanced Levels	34	17%
	Undergraduate Studies	105	52.5%
	Postgraduate Studies	40	20%

Table 17 : Sample Profile

As seen in Table 17, the sample is slightly biased towards Females (57%), the majority of buyers are aged 20-29 depicting the Generation Y and Generation Z buyers and all have children equal to or less than 3 numbers. Most (41.5%) in the sample had a monthly income of Rs. 80,000 and above, whereas 5.5% of the sample had a monthly income of less than Rs. 20,000. Majority of the respondents (52.5%) had completed their Undergraduate studies.

RESULTS

As illustrated in Table 18, the overall importance placed on 'Information' was relatively higher with a mean of 1.7260, indicating that this is the most considered factor in baby care packaging among buyers in Sri Lanka.

Next, 'Graphics' had been rated with a 2.6955 mean value and 'Dimensions' had a mean of 2.8200. This reflects that buyers still do consider Graphics and Dimensions in the package, but the severity of consideration is a lot less in comparison to Information in the package. Among 'Graphics' and 'Dimensions' aspects, Graphics (color and artwork) of the package is considered marginally more important than 'Dimensions' (shape and size).

	Mean (Graphics)	Mean (Dimensions)	Mean (Information)
Mean	2.6955	2.8200	1.7260
Std. Deviation	0.87609	0.76757	0.46907

Table 18 : Mean rating of all Dimensions

Results related to the gender influence on the evaluation of package elements are summarized in Table 19.

	Graphics	Dimensions	Information
Male	2.6688	2.7567	1.7540
Female	2.7160	2.8687	1.7044
Total	2.6955	2.8200	1.7260

Table 19 : Gender analysis on Package Dimensions

Independent sample t-test was carried out to understand whether there are variations observed in the importance placed on each of these three dimensions by gender groups of males and females. When it came to 'Information', equal variances were observed from the Levene's test and it was identified that there was no significant difference in variances on the importance placed on information between males and females (p value of $0.460 > 0.05$).

On 'Graphics', equal variances were assumed between males and females from the Levene's test and there was no significant difference in variances of the importance placed on graphics between males and females (p value of $0.706 > 0.05$).

When it comes to 'Dimensions', equal variances was again observed among males and females (Levene's test) and there was no significant difference in variances of the importance placed on dimensions between males and females (p value of $0.307 > 0.05$).

Table 20 presents the results regarding the influence of income on the evaluation of package elements.

	Graphics	Dimensions	Information
<20001	2.9669	3.1364	1.7091
20001 – 40000	2.7017	2.6927	1.8563
40001 – 60000	2.5861	2.7518	1.7830
60001 – 80000	2.6296	2.7531	1.7407
>80000	2.7404	2.8876	1.6410
Total	2.6955	2.8200	1.7260

Table 20 : Level of Income analysis on Package Dimensions

Test of ANOVA was conducted to identify whether observations vary significantly among buyers of different income levels.

On 'Information', the Levene's test concluded that there is no significant variance among the groups on the importance placed on Information and no significant differences were observed (p value of $0.205 > 0.05$).

On 'Graphics', Levene's test concluded no significant variance observed. No significant differences were observed among different income groups as well (p value of $0.710 > 0.05$).

On 'Dimensions', the Levene's test concluded that there is no significant variance observed among the income groups. There was no significant difference observed among the different income groups on the importance placed on dimensions (p value of $0.413 > 0.05$).

Table 21 illustrates the results derived for the influence of education on consumer evaluation of package elements.

	Graphics	Dimensions	Information
Ordinary level	2.6364	2.7302	1.7619
Advanced level	2.7460	2.8235	1.7000
Undergraduate	2.7203	2.8476	1.7162
Postgraduate	2.6182	2.7917	1.7550
Total	2.6955	2.8200	1.7260

Table 21 : Level of Education analysis on Package Dimensions

On 'Information', the Levene's test concluded that there is no significant variance among the different groups of education on the importance placed on Information and no significant differences were observed (p value of $0.936 > 0.05$).

On 'Graphics', Levene's test concluded no significant variance observed. No significant differences were observed among different groups of education as well (p value of $0.897 > 0.05$).

On 'Dimensions', the Levene's test concluded that there is no significant variance observed among the different groups of education levels. There was no significant difference observed among the different groups of education on the importance placed on dimensions (p value of $0.925 > 0.05$).

DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

The three dimensions of packaging discussed are all considered by the buyer, as evidently each of it has its own role. Baby care dynamics are different to FMCG and so is the question of demographic differences among buyers in Sri Lanka.

The average (mean) rating for the level of consideration of 'Information' was 1.7260. The insight obtained is directly in conformity with Karimi et al. (2013) where the observation of consumers feeling important to consider information on the package in order to compare quality and value is in line with the study's observation. Further, this also indicates that a lot

of consideration is given to the information on the packaging, which agrees on the similar insight from Jafari, Sharif, Salehi and Zahmatkesh (2013, cited in Ruto, 2015)) who observed that a consumer will more likely purchase a product over the rest due to the informative role it has played in their decision making process. Further, the insight from Ruto (2015) in his study also is in likeliness with this where he observed that a consumer responds positively to information that is well written and clear causing the consumer perceives higher care given to this particular product hence greater perceived quality. Silayoi et al. (2004) and Karimi et al. (2013) in their studies identified that written information on the package assisting consumers in making their decisions carefully as consumers consider product characteristics. 'Information' on packaging of baby care products is placed more consideration and importance for assurance and reliability, by buyers in Sri Lanka.

When it comes to 'Graphics', the research insight of Grossman and Wisenblit, 1999 (cited in Karimi et al., 2013; Silayoi et al., 2004), depicts that 'Graphics' become a very critical factor especially when the product is of a low involvement decision. In this instance, buyers, amidst demographic differences has placed an equivalent amount of importance in packaging on graphics. The insight of Grossman and Wisenblit (1999) on a higher importance being placed on graphics when it's a low involvement purchase decision is also indirectly observed here, as baby care generally being not of a low involvement category (requires additional research) depicted only a moderate level of importance placed by the buyer on graphics (mean of 2.69). When it comes to 'Packaging Dimensions' (shape and size), the study of Holmes and Paswan, 2012 (cited in Ruto, 2015) stated that when a consumer feels that the thought put into designing the package of any particular product is done creatively, then it bears an influence on perceived quality, which was in reference to the shape of the package. But in this context, the buyer had placed a moderate level of importance on the 'Dimension' of the package, with a mean value of importance of 2.82. Findings would have been not inline due to reasons, which is a research area further to be studied, possibly due to the diverse dynamics of this category as mentioned before. The average Sri Lankan buyer doesn't pay significant consideration on the package of the baby care product. Hence, the insight of Holmes and Paswan seems less applicable within the baby care industry in Sri Lanka.

When discussing on the overall consideration of the packaging elements, it is to be stated that the baby care sector dynamics discussed initially was verified that Sri Lankans place more care and precaution for the baby.

The insignificant difference with regards to demographic factors discussed including gender itself, brings us to the acknowledgement of the changing world with the changing roles played

by people. Shekhar (2013), in his study, observed a significant difference among males and females on packaging, which is in contrast to the findings of this study. However interpretations supportive to this study have been identified from researchers such as Leng (2010), where he concluded that the impact of packaging elements on consumer purchase decision is not stronger or weaker depending on the consumer's underlying characteristics, where gender and education level has been part of his research which determined his conclusion and supportive to the findings of this research.

When going through recent studies and insights from transparencymarketresearch.com, researchbeamandtechnavio, it was identified that consumers tend to buy products mainly from the recommendations from friends and family, recommendations from expert bloggers and positive prior experience. Sri Lanka might not be currently up to date with relying on bloggers, but the reliance of word of mouth from close families and friends is observable, which proves to be significant than the impact from packaging. Role of Dads being developing into being more involved, where in the global scenario, 73% of Dads are being very involved with purchasing for their babies, where 21% engages in purchasing for their baby infrequently while a minimal 6% rarely engages, which is an insight for males in Sri Lanka too not being significantly different than females when it comes to considering the different elements of packaging when buying.

RESEARCH IMPLICATIONS

This study was focused to fill a gap by studying an area that has not been studied enough especially with reference to the Sri Lankan context. People spend a lot, care a lot and value a lot for their babies, which has resulted in a mass number of products catering to the safety, convenience and need of the baby. In such a situation, understanding the mental schema of the buyer of baby care products is highly valuable both for academic insights as well as managerial use. There are studies done with regards to packaging and its impacts, but a very few have concentrated on the baby care category, and very rare in the Sri Lankan context. Hence, this study has brought about knowledge of Sri Lankan buyers of baby care products and their concentrations and considerations on packaging, also in line extracting insights on what they are concerned about in the package which also provides cues for the product sought after. Academic studies focus on packaging as a part of the marketing mix of Product, whereas the emerging importance of package had package also expressed as the fifth P in the marketing mix. Yet, connecting it to the baby segment was not visible. The insights brought in this study provides weightage and communicates focus areas in a package for more effectiveness.

As identified by the insights gained, marketers who are engaging in the baby care industry in Sri Lanka should lay concerns on the following. Higher priority is placed by buyers on the information available on the package. Hence, adequate information needs to be placed, failing to, buyers who are concerned would most likely refrain from purchasing the baby care product. Saying that, it should be kept in mind that respondents weren't totally denying the consideration for graphics and dimensions, but only that it wasn't a comparatively highly dominant factor for purchase. As the ratings weren't a total disagree (Rate 5), marketers can still make a difference as research insists that over 70% of buyers make their purchase decision at the point of purchase (keeping in mind the significant impact information on the package creates, besides the appeal of graphics and dimensions).

FURTHER RESEARCH

Even though abundant insights were gained from the study, there are plenty of spaces to be filled in the subject. Further, it is important to understand the limitations of this study. Data was collected from respondents only in the vicinity of Colombo district, hence it is not identically representative of all baby care product buyers throughout Sri Lanka. Adding to this, the sample was 200. A wider research with a larger sample throughout the island needs to be undertaken to gain a more transparent knowledge. Inherent limitations of Questionnaires would have affected this study, and the need to engage in multiple modes such as focus group discussions and ethnographic research can be conducted at least in smaller scales throughout the island. In the descriptive study undertaken, other variables of significant impact such as Country of Origin, Brand, Distribution and Availability were not included in the study. Hence, the presence of those variables in line with the packaging elements discussed in the study has the potential for deriving different insights. Hence, the insights from the study are concluded assuming the non-influence of the said other factors. The baby care product category discussed was limited to diapers, wipes, teething rings, bottles and nipples. However, there is a large range of products besides these including products such as cot sheets, baby apparel, baby bathtubs, strollers and car seats. Hence, the insights from the study might not be totally applicable to all baby care products.

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