

DISSERTATION PROPOSAL

# A Study into the Human Responses of a Low Commodity Baby Product in the Irish Market

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Consumer Behaviour

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## **Introduction**

The aim of this research of consumer behaviour is to understand the human responses towards a low commodity baby product. This research will be guided by the buying behaviour of consumers and the decision making process.

In order to understand this topic better the managerial approaches towards consumers must be adapted in order to understand the reasoning behind the buying behaviour of a consumer. It will be discussed how consumers acquire, remember and use product knowledge in the buying process but their attention and comprehension of the product, their memory of any advertisements they have seen, by word of mouth of a product and by their own judgement and choice of the specific product.

The research will be a result from previous studies carried out into the purchase decision of products. This research will differ from other studies as it will deal with the purchase decision of a low commodity product which is a market that is mainly price driven. But it is important to note that it is not in the best interests of every person to get the cheapest price available other factors may influence the buying decision, especially as many branded baby wipes have been topical in the past few months about ingredients being pumped into the wipes.

This research problem was gathered from the literature review into the companies perspective of consumer behaviour, the buying behaviour of consumers and the decision making process made by a consumer when purchasing a product.

The research will help to answer the main objective and the sub-objectives and it will be done through qualitative research and quantitative research. Interviews and questionnaires will be carried out on women who are in their second and third trimester of pregnancy and women who have babies and infants under the age of four years old.

## Literature Review

From the outset this literature review will be broken into three main sections. The first section will deal with articles relating to the organisation, how the management approach their customers in order to market their product. The second section will deal with the buying behaviour of consumers with the specific influences that will contribute to this decision. The final section will concentrate on the decision making process of a product such as baby wipes.

### ***Management approach to customers***

Theodore Levitt developed one of the greatest piece of marketing writing in 1975 and it was called Marketing Myopia which was worldwide known and of great interest to many companies. The major aspect of this article was the idea of classical marketing.

There must be a focus on the market as a whole not only each specific company. Each company should analyse the market that they are currently in, for example baby wipes are in a low commodity product market. Once the company can identify the market this will lead to a better understanding of the strategies that the company must comply with and build on future plans which will in return benefit the company and the market.

In Levitt's eyes the understanding was that customers bought a product for the functionality of the product itself not just to have a product that was in trend or socially accepted. This can easily relate to the baby products, parents don't buy a baby wipe because it is socially accepted the buy it for the functionality and convenience to clean their child. In the purchasing decision of a customer financial aspects play a major role when choosing a product. This can be said that any advertisements for products are disregarded in some cases as it is all down to a money issue when deciding what product to purchase. Advertisements will catch the eye of a consumer and it will be stuck in their memory if done right but unless the price matches the great advertisement spread then consumers will not buy for a higher price. This can come into play with baby wipes as they are a low commodity product so no matter how much advertisement is done for them consumers will pick the cheapest unless other features of a wipe are attractive.

A captivating question was included in this article by Levitt. He stated if Hollywood concentrated more on movies, would profits increase (Levitt,1975). This questioning was accurate by Levitt because things were moving on and in his understanding he was moving in the right direction towards contemporary marketing. Contemporary marketing in regards to baby products as years ago it was only known to use cotton wool and cooled boiled water to clean your baby but as time was moving it created a baby wipe to make all matters easy.

Levitt also stated that any company must ensure that they are consumer focused with the consumer at the forefront of the mind and also product orientated. If a company could easily balance there two aspects they would be able to succeed in the future. Organisations must be innovative in order to keep their customers interested in the product. The needs and wants of all consumers must be provided for adequately according to Levitt.

This approach towards marketing has many flaws as it is an old approach to marketing.

Since Levitt wrote his eye catching article there have been many other critiques that have jumped on the bandwagon and changed Levitt's viewpoints from a past approach towards a contemporary approach.

Another critique writer, Stephen Brown wrote an interesting article "Torment Your Customers (They'll Love It)" in 2001. This was on the complete flip side of Levitt's Marketing Myopia.

The main argument in Brown's article was the customer centricity issue. The argument decided to state that marketing is not creative or innovative. Contemporary marketing is dealt with in this article. This approach is portrayed through the customer centricity, where many companies are falling over their customers to give them exactly what they want. In Brown's viewpoint customers do not know what they want (Brown, 2001). This is shown when he strongly says 'they don't even know what they don't want' (Brown, 2001). He continues his argument stated that customers are not knowledgeable and they only want slight improvements with products not big stepping stones. Marketing is stagnant in the marketplace according to Brown.

Brown uses the illustration of post modernism that customers have a good understanding of products as customers are left to their own ways in order to research the products.

Another researcher Patrick McCole (2004) wrote an article stating that although contemporary marketing concepts concern the satisfaction of customers, customers always like the fact of competitions. This is portrayed through the title of Brown's article "Torment Your Customers (They'll Love It)" (Brown, 2001).

Retro marketing is the belief that customers today are not marketing savvy they just want to enjoy what product is being given to them. Retro marketing is not appropriate in every occasion for every product. Retro marketing may only be acceptable for baby wipes that have strong brand equity and can afford to take a risk (MCCole, 2004).

Contemporary marketing is dealing with Brown's thinking in his article where the more old fashioned past approach is our very own marketing guru Levitt. From a marketing aspect both articles are correct and parts of each can be used in many companies if applied in the correct manner.

The above is a detailed review on the approaches which companies must take in order to gain consumers and help improve their purchasing decision in regards to their product. This is the first step of research which must be conducted to ensure that companies are helping as much as possible in order to pull in consumers.

### ***Buying Behaviour***

Bashar, Ahmad and Waslq wrote his article 'A study of influence of demographic factors on consumer impulse buying behaviour' in 2013, which primarily states that 'Human experiences and impulse buying should be interpreted as a consequence of cognition-based interactions' (Bashar et al, 2013). Therefore people will impulse buy products based on their age, sex, education level, income level, occupation and size of family (Bashar et al, 2013). Price of baby wipes would be a major impact with this behaviour as it is based on disposable income. Depending on factors, but if the size of the family is large then they will more than likely stick to the baby wipe they are used to.

Another related article of buying behaviour was conducted by Iris Gertner Moryosseff of a study on 'Possible selves and consumer behaviour amongst first time mothers as related to shopping for baby goods', stating the consumer behaviour of first time mothers (Moryosseff, 2012). It is evident from this research that there is a level of anxiety and fear associated with buying baby products. In-depth research was carried out and the emphasis is financial attention when buying baby products. But the anxiety is still a factor that will hinder the buying behaviour of new mothers and conscious parents (Moryosseff, 2012). Iris Gerther portrays this conclusion on buying behaviour well through the close analysis of the market and it can easily be adapted to this research on a low commodity product and will help provide focus.

Moreover, Veith and Lianu (2013) conducted an analysis on the 'Origin of the product and the buying decision'. From the outset the research determines the influence of the country of origin of a product in the decision of a consumer. It is suggested that there is a 'certain influence of the origin' when making a purchasing decision, but it can be widely seen that this influence may not be on the actually country of origin, instead on the 'perceived one' (Veith et al, 2013). It may not be price driven, although baby wipes are a low commodity, price driven market, other factors may contribute to the behaviour of the consumer when buying a specific product. This research can help conclude what factors influence the consumer when buying a product besides price.

The above is a review of literature that helps improve the buying behaviour of consumers.

### ***Decision Making Process***

Broadbridge and Morgan recorded their article 'Retail-based baby-products: What do consumers think?' in 2000, outlining consumer's behaviour between retail branded baby wipes and manufactured branded baby wipes. Consumer's regards retail branded wipes with a high risk than a branded wipe (Broadbridge et al, 2000).

Although Broadbridge and Morgan's research stated that consumers have tried retail branded wipes, they regard manufacturer-branded baby products as a high quality product and lower risk association.

Foye Brookman took an insight into 'Baby items popular among adults', where they main findings were that consumers would buy more baby products if price was

reduced (Brookman, 2009). This related to the buying process model where the consumer evaluated alternatives. Decisions in this stage can be affected by budgets and as this research stated people may not go back to their old ways of buying after this economic downturn the economy is experiencing (Brookman, 2009), so price may always be a contributing factor in the decision making process of a consumer, especially in a low commodity baby product market. This research gives us better insight into the factor of price. It will help with a better understanding if price should be eliminated from the influencing buying factors in order to get the views of the type of baby wipe rather than a view price driven.

Furthermore, Joseph Sirgy developed a critical review on the 'Self Concept in Consumer Behaviour' (Sirgy, 1982). This researcher characterised consumer behaviour as fragmented, incoherent and highly diffuse. It can be widely agreed that self concept signified the 'totality of the individual's thoughts and feelings' (Rosenberg, 1979). Behavioural theories help decide the consumers conditioned responses while cognitive theory deals with the information relating to the consumer. Consumer's personalities can be brought out through the use of products. Tucker (1957) stated that 'there has been an implicit concept that consumers can be defined in terms of either the products they acquire or use'. This can easily be related to the consumption of baby wipes as people could easily pick up certain wipes which best suit their personality. For example, if the person likes protecting the environment then they will possibly buy the most natural baby wipe on the market. Another example would be if a consumer is price savvy they would possibly buy the baby wipe that is on promotion rather than paying full price for the product. Joseph Sirgy concluded that self concept theories can contribute to the attitudes of the consumers and then in return will have a knock on effect on the decision making process (Sirgy, 1982).

A study by America's Cotton Producers took an in-depth insight into 'What's important to Parents' (Anon (1), 2013). In this analysis the major aspects and features are the safety and quality of the product. This will be interesting to see if the Irish market has the same perceptions of features of baby wipes as that of American consumers. From this research the purchase decision is extremely important for parents as they state that 'information would influence their purchase decision' (Anon (1), 2013). In contrast the product is based on trust and the consumer will believe in



what is being conveyed by a company. Trust is a major aspect for a company to control when it comes to the decision of a consumer. If the brand is conveyed to the consumer as a good quality and safe product to use on their baby then they will opt for a wipe that gives information willingly to consumers than companies that push products through constant branding. This will leave a question for this research that perceptions and company responses to consumers are important aspects for keeping loyal consumers to a product even if it is driven by price.

The above is an in depth review into other critiques and research in helping to understand the decision making process of consumers when buying a product.

## Research Question

The aim of this current research is to investigate the consumer reactions towards a low commodity baby product.

From the outset it is apparent that price is a major aspect especially in a low commodity product. This factor may be illuminated from the consideration of baby products in this case if it proves to hinder the study.

In order to investigate this topic of consumer behaviour in a more defined manner of human responses towards a low commodity baby product of baby wipes, a number of aspects must be considered in order to conclude on this research area.

The research problem in this analysis is an investigation into the understanding in the buying behaviour and decision making process when parents are buying baby products. This deals with human responses towards products and the reasoning behind a purchase decision.

The following are a number of sub objectives which have been drawn from the literature review for the purpose of the positivistic research.

### ***Sub-objective 1***

- Income levels of consumers have a strong association with the buying behaviour of the end product ( Bashar et al, 2009).

This objective will be put in place to identify if price is a major factor in the buying behaviour and the decision making process of baby wipes in the Irish market.

### ***Sub-objective 2***

- Consumers will tend to buy manufactured branded baby wipes quicker than retail branded wipes due to the perception of the consumer (Broadbridge et al, 2000).

This objective will deal with a consumer's ability to acquire a product and their knowledge behind the product. It will primarily deal with the attention and comprehension of the product and the consumers judgement and choice in the decision making process. It will be the challenge between branded wipes and private label wipes and how a consumer's perceives a product.

### ***Sub-objective 3***

- Mothers of babies and infants have a higher level of anxiety during the purchasing process of goods for their babies (Moryosseff, 2012).

This objective deals with the consumers self concept into the buying decision of baby products. It will deal with what is going through a mothers head when choosing the right baby wipe for their child.

### ***Sub-objective 4***

- A consumer will choose a product for their baby with the best possible quality available due to the preciousness of a baby (Anon (1), 2013).

This objective will deal with the different aspects of the physical product when consumers a buying them. Will consumers buy a product that has a good quality feature or will they choose any.

### ***Sub-objective 5***

- Branding of products is an important aspect when making a purchasing decision of baby wipes.

This objective will investigate whether consumers will buy a baby wipe due to the specific brand of a product or if they will buy any type regardless of the brand.

### ***Sub-objective 6***

- What aspects influence the consumer in the buying behaviour and the purchase decision making process of a baby wipe?

This sub objective will deal with the different aspects that will influence a consumer to buy a product. For example, the environment, culture, family, media etc.

For the purpose of the interpretive approach to this research the same main object will be used but instead of breaking it into sub-objectives for the convenience of the interview, a 'theme sheet' will be drawn up featuring topics, similar to the objectives but not as specific.

The following are a list of the themes:

- The price aspect of baby wipes
- The quality from a baby wipe
- The brands of baby wipes
- Influences towards buying decision
- Perceptions of baby wipes
- Self concepts

## **Methodology**

For this research into the understanding of decision making in the buying of baby wipes, a research methodology consisting of both qualitative and quantitative research techniques will be adapted.

The population for this research will be parents, mostly women who are in their second to third trimester of pregnancy and women with children under the age of four years old who use baby wipes on a regular basis.

In order to obtain a sample for the purpose of this research development, a non probability sample will be used. The qualitative research will be based on convenience sampling as they will be drawn at the convenience of the interviewer. The research instrument will be comprised of interviews of fifteen women, a mix of expecting women and women with babies and infants. The ages of these women who will take part in the interviews will range between twenty years old and thirty five years old.

The quantitative research will be primarily based on purpose sampling. This will be at the researcher's judgement to select the people for this section of research. The research instrument for this quantitative research will be carried out through a questionnaire, targeting the same audience as the qualitative research.

The samples will be accessed through people who the researcher knows that has babies and infants under the age of four years old. The researcher will also be in contact with a midwife in order to collect the sample of women who are in their second and third trimester of pregnancy. This midwife will give me access to the prenatal classes and postnatal classes in order for a mixed sample of people in Ireland.

For the data analysis for this research, it will be all done through SPSS Statistics. All data will be entered into this data base and organised accordingly. This will in return help analysis the data and drawn up conclusions in order to define my objective and sub objectives.

In order to conduct this research there are many ethical considerations that need to be addressed. As this research is in the category that involves human volunteers

involving the deception of the participants, there may be an ethical risk associated with this research. For the purpose of the ethical considerations, this research will keep all people participating in the qualitative interview anonymous and the questionnaires in the quantitative section will not ask for any personal details just their judgement on their buying decisions for baby wipes. Another ethical consideration will be in the brands of the wipes. All brands will be blind tested, labelling them anonymously and not under their own brand names.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, from the outset of this research project the above steps will be taken in order to achieve a desired result.

The above literature was relevant in finding a position in consumer behaviour for this research. From the research it was evident that not enough research has been taken into account for the human responses that occur with any person when buying a product. The study will look at the Irish market in general and towards a product that is widely used, baby wipes.

Once all data is collected from the relevant participants then this can be reviewed and analysed for the appropriate section of research.

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