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CONSUMERS' EXPECTATIONS IN BABY FOOD PRODUCTS WITH REFERENCE TO INDIAN MARKET

KEY WORDS:

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INTRODUCTION:

Baby food varies from culture to culture. In many cultures, pastes of grain and liquids are the first baby food. In human history and presently with many cultures around the world, babies are fed food pre-masticated by the caretaker of the baby in order to pulverize the food and start the digestion process. An infant's first bite of solid food is ceremonial and holds religious importance in many cultures. An example of this is 'annaprashan', a Hindu ritual where the infant is fed sweetened rice porridge, usually blessed, by an elder family member. Similar rites of passage are practiced across Asia.

Baby food is any soft, easily consumed food, other than breast milk or infant formula that is made specifically for infants, roughly between the ages of four to six months and two years. The food comes in multiple varieties and tastes; it may be table food that the rest of the family is eating which has been mashed or otherwise broken down, or it can be purchased ready-made from the market.

India was one of only 37 countries which enacted legislation after the World Health Assembly in 1974 urged member states to review sales promotion activities on baby foods and introduce laws on advertisements of such products. The Act prohibits all kinds of promotion of baby milk formula and cereals - including advertising, inducements, sponsoring seminars and other events for doctors or medical associations. The law also stipulates that the labeling of all baby food products shall follow certain criteria and that the products should not be promoted for children below two years of age.

BABY FOODS IN INDIA

The demand for baby food in India is witnessing a continuous increase due to rising awareness among parents to adequately fulfill the nutritional requirements of their babies. Though the demand for baby food is comparatively a lot higher in developed countries as compared to developing nations, the market is witnessing increasing demand due to increasing purchasing power of the consumers and busy lifestyle of working women that restricts them to cook food for their babies at home. The baby food market in India is highly organized and predominantly dominated by a single player, Nestle. Other major players operating in India include Abbott Nutrition, Nutricia, Raptakos, Amul, Pristine Organics, British Life Sciences, Mead Johnson, Babyvita and Manna Foods. India's baby food market is estimated to cross USD 520 million in 2014. Milk based baby food segment is the leading contributor, followed by dried baby food and others segment.

BABY FOODS MARKET IN INDIA

Growth in the baby food/formula market is also driven by rising numbers of women working outside the home. According to the World Bank, between 1990 and 2013, the percentage of women in the workforce grew more than four percentage points in the 60 markets included in the survey. As many working mothers return to their jobs shortly after giving birth, prepared baby foods and formulas provide an appealing alternative for working mothers, bridging their desires for healthy, nutritious food with their need for convenience.

The Indian market is particularly attractive because of the country's robust birth rate. Given the increasing reliance by Indian women on packaged baby food, growth opportunities abound. Home-cooked meals are likely to be supplemented with packaged baby food as more women take on 14 Safe Baby Food full-time jobs and purchasing power increases. The baby food industry developed a

large market for the "infant formula" as an alternative to breastfeeding. This led to proliferation of formula feeding which was further supported by the health systems. As a result of fast-paced modern lifestyles, consumers continue to seek convenience and simplicity. At the same time, consumers with children are more confident and demanding about what they purchase. They are also demanding that companies communicate with them openly in regards to their baby food products. The rise in India's baby food market is also part of a broader trend of consumers around the world becoming increasingly aware of the importance of baby foods in augmenting the nutrient requirements of babies and toddlers. In this context, parents are seeking to feed their children products that enhance their development throughout the early stages of life.

The baby food market in India is witnessing rapid growth and is growing by 10-12% a year. India has the largest population of 0-4 year old in Asia. Additionally, due to the increasing number of working women, and the increasing parental concerns about nutrition have led to its growth. Professionally-made food designed to meet the nutrition requirements of babies also address the problems of paucity of time for preparing baby food at home. Packed and bottled baby food is also considered as a supplement to mother's feeding.

Moreover, rapid urbanization, growing population, increasing disposable income has led to the fast paced growth in this industry, where the availability of good quality food is gradually increasing with the entry of international and domestic players in the Indian market and with an aim of bringing innovation in product variant.

MAJOR PLAYERS IN BABY FOOD PRODUCTS IN INDIA:

- Gujarat Cooperative Milk Marketing Federation (GCMMF) aka Amul
- Nestle India Ltd
- Nutricia International Pvt Ltd
- Raptakos Brett & Co Ltd
- Abbott Nutrition
- Mead Johnson Nutrition (India) Pvt Ltd.

Where, Nestle; Wockhardt's Farex; and Heinz Breakfast Creamy Oat Porridge Cereal are the top three popular brands in India in baby food market. Nestle India Ltd maintained the lead in 2015. The company continued to leverage the popularity of its leading brands including Lactogen, Cerelac, Nan, Nestrum and Nestrogen.

Moreover, a growing trend of Merger and Acquisitions has been witnessed in the Indian Food industry over last few years. Nestlé's acquisition of Gerber Food and Pfizer Nutrition are among some of the prime example leading to increasing market consolidation and thus intensifying the competition in the market.

Thus most of the top Baby Food Brands in India are known for providing the right amount of nutrition to babies. Prescribed by most of the famous pediatricians these baby food products are generally given to the child after he/ she completes 12 months. Baby foods produced by the top brands in this segment contain the right nutritional content required by the baby and are also easily digestible by him/her.

Baby food industry consists of companies that manufacture packaged foods for babies; it is ready to eat and readymade. Baby food is categorized into three main types, thick liquid, thicker

liquid and solid foods for their right age. It can be mashed or pureed and fed to the baby. There are different types in which baby food is packaged; different types of containers to different food types, such as baby snacks, bottled baby food, canned baby food, cereals, fruits and vegetables, and meat.

5. Dr. Michelle Annette Smith, Senior Policy Analyst, Office of Food Safety, Produce Safety Staff, FDA.

EXPECTATION OF CUSTOMERS FROM THE BABY FOOD COMPANIES:

- Trusted brand Provides good overall nutrition
- Safe ingredients and processing
- Organic/all-natural
- Flavor or taste child likes
- Good price/value
- Environmentally-friendly/sustainable
- Offers wide variety of flavors/types
- On sale/promotion
- Type of packaging

TRANSPERANCY:

Parents want to know what is going into their children's mouths, so labels should detail all of the ingredients in the product. Including their relative proportions is even better.

SAFETY:

Consumers need to feel like a company values their children's health above everything and that they're willing to take action at the first sign of a problem. Particularly in markets where safety may have been an issue, manufacturers should highlight their safety record on packaging and in ads. And they should regularly engage with consumers through their websites and social media to address questions and concerns.

NATURAL PRODUCTS:

Simple is beautiful, and many consumers are looking for the simplicity of homemade without the fuss. Manufacturers should look for opportunities to remove or replace undesirable ingredients like added sugar, sodium and preservatives. There is strong potential for growth in the organic segment, particularly in Asia-Pacific, but manufacturers need to educate consumers about the benefits of going organic.

CONCENTRATION ON HEALTH:

Health claims can be a strong differentiator between brands and should be a key innovation pillar, with new product development focusing on benefits like improved cognitive and physical development, sleep quality and immune function. With food intolerances and allergies on the rise in industrialized countries in particular, manufacturers should look for ways to better serve this growing segment.

PACKAGING:

In terms of evolution of baby food industry, the usage of innovative packaging techniques has given rise in the investment and development is carried out by major companies to offer better quality products. To better understand why consumers select one baby food or diaper brand over another, and to determine what motivates brand-switching behavior.

CONCLUSION:

Consumers are not just relying on their circle of friends and family; recommendations of health experts are highly influential. TV ads are also an important source of information, but their influence on decision-making is notably lower. The use of TV ads to learn about new products and to influence purchasing decisions. Marketers must prove their value not only to the shopper but to a broader network of trusted sources. Product endorsements from doctors, hospitals and healthcare professionals can hold tremendous clout with parents. Quality and good service will ensure customer loyalty.

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