Barbies and Bears: Nightclub Gay Segmentation

Luciano Crocco, Universidade Presbiteriana Mackenzie, Brazil
Erik Gutmann, Universidade de Santo Amaro, Brazil
Vivian Iara Strehlau, Universidade Presbiteriana Mackenzie, Brazil
Maria de Lourdes Bacha, Universidade Presbiteriana Mackenzie, Brazil

ABSTRACT The consumer market for the male gay people has more and more space in the media, due to curiosity or to its importance in terms of consumption possibility. In spite of the existent prejudice, some companies notice the attractiveness of this market segment. However, their characteristics and features are partially unknown. The purpose of this article is to analyze, through an exploratory study, its characteristics and features and to verify the selection process of a common leisure way for the segment, the night clubs. The first findings point out the existence of three different groups of male gay people, whose differences can and should be taken as advantages by the marketing professionals and the strategies elaboration to reach this specific segment.

Key Words: Gay, Market Segmentation, Positioning, Strategy

[to cite]:

[url]:
http://www.acrwebsite.org/volumes/12514/gender/v08/GCB-08

[copyright notice]:
This work is copyrighted by The Association for Consumer Research. For permission to copy or use this work in whole or in part, please contact the Copyright Clearance Center at http://www.copyright.com/.
Barbies and Bears: Nightclub Gay Segmentation

Luciano Crocco, Universidade Presbiteriana Mackenzie, Brazil
Erik Gutmann, Universidade de Santo Amaro, Brazil
Vivian Iara Strehlau, Universidade Presbiteriana Mackenzie, Brazil
Maria de Lourdes Bacha, Universidade Presbiteriana Mackenzie, Brazil

ABSTRACT

The consumer market for the male gay people has more and more space in the media, due to curiosity or to its importance in terms of consumption possibility. In spite of the existent prejudice, some companies notice the attractiveness of this market segment. However, their characteristics and features are partially unknown.

The purpose of this article is to analyze, through an exploratory study, its characteristics and features and to verify the selection process of a common leisure way for the segment, the night clubs. The first findings point out the existence of three different groups of male gay people, whose differences can and should be taken as advantages by the marketing professionals and the strategies elaboration to reach this specific segment.

Key Words: Gay, Market Segmentation, Positioning, Strategy

INTRODUCTION

Researchers and part of the academy have an interest in the consumer's behavior, focusing on many several and different aspects, generating strategies and marketing tools that will be used by the most diversified markets and companies. However, the approach with specific focus in the GLBT segment (Gays, Lesbians, Bisexual and Transgender) doesn’t seem to bring larger interest, in spite of extensive research. The academic production about that particular segment is still poor, Fugate (1993); Delozier & Rodrigue (1996); Bhat (1996); Bhat, Leigh & Wardlow (1996); Penaloza (1996); Kates (1999, 2002, 2003 and 2004), Walters & Moore (2002); Oakenfull & Greenlee (2004) and in Pereira et al (2005); because the initiative of strategies and tools development has been taken by organizations that, when identifying the importance and the economical relevance of that particular group, quickly enlarged the positioning of their businesses so that segment could be more and more attracted. However, those organizations are having difficulties enlarging the range of products and services, due to a natural limitation: it is not their core competence the concepts elaboration that will develop that specific strategies and/ or tools.

So as in the strategic planning and the marketing planning, the identification of the target segments and their correspondent positioning are some of the most relevant and decisive tasks for the success or failure of organizations.

If the Gay Pride Parade of São Paulo can be considered as a referential of a group size, there is not just a niche, but an important attractive segment not only for the number of
participants, but also for the socioeconomic profile.

The concern about this subject comes from the fact that the gay segment is more and more visible in terms of consumption. The basis of that mentioned visibility, demonstrate the possibility of having very well focused or specified consumption preferences.

Significant differences exist between the groups: gay male, gay female, bisexual and transgender. An example is the number of night clubs especially oriented to each one of these groups, since in the city of Sao Paulo there is a large number of the male gay segment, reducing that number for the female gay public, and not having a specific night club for the bisexual group. The transgender, also was not fond of a specific club. However many clubs usually have shows of transgender artists without constituting a specific club for this group. On the other hand, it represents only a working place.

Therefore, the purpose of this article is to start a discussion if there are and if so what are the differences about the behavior of choosing night clubs for male gay people. The other groups, lesbians, bisexual and transgender, will be addressed in future and specific researches and papers, once they can be constituted in subsets or niches.

The purpose of this paper is to demonstrate and to reinforce the segment concepts, subsets and niches which demand more focused positioning about products, services and or companies.

REVISITING THE CONCEPT OF SEGMENTATION

According to Kotler (2000: 278) several levels and segmentation models exist: segment marketing, niche marketing, local and individual marketing. To him, "a market segment consists of buyers, and buyers differ in one or more aspects. They may differ in their wants, purchasing power, geographical location, buying attitudes and buying practices". As for the niche marketing, still according to the author, a niche" is a smaller, specially formed segment", such as high-income car buyers who want high performance sports cars. The niches are identified starting from a subdivision of a segment.

One way of identification of segments is their buying preferences. These preferences are presented in three ways: homogeneous, diffuse or by cluster.
1. The first segment, homogeneous preferences, shows a market where all the consumers have roughly the same preferences.
2. The segment of diffuse preferences, in the other extreme, shows that consumers vary greatly in their preferences.
3. The clustered preference, according to Kotler (2000:284), might reveal distinct preference clusters, called natural market segment.

As it will be shown further on, the gay segment has special, specific preferences in consuming, and can fit into the cluster preference definition.

The next step consists of the identification of the market segmentation basis. The more common basis used are: geographical, demographic, psychographic and behavioral. The psychographic segmentation has increasing interest for the marketing professionals. It is subdivided into three profiles: lifestyle, personality and values. Since its introduction by Lazer (1963: 140-151), when he defined lifestyle as: "a systems concept. It refers to a distinctive mode of
living in its aggregate and broadest sense….It embodies the patterns that develop and emerge from dynamics of living in a society”. Wells & Tigert (1971:27-35) proposed the focus on Activities, Interests and Opinions, model known as AIO, so that styles could be measured. According to Plummer (1974:33),

"Life style as used in lifestyle segmentation research measure people's activities in terms of: (1) how they spend their time; (2) their interests, what they place importance on in their immediate surroundings; (3) their opinions in terms of their view of themselves and the world around them; (4) some basic characteristics such as their stage in life cycle, income, education and where they live."

According to Kotler (2000:296) "an effective segmentation must be: measurable, substantial, accessible, differential and actionable."

It is very difficult to measure the size of the GLBT market. The reasons are evident: the society is still conservative and the disclosure of the sexual option can cause disruption, social as well as professional. However it is considered significant.

Instituto Datafolha¹ identified through research that: "Amidst the 303 interviewees (all gays), the profile, considering income and education is quite superior related to the non gay average, i.e. 50% have complete university degrees, as opposed to 14% of the adult population of Sao Paulo. (See Chart 1 here.)

As for its substantiality, Datafolha’s research gives clear indications that this segment has superior income, 43% earn more than R$ 2.600 monthly, when related to the same heterosexual profile, only 12% of the population of Sao Paulo earn more than R$ 2.600 monthly, being unequivocal the consumption power. (See Chart II here.)

The research of Datafolha was done in a randomic way. The universe of the research was constituted by the participants, homosexuals, bisexual and transgender, of the 9th GLBT Parade of Sao Paulo.

In that research on May 29, 2005, 303 present people were interviewed. The maximum margin of error for the total of the sample is 6 percent points for more or for less considering a trust of 95%.

In the last fifteen years a great transformation in the media took its course, due to the segmentation that happened in the area. The Internet brought ease in communication and integration of different groups. Specialized Sites make it possible for people with the same likeness and interests to meet. There are countless sites for the GLBT public. Therefore, access to that group became viable, through sponsorship and advertisements. Another possibility is for the scanning of the use of credit cards, once those companies can identify their customers' lifestyle.

The segment GLBT is unique by nature and, therefore it reacts in a quite different way to the components of the marketing mix.

This segment is still lacking of products and services that are exclusively applied to it. With the advance of technology, the GLBT segment can be reached in an efficient way. Several companies still resist in having their brands associated with that kind of public.

¹ http://www1.folha.uol.com.br/fsp/mais/fs1906200506.html
However, on the Day of the Gay Pride Parade, various floats were sponsored. The example of travel agencies is quite significant and some of those companies found the potential of that market and offer exclusive trip packages and leisure programs. Some Hotels address especial assistance to that public's needs.

**REVISITING THE POSITIONING CONCEPT**

Positioning, according to Kotler (2000: 321), "is the act of designing the company’s offering and image to occupy a distinctive place in the target market’s mind ". One of the assumptions of the positioning process is the company’s differentiation, related to its competitors. The differentiation variables are by: product, service, personnel, channel; and image. Still, according to the author, the differences are worth establishing to the extent that it satisfy the following criteria: important, distinctive, superior, communicable, preemptive; affordable; profitable.

The strategy of most companies assumes the penetration in new market segments. The positioning is an effective tool and the technology already allows that the GLBT segment can be reached, not necessarily by the traditional media but, above all, by the new communication kinds, segmented media and Internet.

**THE EMPIRICAL RESEARCH**

The objective of this paper is to identify the process of choice of night clubs in the male gay segment, as already mentioned. According to Campomar (2005), "the field research in marketing is useful to find out if and how, what exists in practice is adjusted to the existing theory; or if the practice can create a new theory, model or concept. It is empiric social research ". The type of research used was the exploratory, according to Mattar (1996: 80),

"The exploratory research provides the researcher with a larger knowledge of the theme or research problem in perspective. Therefore it is appropriate for the first levels of investigation, when the familiarity, the knowledge and the understanding of the phenomenon by the researcher are, generally, insufficient or inexistent. This type of research is particularly useful when the problem notion of the research is vague or diffuse".

The focus group method was the chosen one, because it was necessary for pre-identification of the participants, who should assume their gay male condition and sexual preference, having steady partners or relationship, that would be considered “married” or eventual partners, considered as single. In order to confront the results, two focus groups were established, also with the objective of meeting the scientific method (Campomar, 2005).

"The qualitative research requests a very clear protocol of what was made, in such manner that can reach that what is called the scientific method. Scientific method is difficult to define. A good way to define it is "a group of steps, where, when meeting a result, another person following the same steps, should find the same result" and this should be accepted by the community where the research process is inserted ". The first focus group had eight people and the second one, nine.

The confirmation about the use of that research method, according to McDaniel & Gates (2003: 123) is,
The goal of the focus group research is to understand what the people have to say and why they have to say it. The emphasis is in doing so that the people speak up, in exhaustive and full detail on the given subject. The intention is to uncover how they feel in relation to a product, a concept, an idea or an organization, and how all this fits in their life and their emotional involvement with all of these.

The decision to form two focus groups came out as a result of an individual interview, in which the interviewee's opinion showed that the division between “married” and “singles” was very simplistic, adding terms such as "Barbie" and "Bears" to the segmentation. That brought out the largest difficulty: the access to people assumedly homosexual and declaredly belonging to one of the mentioned groups.

At the beginning, two persons were contacted and it was requested to them that each one should form a group containing “married” and “single”. It is important to point out that these two persons did not know each other. The possibility was offered to them to mix people of the two groups, what was considered as an attractiveness factor, but it did not happen due to agenda problems.

The basic subjects presented to the groups were:

a) The participants' identification, regarding his partner (“married” or “single”);
b) If they go to night clubs; and
c) What are the main reasons for choosing this or that one night club;

It was emphasized by the groups how much the participants felt comfortable and could express themselves with details, as well as the expectation that they had for the supply of information that could be requested.

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SEGMENTS

The research revealed indeed the existence of two macro-segments: “Married” and “Single”. In the segment “Married”, there were found two defined and specific behaviors. The first, Steady Marriage, doesn't have the habit of going to night clubs, nor other places with GLBT public, because these places represent a threat to the relationship, since the flirt probability exists, generating discomfort in the besieged companion. This group was not considered because they don’t meet the objective of the research. The second group, “Open Relationship”, has diametrically opposite behavior. They search night clubs and other provocative places, as a form of causing larger emotions to the existing relationship.

Another segmentation form was detected: by values and lifestyle, and also associated to the physical type. In that case three segments were found: one without specific denomination, the second - "Barbies" and the third - "Bears." The interviewees stated that these names are widespread among the gay community all over the world, and therefore it is very possible that gay nightclubs might be segmented in the same way.

The predominant group, in quantity, doesn't have denomination and the physical type doesn't have characteristics or special behaviors, resembling to any male biotype, doing or not physical exercises or workout. That group relate to the other two in a harmonic way. For identification purpose, they will be called, in this work simply by “Gays”.

The other two groups have specific denomination and characteristics, and the name given to the second group (Barbie)
carries a certain pejorative mark or nature, because other groups call this way, unlike the third group, where the denomination is used by themselves. That segmentation form is recent, the first reports about this denomination appearing about ten years ago.

The second group is known as "Barbies", in allusion to the doll of the same name, because this group has almost an obsession in body modeling, through physical exercises and workout, getting a well developed thorax, maintaining harmonic lines and measures with waist and inferior members. This group has preference in relationship within their own group, living in a harmonic way with the first group, the “Gays” and ignoring or rejecting the next group, the "Bears". However, when a "Barbie" looks for partners among "Bears", they are called "Chasers".

The third group, "Bears", is named because of some physical characteristics: they usually use beard or moustache and, because they are against the physical modeling, they have aspects of "well nurtured", without, necessarily, being seen as fat people. This third group, as well as the first one the “Gays”, relate in a harmonic way with all other groups.

With that double identification, the group of the married gays and the group of the single gays, are represented in figure 1: the Single and the Open Relationship can be Gay, "Barbie" or "Bear", and they are highlighted in the figure, because these were the researched segments. (See Figure I here.)

From that new segmentation, it was possible to identify night clubs that attend the several segments, and, in general, they tend to focus on each one of the found groups more specifically. In the two focus groups all those segments were represented and it was also possible to identify common and specific reasons in choosing these night clubs, among the several groups.

The fundamental assumption to consume the product “Night Club” it is the possibility of finding a partner, with the objective of flirting. There were common and specific reasons and purposes in the choice. Taking the common reasons they were identified in two groups, music and atmosphere.

Regarding the music, the aspect quality is basic and it was defined as "has to be “cool”", being that term used with the meaning about sonority, rhythm and that it favors or as a lever for the second reason: the atmosphere. It was emphasized by the groups that the music is the main element, being a critical success factor. The other factors, such as decoration, space or lighting are not so relevant, being characteristic of the particular place or, simply, success factor, without becoming critical or eliminatory.

The atmosphere is divided into atmosphere itself and frequency. The results showed that factors such as, "be in fashion", is the critical success factor, favorable atmosphere to the meeting or finding, freedom for physical contact, are components of the atmosphere. For the frequency itself, characteristics of "beautiful people", also critical success factor and "plenty of people", but it was possible to quantify the “enough”.

The research identified the existence of specific reasons that derive from the critical success factors. Regarding the music it was noticed some significant peculiarities: for the “Gays”, the music type is very much eclectic, having a slight predominance of techno music; for the "Barbie" the music is almost exclusively techno, being the presence of a given "disk jockey", or simply "DJ", a complementary factor of attraction. For the
"Bears" there exists larger diversity, with a slight predominance of the eighties dance music; there was also detected a vision of counterculture, positioning that public against the techno music, with almost explicit favoring of the dance music.

For the frequency, the research showed different behaviors: the "Barbie" segment tends to ignore the other two segments when frequenting places specifically addressed to them. On the other hand, when a "Barbie" goes to places addressed to any other segment, they are accepted and they become attraction targets. Other conclusive aspects, however of quite reduced importance, are the geographical location in town and the ease in accessing the night clubs. It is not necessary that the night club to be located in neighborhoods or given streets as being part of the "fashion circuit", but the access should be easy, in other words, streets of easy location and plentiful means of transportation.

In the communication process and popularization of the Night Clubs were identified important opinion makers that cause impact on the reasons of choice. The most relevant factor pointed out was the communication by Word of Mouth, and in the male gay segment that factor is very important. Particularly in Sao Paulo – Brazil, opinions issued in newspaper columns by Érika Palomino and André Fischer, in that order, were emphasized as being the main opinion makers. A third common form is the practice of "flyers" distribution, which wake up curiosity and then reinforce the word of mouth communication.

In spite of being mentioned, reasons such as media and means of bill payment didn't allow definitive conclusion as to its importance in the process of choice of the night club.

The newspaper Folha de S.Paulo and UOL(internet provider) might have a possible preference for the gay public, because of the mentioned writers. Regarding the means of bill payment, it is important to explain that they can be pre or post-payment. Pre-payment is the system in which the consumer pays in advance, receiving one card that is worth the amount paid and can be changed for products consumption. The Post-payment is the system where the expense is written down and should be paid when leaving, at the club’s exit.

**STRATEGIC IMPLICATIONS**

Some findings in this research suggest some strategic implications. The first one refers to more effective positioning to reach the male gay public in their several segments: “Gays”, "Barbies" and "Bears". That positioning should be the main focus for any entrepreneur who wants to run a night club for the various publics, providing a favorable atmosphere for their meetings. When the night club is focused on the heterosexual public, an alternative will exist: it can be a place only for amusement. The meeting assumption also exists, but it is not unique, special or fundamental. For the gay segment, the concept of entertainment also exists, but it is not the main reason for going to a night club.

A second strategic implication is the need for the existence and specialization of a promoter in the target segment: “Gay”, "Barbie" or "Bear". The reason for that specialization is that it turns a reference of credibility, given the word to mouth. Another implication is the columnists' endorsement, once their opinion reinforces the curiosity and becomes a trust element to leverage or to destroy the reputation of a night club.
According to Crescitelli (2004), “the advertisement, to be effective, should be in syntony with its public. It should know its repertoire deeply, habits, values, purchase behavior and consumption”. Therefore, if advertisement can be understood as a communication form, the market and the academy still ignore the main components pointed out by the authors. Finally, the alignment of the strategic implications will make the night club seen as being "in fashion", or "modern", factor of main attraction between the “Gays” and “Barbies”. If in the night club are international "DJs", additional points will add to the consumers' mindset and opinion.

**CONCLUSION**

The process of choice of night clubs in the city of Sao Paulo for the gay public has some quite peculiar characteristics. As shown, the gay public is not homogeneous. It has quite significant differences among the identified groups, “Gays”, "Barbies" and "Bears". Those differences involve specific lifestyle of each group. “Gays” and "Barbies" are closer in resemblances and values and lifestyle. As for "Bears", their values and lifestyle are quite different from the other two groups. As it was demonstrated, the identification of that lifestyle and their values is a strategic factor to be used by the night clubs to attract each one of those segments or clusters.

**REFERENCES**


http://www1.folha.uol.com.br/fsp/mais/fs1906200506.htm;


Further Correspondence:
Luciano Crocco,
Universidade Presbiteriana Mackenzie,
Brazil
prof.crocco@uol.com.br
Adult population in Sao Paulo – April/2005

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Education</th>
<th>Basic</th>
<th>High School</th>
<th>College</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>GLBT parade participants</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>45</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Adult population in Sao Paulo – April/2005

GLBT parade participants

- up to US$ 236
- from US$ 1.182 to US$ 2.363
- from US$ 237 to US$ 355
- from US$ 2.364 to US$ 5.909
- from US$ 356 to US$ 590
- over US$ 5.910
- from US$ 591 to US$ 1.181
FIGURE I – RESEARCHER GROUPS

Married

Bears
Chasers
Barbie's
Gays

Open relationship

Steady marriage

Single

Gays
Barbie's Bears
Chasers