

**REVERSE SOCIALIZATION: AN EXPLORATORY STUDY WITH BRAZILIAN FAMILIES**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The speed of changes imposed by the new economic revolution together with the uncertainties acquired as new technologies are inserted into the daily lives of consumers, generate constant concerns of academics and marketing professionals in trying to understand the behaviors arising from these events in order to predict trends. In this scenario, market segmentation by generations is pertinent and widely used since it is possible to identify groups in a society that have a distinctive and binding identity. Exposure to different institutions and socialization processes influences the intergenerational transmission of preferences. More recently, a change in the dynamics of intergenerational transmission has been observed: parents becoming more interested in learning from their children as they grow up acquiring more knowledge than their own, a phenomenon called reverse socialization. The most recent generation of individuals is called Generation Alpha, born after 2010, who have high cognitive potential due to the high stimuli caused by the digital revolution. Thus, the objective of this paper is to identify in which categories of products and services the reverse socialization process occurs in Brazilian families. To this end, a qualitative in-depth interview with projective techniques was conducted with parents and children in order to describe how this generation believes to influence their parents and how parents react to this.

Keywords: Generation Alpha; Intergenerational influence; Reverse socialization; Children's market.

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1 RESEARCH PROBLEM**

Most families are influenced by their children in their shopping. A study of almost three thousand parents in the United States reports an influence of up to 90% (National Retail Federation, 2019). In Brazil, this number can reach 75.8% (Maciel et al., 2018). These numbers are possible because parents pay more attention to their children due to the decrease in the number of children per family (Velooso, Hildebrand and Albuquerque, 2013; Miller, 2018), in addition to giving them more openness in the purchase decision process (Schiffman and Wisenblit, 2015).

The literature on the influence of children on the purchasing and consumption behavior of their parents is profuse, as can be seen in the works of Mcneal, Yeh and Viswanathan, 1993; Ekstrom, 2007; Jeevananda and Kumar, 2012; Costa, Lima and Santos, 2012; Maciel et al., 2018; and Essiz and Mandrik, 2022. The vast majority of studies refer to this phenomenon as intergenerational influence. However, more recently, this influence has been studied from another perspective: that of reverse socialization.

Reverse socialization, as the name implies, describes an opposite direction in which socialization is supposed to occur. Socialization is a process of learning behavior patterns through transactions with other people (Zigler and Child, 1969) in order to fit the needs of a group (Ross, 1896). Socialization has a greater impact early in an individual's life (Moschis and Churchill, 1978). In the first 12 years of life, parents are considered to be the most influential informants of this learning process (John, 1999). Later, peers and other socialization agents end

up exerting a greater influence (John, 1999). Consumer socialization, in turn, is the process in which an individual acquires knowledge, skills and attitudes related to consumption (Moschis and Churchill, 1978). Thus, reverse consumer socialization occurs when the child grows up acquiring more knowledge than their parents obtained in their socialization process, and they are interested in learning from their children (Bertol et al., 2017; Kerrane et al., 2012; Peters, 1985).

As explained, because consumer socialization has a strong impact on an individual's early years, it is necessary to take into account the current behavior of children up to 12 years old. In fact, the concept of Generation Alpha - individuals born after 2010 (McCrindle, 2009) - has been disseminated in the mainstream media (Borrull, 2019), in specialized media (Dupont, 2019; Vergueiro, 2019) and even in transnational consultancy agencies (Wunderman Demers, 2019). However, the national literature in administration is still incipient regarding the consumption characteristics of this generation (Oliveira and Cruz, 2016). In a search conducted in the Scopus and Web of Science databases using the words "socialização reversa" and "reverse socialization" as a search engine, 64 results were obtained, none of which had been conducted in Brazil.

Although there are no studies on reverse socialization in Brazil, it has been investigated in the context of sports (Snyder and Purdy, 1982; Hyatt et al., 2018; White et al., 2023), technology (Jiao and Wei, 2020), pro-environmental attitudes (Singh et al., 2020; Essiz and Mandrik, 2022), communication (Nelissen et al., 2019) and food (Ayadi and Bree, 2010; Kharuhayothin and Kerrane, 2018; Carrigan, Wells and Athwal, 2023), but it had never been used to assess specific behaviors of Brazilian households in more than one product and/or service category, to the best of our knowledge.

Generation Alpha is the first generation in history to be born in a 100% digital environment (Borrull, 2019), i.e. without having to go through any transition from analog to digital. As technology is a major mediator of reverse socialization (Jiao and Wei, 2020), the distinction between analogue and digital subjects is increasingly evident, as digitalization creates several new inclinations, attributes and skills (Masi, 2019).

Thus, considering the evident distinction between Generation Alpha and their parents' generation, and because there is already evidence that reverse socialization can occur in the most diverse contexts, according to recent literature, the research question is addressed: in which categories of products and services the reverse socialization process occurs in Brazilian families?

## **1.2 OBJECTIVE**

To answer this question, this study aims to identify in which categories of products and services the reverse socialization process occurs in Brazilian families.

The study of consumer socialization enables the understanding of learning and evolution in relation to consumption, contributing to the understanding of long-term choices (John, 1999). Thus, by investigating the problem question, it is expected that the findings will solidify the knowledge of a vulnerable public, contributing to future studies of behavioral trends and their intergenerational influence in relation to consumption. It is also expected to make a theoretical contribution to the phenomenon of reverse socialization, a phenomenon that dates back to the last century, but only recently coined as such, without theoretical basis concerning its specificity in the Brazilian context.

## **2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND**

In order to understand how Generation Alpha influences Brazilian families in their purchasing and consumption behavior, the following theoretical assumptions are organized

under the following topics: how the individual begins to relate to consumption as he grows older (2.1 Consumer Socialization), an inversely expected relationship of the individual with his primary influencers, and in which dimensions this phenomenon has already been investigated (2.2 Reverse Socialization).

## **2.1 CONSUMER SOCIALIZATION**

As previously explained, the process of learning consumption-directed patterns is known as consumer socialization, i.e., the process of developing skills, knowledge and attitudes related to consumption (Moschis and Churchill, 1978). During this process, two factors are determinant: the development of cognition and the influence of social agents (Moschis and Churchill, 1978; John, 1999). In the former, learning is closely linked to the stages of cognitive organization that normally occur between childhood and early adulthood (Moschis and Churchill, 1978). A skill that emerges in this process is the ability to evaluate products, comparing with similar alternatives, among others (John, 1999). In the second, the individual begins to understand the social aspects related to products and consumption, expanding their perception of themselves to interactions with other individuals (John, 1999) in various contexts (Moschis and Churchill, 1978). One example is the possibility of making social comparisons and negotiating (John, 1999).

Therefore, although each individual is unique in their values and beliefs, they tend to act in a similar way to their parents, their primary influencers (Moschis and Moore, 1983; Mishra and Maity, 2021), and subsequently similar to other influencing agents, such as media and peers (Chan, Berger and Boven, 2012; Moschis and Churchill, 1978; John, 1999).

## **2.2 REVERSE SOCIALIZATION**

Although the aforementioned authors defend parents as primary influencers of the individual in their early years of life, there is a discussion about which agent most influences this learning relationship and at what point in life the influence is stronger.

Brim (1968) points out that although there is an emphasis on the study of socialization during the childhood phase, this process occurs throughout life as the individual undergoes changes arising from marriage, employment, parenthood and geographical and social mobility. Clausen (1968) draws attention, however, to the conclusion that any external demand for behavioral adjustment can be called socialization. Mead (1970) goes further by proposing that, at that time, society was going through a gap, that is, "a disparity between generations, thoughts, way of life, etc." (Michaelis, n.d., Definition 2), and calls this society prefigurative: a society in which parents learn from their children, as opposed to a post-figurative society in which children learned from their parents. This change from post-figurative to prefigurative occurs because young people today live in a society that is totally different from the society their parents grew up in and that is why there are difficulties in the transmission of culture, so young people live in an attempt to anticipate (prefigure) the unknown, where peers are increasingly assuming the role of role models (Mead, 1970).

This prefigured meaning is even more evidenced by changes in the relationships between parents and children that have occurred in recent decades. McNeal (2000) argues that the increase in family purchasing power resulting from the inclusion of women in the labor market, the decrease in fertility rates and the increasingly advanced age of parents have helped in this change. Indeed, there is evidence that fathers have been less rigid and imposing, adopting an increasingly warm and involved stance with their children (Garcia et al., 2020).

## **2.3 SOCCER**

The term reverse socialization refers to the idea that socialization is occurring contrary to traditional (expected) socialization. Hyatt et al (2018) believe there is no traditional direction

of this exchange, but use the term in the context of their research (soccer) to explain the disruption of patterns advocated by consumer behavior scholars. The authors defined reverse socialization as the influence that children exert on their parents as sports fans. Respondents reported changing their preferences for sport types due to the influence exerted by their children, and in some cases even changed the team they supported before having children due to the influence of their children. Despite the findings of Hyatt et al (2018), other authors argue that most of the time parents influence their children to cheer for their teams (White et al, 2023). In Brazil, soccer has traditionally been very important in culture and family relationships (Helal, 1996). In this sense, the reverse influence in soccer will be investigated in the present study.

## **2.4 TRAVELING**

Focusing on travel behavior of families, Rosenbloom (1987) surveyed married fathers and mothers and reported that more than 50% of them undertook trips only because their children wanted to, and not because it was a need of their own. Thornton et al (1997) argue that parents consider the opinion of their children when choosing a travel destination mainly because an experience that does not satisfy a child has a strong negative effect on its parents. No literature was found concerning reverse socialization in the context of travel.

## **2.5 CLOTHING**

Ekstrom et al. (1987) adopt a reciprocal view of family decision making, and call it reciprocal consumer socialization, which, according to the authors, would be a more realistic research perspective of this dynamic. The authors mention that solo parents would tend to be more receptive to their children's advice and opinions, including when choosing their own clothing.

## **2.6 SUSTAINABILITY**

Ekstrom (2007) identified reverse socialization practices in several different contexts. The influence on aspects related to health and sustainability draws attention. By conducting in-depth interviews with parents of children aged 13 to 30, the author identified parents who reported being influenced to eat less fat, not to buy furniture made from rainforest wood and to stop smoking.

Reverse socialization from the perspective of sustainability has also been tested quantitatively. Through a survey applied to 352 parent-child dyads, with children aged between 13 and 18 years, Singh et al. (2020) confirmed the hypothesis that parents who perceive their children as concerned about the environment are influenced to adopt sustainable behaviors. Interestingly, the covariates adolescents' age, parents' age, family structure, parents' education, parents' employment and annual family income did not give significance to the model. However, it is worth noting that the survey was applied in 12 schools that participated in a program called "The Green School Program", that is, they complied with a series of environmentally responsible measures such as composting wet waste, recycling at least 90 percent of waste, maintaining green coverage in and around the school, among others (Green Schools Programme, 2023).

Yet from the perspective of sustainability, O'Neill and Buckley (2019) point out that children not only influence their parents to adopt environmentally sustainable behavior, but have actively done so by asking questions such as: "Mom, did you leave the tap running?". This effect, however, only happens if parents initially have a neutral attitude towards the environment. Essiz and Mandrik (2022) complement these results by exploring the mother-daughter dyadic relationship with regard to sustainable attitude and behavior. According to the authors, mothers may perceive their daughters as an essential source of information regarding sustainable consumption, because in the course of their socialization, mothers may not have

been exposed to adequate education, making them deficient in this topic. Consequently, they are more susceptible to reverse socialization as long as they maintain effective communication about consumption with their daughters.

## **2.7 TECHNOLOGY**

Some authors approach reverse socialization from the perspective of technology affinity. Kerrane, Hogg and Bettany (2012), for example, identified a 14-year-old adolescent who promised his mother to teach her how to use the computer if she bought it, a clear example of reverse socialization, however, used as a negotiation strategy to influence the purchase of a household good.

Nelissen et al. (2019) uses the term bidirectional socialization to emphasize that parents and children perceive themselves, through the interview reports, as influencers and influenced; parents understand that they teach standards of conduct and rules on the internet to their children and children, in turn, report exerting functional influence on how their parents can use a smartphone.

Thaichon (2017) also argues that reverse socialization is facilitated by the technological gap between parents and children. For the author, as children start using social media earlier, they are more empowered to shop online than their parents. After conducting 63 interviews separately, 35 children and adolescents and 28 parents, reverse socialization was evidenced only among families with adolescents between 12 and 15 years old, and not among children between 8 and 11. Age, parenting style and peer influence were moderating factors of this relationship. The online purchases analyzed were restricted to the retail sector only.

The mediating effect of technology affinity was also investigated by Jiao and Wei (2020). The authors explored the adoption of a product loaded with symbolic meaning in a society, the iPhone, as a demonstration of the reverse socialization phenomenon. Parents interviewed reported engaging in reverse socialization because they see economic and emotional benefits in doing so, as well as gaining more confidence in using and even buying a new iPhone in the future. Their children, adults aged 22 to 32, also feel that they enjoy emotionally beneficial experiences in this dynamic, as by teaching their parents about the product, they feel they make up for a time of absence. The authors conclude that reverse socialization helps brands expand to audiences that initially had no interest in it, and argue that reverse socialization occurs mainly when children have more skills and experiences with advanced technologies than their parents and influence them to change their attitudes and behaviors towards these products. However, as verified in the aforementioned literature, reverse socialization can occur in other contexts.

## **2.8 FOOD**

Food is one of the dimensions of consumption in which children exert the most influence on their parents (SPC, 2015; Maciel et al, 2018). However, most studies restrict research to children's requests to their parents to buy something for themselves to eat. These studies concern intergenerational influence, but not reverse socialization. Reverse food socialization has started to be explored more recently.

Carrigan, Wells and Athwal (2023) interviewed 25 individuals aged 26-74 years and found that some of them try to teach their parents to change their unhealthy eating habits. After reflecting on unhealthy food socialization practices they had in childhood, these individuals reject them, teach their children different habits, and even actively seek to change their parents' attitudes. It is noteworthy that, to the best of our knowledge, reverse food socialization has not yet been investigated directly with younger children.

Thus, this study adopts the view that reverse socialization occurs when the child grows up acquiring more knowledge than their parents obtained in their socialization process, and because of that the parents are interested in learning from their children (Bertol et al., 2017; Kerrane et al., 2012; Peters, 1985).

### 3. METHOD

The qualitative method of obtaining data has been used in marketing research in order to uncover the most subjective motivations of the consumer (Vieira and Tibola, 2005). Thus, the in-depth interview is the most appropriate tool for investigating the phenomenon in question, as this technique allows an extensive exploration of the interviewee's perspective on the subject, obtaining deep reflections and dense descriptions (Belk et al., 2013). Furthermore, following previous studies on consumer socialization (Hyatt, 2018; O'Neil et al, 2019; Carrigan, Wells and Athwal, 2023) a qualitative approach was adopted and in-depth interviews were conducted.

Studies of child influence have been criticized for employing an individualistic or dyadic approach rather than exploring the family context as a whole (Kerrane et al., 2012). Therefore, this study chose to collectively interview the family, bringing a more dynamic view of the consumption process (Ekstrom et al, 1987).

Several strategies were used to obtain respondents by approaching families in the subway, parks and schools. In addition, schools and other institutions that deal with children and families were also contacted. This effort generated 50 leads, which resulted in 8 initial interviews and a further 13 interviews through the interviewees' references, i.e. snowballing sampling (Goodman, 1961).

In total, 21 interviews were conducted. In 5 interviews, the child chose not to participate. Thus, 21 parents and 22 children were interviewed, out of a total of 27, as there were interviews in which more than one child fell into the age range between 7 and 11 years. This age group was chosen because, according to John (1999), at this stage the child experiences an increased understanding of the symbolic aspects of consumption. Table 1 contains the profile of the interviewees. The names have been changed to preserve the identity of the interviewees.

Due to the unique character of each qualitative research, there is no consensus on the minimum or maximum amount of interviews to be conducted (Czernek-Marszałek and McCabe, 2022). The credibility of the research depends less on the sample size than on the richness of the information collected (Patton, 1990).

Table 1 – Profile of interviewees

Name	Child's age	Type of School	Marital Status	Profession	Social Class
Julie	10	Private	Single	Lecturer	B2
Fernanda	11,7	Public	Married	Nurse	B2
Edilaine	11	Private	Married	Administrator	B1
Mariene	8	Private	Single	Psychologist	B2
Tadeu	8	Public	Married	Research officer	C1
Angela	11	Public	Married	Customer service supervisor	B2

Ricardo	9	Private	Married	Packaging production coordinator	B2
Helena	8,7	Public	Married	Entrepreneur	B2
Emerson	7	Public	Single	Entrepreneur	C2
Cícera	8	Public	Divorciada	School Teacher	B2
Romilda	11	Public	Married	Lecturer	B2
Iolanda	11,7	Public	Single	Unemployed	C2
Madalena	7	Public	Single	Elderly caregiver	C1
Roseli	11,8	Private	Married	Sales Representative	B1
Joelma	8	Private	Married	Physical Educator	B2
Antônio	11,7	Private	Married	Retired	B2
Luciana	10	Private	Married	Real Estate Broker	B2
Maíra	7	Private	Married	Administrative assistant	B2
Lucimara	10	Private	Widowed	Sales representative	A
Raquel	10	Public	Married	Nursing assistant	B2
Thais	10, 10	Private	Married	Accountant	B1

Note: social class was measured according to Critério Brasil provided by Associação Brasileira de Empresas de Pesquisa (ABEP, 2022).

Source: the authors

Projective techniques were used during the interviews, as their use facilitates the penetration of psychological defense mechanisms that may occur due to ignorance of particular influences or unwillingness to admit certain types of influences (McDaniel and Gates, 2014), in addition to reducing the bias of the interviewee wanting to please the interviewer (Doherty and Nelson, 2010). The use of these techniques can be especially revealing when interviewing the investigated public since there is evidence that low-income parents tend to adopt an authoritarian parenting style (Rubin and Kelly, 2015), that is, they talk less with their children about consumption, not asking their opinion about it (Carlson and Grossbart, 1988). Therefore, this parenting style can undermine the observation of reverse socialization in family dynamics. Thus, the projective technique can help to unveil this practice.

The interviews followed a script elaborated from the literature reviewed. A pre-test was conducted for this script and some adjustments were made. However, new perspectives and relevant categories emerged during the interviews. Thus, new questions were included during



the process and were inserted in the analysis (Morse et al., 2002; Beyda, 2010). Table 2 shows the dimensions identified in the literature that were explored during the interviews.

Table 2 – Interview Script

1	<b>Grand tour question (Parents and children)</b>
2	<b>Habits (Parents and children)</b>
4	<b>Generational gap (Parents)</b>
5	<b>Role of the school in reverse socialization (Parents and children)</b>
6	<b>Reverse socialization (Parents and children)</b>
7	<b>Dimensions in which reverse socialization takes place (Parents and children)</b> 7.1 Technology 7.2 Food 7.3 Soccer 7.4 Environmental concern 7.5 Clothing 7.6 Traveling
8	<b>Parental Style</b>

Source: The authors

The audios of the interviews were recorded - with the authorization of the families according to the Informed Consent Form - and transcribed verbatim. The interviews generated more than 18 hours of recordings, averaging 50 minutes each. The transcriptions resulted in 485 pages.

## 4. FINDINGS

Data analysis was conducted concurrently with data collection through a process of interaction, a result of the iterative characteristic inherent in qualitative research (Morse et al., 2002). To this end, the transcripts were reviewed and re-read several times to gain familiarity and to ensure that the data were properly interpreted (Ee et al., 2021). The data were compared with the literature originally consulted, together with updated literature to contextualize the themes with the latest findings on consumer behavior (Hall et al., 2021).

Below are presented the dimensions in which reverse socialization practices were reported.

### 4.1 ELETRONIC GOODS

The category of electronic goods was the category in which reverse socialization practices were most evident, confirming the suspicion of Generation Alpha having a higher technological mastery than past generations (Mccrindle, 2009, 2014; Borrul, 2019). Smart TV, Computer and Smartphone were the products that were most repeated.

### 4.2 SMART TV

Most televisions today are connected to the internet and offer dozens (sometimes hundreds) of content options. Parents report a difficulty in dealing with this technology:

Ricardo

For example, on my father-in-law's TV, he is better at... because my father-in-law has three controls there, right, each one turns on each thing. And I get lost when I go there. And he picks it up and he puts it on to... Either to take it off the Net, to put it on YouTube, or to put it on the TV itself, he can do that part easier.

If analyzed from a comparative perspective between generations, the above report evidences a historical-cultural paradigm shift, because for older generations, television is the main medium was a symbol of power within the family environment of which only the father figure had control of the content to be watched. Nowadays, parents report the difficulty in dealing with this technology to the point of becoming impatient:

Roseli

This television nowadays drives me crazy! I like television that I press the button, it turns on, I press the button, it turns off. It has millions of buttons now, you know? Not my television, mine is a bit simpler. But I go to my sister-in-law's, and hers is one of those very modern ones. They have everything on it. They have Netflix, Disney, I don't know, everything. I say: "José, I just want to put it on the channel so I can watch the soap opera". You know what? That television annoys me, that television stresses me out. I say: "I'm not going to watch anything else!". Then he says: "But, Mom!". I say: "I don't want to, José!". I have a hard time.

When parents were asked how they felt about asking their children for help, they said it was "normal", "natural" and "easy".

### 4.3 COMPUTER

Despite appearing less frequently in reports, some children report impatience at watching their parents struggle with technology, and proactively offer help.

Gabriel Miguel (10 anos)

Oh, she literally works with technology. She does home office. But there are times when it seems that she doesn't understand anything, so it seems that **I am smarter than her with technology**. [...] I help her. It's agony!

Other parents actively seek help.

Roseli

What else do they do for me? The computer itself. He has to do it, I have to paste it, print it. I say: "José, I need to print this here". He does it all for me.

While some parents report impatience with technology, children's impatience to see their parents trying to learn how to deal with technology makes them solve the problem more quickly.

### 4.4 SMARTPHONES

Brazil is the fifth country with the most smartphone users in the world (Statista, 2023). It is estimated that among the population that owns at least one smartphone and a child between 0 and 12 years old, about half of these children own a smartphone (Mobile Time, 2021). In the sample of the present study, this reality was confirmed, since the vast majority of the children interviewed have one smartphone. Some children interviewed got their first smartphone at the age of 5. Thus, parents see them as great helpers in the use of this device.

Roseli

If I want to move something on my cell phone, find it, they find it for me.

Some parents report a feeling of inferiority for not being able to use the cell phone as well as their children:

#### Iolanda

Nowadays children are well... children are practically born knowing how to use cell phones [...]. It's very... wow, sometimes we feel... Look, I'll tell you my case, I feel **dumb**, because I don't know how to handle such a simple thing.

As the smartphone is already so present in the daily life of Brazilian households, the mother's testimony above shows a feeling of incompetence in dealing with technology that is seen by her as something simple. Thus, her daughter helps her whenever she needs it.

### 4.5 SOCIAL NETWORK

A study released by the Comitê Executivo de Tecnologia da Informação e Comunicação [Executive Committee for Information and Communication Technology] (CETIC) points out that 88% of children and adolescents aged 9 to 17 have a profile on a social network, and the social network Tik Tok is one of their favorite ones (TIC Kids Online Brasil, 2022).

In the sample interviewed, the Tik Tok social network proved to be the favorite of the children interviewed. The report of a mother below shows how this social network changed her perception of her dancing habits:

#### Helena

The world is renewing, it changes all the time. In my time there were no dance technologies, Tik Tok, these things. And today there are. So, she learns a dance today that in my time was totally different...[...] So, the dances didn't have so much synchronization, right? Nowadays, everyone dances the same, right? Any kind of music is the same kind of dance. And in my time it was different. Sertanejo danced differently, samba danced differently, nowadays everything is kind of Tik Tok, the reference is Tik Tok, the same dance moves.

When asked if her daughter had ever asked her to record a dance clip together, the mother said yes. For another family, the 10-year-old daughter even asked her mother to record a dance together on Tik Tok, but gave up because:

#### Juliana (10)

I teach her, but it looks awful. My God in heaven!

The mother then agreed to her daughter's observation. It is interesting to note that other mothers reported a similar dynamic and that for this reason they do not use and do not intend to use this social network.

### 4.6 SUSTAINABILITY

Sustainable consumption and pro-environmental attitudes were rarely reported by the interviewees. In fact, the word "sustainability" was unknown to most of the children interviewed. When used examples such as separating garbage, not polluting water, not disposing of used oil in the sink and so on, children and parents recalled situations. In some interviews, parents reported that their children called their attention to adopt a more environmentally responsible behavior, as shown below:

#### Maíra

The other day I... because here in the building where we live there is separation of recyclable, oil and then in the rush I was throwing a glass along with other things and he said: "oh, this one is not recyclable". I said: "It's just that I hadn't washed it". Then he corrected me, yes.

#### Roseli

The water! Benjamin always draws my attention to the water. When I'm brushing my teeth or washing the dishes, he says to me: "Turn off the tap! Mom, turn off the tap! He always says it, right?"

In another family, when asked the son why he had drawn his mother's attention to turning off the tap while she was washing the dishes, the son said:

Gabriel Miguel (10 years old)

It's just that I had agony. I don't know why. I can't see something running like that for a long time. [...] **It feels like I'm the mother sometimes.**

These findings corroborate those of O'Neill and Buckley (2019) in which children actively inform and encourage their parents to adopt more sustainable behaviors, as long as parents initially have a neutral attitude towards sustainability.

Although studies indicate that environmental awareness can be explained by age, with new generations being more concerned about sustainability than older generations (Ronchi et al, 2016) and by educational level, with people with higher levels of education tending to demonstrate environmentally responsible attitudes (Schäufele and Hamm, 2017), the incidence of these factors was low in the interviews, regardless of the social class to which the family belonged. This can be justified by the fact that many Brazilians still have some difficulty in adhering to conscious consumption (SPC, 2019). Economic crises also decrease the commitment to adopt more environmentally responsible attitudes (Gomes, 2022).

#### 4.7 FOOD

Food was the category in which reverse socialization practices were practically absent. A single case that deserves to be highlighted is that of a 10-year-old son reporting that his mother loves to eat noodles, a notably ultra-processed food, and he does not. When asked if he did not eat noodles just because he did not like the taste, he said:

Gabriel Miguel (10 years old)

No, even if I liked the taste. It's like Coca-Cola. Coca-Cola, like this... A week of Coca-Cola will do a lot of harm to your health on its own. And noodles the same thing. Except the effect is less... It's less aggressive.

However, he did not try to convince his mother to stop eating.

Most families confessed they needed to improve their eating habits. Soft drinks, fast food, and ultra-processed foods are still part of the daily life of families, regardless of the family's income. In only one case, in which the child that studies in a private school, the mother reported that it was a challenge for her to prepare the lunchbox with only healthy snacks to comply with the school's rule. But there was no attempt by the daughter to improve the mother's eating habits.

One father mentioned that he does not usually give in to his children's requests for other product categories, but that for food, whenever his child asks, he tries to fulfill it:

Ricardo

So, like, I don't usually deny eating. If I have, if I don't have money at the time, if I have a credit card, I'll buy something, I'll pass the card. Because when he, especially because when he asks, he eats it, right, it's not like he asks and doesn't eat it, he wastes it, right. But not for other things, other things we give, if we can, yes, if not, no.

In this particular case, the father reports that he has this attitude towards food because he has negative memories from his childhood of not being able to eat what he would like due to budget constraints. Other parents report a similar situation, but for different reasons, such as

sporadic indulgences to their children or when they want to indulge themselves and involve their children in the process, findings that corroborate other studies (SPC, 2015; Massyliouk and Campos, 2016; Maciel et al, 2018).

These family behaviors are the portrait of a population that has more than 95 million people over the age of 18 who are overweight or obese (IBGE, 2019), and more than 9 million children under the age of 10 who are also overweight or obese (Ministry of Health, 2021).

#### **4.8 TRAVEL**

Most parents report choosing their travel destination, whether for vacation or escapist trips, based on their children's opinion, because, for them, if their children do not like the chosen destination, the experience ends up being negative for everyone:

**Maira**

Ah, like this, now it's getting close to the vacations. And my husband and I really like to go on trips like this, take the car and go on the road, right? And the last one we did, we went to Minas Gerais and stopped, you know, to see museums, churches. Then the boys said: "Mom, next trip we can't go to a beach, can we? Because we can't stand it anymore, we go uphill to see churches, downhill to see museums".

**Thaísa**

Before choosing the place, we need to know if they would like to visit, if there is something, mainly, if there is something interesting for them, so as not to be a bored trip, right, for them, which is just an adult program, so we always try to see both sides, especially for them too, to be good for both of us.

**Roseli**

Their well-being is better than mine, like, anywhere I want to go, you know? [...] So we kind of program ourselves around what they like.

The above reports exemplify stories that appeared in most interviews. As explained in the theoretical background chapter, there is a vast literature on the influence of children on travel destination choices, but not on reverse socialization. In this sense, through what was observed in the interviews, it is possible to verify that travel is not a category of service that arouses so much interest in children that they actively try to teach their parents something about it, and that parents are still more involved with this service than their children. Seeking children's opinion is only for the convenience of not having to deal with complaints during the trip, as predicted by Thornton et al (1997). Thus, travel remains outside the scope of the reverse socialization phenomenon.

#### **4.6 CLOTHING**

Some mothers reported asking their children to help them choose their clothes, and in some cases mothers give up the option they had initially chosen because of their children's opinion.

**Roseli**

When João says: "Oh, mom, it's not good". I say: "Well then, João, I won't take it."

**Luciana**

My oldest son got married last year and it was my son [younger one, aged 10 years] who chose my wedding outfit.

These reports corroborate what was argued by Ekstrom et al (1987). However, contrary to what the authors postulate, this influence appeared both in families with a single mother

configuration and in families in which the mother and father figures were present. It is worth noting that this influence was found only between the mother and son or mother and daughter dyad, being absent in the father and son and fathers and daughter relationship.

#### **4.7 SOCCER**

No stories regarding children influencing parents to adopt their soccer team were observed during the interviews, contrary to the findings of Hyatt et al (2018). Some parents report actively influencing their children to support their team, especially fathers:

Ricardo

I have many cousins and uncles from the Pompey side [joke about the association of his family name and the team's stadium name]. There is not one who is not a São Paulino. I said: "oops, you can't escape the rule".

The above report is in line with Reale and Castilhos' (2015) and White et al's (2023) findings: fathers who are team supporters strongly influence their children's team supporting behavior.

### **5. FINAL CONSIDERATIONS**

The present study aimed to investigate in which categories of products and services the reverse socialization process occurs in Brazilian families. We contribute to the literature on reverse socialization by gaining a deeper and richer look into the processes that occurs among families from emerging countries where disparities between generations are more pronounced than in more advanced countries where previous studies on this topic were conducted.

Parents' discomfort in dealing with new technologies was notorious throughout the interviews. Regardless of the parents' age, they often ask their children for help in dealing with streaming services, smart tv and smartphone. In some cases, the reason for this request for help is not because they do not have enough knowledge to deal with technology, but because technology arouses a certain impatience. Apparently, parents are giving up on learning how to deal with innovations, as these innovations happen faster and faster. In other cases, this difficulty arouses negative feelings of inferiority in parents: "I feel dumb, because I don't know how to handle such a simple thing".

It is worth noting that this relationship is mediated by parental style, with families with more open communication being more prone to reverse socialization in the field of technology. The parental style was not only assessed through open questions, but also observed during the interviews. The behavior of the children during the interview can be considered as a proxy of parental style, once most parents who responded vaguely to the question 8.1 - How do you raise your children? are the families that the children kept interrupting the parents' speech, or that made fun of the parents' answers. It is reasonable to conclude that these families have open communication standards and, therefore, the parents are not authoritarians.

Brands should reflect on whether innovations are negatively impacting the user experience. Although not the focus of this study, the interviews provide a path for future avenues of research on user experience. This concern is even more pertinent in the current context in which there is a worldwide trend of an aging population while younger generations are getting smaller and smaller due to the falling fertility rate. Brands should not place so much responsibility on younger generations, because even if parents see their children as reliable influencers to be followed, and children are proactive in helping them, the population of children aged 7-11 is decreasing worldwide as the fertility rate has been falling for decades

(World Bank, 2023). Therefore, investing in strategies to strengthen the idea of the child as an influencer or socialization agent may be unproductive.

Regarding consumer socialization, as socialization studies contribute to tracking and predicting trends of a given target audience (John, 1999), marketing managers and trend researchers will be able to look at the findings and predict behavior when Generation Alpha officially arrives in the consumer market, as they come of age in a few years.

During the literature review, it was possible to note that the literature on reverse socialization and intergenerational influence are intertwined. That is, many authors discuss reverse socialization, but use the term intergenerational influence, as evidenced in Chapter 2 - Theoretical Framework. Reverse socialization differs from intergenerational influence, because not necessarily when exercising their intergenerational influence, the child wants to teach something to their parents, they simply want to convince them to purchase a product or service for their own benefit. In reverse socialization, the child actively influences the parent to consume, or the parent actively seeks help to do so. Thus, we can conclude that all reverse socialization is a form of intergenerational influence, but not all intergenerational influence is a form of reverse socialization.

Although an exhaustive literature review on the two terms was not conducted, the present study contributes to the theoretical differentiation between these two constructs, facilitating future studies that intend to unravel greater nuances in other contexts.

The major limitation encountered was during the conduct of the interviews. Although online interviews are widely used and considered valid for academic studies in applied social sciences, this strategy proved to be unproductive in engaging children in conversation, making it difficult to maintain their attention to answer the questions, as well as trying to distract their parents. Additionally, even if the interviews had not been conducted online, the in-depth interview may not be sufficient to fully explore the child's perception, as the chosen research method directly impacts their response (Yelland & Bartholomaeus, 2021). In this sense, a multi-method approach can provide a multifaceted view of the child's universe, as recommended by Yelland & Bartholomaeus (2021). It is worth noting that there is still potential for other more creative methods of collecting data with children that come even closer to the current reality of Brazilian children. For example: gamification.

Another limitation concerns convenience sampling. Although most of the interviews were conducted with people totally unknown to the authors, the recruitment process took place by convenience, that is, the places chosen to approach the families were not totally random.

This study also explored reverse food socialization, where children encourage their parents to choose healthier food options, but other health-related dimensions could also have been addressed. For example, Vel, Mathew and Sjikrhodae (2016) conducted a case study of a social marketing campaign on breast cancer. The campaign, called "Protect Your Mother" was aimed at children to make their mothers aware of breast self-examination. To the best of our knowledge, there is no reverse socialization research that has investigated families' perceptions of this campaign and/or reverse socialization and disease.

Another category that reverse socialization can be investigated is Fake News. As shown in the research, parents have a certain aversion to dealing with technological innovations, and one way of spreading Fake News is the manipulation of visual elements. Probably, as the universe of graphic effects is more familiar to children and as the study of the prevention of Fake News is something recent, that is, not taught to parents while they were in school, children may grow up acquiring more skills in identifying this type of falsification and therefore help socialize their parents in the future.

## 6. REFERENCES

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