



## Understanding Consumption during the Transition to Motherhood: An Exploration of Shopping Orientation among New Mothers

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Approximately four million women become mothers every year in the United States alone (CDC, 2013). According to Michaels, Hoffman, and Goldberg (1982), the transition to motherhood is the most universally-occurring adult developmental transition, and one that has implications for an individual's psychological, sociocultural, and biological state. This transition also has implications for consumption, in that, "From the moment a woman finds out she is pregnant, the way she thinks, feels, and shops changes" (Eric Mower and Associates, 2013, para. 3). From early pregnancy until the child is one year old, a new mother spends approximately \$10,000, resulting in roughly \$16 billion in purchasing power (Time to Earn, 2013). Clearly, there is a critical need to understand new mothers as a consumer segment, particularly in terms of how their shopping behaviors are impacted by this transition.

The purpose of this study was to investigate shopping behaviors among new mothers and to explore these changes in terms of shopping orientation. Shopping orientation is described as a consumer's general attitude towards shopping that reflects motivations and goals sought by shopping activities (Seock & Sauls, 2008; Shim & Gehrt, 1996). Seock and Sauls (2008) examined six shopping orientations relative to Hispanic consumers: shopping confidence, brand/fashion consciousness, price consciousness, in-home shopping tendency, convenience/time consciousness, and planned buying tendency. Indeed, the significant population growth and buying power of this group makes understanding their shopping behaviors important. The same could be said for new mothers, in that, considering the physical, social, and psychological changes that a new mother experiences, it is likely that her shopping orientation will also change once becoming a mother. Yet, despite the importance of shopping orientation in market segmentation (Shim & Kotsiopulos, 1992), little is known about the concept among new mothers as a particular group of consumers.

A qualitative research approach was employed to address the purpose of the study. Upon IRB approval from the researchers' university, in-depth interviews were conducted with fourteen women who had become mothers for the first time within six months of recruitment. Interviews were audio-recorded with participants' consent and lasted between 30 minutes and two hours. Questions focused on the participant's shopping behaviors since motherhood, including where she shops, what she buys, and which channels she uses now that she is a mother. Interviews were transcribed and analyzed for emergent themes across the responses (Spiggle, 1994).

Four shopping orientations emerged as most prominent among participants in the study: price consciousness, in-home shopping tendency, convenience/time consciousness, and planned buying tendency. Several of the participants became stay-at-home-moms after having their babies, which led to a reduction in the household income, therefore they were more concerned with price than prior to becoming mothers. Participants also emphasized the fact that the

challenges of shopping with a baby have made in-home shopping more desirable and practical. Convenience and time were also considered, given that the participants talked about having an additional person to bring with them while shopping and having much less time to devote to shopping than before having the baby. Finally, a tendency toward planned buying emerged very strongly in the data, as participants found themselves having to plan their purchases in order to complete a shopping task quickly. However, participants also talked about increasing the amount of impulse purchases they made, particularly for infant clothing.

By focusing on a sample that has been overlooked in consumer behavior research in general, findings of this study expand on the literature in the areas of motherhood and consumption as well as shopping orientation. Having a child means transitioning to a new role in life, and as this study reveals, such a transition can prompt a new mother to experience the shopping process differently and even become a different kind of shopper. Marketers and retailers who understand the evolving shopping needs of this important consumer segment will be better able to address the challenges inherent to the transition to motherhood and to therefore satisfy the needs and wants of a wider range of female consumers (Moye & Kincaid, 2003). As findings of this qualitative study would be difficult to generalize, further research is needed on consumption and new motherhood, and particularly that which examines brand preference and store evaluation criteria among this group of consumers.

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