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DIGITAL CONSUMPTION AND CONSUMER INVOLVEMENT OF FIRST-TIME MOTHERS IN THE CONTEXT OF THE SDG: RESPONSIBLE PRODUCTION AND CONSUMPTION

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ABSTRACT

Objective: The objective of this article is to review the literature regarding the media use of new mothers and to determine the implications that their transition to motherhood has on their e-commerce behavior.

Theoretical Framework: This review article examines the online shopping behavior of new mothers, considering knowledge regarding online shopping behavior and the consumption patterns of new mothers.

Method: This article is based on a review of the literature in the field.

Results and Discussion: Baby goods are high-involvement goods and there is a high level of perceived risk associated with the purchase of those goods by new mothers. New mothers tend to research items online and then make their final buying decisions and actual purchases in brick-and-mortar stores.

Research Implications: These findings may be of interest to all those interested in online shopping behavior, the effect of new motherhood on consumption patterns, and the buying and selling of baby goods. They provide valuable insight, which should inform efforts toward the SDG of responsible production and consumption.

Originality/Value: This article addresses the consumer behavior of new mothers, who constitute an important and unique consumer demographic. There has been little previous research on this topic.

Keywords: E-commerce, high involvement, first-time mothers, first newborn, responsible production and consumption, Sustainable Development Goals (SDG).

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1 INTRODUCTION

Digital consumption includes information transactions, social and commercial interactions, and the influence of online product recommendations. Digital consumption has increased in recent years. Until recently, it was believed that the main barriers to internet shopping were concerns about privacy and

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information security. However, the internet is now generally recognized as a legitimate shopping avenue and, therefore, sales sites are expected to perform accordingly (i.e., to be as professional as possible, to display actual prices throughout the process, and to not waste the consumer's time).

There has been little previous discussion about new mothers as a unique and specific consumer demographic and their use of the internet as a source of information and for e-commerce. Therefore, the objective of this article is to review the literature regarding the internet use of new mothers and to determine the implications that their transition to motherhood has on their e-commerce behavior. This article deals with the online behavior of new mothers that is related to their firstborn children. The effects of the transition to motherhood and the changes it brings, the increasing consumption of digital content, and the ways in which those factors influence consumption behavior will be addressed in this work. Among other matters, this review article addresses the question of whether new mothers prefer to purchase baby goods online or in brick-and-mortar stores and the reasons for their preferences in this area.

2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

2.1 CONSUMER BEHAVIOR OF NEW MOTHERS

One of the momentous changes associated with a first birth is the change in the new mother's identity, including her goals, aspirations, and fears regarding her new role as a mother. This new identity is related to the concept of *possible selves*, as new mothers consider what and how they might want to be (and not want to be) as they fulfill their new role. Many parents experience a deep change upon the birth of their first child; instead of focusing on the present, they begin to deal with the future and anticipate what may be in store for them and for their baby (Dholakia, 2001).

Mothers' consumption behavior can be characterized as high involvement after long-term evaluation. Before making decisions about purchases, they get assistance from friends and family and also seek information from the internet. They then use the information they have gathered to decide where to purchase

baby goods and what brands of baby goods to buy (Story, Davies, & Farrell, 2005). The goods that a mother purchases for her new baby influence her prestige and image as a good mother, in her own eyes and those of others (Prothero, 2002; Sorenson & Thomsen, 2005).

2.2 CONSUMER BEHAVIOR OF NEW MOTHERS INVOLVING THE INTERNET

In Israel, there are dozens of websites supporting expectant and new mothers that offer vast amounts of information on child-rearing, quality products, and price comparisons, as well as various tips. These sites include: www.mamy.co.il/article.aspx?IDP=5385, www.kidoz.co.il/forum/, www.academics.co.il/Articles/Article6165.aspx, and www.mynet.co.il/articles/0,7340,L-3729338,00.html. However, the internet is not perceived as an entirely reliable and objective source of information about baby products. Mothers suspect that seemingly unbiased forums are biased, including by sponsorships from companies that sell baby products (Burrows, Nettleton, please, Loader, & Muncer, 2000; Clare & O'Connor, 2006). Apparently, the internet serves mainly as a tool for collecting information and assessing various alternatives rather than as a venue for making purchases. First-time parents ultimately prefer purchasing goods for their baby in brick-and-mortar stores, after viewing and touching the product, rather than using electronic information and making purchases online (Clare & O'Connor, 2006).

The fact that baby goods are high-involvement goods that are unfamiliar to the new mother increases the importance of recommendations from friends and family members, as opposed to the internet. Mothers use the internet to collect information and to educate themselves about different products, but make their final decisions based on recommendations from their nearest friends and experienced mothers (Clare & O'Connor, 2006).

2.3 RATIONAL AND EMOTIONAL CONSUMER BEHAVIOR OF NEW MOTHERS

E-commerce is characterized by emotional, impulsive buying of familiar, low-priced, low-involvement products. For high-involvement products, the

internet is used to collect data prior to the consumption decision (Kalaignanam, Kushwaha, & Varadarian, 2008; Keller, Watters, & Shepherd, 2007; Ringer, 2007).

The most common reasons for purchasing online goods were as follows (WIP, 2008):

1. The customer is familiar with the product and has used it before;
2. Due to the low price of the product, the customer perceives the online purchase of this item as a low-risk purchase;
3. The customer has all the necessary information on the internet;
4. The customer feels safe buying from a specific website.

The new mother is not an impulsive buyer. She has a strong interest in and a high degree of involvement with the baby products and, in her view, the benefit of online shopping lies in the opportunity it presents to save time and effort, as she "visits" numerous stores and brands in a short time from the comfort of her own home (Chang, Waiman, & Vincent, 2005; Phau & Meng, 2000).

The new mother sits at the computer, views on-screen images of items, and promptly compares features and prices with those of similar items. Since she cannot feel or touch the items and because her surroundings lack the shopping experience provided by brick-and-mortar stores, impulse shopping takes an entirely different form. E-commerce consumers identify items that attract their attention, thereby inadvertently entering the category of irrational purchase. They believe that the mere search for and comparison of prices represents a rational approach, but this is completely erroneous (Kalaignanam *et al.*, 2008; Ringer, 2007).

Many companies use telesales staff, in addition to their websites, to answer immediate questions. However, in the information-gathering stage, consumers do not always know the questions they want to ask and still have to see and feel the product during the purchasing process (Okkyung, Sangyong, & Ajith, 2005; Shove & Southerton, 2000). The consumer needs the internet to replace the job of the salesperson by providing a social environment that is almost human.

2.4 PERCEIVED RISK

Davis and Olson (1985) defined perceived risk as the consumer's feelings about the wisdom of a purchase and the stakes involved in that purchase. The purchase of high-stakes products is usually rational and thoughtful and follows extensive information-seeking based on the assessment of alternatives and their respective advantages and disadvantages. Electrical appliances such as refrigerators, TV sets, and air conditioners are suitable items for studying internet consumer behavior, since they are distinct, relatively expensive goods intended for long-term use and consumers generally conduct extensive searches for relevant information before purchasing such products (Li, Zhao& Srinivas,2023; Rutter & Southerton, 2000). New mothers perceive the purchasing of goods for their babies as high-stakes purchases, since these goods represent the mothers' being a "good, ideal mother" and identify them as the correct mothers for their new role (Gertner, 2016).

Bobber (2002) surveyed 129 young consumers, aged 18–25, and asked them whether the internet could replace shopping malls. He found that despite the increased use of the internet, it was no substitute for the exhilaration of actual mall shopping. In that study, only 22.9% of respondents reported shopping on the internet, mainly for CDs, computer supplies, books, and games (Bobber, 2002). That study found that the main reasons that new mothers gave for online shopping were: 1) price; 2) availability; 3) convenience in the buying procedure; and 4) home delivery (Bobber, 2002).

Updated insights and references about the role of perceived risk in online consumption conclude the following:

Perceived risk remains a crucial determinant of online purchasing behavior. Risk-related concerns, including privacy, security, and financial risks, directly impact the likelihood of completing online purchases.

Features such as robust encryption, clear return policies, and customer reviews have been shown to mitigate perceived risks effectively.

Perceived risk is also relevant in newer e-commerce domains, such as targeted advertising and livestreaming platforms. For instance, studies show

that perceived privacy risks associated with targeted advertising can lead to resistance and avoidance behavior (Patel *et al*, 2023; Hossain,2024; Wang,2023)

2.5 E-COMMERCE AMONG WOMEN IN ISRAEL

Women are now considered the most promising market segment for internet industries. Hundreds of sites are targeted at women and there are mailing lists, forums, and even search engines focused on women-related topics.

A study conducted in Israel in 2016 with 300 participants examined online shopping behavior. The findings revealed that over 67% of respondents purchase items online, including high-involvement products. The breakdown includes media devices (computers, tablets, smartphones) at 38%, home furniture and accessories at 35%, children's toys and games at 34%, household appliances at 34%, children's clothing and footwear at 33%, and cosmetics and toiletries at 31%.(https://www.metoda.co.il/metodapaperonlineshoppingsurvey)

Study examines parents' online purchasing patterns for children's products in Israel(https://www.gov.il/BlobFolder/reports/internet-shopping-patterns-kids/he/children-products-online-buying.pdf) highlight concerns about safety risks due to non-compliant or counterfeit products bought online. Parents often prioritize cost and convenience over safety, leading to potential hazards. The study recommends raising awareness of product safety, establishing dedicated informational websites, and using social marketing to shift consumer behavior toward prioritizing safety. Products frequently purchased include clothing, toys, and hygiene items, often from international platforms like Amazon or eBay.

Studies suggest that new first-time mothers, whether single or partnered, will tend to exhibit traditional patterns of consumption rather than engage in online processes, probably due to the non-tangible, personal aspects of shopping in brick-and-mortar stores. The new mother wants to hold and touch the products for her newborn and make decisions based on seeing the items and feelings and other senses. Most new mothers will collect information from the internet, but their final decisions and actual purchases will be made in brick-and-mortar stores.

In Israel, there is no significant difference between Israeli internet users in terms of ages, except for a relatively low percentage of 50-59-year-olds, deriving mainly from their smaller share in the population. https://en.isoc.org.il/about/news-room/israel-internet-use-2021

Israeli women use the internet in a skeptical way. They are willing to get information to share and to read about her and other's experiences, but they are concerned about giving credit-card details or personal details. They are more interested in collecting and analyzing data prior to their purchase than in making the actual purchase over the internet (Gertner, 2016).

3 METHODOLOGY

This article is based on a review of the extant literature in the field. This review included an examination of literature concerning different aspects of the consumer behavior of new mothers, the role of perceived risk in buying decisions, and the use of e-commerce among Israeli women.

4 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The internet undoubtedly plays a major role in providing emotional support for first-time mothers. It offers support, information, and a forum for exchange between mothers while fostering a maternal identity for new mothers (Aitken, 2024 ; Eddi,2021 Siddique ,2020; Al-Mutawtah,2023 Interestingly, mothers are more assisted by the internet than fathers, who prefer guidebooks or professional sources of information (Iee,2021 ; Mulauzi et l,2020). The low frequency of buying first-time baby products via e-channels may be due to the following: 1) the high level of involvement associated with the consumption of baby products; 2) the high perceived risk of such purchases; 3) having time to search during pregnancy; 4) the low level of trust in the information presented online; 5) reluctance to disclose credit-card details online; 6) lack of human contact; and 7) difficulty choosing the best alternative and reaching a final decision. All of these factors together make the internet a good channel for evaluation prior to decision-making rather than a buying channel. The internet

is used as a consulting channel and a pool of information prior the acquisition, but the actual purchases are made with the father or friend after viewing the item.

There has been scant research on the purchase of secondhand baby products over the internet. Future studies might examine mothers' shopping behavior involving second-hand baby products as a function of demographic variables, such as age, gender, and income.

Despite the convenience of armchair browsing and quick price comparisons, the virtual shop has yet to replace the mall, and it is hard to achieve full satisfaction among online buyers. It will be interesting to examine the electronic consumption of first-time mothers in the future in relation to age, family status, and other demographic variables.

5 CONCLUSIONS

New mothers have fears and doubts related to their new role. They look to their peer groups, read a lot of information on the internet, and use social networks to see and hear how other mothers are behaving, but eventually decide to buy particular products for their babies from brick-and-mortar stores after touching and seeing the products.

Although digital consumption is cheaper and readily accessible, new mothers prefer to go to real stores to buy the first products for their new babies and to evaluate the different brands in the store. Once mothers have become familiar with the different brands and products, used them, and evaluated them based on that use, they may use the internet for repeat purchases of items.

This is one of the first articles to address the online-shopping habits of new mothers. These findings may be of interest to all those interested in online shopping behavior, the effect of new motherhood on consumption patterns, and the buying and selling of baby goods. They provide valuable insights which should inform efforts to achieve the SDG of responsible production and consumption.

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