

Fashion Involvement of the First-Time Mother: Online Purchasing or Face-to-Face Purchasing

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Abstract: The first-time mother often uses the consumption process to overcome the disparity between her old and her new role and being viewed as the ideal mother in the public consciousness. Research shows that buying the right clothes and the right fashion is symbolic consumption often related to demographic variables like age or income, and to other relevant factors including personality traits and price perception. Becoming a mother for the first time is one of, if not “the”, most significant transition in the women’s life expressed in physical, emotional, psychological, and mental changes the pregnant and post-pregnant mother experiences. Therefore, offering a new approach to the marketers will help associate them to better identify and fulfill the women’s new needs. This article attempts to illustrate ways to penetrate the new mother’s world and behavior. Based on popular research it appears that new mothers often use fashion clothes for their first baby to activate self-esteem, as well as for prestige sensitivity [1]. Over the last decade online consumption has increased significantly both globally as well as in Israel. More new mothers are using the internet to compare and order goods This increasing and changing trend leads the authors to examine similarity or differences in the fashion involvement of the new mother. Using a focus group embracing eight first-time mothers, with their first newborn aged up to 15 months, the authors suggest that even though the online consumption in Israel is increasing rapidly, new mothers are still likely to buy using traditional stores. These findings indicate that the new mother is not using the internet as a purchasing channel, but is likely to collate information through the web while preferring to do her shopping face to face. The data consider that lack of time and high involvement in baby’s clothes are the main reasons for not using online consumption. The research also advises the marketers to use the web only as a source of information and recommendation for the new mother, based on the fact that she needs a role model for her behavior in her new position.

Key words: Fashion involvement, online consumption, first-time mother.

1. Literature Review

1.1 *Becoming a Mother for the First-Time Behavior and Demographic Characteristics*

Transitions in life separate the person from the key role to which he was accustomed, and engage him in creating new roles to fit the gaps. The individual will begin to formulate possible selves and to envision himself as he might possibly become [2]. The mother’s new selves struggle with serious questions such as, what kind of mother do I want to be? Or, will I be a good mother? What is a good mother? And, will I be able to balance my new work and life with my new role as a mother? [3].

During the last decade some significant changes have occurred in the demographic characteristics of the new mother.

Age: the age of the first birth and educational attainment have changed over time and, for example, the mother’s age at the first birth increased by 3.6 years from 1970 to 2007—from 21.4 to 25.0 years [4]. The percentage of women aged 35 and over increased nearly eight times between 1970 (1%) and 2006 (8%), and the percentage of first-time mothers under 20 years of age dropped from 36% to 21% during that same period [5].

Marital status: The proportion of single mothers by choice in Israel has been three times greater since 1990s. They accounted for only 5% of all single mothers in 1985, and 17% in 2008 [6]. In the western world, the percentage of single mothers also increased

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and today, according to U.S. Census Bureau, more than 80% were headed by single mothers out of about 12 million single parent families in 2014 [7] (Fig. 1).

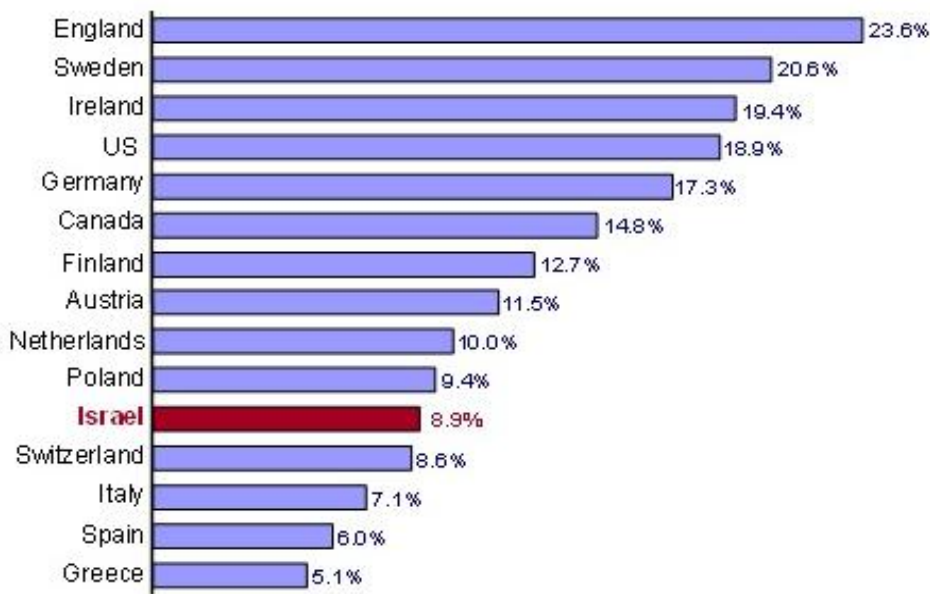
1.2 Education of the New Mother

New mothers have career desires and delay births enabling them to finish college before childbirth. This raised the education of the new mother by 41% during the 1990s [4]. Among mothers of newborns who were aged 35 and older, 71% had at least some college education [7]. Increasing college education also appears amongst solo mothers where 3% of the solo mothers by choices have no college education [4].

Income: The income of new mothers is higher than before due to their higher education and the fact that they postpone their first pregnancy in order to develop their career. The solo mother by choice has a higher income than the divorced mother especially since she is

older, has greater savings, and has only one child (at the age of 39). New parents become more aware of their expenses, income, savings and so on in the past and currently. They find themselves forced to adopt more reasonable buying habits, postpone large expenditures (such as car, electrical goods or even moving to a new house) and first consider buying goods for their first baby rather than for themselves [8]. In all western countries, single mothers are poorer than partnered mothers. The government applies a proactive safety policy to help their ability to work and raise a child. In Israel the poverty rate is extremely low, and stands at 18% of mothers who live below the poverty line. This difference should be compared to 40% in Canada, and 38% in the USA. The explanation for this is that in Israel there is a relatively low percentage of married mothers as well, who live below the poverty line, most of whom are Arab and Druze.

Single-parent mothers as a percent of all mothers*
2004-2005



*mothers aged 18-64

Source: Taub Center for Social Policy Studies in Israel.
Data: Luxembourg Income Study (LIS), database.

Fig. 1 Single parent mothers as a percentage of all mothers, 2004-2005.

Working status: Having a baby is a major factor causing conflict between the mother and the “worker”. New mothers choose to alter their occupational pattern after childbirth and spend more time being a mother than developing career opportunities. Some women prefer to work at home while others have a “work commitment”—they feel obligated to work and have an incentive to keep their job after their first childbirth. More than half (57%) of the women aged 18-50 having their first child were members of the labor force, while 76% in 2006 and 72% in 2008 of the new mothers worked during their first pregnancy.

Educated mothers with a first degree or higher education were more likely to work during pregnancy than mothers with less education (87% vs. 28-27%). Women having their first child before their first marriage were less likely to work during pregnancy (53%) vs. new mothers giving birth after their first marriage (84%). New mothers having their first child at the age of 25 years or older had higher rates of working during pregnancy than younger mothers (will pertain to her new identity as a “good mother”) [3].

In sum we can see through the new mother’s demographic and behavioral attributes [7, 9] that:

- The new mother is now older than two decades earlier (14% of the new mothers were 35 years old in 2008 compared to 9% in 1990);
- They are more educated (54% had at least some college education compared to 41% in 1990); 41% are not married (compared to 28% in 1990), delaying marriage till after having embarked on a career or only when “Mr. Right” comes along [9];
- A growing trend exists to have a child without a partner and increase their educational achievements, and due to improved medical skills that facilitate becoming pregnant at an older age.

1.3 Fashion Involvement of the New Mother for Her Newborn

For the goods and services we purchase often

express who we are and, according to Ref. [10], there is a relationship between symbolic consumption and personal role transitions. In their study these authors imply that consumption helps to construct the consumer’s identity at the following dimensions:

(1) Consumption to handle uncertainty—a role change is often guided by challenges, stress, and uncertainty about the obligations and performing the new role. The less secure the consumers will be relative to their new role performance and expectations, the more likely they will be to use products and services as stereotypical symbols to enhance role performance.

(2) Consumption motivated to achieve the ideal self—consumption of representative products will help the consumer to accept her ideal self as desirable. The women will have cosmetics that fit their ideal identity as cultivated women or the new mother-to-be will purchase services that will pertain to her new identity as a “good mother” [3].

(3) Consumption to cope with liminality—the more significant the transition, the more likely consumption will be used to facilitate the transition to the new role by narrowing the gap between the real/current identity and the new/ideal identity and by reducing the uncertainty and coping with the liminality during the change [11, 12].

These roles of consumption during transition to mother often enhance the clothing and other baby products as an important issue of the behavior of the new mother reflecting her self-esteem, especially when she is a partnered mother with a cohabiting relationship [1]. As for solo mothers, consumption behavior of fashion clothes for the newborn is often influenced by her price perception and the price quality due to the fact that solo mothers often rely on one salary but are more sensitive to the price of the product and less to the consciousness of others [1].

Since the women are very much aware of the signals they send to the surroundings through their children’s clothing, and they use clothing as symbolic goods, the

researcher refers to baby's fashion as a high involvement product, meaning the perceived risk of the purchase is high and chancy [13,14]. High involvement products are considered post-purchase processes when the consumer is seeking information before making a decision. The new mother uses individuals, family friends, acquaintances, marketing, advertising or exhibitions, public communication instruments and personal experiences. The new mother also uses the internet saving her time and money, which has made a huge change in seeking information for consumers at both high and low levels of involvement. The internet is the most efficient media providing the relevant information within a short period of time and with reduced effort for high involvement consumers [15, 16].

In her research [1] shows that in partnered, as well as in solo new mothers, there is a positive correlation between price perception, public self-consciousness and media usage with the new mother's involvement with the baby's fashion clothes. Based on this study, the higher the price perception (in terms of consumer's perception of the product's quality) indicates beliefs regarding the high quality of the product and its status [17] with the fashion involvement of the new mother being higher. The mother's involvement with fashion clothes for the first baby also has a positive linkage to the personality traits of the new mother both as regards self-confidence and public self-consciousness (i.e., what she and others perceive as a good mother [18]). This is also positively related to the mother's media usage (the variety of channels the new mother uses in order to collect data about the clothes from print, personal and interactive channels [19-21]).

1.4 Online Consumption as an Increasing Trend

According to the 2013 Internet ranking committee (<http://www.globes.co.il/news/article.aspx?did=1000815317>) it transpires that in Israel there are 5.2 million internet surfers, who account for 77% of the population. And 91.8% of them surf from the table or laptop computer, 46% surf from their mobile phones and 18%

from their tablets.

The highest proportion of internet surfers is amongst youth aged 15-17 (97.1%), with less than half of those aged 65 and older surfing the internet (45.7%). The prominent area of surfers' interest is Israeli sites of news, entertainment and thereafter is blogs, and forums that developed over the years. Economics, followed by purchasing, sport and food are in fifth place and below.

The proportion of Israelis who bought at least one item using the web, indicates the extent to which Israel is an online society. But of all fields the highest percentage of users is found in the field of vacation. And 60% said they closed deals, bought flight tickets and made hotel reservations through the internet abroad, and only 20% did this through Israeli sites. On the other hand, 91% of Israeli consumers prefer to buy food at supermarkets online, 82% of Israelis made purchases outside of Israel, and 18% made purchases on Israeli sites (<http://www.themarket.com/technation/1.2526661>).

Some 10% of online purchases were made on international sites; consumers spent twice the amount of time on the internet and spent twice the sum of money than consumers who make most purchases online from local sites.

In a global survey of 13,000 drivers in 11 countries, Samson et al [22] find globally that drivers seek more integrated digital marketing experience from manufacturer and dealer sites. The study finds that 13% of buyers browse more than 20 websites to get the information they seek, 92% visit at least six websites before buying a car, 69% turn to traditional offline media for information to make a car-buying decision, 86% customers want dealer sites with better integrated digital marketing, 62% favor a process that will enable them to get more simplified information online, 59% welcome the ability to chat online with a dealer and 87% of respondents felt that better interactive digital marketing is a must for the auto industry (ibid). The study shows that for customers buying a car, the internet has a more positive and impressive influence

on decision-making than television or print media or other word of mouth media. The positive impact of the internet was shown also in the study by Dai et al [23] where early positive online knowledge has a positive impact on the customers' purchasing also in high involvement products (high perceived risk products).

Research shows differentiation in online consumption behavior based on gender [24], where women need websites with more information and men are interested in key words, figures, tables, and graphics and need only limited information. The process of gleaning information is available as the site is easier to use [25] meaning that men navigate more successfully within the structure of the site while females are not affected by it. At the search phase of the process, men are more passive in collecting information, needing more spatial properties like location while females are more active in collecting information and need more verbal sites using more object properties like colors [26].

The internet allows us to share information, opinions, and data without ownership where the mother can collaborate, as well as share, information using the web [27] YouTube, Flickr, Facebook, Freecycle, and Twitter. In a broad sense, the Internet itself is a giant pool of shared content that can be accessed by anyone with an Internet connection, and new mothers can use these channels as information resources.

2. Methodology

The empirical research is qualitative group

interviews with two groups of new mothers. The interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim. The mother group embraced ten first time mothers aged 24-37 with their first child aged 6-18 months.

The first group included five mothers (Dorit, Sharon, Gal, Mayyan and Shira) with their first child aged eight to ten months, and the second group included four mothers (Rachel, Odelia, Efrat, and Rinat) with a new baby one-two years of age.

The groups included mothers from health care centers in the center of Israel (Tel Aviv, Rehovot, Bat Yam, Azor and Yavne) who met several times before the interviews in order to improve and ease the open atmosphere of the discussion. The participants included mothers all living in different households with diverse incomes. All were partnered mothers having a stable relationship for more than three years.

The meeting took place in the morning in central Tel Aviv (in a consulting firm's board room) and the mothers in group A, as well as in group B, came with the children (as they were still breastfeeding). Each group lasted for one two-hour session, with a 30-minute break for coffee and snacks.

Preliminary research [1, 19] demonstrated a significant relationship between fashion involvement for the baby's clothes and demographic parameters including age, income, education and marital status. The female participants were divided into the following profile (Table 1).

Table 1 Participants' description.

	Group A (babies aged up to 1 year)					Group B (babies aged between 1-2 years)			
Participant	Dorit	Shira	Gal	Sharon	Maayan	Rachel	Odelia	Rinat	Efrat
Mother's age	34	29	27	30	26	25	24	26	37
Baby's age (months) and gender	9 m girl	5 m girl	5 m girl	6 m boy	7 m boy	15 m boy	17 m girl	18 m girl	14 m girl
Mother's income compared to the average	High	Average	Average	High	Low	Low	Low	High	High
Mother's marital status	Solo mother	Married	Partnered (cohabiting relationship)	Married	Married	Married	Married	Married	Solo
Mother's education	High school	2nd degree	1st degree	1st degree	High school education	High school education	High school education	1st degree	1st degree

3. Findings

The mothers were anxious to talk about their consumption behavior for the new born and have a great deal of knowledge about the internet and the information they can find there. All of the mothers used the internet with average frequency, of between two-six hours a week before becoming mothers, and most of them listed one experience of buying products from the web—mostly food and insurance goods like insurance for the car, vacation in Israel and overseas.

They hardly share information besides sharing their experience of using a travel agency. “I publish my impressions from the trip to Greece in the forum in order to recommend it to others” (Odelia). Gal shared from her experience in buying a computer and Maayan shared her impressions of having a new refrigerator.

The overall findings suggest that the new mothers with a child up to two years of age are highly involved in fashion products. They are seeking the right brand and collection information using the internet but eventually they go to the store and purchase the goods face to face. Since fashion is an important product affecting the consumer’s positioning and identity [1, 28] the new mother is seeking the latest trends in the web, is looking for the clothes personalities are wearing and is likely to buy the “right” product as the “perfect mother”; but ultimately, she must go to the store and see it for herself.

“For Shon, my baby, I seek the exact clothes like Prince George and I saw what clothes Angelina Jolie’s baby was wearing, but I went to the store in the center where I live to feel the clothes and to decide what size is the right one” (Dorit).

The purchasing is traditional because of the new mother’s curiosity regarding the baby’s size and color, and also because she is still insecure in deciding the correct fashion.

“I went to the store to see the suit for Itai and still could not decide. So I took my mother and my best

friend to help me decide because I wanted it to be the best decision” (Sharon).

This statement clearly states that the new mother, regardless of her demographic variables, is looking for the right clothes using traditional shops, due to the fact that this is new to her, she does not know much about clothing, and needs to feel the material prior to buying. The decision-making is a substantial rather than an impulsive decision but is highly involved in the first clothing for the new born baby.

3.1 Fashion Involvement and the New Mother’s Characteristics

Consumption and material preparation during transition to motherhood helps control the duration, separating the pregnant woman from those prior to childbirth, and activating the new role as a new mother [1]. The consumption also helps the mother to adapt to her new role and generate her new position as a mother [29, 30].

Fashion involvement is negatively related to age and education, where the lower the new mother’s education or the younger she is, the greater her fashion involvement in baby clothes [1, 21]. The results in this research support the claim that new mothers with lower education and are younger demonstrate higher involvement in clothes.

“I look for the clothes very carefully and invest much time and energy in finding the right clothes to impress the family” (Maayan).

The young new mother was more concerned about her choice and its influence.

“I did not want to choose for Lian (my baby girl) the regular clothes everyone is wearing, after all she is my first born and I must give her the best choices ever” (Odelia).

These statements suggest that the new mother is young, less educated, and less secure in her decision-making, is influenced more by the surroundings, and is more anxious about making the “right choices” for her child.

On the other hand, the oldest mothers (aged 30 plus) and the highly educated mothers (B.A. degree or higher) had little or no involvement in the baby's clothes, probably due to the fact that they have no opinion about positioning themselves using the baby's clothes.

"I was given my sister's baby clothes for Tamar and I used them. I don't think it's wise to spend any money on baby's clothes in the first two years. They are growing all the time and it's better to save the money buying them toys or books" (Shira).

In sum we see that the new mother has high involvement to her firstborn's clothes. She is looking for ideas on the web but still purchases in the stores after carefully seeing and looking for the clothes.

3.2 Online Consumption as an Increasing Trend

The findings suggest that the new mother is seeking and sharing information using the web but hardly buys online. Regardless of her demographic variables the new mother goes to the store to see the clothes and to decide what to buy.

"I looked for the clothes in the internet but in the end, I couldn't help it and must feel the material and look for the right color" (Gal).

The experience of buying the first clothes must be face to face in the traditional way and the new mother does not want to miss it.

"I hardly buy the clothes for Michal since I got most of them from friends and neighbors, but the few outfits I bought I went to the cheap warehouse in the center and chose. They are so adorable and so tiny" (Rinat).

Consumption was not related to the baby's age where mothers from the first and the second group (baby's age younger and older than one year) had the same consumption behavior.

Based on Refs. [31-33] online consumption categorizes more the younger consumer (aged 18-25) who is more innovative, less suspicious of giving their credit card, and is more sensitive to time. Still, in this study no relationship between the new mother's age and online consumption behavior was seen, and young

as well as older mothers preferred traditional consumption.

"I buy a lot of groceries using the web but for Michal I couldn't buy online because I wanted to see them myself and to see the right color and the right size. I couldn't buy without seeing the clothes. It is my first baby, after all" (Efrat).

Traditional consumption was also revealed in highly educated mothers.

"I must use the internet because I was used to it and must see what the latest trends are but eventually I went to the nearest store to buy Adina her first dress for kinder garden" (Dorit).

Online consumption is conspicuous consumption categorized as consumers having identities through products and goods. They are "consume now", and characterize themselves through consumption, use consumption to be happy and to advertise what they have [34].

In fact, modern fashion consumption is "you are what you wear" [27, 33]. In this study the new mothers use baby clothes to identify themselves as "perfect mothers". The partnered mothers are probably more aware of the impressions she makes in the eyes of her family and friends.

"I was so troubled what my mother-in-law would say about me and I wanted to make the best impression so I bought the best clothes for Aaron without even looking at their price" (Rachel).

It was interesting to see that solo mothers, on the other hand, were less self-consciousness and less influenced by the opinions of those around [1,3,35], and here, too, both Dorit and Efrat were solo mothers by choice and were less afraid of the impression they make.

"I didn't care about what they will say, I only wanted to buy the cheap and good material so my baby will be happy. I went to the book store and there I was devastated by the variety of toys and books for babies. I didn't care about the baby; after all he is growing so rapidly" (Dorit).

Dorit claims that new mothers look at clothes as symbolic products influenced by self and public consciousness but the solo mothers have their own, non-confirmative decisions, have less perception about their consumption, and are highly involved in the price of the products. These findings are possibly due to the fact that solo mothers are more financially stressed and have limited savings, which increase their price sensitivity [1,36].

4. Discussion

The above themes obtained from the interviews point to the fact that the new mother is highly involved in baby fashion. She treats clothing as symbolic items, positioning her as a perfect mother deeply influenced by web sites and the internet.

Since the higher the involvement indicates more media usage and more time the consumer will dedicate to advertising [37, 38] it is logical to suppose that new mothers will use the internet to share information to gather conclusions and to share from their experience, but they will not miss the buying experience of the first baby's clothes.

As the researcher shows, the results of this research also advocate that solo mothers are more price perceptive, and partnered mothers are more publicly self-conscious, but both solo and partnered mothers are highly involved in clothing for their first child regardless of their marital status.

Both solo and partnered mothers have high involvement in fashion clothing but the more educated the mother is and the older she is, the lower is her involvement.

For the new mother clothing for the baby is symbolic in terms of status and the importance of positioning, so looking on the web site for the latest trend or the outfit celebrities are wearing is essential if mothers want their baby to be fashionable [17]. Still, the buying decision will be at the store because this is a new product, a new experience, and she treats shopping as participation in the new and enjoyable job of her new

role as a mother.

Marketers in the baby clothes segment should be aware of the fact that information must be shared using the web forums and blogs but the main decision will be made at the store. These findings suggest that marketers advertise all the information on the web, but allow the new mother to use a coupon or other sales promotion to go to the store personally to buy the clothing.

It will be interesting to examine the consumer behavior of the new mother after her new born is older (more than 2 years) or to explore her buying consumption procedure for the second baby.

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