SINGLE MOTHERS AND SOCIAL MEDIA USES – TRENDS AND BEHAVIOR

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ABSTRACT

Social networking sites (SNSs) have become an increasingly common aspect of daily life. As of August 2012, 69% of online American adults used SNSs; Facebook was the most popular, used by 66%, followed by LinkedIn (Brenner, 2012).

Social network sites are defined as web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system; (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection; and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system (Ellison, 2007)

Based on popular scholarship it appears that solo mothers by choice are more likely to use the Internet to seek support groups, meet other peer groups in the same situation, and deal with the same conflicts and issues characteristic of the solo mother (Russell, 2012; Walton, 1999).

In this article I will analyze the social media usage by solo mothers, its effect on the transition to mother for the first time, and the situation and patterns in which the solo mother uses social media.

Key words: Motherhood, single mother, social media.

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1. Introduction

Becoming a mother for the first time is a dramatic transition in the woman's life cycle, as it changes the role's definition, consumer behavior, and preferences and, in fact, forces her to make changes in her consumption decision Gertner Moryossef 2011)

The lack of free time and the availability of the media increase the number of social SNSs used by new mothers with a young child (aged 0-3 years) from 56% (2005) to 92% (2011), but still more than 85% of new mothers (PEW, 2011a).

After becoming a mother for the first time the Internet usage increases by 45%, email by 31%, and mobile phone usage by 28%, while magazine readership declines by 55%, and TV viewing slumps by 36% (McDaniel et al., 2012). Research shows that media usage (Internet, television, radio magazines, newspapers, movies, and books) has a considerable impact on dress and appearance, and influences fashion involvement both amongst solo and partnered mothers, with no difference between the two sectors. Both solo, as well as those in a partnered positive relationship, suggest that when the new mother is more involved in her newborn's clothes she will use more channels of information regardless of her marital status (Dixon, 2007; Hiew Shu & Tee, 2012; McFatter, 2002; O'Cass, 2004).

New mothers are a specific segment worth treating differently because of their high involvement and high level of anxiety after birth (Gertner Moryossef, 2011).

There has been little research on single mothers by choice and their increasing percentage (5% in 1960 to 41% in 2010 in USA). In this paper, the author will review trends and uses of SNSs by new mothers in general and by single mothers in particular, to try to evaluate the characteristics and features of SNS users.

2 Social media in general – trends and characteristics

The social media, including social networks (Facebook), joint projects (Wikipedia), blogs, content communities (Youtube) and worlds of virtual games (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010) is perceived by consumers as a reliable source of information on diverse products and services, to a greater extent than companies that send messages under the auspices of traditional communications (Mangold & Faulds, 2009).

The social media influenced the consumer and made him more active and more involved in the process of evaluating the information. If, formerly, the consumer was exposed to information that was filtered and evaluated, and was controlled by the organization, s/he is

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now exposed to information written by other consumers, by other unfiltered and unmonitored criticism and opinions by the organization itself. Thus the social media enables the consumer to be the producer in practice, who writes and influences the process of transferring the information, opinions, and purchasing intention in an unbiased and non-commercial manner, and with greater impact (Cader & Al Tenaiji, 2013; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010 Singh, Tanuja et al., 2008).

The social media includes social networks (Facebook), joint projects (Wikipedia), blogs, content communities (You tube) and virtual games (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). It is perceived by consumers as a reliable source of information that provides background about diverse products and services to a greater extent than do companies that send messages under the auspices of the traditional communications (Mangold & Faulds, 2009).

The social media affects the consumer and makes him more active and more involved in the process of evaluating information. If, in the past, the consumer was exposed to information that had been filtered and evaluated, and was controlled by the organization, he is now exposed to information pertaining to the company written by other consumers in unfiltered and uncontrolled criticism, and other opinions by the company itself. In such a way the social media enable the consumer to be the producer in practice, who writes and influences the process of conveying the information, the opinion, and directing the purchase in unbiased and non-commercial manner, wherein lies its considerable strength (Cader & Al Tenaiji, 2013; Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010; Singh et al., 2008).

The social media affects the consumer at the following aspects:

1. Interactivity – the consumer involves and does not simply receive the information;
2. The use of a source as new information – Internet is a the new and key source;
3. The reliability of the information on social networks is greater and less biased;
4. The social media enable a two-directional dialogue between organization and consumer.

The concept of social media describes diverse platforms that facilitate generating networks of social connections, content, and sharing information by the users. The social media provide a broad variety of new sources that include online information that was created and distributed by consumers, with the intention of informing, enriching, and educating each other regarding products, brands and so on. The use of social networks reached more than 80% of the global population that is on the network, and 1.2 billion users globally. In Israel,

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the social network Facebook is dominant in the field, with an estimated 3.7 million users in 2013. Until 2015 no less than 50% of online sales were conducted through social media channels, and already today, Facebook generates about 26% of the approaches to trade sites globally. This number is likely to rise with the growth of the largest social network in the world. Furthermore, 20% of the surfers prefer checking products directly on the brand's Facebook pages.

The importance of the social media lies primarily in the importance of the social networks gathering and assessing the information prior to, and during, the purchase itself. The Internet has become a more efficient and effective method than it was for consumers in the past. Nowadays, it is possible to reach a large quantity of information at a relatively minimal cost in time, money and effort. From certain aspects, consumers can receive information that is similar to that advertised in the traditional Internet mass communications. They can receive this directly from the wholesalers, from the sales representative, from the customer service representative, "face to face" on the company's site, from the brand page on Facebook, or by word of mouth.

In Israel 2012, 59% of the consumers conducted online (or other non-online) market research prior to purchase.

In recent years, online purchases in the Israeli market have also increased. Surveys conducted recently in Israel indicate that the absolute majority of Israelis (some 80%) conduct online purchases from local and international sites.

The data testify to the high readiness in the Israeli market to perform online purchases in diverse fields, with 60% of the purchases conducted on international sites (Kol & Lev On, 2014).

3. New mothers' characteristics and the social media

The relationship between symbolic construction and identity construction is manifested in four different but related ways (Banister & Hogg, 2006; Griffin et al., 2007):

1. Behavior consumption to manage with uncertainty;
2. Consumption motivated to achieve the ideal self ;
3. Consumption to cope with liminality;
4. Consumption to bridge identities;

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Based on research (Gertner Moryossef, 2011; Sorenson& Thomsen 2006) behavior consumption for the new mother helps to construct her new identity and new role at the following dimensions:

1) It supports the construction of the single consumer's identity, i.e. the objects are saying something about the consumer;

2) It provides a certain feeling or sense that develops the consumer's experimental identity. Consumption can construct maintenance identity when the consumer's identity is established and solid versus acquisition identity;

3) It can play a positive role in helping the consumer during transition but despite the uncertainty and insecurity consumers sometimes feel indecisive and uncertain in their consumption decisions.

Consumption not only has positive aspects during the transition but also can complicate the process, making it complex and confused (Banister & Hogg, 2006; Sørensen, 2010).

The findings demonstrate that uncertainty, resistance, fears, constraints, negative feelings and problematic aspects can accompany the transition and may confuse the consumer.

Research with 360 Israeli women aged 18-44 (PEW, 2011; Zeta-tools, 2011) show that 95% read mail at least once a day, surf the internet or talk on their mobile phones, 20% read blogs and 81% have an active Facebook profile. More than 50% of the women share the information on products on the social networks. The high use of the social networks characterizes women in general (compared to men) and new mothers in particular.

Studies with a research population of 360 Israeli women aged 18-44 (Zeta tools, 2011) show that 95% read emails at least once a day, surf the internet or talk on their cell phones; 20% read blogs; 81% have an active Facebook profile; and more than 50% of the women share knowledge about products on the social networks (PEW, 2011; Zeta-tools, 2011).

The considerable use of social networks is characteristic of women in general (compared to men) and of new mothers in particular.

Blogging, internet and other social networking, as well as magazines and televisions are used as guides to improve the macro-system interaction of the new mother, explain the increased use of the mass media after having a child (McDaniel et al. 2012).

The new mother spends more time using the Internet prior to the decision-making to expose the data, evaluate the surfer's opinion and make a choice. Based on face-to-face interviews

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with 106 participants and two focus groups of solo mothers by choice (Gertner Moryossef, 2011, 2016) results show that married, as well as single, mothers use magazines, internet and television, in the same way.

Because the new mother is not familiar with her new role and suffers from an element of uncertainty, she will use the media for her decision-making (Grace et al., 2013; McDaniel et al., 2012). The media usage increases dramatically when they become new mothers.

The media, including internet, television, radio, magazines, newspapers, movies, and books has a considerable impact on dress and appearance (Dixon, 2007; McFatter, 2002; O'Cass, 2004). Advertising in magazines and mass media sources are the main factors that influence the consumption of the baby's products (Cardoso, 2007).

The average age of the new mothers studied was 27 years. McDaniel et al. (2012) found that the frequency of blogging predicts the mother's feeling of well-being (i.e. marital satisfaction, couple conflict, parenting stress, and depression). The more the mother uses SNS the more she feels connected to the outside world, and her wellbeing increases.

Studies show a negative relationship between age and internet use by the mothers, a positive relationship between the parent's education and the Internet use, and a positive relationship between income and media usage (Doty et al., 2012).

Comfort with technology appears to be a more salient predictor of parents' online activities despite the fact that they may differ in their online information-seeking behavior according to income and online social activities. An ecological, social capital lens sensitizes educators regarding family life, policy makers, and researchers to the possibility that technology provides resources to families. One should bear in mind that differences in personal context may offer diverse opportunities and limitations (Doty et al., 2012; O'Connor & Madge, 2004)

Women after birth worry about their new role and about the combination with old roles, and make use of the digital media and the social network to hear about other mothers' experiences, recommendations and cooperation.

4. Single new mothers' characteristics and social media

The single mother includes mothers with children from a previous marriage and single mothers by choice who never been married having their child solo with no partner. The second group includes first time mothers by choice whose number increased rapidly from 5% in 1960 to 41% in 2010, in the USA as well in Israel. The proportion of solo mothers in Israel

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increased significantly. The percentage of single mothers by choice has been rising over the last three decades from 1.3% in the 1990s to 3.4% in 2005 (Central Bureau of Statistics 2008: 178-203; Gertner Moryossef, 2011).

The never married single mother by choice is a growing group with its own special needs and the following characteristics (Banister & Hogg, 2006; Segal-Engelchin, & Wozner, 2005)

- Age: Women take this decision after experiencing several previous unsuccessful and disappointing relationships rather than establish a family unit. They fear missing the chance to become pregnant due to the ticking biological clock, which generates increasing pressure towards the end of their thirties.

- Socio-economic situation: Solo mothers belong usually to the middle class and above. Most have higher education. As of 2007, a parent with higher education heads 43% of single parent families, 19% lack higher education, 13% have a B.A degree, 11% have an M.A. or a Ph.D. Those completing high school account for 40%, completing elementary school for 14%, and only 3% lack any education.

- Employment: Most solo mothers are employed in the free professions, own their apartment or live in a rented, well-equipped apartment. Most solo mothers (69%) supported themselves and their children. Alimony from the fathers was demanded by 18%, and 13% needed support from the State.

- About 70% of the single mothers belong to the labor force, to the same extent as partnered mothers, and are employed full time or part time.

- The average age of employed single parents with more than 12 years of schooling is 38 (Bar Zuri, 2007)

Since single mothers are often more stressed than partnered mothers it will be interesting to see if the social media reduced parental stress and enhanced self-disclosure.

Studies (Cairney et al., 2003; Morris, 2014) show that single mothers are more depressed after birth (12 months) and have fewer social friends and less of a social environment due to lack of time. The fact that single mothers have less time can explain the high frequency of social media. Solo mothers use twitter, Facebook and other socio-technical systems related to maternal and child health in order to have friends and a social environment after birth, to share information about their children, to change their style of birtfeeding and other maternal help. Solo mothers also use SNS systems to announce the birth and share the baby's

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development. The percentage of mothers with Postpartum Depression (PPD) was lower in the group of the SNS users compared to the non-users of SNS systems (Morris, 2014).

The use of social technologies by "Mommy Blogging" (Mendelsohn & Honey, 2010) has characterized where mothers write blogs referring to their children's development, read blogs from, and experience and practice mothers' sharing their experience and knowledge in the web.

Single mothers having their first child on their own are more likely to use social media for social comparison theory (SCT) and use the Internet to learn from one another, find analogous groups, and to support one another. Studies show a negative correlation between education and social media usage, and a positive correlation between age and social media usage (Cardoso, 2007).

Studying 32 African new single mothers, Warren et al., (2010) found that 62.5% had access to a computer at home to seek information related to child development, to gather information about their unique situation, and their rights and privileges as a single mother.

Based on individual interviews (Gertner Moryossef, 2011) single mothers often use social media to share their station with other peer groups and to feel less lonely using SNS.

5. Implications

Internet resources can often play an important role in the lives of new parents as emotional support, tangible aid, and to provide information; a new parent often uses the internet as a bridge to the outside world (Scharer et al., 2009).

Little has been studied about the relationship between marital status and internet usage but based on focus groups (Gertner Moryossef, 2011) single mothers conduct more online activities due to their need to seek information and to connect with other peer groups.

Studies shows that a positive relationship between being a parent and social activities affect mothers more than fathers, and single mothers compared to married mothers. They tend more to use social media for social environment and interactive relationships.

Being a member in an online group in one's free time without any need to leave the house, and still be able to share conflicts and ideas related to mother's problems and conflicts, makes meeting and keeping friends hard. Mom Meet Mom helps people stay social and find the support and community they need to really enjoy the experience of motherhood.

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Since the common uses of SNS by mothers of young children are social support, advice, parenting purchases and favors (Morris, 2014) this study may be the base for the marketers to use SNS in a specific way for mothers, especially single mothers needing social activities after birth.

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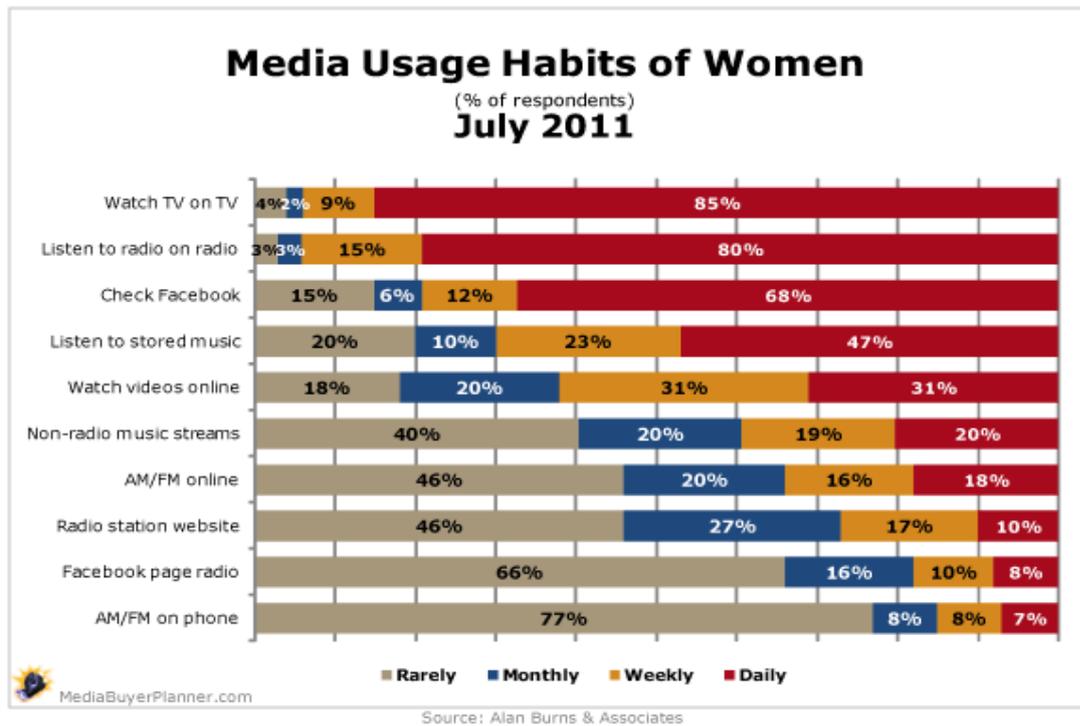
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Figures

Figure no. 1: Media usage habits of women.

Source: Alan Burns Association (2011)

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The Makeup of Single Mothers, 1960-2011

Among all single mothers with children under age 18

1960 — Never Married 4%, Spouse absent 14%, Divorced, separated, widowed 82%

2011 — Never Married 44%, Spouse absent 6%, Divorced, Separated, Widowed 50%
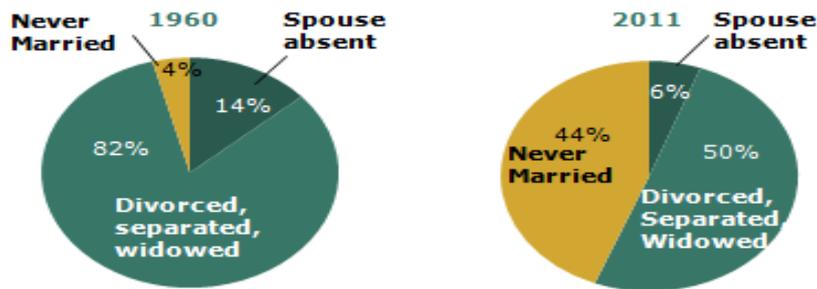
Note: Separated and widowed mothers are included in divorced, etc.

Source: Pew Research Center analysis of the Decennial Census and American Community Surveys (ACS) Integrated Public Use Microdata Sample (IPUMS) files

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Figure no. 2: The makeup of single mothers, 1960-2011

Source: http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2013/05/29/chapter-4-single-mothers/

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