

Single-Parent and Dual-Income Families: Time-Poor Consumers?

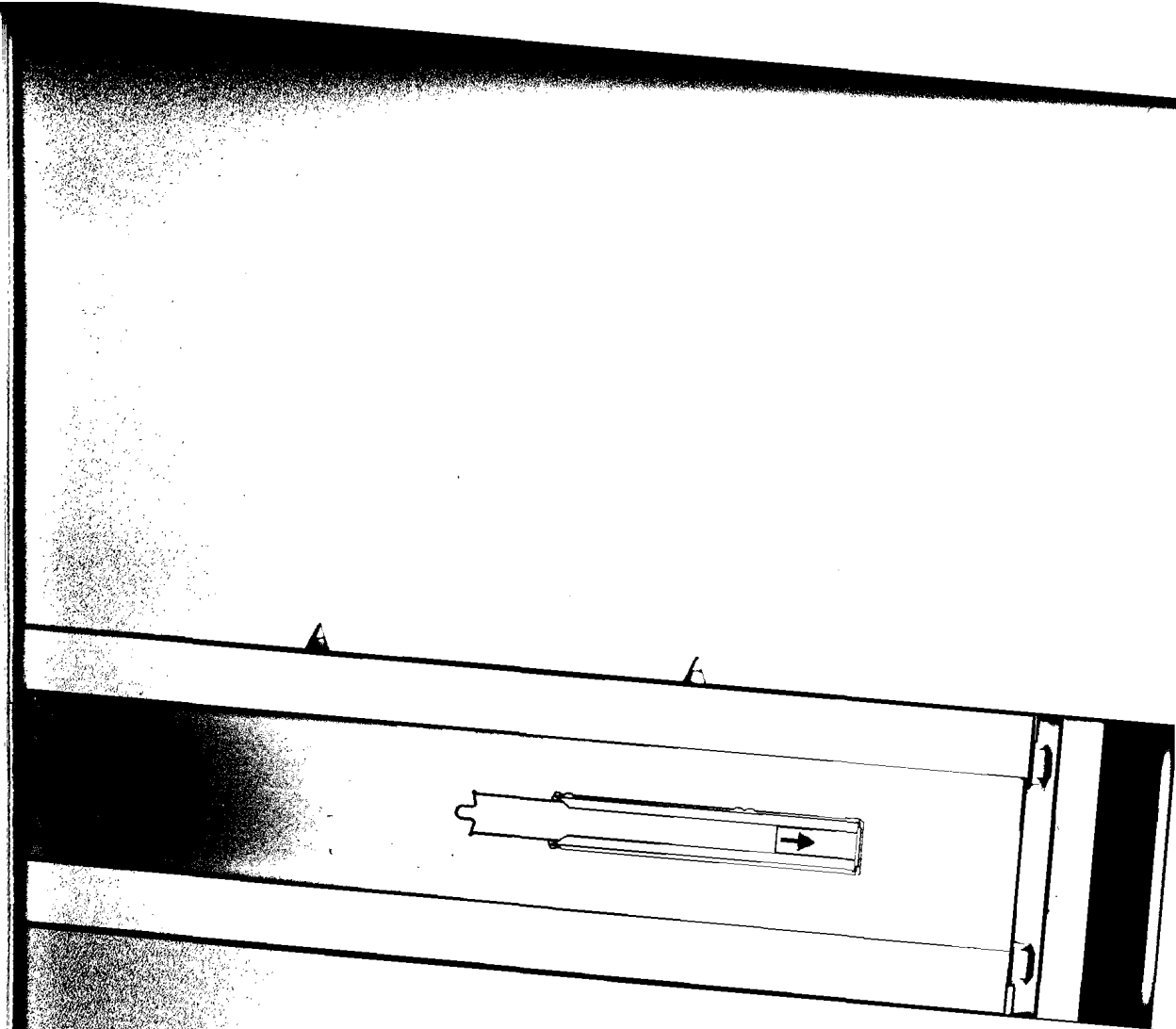
Melody L. A. LeHew, Kansas State University

Futurists and consumer analysts have predicted increasing time poverty as a pervasive trend in the United States (Galenskias, 1997). Researchers suggest consumers are shopping less often and/or shopping from home to save time ("Consumers, feeling hassled," 1996). Various explanations for the increasing perception of time poverty have been posited, the most cited being the changing lifestyle characteristics of Americans (Fram & Axelrod, 1990; Galenskias). The traditional household model of a single-earner, nuclear family arrangement is no longer predominant. U. S. family patterns are more diverse with a greater number of single-parent families and dual-income households. This change impacts household resource allocation, especially time, which may be precipitating the reduction in time devoted to shopping.

The increasing incidence of time-poor households is a topic of concern for consumer educators. With expanding product choice in today's marketplace, the consumers' search and evaluation process that results in a satisfactory purchase decision becomes even more difficult. "To make rational consumer decisions increasingly requires consumers who are willing and able to spend considerable amounts of time, money, and effort searching and deciding" (Garman, 1995, p. 380-381.) The current paper investigates characteristics and shopping motivations of time-poor consumers to offer a more thorough understanding of such families by consumer educators.

Background

The increase in single-parent households can be attributed to the dramatic increase in the divorce rate in the past four decades, as well



as the more recent increase in the number of unwed mothers. According to a recent report from the U. S. Census Bureau, 82% of the 11.9 million single parents are single mothers ("Growth in Single," 1998) who act as primary care-givers and income-earners. Likewise, the number of dual-income households has been increasing. Approximately 75% of married couples are employed full time (Snyder, 1996) and according to the U. S. Census Bureau, 39% of these dual income households have children present (McNeil, 1999).

Women have expanded the number of roles they perform by entering the workforce. Fram and Axelrod (1990) found that 92% of 500 families surveyed reported that the wife was responsible for buying goods regardless of the product category. The responsibility for shopping has stayed with the female, instead of being divided equally between partners. Therefore, working wives and mothers may be especially sensitive to time constraints. A substantial number of dual-income families (50%) and single parents (35%) perceived shopping to be stressful (Fram and Axelrod).

Time Poverty and Lifestyle Characteristics

Much of the research concerning time poverty has focused on working women. It is logical to assume that working women, especially mothers, might be time-poor. The amount of leisure time available for many working women is limited, in light of the hours spent working, completing self-maintenance activities (sleeping, eating, etc.) and household maintenance activities (laundry, meal preparation, etc.), leaving approximately 8 - 13 hours of leisure time per week. Within those leisure hours, parents spend up to 11 hours per week interacting with their children ("Consumers, feeling hassled," 1996), leaving a minimal amount of discretionary time for other activities such as relaxing, shopping, or other pleasurable tasks. Therefore, the first objective of this study was to investigate

the relationships between female consumers' perceptions of time poverty and their lifestyle characteristics.

A review of the time poverty literature generated the following research hypothesis:

H₁: Consumers' perception of time poverty will be significantly influenced by the following lifestyle variables: single-parent status, dual-income status, and employment status.

Time Poverty and Shopping Motives

The second objective of the study was to investigate the relationship between perception of time poverty and shopping motivations. There have been several empirical investigations of shopping motivation, but the relationship to perception of time poverty has received very little attention. Shopping motivation refers to the underlying reasons for shopping; the benefits gained from and/or the needs satisfied by the behavior. Four common motives were found in the review of literature that span motifs to the studies reviewed: economic, social, hedonic, and aesthetic motivations for shopping. Economically motivated consumers tended to be price-conscious shoppers, so therefore comparison shopping was especially important to such consumers (Kang, Kim, & Tuan, 1996; Mooradian & Olver, 1996) and several shopping trips may be necessary to find the best deal. Time-poor consumers may not have the extra discretionary time to spend satisfying this need. Socially motivated consumers shop to satisfy needs for companionship and enjoy being around crowds of people (Kang et al.; Mooradian & Olver), which requires an investment of time that time-pressured consumers may not have. Hedonically motivated shoppers find pleasure in the act of shopping and focus on the enjoyment of the experience. Likewise, aesthetically motivated consumers enjoy the sensory stimulation of the experience (Kang et al.; Mooradian & Olver).

Knowing the basic characteristics and motivations of time-poor families should enable consumer educators to recommend better search strategies to such consumers. It should also encourage consumer activists to push for greater educational information to be provided by marketers to ease the search and decision process. Based on the review of literature related to shopping motives, the following research hypothesis was generated:

H₂: Consumers' shopping motivation will be significantly influenced by perceptions of time poverty and by the following lifestyle variables: single-parent status, dual-income status, and employment status.

Methods

A survey instrument was developed as part of a larger study. In this paper, three sections of the instrument were utilized: consumer characteristics (3 items), shopping motivations (21 items), and perception of time poverty (10 items). The shopping motivation items were derived from previous research and captured basic economic, social, hedonic, and aesthetic motives for shopping. Five-point response choices were used to measure consumers' level of agreement with such statements such as, "I find shopping to be a hassle," or "I generally shop for sales." A previously validated indicator of perceived time pressure (Chronbach's alpha = 0.88), role overload (Reilly, 1982), measured consumers' perception of too many commitments or too many role demands on available time and energy. Five-point response choices were used to measure consumers' level of agreement with statements such as, "There are too many demands on my time," and "I can never seem to get caught up." Categorical items also were included to measure the lifestyle variables of interest.

A commercial list broker generated the random sample of 3,000 female consumers residing within the U. S. (48 contiguous states) to

whom the instrument was mailed. To improve the response rate, the researcher used several techniques. Those who returned a completed questionnaire were eligible to win a \$100 gift certificate. Return postage was pre-paid, and non-respondents received a second survey four weeks after the initial mailing. Eleven percent of the surveys (n = 324) were returned as non-deliverable. The response rate of useable surveys was 22% (n = 590).

Results and Discussion

To test the first research hypothesis, three separate analyses of variance (ANOVAs) were performed. The separate tests examined the effects of respondents' single-parent status (yes/no), dual-income status (yes/no), and employment status (yes/no) on perception of time poverty (Table 1). Responses to the 10 time poverty items were summed, with a higher score indicating higher time poverty perceptions.

The first hypothesis was supported. In all three ANOVA tests, perceptions of time poverty were significantly higher for single-parents $F(1,421)=4.23, p<0.05$, dual-income families $F(1,500)=5.56, p<0.05$, and respondents' who were employed full time, $F(1,428)=5.00, p<0.06$.

In a previous study, the shopping motivation items were reduced to four factors using an Iterated Principle Factor Analysis (LeHew & Cushman, 1998), and were labeled economic, social, hedonic, and aesthetic. The same factors represented dependent variables in this study in four MANOVAs to test the second hypothesis. Time poverty was collapsed into a categorical variable (high/low), and used as an independent variable along with single-parent status (yes/no), dual-income status (yes/no), and employment status (yes/no). Two of the overall MANOVAs were significant. Shopping motive was significantly different based on perceived time poverty (Wilks' Lambda = .94, $F = 7.98, p < .05$) and employment status (Wilks'

Lambda = .96, $F = 2.50$, $p < .05$). Therefore, separate ANOVAs were used to further test the relationships for these two independent variables (Tables 2 and 3).

Table 1
Analyses of Variance (ANOVAs) for Perception of Time Poverty

Source	df	F	SS	MS
Single Parent Status ^a		4.23*		
Between Groups	1		217.63	217.63
Within Groups	421		21862.71	51.50
Total	422		21900.34	
Dual Income Status ^b		5.56*		
Between Groups	1		282.18	282.18
Within Groups	500		25405.79	50.81
Total	501		25687.96	
Employment Status ^c		5.00*		
Between Groups	1		255.75	255.75
Within Groups	428		21886.32	51.14
Total	429		22142.07	

Note. Sample size varies due to missing cases.

* $p < .05$.

The second research hypothesis was partially supported, with consumers' shopping motivation significantly influenced by perception of time poverty, and by one lifestyle variable, employment status. Surprisingly, highly time-poor respondents reported being economic shoppers, $F(1,497)=16.52$, $p < .001$. Past literature did not support this relationship since bargain seeking takes additional time.

Further research is necessary to understand this finding. Shoppers' reporting low levels of time poverty found hedonic pleasure, $F(1,497)=5.42$, $p < .05$, and social environment, $F(1,497) = 7.61$, $p < .05$, as motivating factors.

Table 2
Analyses of Variance (ANOVA) for Perception of Time Poverty

Source	df	F	SS	MS
Economic Motive		16.52***		
Between group	1		13.26	13.26
Within group	497		398.99	0.80
Total	498		412.25	
Hedonic Motive		5.42*		
Between group	1		4.23	4.23
Within group	497		387.68	0.78
Total	498		391.90	
Aesthetic Motive		1.24		
Between group	1		0.86	0.86
Within group	497		342.68	0.69
Total	498		344.53	
Social Motive		7.61**		
Between group	1		4.62	4.62
Within group	497		302.01	0.61
Total	498		306.64	

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$ *** $p < .001$

Table 3
Analyses of Variance (ANOVA) for Employment Status

Source	df	F	SS	MS
Economic Motive		0.39		
Between group	1		0.32	.32
Within group	407		334.83	0.82
Total	408		333.15	
Hedonic Motive		0.40		
Between group	1		0.32	.32
Within group	407		327.39	0.80
Total	408		327.71	
Aesthetic Motive		0.08		
Between group	1		0.06	0.06
Within group	407		294.54	0.72
Total	408		294.60	
Social Motive		8.49*		
Between group	1		5.33	5.33
Within group	407		255.36	0.63
Total	408		260.69	

* $p < .01$

Results presented in Table 3 indicate that consumers with social motivation for shopping were significantly influenced by their employment status, $F(1,407)=8.49, p<.001$. Respondents who were not employed at the time of the survey were motivated by the social aspects of shopping. This finding may suggest that fully employed respondents may satisfy social needs through interactions with co-workers. Being employed full time did not significantly influence economic, hedonic, or aesthetic shoppers.

Recommendations

A better understanding of the relationship between time poverty, lifestyle characteristics and shopping motivations is necessary so that consumer educators can develop programs geared toward helping time-poor shoppers increase their efficiency. It has been assumed that time-poor consumers are working mothers residing in dual-income or single-parent households and that they are willing to pay for convenience. Although these assumptions appeared logical, they had not been tested empirically or supported until now.

In consideration of the findings, the following recommendations can be made. Since time-poor consumers comparison shop in order to find quality products at the best price, consumer educators could offer programs in the community to help current and future time-poor consumers to understand the attributes of quality products and the relationship to price, especially with complex products, which would increase the efficiency of their search process, evaluation of alternatives, and purchasing behavior.

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Melody L. A. LeHew is Assistant Professor, Department of Apparel, Textiles, and Interior Design, Kansas State University, 225 Justin Hall, Manhattan, KS 66506-1405; (785) 532-1321; e-mail: mlehew@ksu.edu