

# AN INVESTIGATION OF INFORMATIONAL VERSUS EMOTIONAL ADVERTISING APPEALS DURING LIFE TRANSITIONS

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## ABSTRACT

*The traditional family life cycle model explains the consumption behavior of individuals and households during a set of temporal periods in consumers' lives. Yet, these seemingly distinct periods in one's life may overlook times at which considerable consumer activity takes place, whether it deals with increasing product awareness, trial, evaluation, and/or purchase. In a study of consumption behavior issues related to primary life changes or transitions, we examined emotional and informational advertising appeals using expectant mothers as our subject population. The findings suggest that expectant mothers view informational appeals more favorably than emotional appeals. Implications of the study's results for researchers and practitioners are provided.*

**JEL:** M300, M310, M370, M390

**KEYWORDS:** marketing, primary life changes, life transitions, advertising appeals, expectant parents

## INTRODUCTION

According to data from the U.S. National Center for Health Statistics, the number of babies born in the U.S. every year approaches four million. Additionally, some estimates suggest that a family earning \$56,300-\$98,500 a year spends nearly \$11,568 in just the first year of a child's life on necessities such as food, clothing, appliances, day care, and hygiene products (babycenter.com, 2011). This is in line with the U.S. Department of Agriculture statistics, which show that a couple earning an average of \$61,000 a year will spend approximately \$270,000 in today's dollars to raise a child to age 17 (Lino, 2008).

While most statistics relate to expenses following the birth of a baby, there is little or no research investigating consumption patterns of individuals or families in transition such as expectant parents. In the period preceding the birth of a child, parents are not only engrossed in the emotional ups and downs of the pregnancy, but are also called upon to engage in major purchasing decisions that may at times run in the thousands of dollars (Mergenhausen, 1995). This is the time when parents spend money on remodeling a room and buying furniture for the new baby or even yet purchasing a larger home. Despite the potential gains marketers can realize by reaching this market in a timely and effective manner, we know very little about the consumption behavior of expectant parents as well as other individuals during life transitions. The purpose of this study was to investigate one important aspect of consumption behavior during significant life transitions. Specifically, we were interested in finding out whether expectant mothers would respond more favorably to emotional as opposed to informational appeals and whether emotional or informational appeals would lead to higher global evaluations and purchase intentions of the advertised product. The paper begins with a discussion of primary life changes and the significance of such changes on consumption behavior. Following this discussion, we examine the issue of emotional and informational appeals in the context of the motivation to process and involvement theory, develop our hypotheses, and offer a detailed description of the methodology adopted in this study. The paper concludes with a presentation of the results and a discussion of our findings in the context of future research and marketing strategy. Limitations of this study are also discussed as a means of addressing the generalizability of the findings.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

A great deal has been written about the veracity of the family life cycle (FLC) and its associated implications for consumer behavior (e.g., Wells and Gubar, 1966; Reynolds and Wells, 1977; Du and Kamakura, 2006). The traditional FLC describes consumption patterns of individuals or families as they move through various stages of life such as “young, married, with no children,” “families with teenagers,” and “families as launching centers” (Stampfl, 1978; Murphy and Staples, 1979). Two important factors typically describe each stage of the FLC. One of these factors is income level, which normally tends to rise with age until retirement. The second factor relates to the various needs that arise with the corresponding types of goods and services that individuals are likely to purchase in a particular stage of the life cycle (Rich and Jain, 1968). In others words, researchers have traditionally assumed that individuals in particular stages of the FLC exhibit relatively homogeneous behavior.

Following the above arguments, FLC stages seem to lend themselves as good segmentation variables (Javalgi and Dion, 1999). For example, individuals in the “single stage” of the traditional FLC are more likely to spend their money on new cars, clothing, food away from home, and entertainment. In contrast, those in the “Full Nest I” stage (i.e., young couples with small children) are likely to spend their money on purchasing a home, furniture, and appliances. It is also important to keep in mind that there is no universal agreement regarding the exact demographic characteristics of people comprising the various stages of the FLC. Along with this, there is a lack of consensus regarding the life paths people take as they move through the FLC. In fact, citing cultural and social changes, researchers propose “alternative approaches” to the traditional FLC (Derrick and Lehfeld, 1980) or a “modernized” FLC (Murphy and Staples, 1979). Moreover, in a recent study Du and Kamakura (2006) identify yet another method to classify households into life stages and determine the most common life paths taken by households within the life cycle model. While researchers and practitioners have carefully studied the FLC and its variations attributed to societal changes and have devised strategies and methods on how to classify and reach households in different FLC segments, they have largely ignored the times immediately preceding, during, and immediately following these fundamental changes in one’s life.

According to Mummert (1995), primary life changes, which involve the move from one stage of the family life cycle to the next, are the critical times where considerable change in consumption occurs. Other researchers have used terms such as life transitions (Goodwin and Gentry, 2000), role transitions (Schewe and Balazs, 1992; Mehta and Belk, 1991), and life events (Lee et al., 2001) to describe the same idea. Examples of primary life changes include significant events in one’s life such as expecting or being a new parent, engagements/marriages, moving and the purchase of a new home, divorce and the dissolution of marital assets, retirement, and death/survivorship. These are times when individuals are likely to spend a considerable amount of resources, as a means of getting ready to face the new, seemingly different, way of living. As one might normally expect, periods of transition such as the ones described above elicit high levels of uncertainty, anxiety, and other emotions ranging from happiness to sadness (Gentry and Goodwin, 1995; Gentry and Kennedy, 1995).

As Lee et al. (2001) suggest, “...major life changes and transitions are often viewed as ‘stressors’ that create a generalized demand for readjustment by the individual...” (p. 26). Mergenhagen (1995) echoes these sentiments by suggesting that, “...businesses that market to people in transition are dealing with people under stress...” (p. 244). At times, the emotional roller coaster may apply to events that are seemingly happy occasions in one’s life. For example, while the prospect of retirement seems such a joyous occasion on one hand, it could simultaneously evoke feelings of sadness because it signifies a transition from work and vitality to a sedentary lifestyle.

Notwithstanding these emotionally laden times, individuals are also called upon to make important purchasing decisions. The significance of these purchasing decisions may or may not be related to the

dollar amount of the purchase, but it may also have to do with specific product attributes such as security, safety, and reliability. Lee et al. (2001) go on to suggest that consumers in life transitions may use “coping” strategies to handle the demands associated with such stressful situations. One of these strategies is “emotion-focused,” which allows individuals to cope with particularly problematic situations by “...engaging in activities to get one’s mind off a problem...” (Lee et al., 2001; p. 26). Therefore, a fundamental issue for marketers is to determine how to best appeal to consumers during life transitions. According to Mergenhausen (1995), marketers can devise more effective target market strategies by engaging in tactics that alleviate the stress associated with such periods. In this vein, one fundamental question that arises is whether emotional appeals would be more appropriate than informational appeals when targeting individuals during primary life change periods.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

An advertising appeal is the central idea of a message, which summarizes the attributes of the product. Most appeals fall within one of two omnipresent categories. Informational appeals are those messages relying on hard information and facts to convey why the receiver should like a product and buy it. Albers-Miller and Stafford (1999) suggest that logical arguments are at the heart of informational or rational advertising. This form of appeal intends to solicit rational decision-making.

In contrast, if the advertiser tries to build a favorable appeal for its product by linking it to desirable images and symbols, an emotional or transformational appeal is at work. Kotler and Keller (2009) suggest that ads using transformational appeals “might depict what kind of person uses a brand or what kind of experience results from using the brand...” (p. 478). There are various types of appeals that advertisers might choose to use in this context from fear and shame to humor and joy (Solomon, 2007). The particular type of appeal employed is normally a function of the advertised product, the advertising objective, and certainly the target audience (Kotler and Keller, 2009).

In the context of this study, expecting a baby is a particularly stressful period in a parent’s life when uncertainties regarding the health and safety of the unborn child dominate everyday occurrences. This is a time when expectant parents try to imagine what their unborn child would look or be like. Therefore, daydreams and sensory pleasures may dominate one’s decision-making criteria (cf. Hirschman and Holbrook, 1982). One possibility, then, would be for expectant mothers to rely more on hedonic/emotional appeals. However, let us investigate the case of an expectant mother pondering over the purchase of a stationary activity center for her soon to be son or daughter. While the amount of the purchase may be relevant for some and not for others, features such as safety and durability may be at the top of their list. This would lead us to believe that the consumption behavior of expectant mothers is driven by the personal relevance or felt involvement (Celsi and Olson, 1988) in a particular product category. Therefore, expectant mothers should respond more favorably to an advertising appeal that addresses their utilitarian motives (i.e., an informational appeal) as opposed to one that relies on hedonic benefits (Friedman and Lessig, 1986; Havlena and Holbrook, 1986; Holbrook and Hirschman, 1982).

The above argument is in line with the underlying principle advanced in the motivation to process and involvement literature, which advocates that ads for products of high personal relevance will be processed more carefully than ads for products that are not personally relevant. In their discussion of felt involvement, Celsi and Olson (1988) suggest that “...a consumer’s perception or feeling of personal relevance for an object or event is an acute state that only occurs at certain times and in certain situations” such as expecting a new baby (p. 211). Moreover, Petty et al. (1983) posit that different advertising messages may be more suitable for people in different situations, which include differing levels of involvement. This is also in agreement with the whole notion that in a high involvement situation such as a life changing event or transition, people may respond to informational appeals more favorably than emotional appeals as long as the information “...is perceived to be cogent and persuasive” (Petty et al.,

1983, p. 138). Therefore, we conjecture that expectant mothers should be more receptive to informational advertisements.

- H<sub>1</sub>: Expectant mothers will provide more favorable evaluations of an informational advertisement than an emotional advertisement.
- H<sub>2</sub>: Expectant mothers will provide higher global product evaluation and purchasing intentions for a product featured in an informational advertisement than an emotional advertisement.

**DATA AND METHODOLOGY**

Subjects were 102 expectant mothers participating in prenatal (i.e., Lamaze) classes offered through local hospitals. Table 1 provides the summary of demographic characteristics of participants. Typically, expectant parents participate in Lamaze classes free of charge as long as they sign a pre-delivery agreement with participating hospitals indicating that they plan to use the neonatal facilities of the hospital at delivery time. Although their partners such as expectant fathers and other relatives or friends usually accompanied mothers, we chose to avoid any potential problems of administering the survey to a varied group of people by asking expectant mothers to complete the instrument on their own. Additionally, we decided to avoid any problems associated with varied levels of experience and knowledge regarding purchasing behavior during this particular transition period, by asking only new expectant mothers to participate in the study. We obtained permission from the respective Lamaze instructors to conduct the experiment during regularly scheduled evening classes.

Table 1: Characteristics of Participants

Age (mean value)	27.6	
	Frequency	Percent
<b>Education</b>		
High school incomplete	9	9.3
High school graduate	28	28.9
Some college	11	11.3
Bachelor’s degree	33	34.0
Grad/professional degree	16	16.5
<b>Race</b>		
White	17	17.5
Black/African American	4	4.1
Asian	0	0.0
Hispanic/Latino	59	60.1
Native American	6	6.2
Other	4	4.1
<b>Marital Status</b>		
Single	11	11.3
Married	86	88.7
<b>Income</b>		
\$20,000 or less	17	17.5
\$20,001 to \$30,000	29	29.9
\$30,001 to \$50,000	13	13.4
\$50,001 to \$75,000	31	31.9
Over \$75,000	7	7.2

*This table shows only 97 participants as five out of the initial pool of 102 participants did not fully complete the experimental instrument and were not, therefore, included in the data analysis. we conducted the experiment in an area where the population is predominantly hispanic.*

We assigned subjects to experimental treatments on a random basis so that approximately half of the expectant mothers received the informational print advertisement while the remaining half received the emotional advertisement. Images and information from actual print advertisements from retailers and magazines targeting expectant and new parents such as Parents magazine served as the foundation of the advertisements created for the purpose of this experiment. The ads addressed two experimental objectives. First, we scanned several magazine issues to identify ads that would fall either in the informational or emotional appeal categories as elaborated upon earlier. Second, we wanted the

advertised product to be the same across the informational and emotional advertisements or otherwise belong in the same product category. This was necessary to avoid confounding effects related to motivation to process ad information as well as issues such as differing levels of task importance, involvement, and product knowledge.

Having the above two objectives in mind, we created two ads, one informational and one emotional, by mimicking actual ads advertising stationary walkers (also known as activity centers) from well-known baby product manufacturers. The stationary walker featured in the ads was the same for both ad conditions. To avoid problems related to different brand names and their respective preferences, pictures in the ads were minimally altered via photo-editing software so that the original brand names were eliminated. Instead, we chose to use a fictitious brand name, WalkerPLUS, in order to avoid potential bias associated with a particular brand name, positive or negative.

The emotional advertisement was further enhanced by including four large photographs, one of which was showing the product in use by toddlers while playing joyfully with big smiles on their faces. One of the other photos showed a mother holding her baby and smiling. The ad copy included such phrases as “360° of pure fun and play,” “The great entertainer from WalkerPLUS,” and the main tag line suggested that the “Baby will enjoy the built-in telephone, mirror, interactive clicker, and music.” Vivid colors dominated the photos and copy. On the other hand, the informational ad included two small photographs and a lengthier ad copy, which touted the safety, sturdiness, and usage benefits of the stationary walker. One of the two photographs depicted an old-style walker with a prohibited sign (circle with a diameter) drawn over it and information indicating the fact that “...old-style walkers are considered to be unsafe by the U.S. Consumer and Product Safety Commission.” The other small photograph did show the walker in use by a toddler and his older sibling. In addition to the safety warnings presented at the top of the ad, the ad copy suggested that the walker was “. . . recommended by physicians and child experts,” that it “. . . frees up mom’s hands,” and that it provides “. . . safe fun and exercise for the baby.” In sum, the informational ad clearly described the benefits of this particular stationary walker, while at the same time suggesting that “it is recommended by physicians and child experts everywhere.” The latter is unsubstantiated claim intended to increase the quality of the arguments provided (cf. Petty et al. 1983).

We pretested the ads at two separate Lamaze sessions with participants similar to the ones who participated in the experiment, but not the same. Twenty five pretest subjects were randomly assigned to the two advertisement conditions (informational vs. emotional). Following the review of the ads, pretest participants were asked to respond to various statements designed to capture whether they perceived the ads as informational or emotional using the classification scale developed by Jourdan (1999). Based on the pretest findings, subjects who viewed the informational ad rated it higher on the informational scale than the emotional ad (Mean<sub>informational</sub> = 16.82 vs. Mean<sub>emotional</sub> = 9.86,  $t(23) = 4.87$ ,  $p < .01$ ). As expected, subjects who received the emotional ad rated that ad higher on the emotional scale than the informational ad (Mean<sub>emotional</sub> = 15.07 vs. Mean<sub>informational</sub> = 7.36,  $t(23) = 7.66$ ,  $p < .01$ ). The Cronbach’s alpha for the emotional scale was .93 and for the informational scale .90. There was compelling evidence to believe that the two ad conditions elicited the desired ad effects. The actual experiment did not include manipulation checks in order to (a) adhere to the time limit requirements set by the Lamaze instructors and (b) avoid either biasing the subjects regarding the intent of ad condition or to avoid confounding errors due to exposure to previous dependent measures.

The data collection process took place at seven different Lamaze classes with an average enrolment of 15 expectant mothers. We initially asked subjects to participate in the survey on a voluntary basis and we instructed them to complete an informed consent form. We then handed out a questionnaire that asked them to “. . . read all information carefully” and to “. . . follow all instructions completely.” Following the presentation of either the informational or emotional advertisements, we asked the participants to rate the advertised product on nine seven-point bipolar adjective scales (good-bad, like-dislike, favorable-

unfavorable, poor quality-high quality, unsatisfactory-satisfactory, useful-useless, dangerous-safe, harmful-harmless, like extremely - dislike extremely) designed to capture the global evaluation for the product (Cronbach’s alpha = .92). Prior to data analysis, some of these scales were reverse coded to ensure consistency across all scale ratings. Immediately after this, subjects indicated their purchase intentions on two five-point rating scales (definitely will buy - definitely will not buy, definitely like to have - definitely not like to have; Cronbach’s alpha = .80).

They were then asked to respond to 15 seven-point bipolar adjective scales designed to measure their attitude toward the advertisement (Aad; Cronbach’s alpha = .85). Finally, subjects provided demographic information and responded to several questions regarding the timing of major purchases (over \$50) before birth. The survey instrument took approximately 15 minutes to complete. We removed five questionnaires from the data analysis as the respondents left several items blank. Effectively, this resulted in a sample of 97 respondents for data analysis purposes. After the completion of the experiment, participants indicated whether they had guessed the purpose of the study. From this debriefing, there was no reason to believe that they responded in a systematic way as a means of influencing the study findings. Immediately prior to releasing the subjects, the researchers provided a disclaimer in writing clearly indicating that some of the claims made in the ads were not real, especially the one indicating that the product was recommended by physicians and child experts.

**RESULTS**

To test the proposed effects we performed a multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) procedure in which the dependent measures of interest (attitude toward the ad, product global evaluation, and purchase intention) were analyzed simultaneously as a function of ad type (informational versus emotional). MANOVA results suggest that subjects provided different global evaluation, purchase intention, and Aad ratings for the two ad types (Wilks’  $\Lambda = .35, p < .01, \eta^2 = .65$ ). Univariate analyses provided details regarding the specific nature of the differences. According to analysis of variance (ANOVA) results (see Table 2), subjects provided higher global evaluations of the product after they viewed the informational ad (Mean = 48.11) than the emotional ad (Mean = 33.49;  $F = 51.19, p < .01, \eta^2 = .94$ ). Additionally, those subjects considering the informational ad provided higher purchase intention for the product (Mean = 9.76) than subjects who considered the emotional ad (Mean = 8.49;  $F = 8.26; p < .01, \eta^2 = .08$ ). Similarly, attitude toward the ad (Aad) was higher for the informational ad treatment than the emotional treatment (Mean<sub>informational</sub> = 85.50 vs. Mean<sub>emotional</sub> = 65.76;  $F = 167.31, p < .01, \eta^2 = .64$ ). In sum, univariate results show clear support for both  $H_1$  and  $H_2$ .

Table 2: Analysis of Variance Results

Dependent Measures	Informational Advertisement (n=46)	Emotional Advertisement (n=51)	Effect Size ( $\eta^2$ )
Global Evaluation (***)	48.11	33.49	.94
Aad (***)	85.50	65.76	.64
Purchase Intention (***)	9.76	8.49	.08

*The table shows the means of the various dependent measures of interest. The effect sizes for global evaluation and Aad are large, while the effect size for purchase intention is medium. \*\*\* indicates significance at the 1 percent level.*

Lastly, independent sample t-tests revealed that the informational ad was perceived more positively (i.e., good, interesting, inoffensive, trustworthy, persuasive, informative, believable, appealing, pleasant, honest, clear, convincing, and positive) than the emotional ad with one exception related to the like-dislike item. Whether globally or in terms of its individual dimensions, subjects seemed to consider the informational ad much more favorably. Table 3 shows individual scale means for the Aad measure across the two ad conditions.

Table 3: Informational vs. Emotional Advertising Appeals

Individual Scale Items	Informational Advertisement (n=46)		Emotional Advertisement (n=51)	
	Mean	Standard Deviation	Mean	Standard Deviation
1. Bad – Good**	5.70	1.31	4.80	1.96
2. Dislike – Like	5.57	1.13	5.16	1.64
3. Not Interesting – Interesting***	5.54	1.03	3.20	1.31
4. Inoffensive – Offensive***	5.24	1.06	6.04	1.23
5. Untrustworthy – Trustworthy***	5.80	0.88	3.27	1.13
6. Not persuasive at all – Persuasive***	5.85	0.87	3.88	1.01
7. Uninformative – Informative***	5.43	0.87	3.80	1.04
8. Unbelievable – Believable***	5.85	0.89	4.88	1.49
9. Appealing – Unappealing***	5.67	1.12	4.82	1.55
10. Unpleasant – Pleasant***	5.37	1.24	4.49	1.46
11. Dishonest – Honest***	5.80	0.83	4.18	1.57
12. Imprecise – Clear***	6.07	0.74	3.51	1.27
13. Convincing – Unconvincing***	5.50	0.98	3.84	1.42
14. Dull – Interesting***	5.98	0.91	4.69	1.26
15. Negative – Positive***	6.13	0.86	5.20	1.55

*This table shows the means and standard deviations for the individual items, which comprised the Aad measure. Scale items #4, 9, and 13 were reverse-coded prior to data analysis. \*\*\* and \*\* indicate significance at the 1, and 5 percent levels respectively.*

Although not formally proposed, we were also interested in finding out how far in advance of the birth major purchases were made or expected to be made. Responses ranged from immediately before birth (0 months) to eight months in advance. The average response, however, was 2.3 months in advance. Finally, we examined the dependent measures of interest across all demographic variables, but we did not detect any significant effects.

## DISCUSSION

The goal of this paper was to address one small, but interesting aspect of consumption behavior during life transitions. Using an experimental design, the paper examined global product evaluations, attitude toward the advertisement, and purchase intentions of expectant mothers for two ad conditions: informational vs. emotional. This idea evolved from the fact that previous research has indicated that people in life transitions face emotional stressors. Therefore, it would make sense to try to reach these individuals by employing tools such as emotionally laden ads. The belief is that such ads can help alleviate the stress associated with life transitions and at the same time evoke positive feelings toward the advertised product. However, theory associated with motivation to process and involvement suggests that people are more likely to prefer advertisements that are relevant to them in terms of the information provided about salient products.

Based on the findings in this study, expectant mothers view informational advertisements more favorably than emotional advertisements. Interestingly, previous research has examined the consumption behavior of individuals while in the various stages of the FLC, but for the most part has ignored the periods preceding, during, or immediately following major FLC stages. This study showed that marketers need to investigate more rigorously the consumption behavior of individuals going through such transition periods. Unlike previous literature suggesting that people in life transitions will respond more favorably to emotional ads as part of a coping process, we showed that their consumption behavior is much more complex and counterintuitive. Certainly, our study addressed just a small part of this research domain using two specific ads and a specific sample of individuals in one particular life transition. Further research is necessary to understand the overarching behavior of people in life transitions as well as their coping strategies. Simply assuming that they will respond favorably to certain stimuli because of the fact they are experiencing emotionally laden periods in their lives is an oversimplification of their intricate behavior. The importance of significant transition periods in one's life raises several interesting research

implications. For example, future research should delve more deeply into identifying differences in consumption patterns during primary life changes as compared to other less emotionally volatile periods of life. It would be interesting to see exactly when, how, and why such consumption behavior differs.

Moreover, the idea that consumers may respond differently to advertising stimuli during times such as the ones described previously requires further examination. Does the situation one is facing, for example, add to the complexity of purchasing decisions? Is the motivation to process information higher or lower for certain purchases and not for others? How do the different emotions influence the way individuals behave in the marketplace? What are the most effective integrated communication strategies when attempting to reach a market in transition?

While we have addressed the need to study consumption behavior and its peculiarities surrounding transition periods, it would also be worthwhile to differentiate among the various forms of primary life changes. Our study concentrated on one particular form of primary life changes. Other life changes such as moving, purchasing a new home, and divorce may call for a new, albeit different, approach of looking at the consumption behavior picture. What kind of psychological influences and/or processes dominate purchasing decisions in these other primary life changes? Is there a common thread or conceptual framework that would explain the consumption process during the majority of the transition periods? Future research should not only attempt to validate the findings of our study, but also to identify the peculiarities and/or similarities across all primary life change periods.

The notion that expectant parents may spend a substantial amount of money preceding or immediately following the birth of their child has powerful implications for practitioners. This could represent a multibillion-dollar market with tremendous potential for cultivation and growth. Certainly, reaching consumers when they are most likely to make their purchases should be of great interest to practitioners. Considerable knowledge regarding the consumption behavior of individuals during primary life changes should help practitioners sharpen their communication and marketing focus.

Our study examined one particular, but nonetheless important, aspect of communication toward expectant mothers. The findings suggest that retailers and/or product manufacturers and service providers would be better off using informational appeals rather than emotional appeals when targeting this market segment. Additionally, as any new parent would readily admit, very few marketers choose to target expectant parents simply because of their inability to easily track them down or the fear that such an action would not be welcome. Our study, however, suggests that expectant mothers seem to view both informational and emotional stimuli positively, although the informational ad was clearly evaluated more favorably. Therefore, marketers are advised not to shy away from providing good, factual information to expectant mothers. A closer look at the individual Aad scale item evaluations suggests that expectant mothers find informational messages more appealing, convincing, and interesting; neither the informational nor emotional ads were deemed to be offensive. Certainly, we cannot make the case that all ads would be well received by expectant mothers on the account of our limited stimulus materials and sample. Some retail industry experts and practitioners further suggest that sales promotions such as free gift packages may be used to lure pregnant mothers into stores (Rosendahl, 1995). Are sales promotions simply gimmicks that can be used to attract initial purchases? In this respect, are there more effective ways to build long-term relationships in light of the significant expenditures of parents?

Finally, our findings indicated that the majority of expectant mothers make major purchases approximately two months prior to birth, while some suggested that purchasing items as soon as they enter this transition period is not out of the question. This is another indication of the importance of reaching this particular segment of the market at the right time. It also suggests that marketers may be more successful, if they choose to separate or segment what is traditionally known as the “new parents” market to two new segments that differentiate between “new” and “expectant” parents.



## CONCLUDING COMMENTS

In the context of this study, decisions made by consumers during this period may have far-reaching implications, financial and otherwise: Is this the right mortgage? Is this crib safe? Will this be a reliable car? These questions represent just a few examples of complexity associated with decision-making during transitions. Moreover, the idea that decisions must be made during a defined period in time adds to the complexity. Could this make consumers, then, even more vulnerable to unscrupulous advertising practices? As Brennan and Coppack (2008) suggest, education and training may empower consumers to make the right decisions, which, in turn, advance their own interests as opposed to the interests of the advertisers. Therefore, it appears that public campaigns to educate consumers about the pitfalls of making decisions during life transitions could possibly increase their awareness of deceitful attempts to secure their business. Notwithstanding the interesting findings of this study, there are certain inherent limitations associated with our research design and the generalizability of the results.

First, the study findings were based on two specific ads for a particular product. Different ads or similar ads for other products may not elicit the same effects. While the manipulation checks indicated that expectant mothers perceived the ads as either informational or emotional, there is no clear indication in the literature which specific elements of the ad (words vs. pictures) may actually stimulate the varied attitudinal effects. As the saying goes “a picture is worth a thousand words,” it is not clear either from the manipulation checks or the actual findings which of the two ads evoked exactly which feelings or whether they stimulated differing levels and types of cognitive processing. This is a fertile area for future research. Additionally, our survey respondents were expectant mothers only. Would expectant fathers react the same way to our advertising stimuli? In this vein, how would the mother-father dyad react to the same stimuli? Lastly, our findings provide little information regarding the reactions of people in other types of life transitions. However, this research is a first step in not only stimulating the interest of other researchers in the area, but also providing some worthwhile background in studying more refined advertising effects.

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