Clothing Consumption Via Television: the Woman's Perspective
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[to cite]:
   Nancy F. Stanforth and Sharron J. Lennon (1996). "Clothing Consumption Via Television: the Woman's Perspective", in GCB -
   Gender and Consumer Behavior Volume 3, eds. Dr. Janeen Arnold Costa, Salt Lake City, UT: Association for Consumer
   Research, Pages: 161 to 162.

[url]:
   http://www.acrwebsite.org/volumes/15612/gender/v03/GCB-03

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Clothing Consumption via Television: 
The Woman's Perspective

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Non-store retailing is thriving in the 90's; channels of distribution include mail order, telephone, door-to-door, television, and on-line (computer) sales. Factors which have influenced the growth of non-store retailing include time-pressed shoppers, changes in the use of leisure time by families, improvement in services and products available through non-store channels, and desire for convenience (Drucker 1993). Television shopping statistics are particularly impressive, with future access expected to reach over 500 channels, and sales already surpassing the $2.5 billion level (Zellner 1994). Given the growth of this channel of distribution, marketers need to know more concerning the consumers who choose to shop via television. For example, little is known regarding ways in which television shoppers differ from catalog and store shoppers. Since the delivery of quality and value to the customer through improved customer service has been identified as a potential competitive advantage (Fuller 1989; Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry 1985; Woodruff, Clemons, Schumann, Gardial and Burns 1991), we need a better understanding of what services television shoppers want and whether this varies by product type. The purpose of this research was to compare television shoppers who had purchased apparel with those who had not on perceptions of risk, convenience, satisfaction, and gift-giving. We elected to focus on women because women's apparel comprises the largest share of the family's apparel expenditures ("Hot clothes" 1993).

A mailing list of individuals who had purchased from television was obtained from a national market research firm. Three thousand names were randomly selected from the list and were mailed a questionnaire; the return rate was 33%. About 83% of the respondents were female; 52% had a body mass index of 25 or greater, indicating that they were overweight. In general, shoppers expressed a wide variety of fit problems, most of which seemed to deal with body parts which were larger than that allowed for by standardized sizing. MANOVA with shopper category (whether or not they purchased apparel from television) as the independent variable revealed a multivariate main effect for shopper category; univariate analyses revealed main effects for shopper category on 18 of the 20 dependent variables. In general, purchasers of apparel were more satisfied with service, planned to make more apparel purchases in the future, and tended to agree that the quality of apparel on television was excellent. On the other hand, television shoppers who had not purchased apparel were more concerned with a variety of risk factors such as potential fit, potential tactile qualities of the apparel, potential overpriced nature of such
apparel, and the likelihood that they might be placed on hold. Apparel shoppers were more likely than those who had not purchased apparel to agree that convenience in apparel shopping was important. Finally, apparel shoppers were much more likely to plan to use television for gifts for both business associates and family members. Like other non-store shoppers, shoppers who used television to obtain apparel were willing to take risks in purchasing. In general, they were satisfied with customer service and the convenience of shopping for apparel by television. Given the number of respondents who were overweight, we suggest researchers investigate the extent to which large-sized customers prefer the television shopping experience.

More research is needed on television shopping to determine both the viability of this new distribution channel and the impact that this new competitor may have on retail stores and consumers. Larger retailers may find that television is an important way to increase their market area without building new stores. Wide selections of merchandise and sizes may make television a strong competitor for smaller retailers, bringing consumers much wider ranges of merchandise than are available locally. It is important to determine the long-term impact that television shopping may have on retailers and consumers. There is the potential for both economic and social impact. Further research should focus on the social aspects, such as how social values might factor into apparel shopping via television, and the impact this may have on local communities.

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