

MOTHERS' LITTLE HELPERS

The Mixed Blessings of
Smartphones and Social Media

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Mothers are a highly digital cohort by multiple measures—internet penetration, smartphone ownership, social network usage, etc. It helps them accomplish the multitudinous tasks of motherhood while also giving them some escape from those demands. But all this digital usage (and the multitasking it often entails) can sometimes aggravate as well as reduce the pressures of their day.

For instance, social networking—often powered by their smartphones—eases the isolation that motherhood can bring. But it also exposes mothers to anxieties about whether they are performing the role of mother as well as those whose posts they read and whose Pinterest-perfect pies they see photographed. Meanwhile, though social networks and smartphones help many mothers with their shopping, those digital resources do not play as consistent a role there as the popular stereotype might suggest.

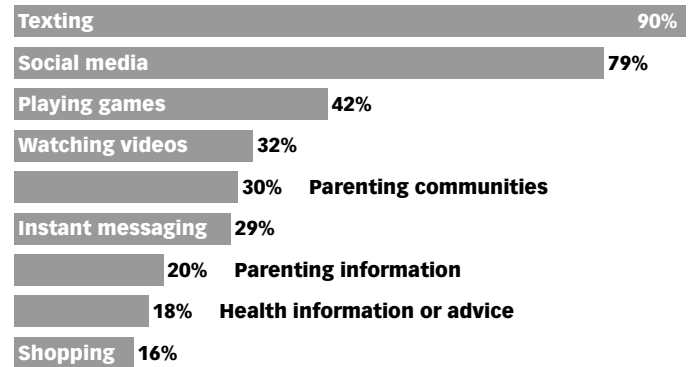
This report will examine the scope of mothers' digital usage and the distinctive ways in which digital tools and media fit into their daily lives. This will include a close look at their social networking and smartphone usage, as well as the multitasking to which (for better or worse) they often resort.

KEY QUESTIONS

- How digital are mothers? (Spoiler alert: They're extremely digital.)
- How does social networking fit into mothers' lives, including their shopping? And how much social is too much?
- How are mothers using their smartphones?
- How do mothers feel about all the multitasking their digital devices let them perform?

Daily Smartphone Activities Conducted by US Mother Smartphone Users, July 2014

% of respondents



Note: expectant females or mothers with children under age 9
Source: BabyCenter, "US Mobile Mom 2014 Report: Mobile Powers Mom's Life," Sep 8, 2014

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A MIXED BLESSING FOR MOTHERS

True to stereotype, mothers are big users of digital devices and media. But lots of people use lots of digital. What's distinctive about mothers' activity is its dual-track aspect—employing digital to streamline the tasks they must accomplish and to get some escape from them as well.

Mothers use digital to give moments of down time the feel of personal leisure by visiting a social site, playing a game, etc. "They are sneaking little bits of leisure and 'me time' throughout their day," said Julie Michaelson, vice president of global sales at BabyCenter. But this can have a hurry-up-and-relax feel to it, giving an undercurrent of urgency to their leisure. According to a recent Ipsos Public Affairs survey, 64% of mothers say "the act of finding time for themselves is stressful."

Moreover, some of the digital content they encounter is anything but relaxing. Laments about "Pinterest stress"—as mothers feel they can't measure up to the perfection displayed there—continue to ripple through the blogosphere. This helps explain why July 2014 polling from Current Lifestyle Marketing found that half of mothers said they've considered quitting or taking a break from social networking. Chances are that most will not end up doing this, at least for long. But it's a telling distress signal that they have even considered it.

Mothers have earned their image as champion multitaskers, and it does enable them to squeeze some entertainment and social interaction into the day. But many experience multitasking as a stress-inducing problem rather than as a healthy solution to their time crunch. It's not as though mothers are utterly bereft of leisure time, though they have less than non-mothers. (The most recent data in the "American Time Use Survey" from the US Department of Labor Bureau of Labor Statistics shows mothers averaged 3.91 hours per day for leisure and sports in 2013, vs. 4.49 hours for fathers.) The catch is that mothers' leisure tends to come in often-interrupted snippets. This makes it conducive to digital usage, and there's considerable overlap between digital time and "me time." Here again, though, the always-on aspect of this has its downside.

All in all, then, digital is quite useful for mothers. But marketers who approach them by digital means should not imagine mothers find it a panacea for the wear and tear that motherhood entails.

US Mother Social Media Users Who Have Considered Stopping Use of/Taking a Break from Social Media, by Age, July 2014

% of respondents



Note: because they are "burned out" or "frustrated"
Source: Current Lifestyle Marketing, Sep 24, 2014

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BASICS OF DIGITAL MOTHERHOOD

Mothers live up to their reputation as a highly digital group. Internet usage is the norm, and most mothers have digital devices.

eMarketer estimates that more than nine in 10 mothers in the US with kids younger than 18 in the household will use the internet at least once a month this year.

US Mother Internet Users and Penetration, 2013-2018

	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
Mother internet users (millions)	34.0	33.9	34.0	34.0	33.4	33.5
—% change	0.1%	-0.2%	0.4%	0.0%	-1.9%	0.3%
—% of total mothers*	94.6%	94.5%	94.9%	95.0%	93.2%	93.5%

Note: females ages 18+ with children under 18 in the household who use the internet from any location via any device at least once per month;

**with children under 18 in the household*

Source: eMarketer, Aug 2014

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And they are not relying on low-tech methods to reach it. In Edison Research's "Moms and Media 2014" report, 86% of mothers surveyed in January 2014 said they have internet access at home, and 74% have Wi-Fi there.

Mothers are also well-equipped with mobile devices. The same survey found 92% owned a mobile phone and 69% owned a smartphone. Nearly half (47%) had a tablet. Looking at mothers with kids younger than 9 in the household (plus expectant women), BabyCenter polling in July 2014 found that 88% said they "own or personally use" a smartphone. The penetration figure was 83% for laptops and 61% for gaming consoles.

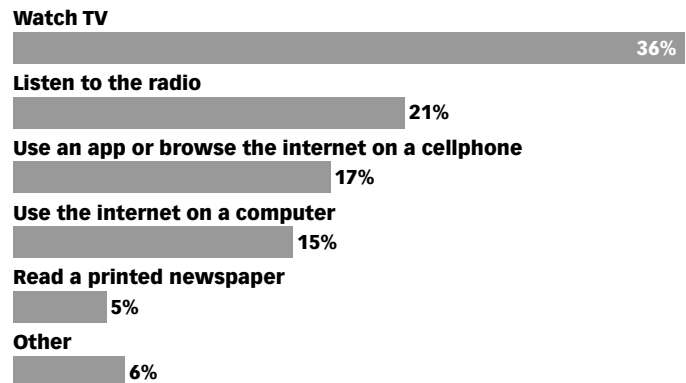
USING MULTIPLE SCREENS

Mobile though they are, mothers have not abandoned PCs. Analyzing survey data from October to November 2013, a February 2014 report by Yahoo looked at digital activities mothers conduct at least monthly. The percentages of US mothers who use PCs for emailing, researching products and several other activities were significantly higher than the percentages who use smartphones or tablets. One example: 80% used a PC to watch video, vs. 57% who used smartphones and 38% who used tablets.

Beyond the internet, another screen still matters to mothers: TV. Seventy percent of mothers in Edison Research's survey said they have a TV in their bedroom, more than double the proportion (33%) with a computer there. And TV viewing eclipses internet usage as a regular morning activity.

Primary Media Activity Conducted Most Often in the Morning by US Mothers, Jan 2014

% of total



Source: Edison Research, "Moms and Media 2014," sponsored by Triton Digital, May 8, 2014

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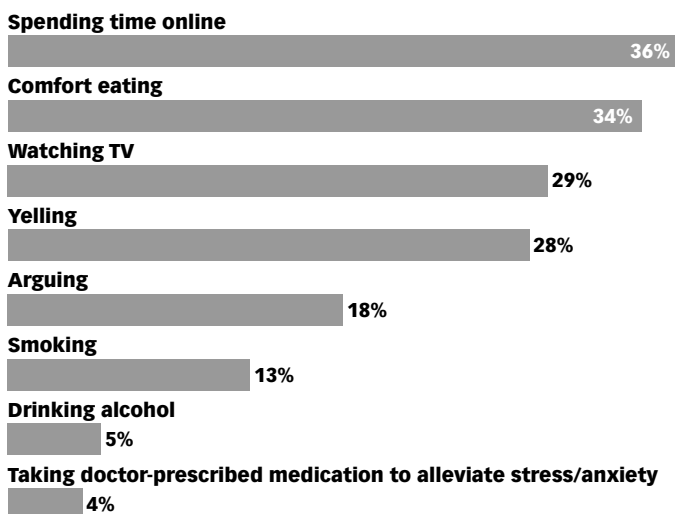
Giving a digital twist to old-media usage, 67.2% of US mothers have a DVR at home, according to TiVo polling in April 2014. Mothers also view TV and other video content digitally via services like Netflix. In BabyCenter's survey, 58% reported having a streaming TV subscription.

And they are not watching just to learn how to make casseroles or deal with diaper rash. "A lot of people have the assumption that moms are watching a lot of how-to content, but they're also watching entertainment," said Dana Points, content director of Meredith Parents Network at Meredith Corporation. "We feel like mom is looking for a balance of information and entertainment." The appetite for video entertainment is particularly strong among younger millennial mothers, who are "more likely than the older ones to watch online-only video shows or webisodes for entertainment value," she added.

All this screen time adds up, and some mothers wonder whether they overindulge in it. In polling from April to May 2014 conducted by Ipsos Public Affairs for the Clinton Foundation, sizeable numbers of mothers associated high levels of internet and/or TV usage with an "unhealthy stress level."

Causes or Effects of Unhealthy Stress Levels According to US Mother Internet Users, May 2014

% of respondents



Note: n=1,001; respondents answered that they spend "too much time" doing these behaviors
Source: Clinton Foundation, "Growing Pains: The Stresses of Being an American Mom" conducted by Ipsos Public Affairs as cited in press release, Sep 30, 2014

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INTERACTING ONLINE WITH BRANDS

Mothers' time online includes exposure to advertising, along with research they initiate about possible purchases. Going online can also give them the convenience of buying things without dragging their kids around a physical store.

In Yahoo's survey, just 30% of mothers said they were receptive to internet ads that lacked "personal relevancy." The figure jumped to 66% for ads that did have personal relevancy and 70% for ads "with relevancy to current online activity."

"One thing ultimately to remember with moms is that they are always looking for a brand that's going to make their life easier," said Christine Wilson, founder of MtoM Consulting, which specializes in marketing to mothers. "So if that is conveyed in the advertising in an authentic way, they're going to perk up and pay attention."

One respect in which advertising (online or offline) may lack relevance is in its depiction of families. Noting that nearly half of births in the US are now to unmarried women, Michaelson said, "We hear from them and from many moms that advertising doesn't really reflect the nontraditional family unit that has become almost commonplace today."

This does not mean mothers want marketers to address them solely in terms of their role as mothers, especially as they get past its initial stages. "When you have a new mom, she's excited to be a mom, and that's the time when she's most likely to wear that badge a little brighter," said Amy Colton, executive vice president of Current Lifestyle Marketing. As her kids get older, "that tends to go down and it's more important to address her as a woman who happens to be a mom."

While fully aware of being novices at parenting, new mothers don't want to be treated like children themselves. In part, this reflects the fact that the average age of first childbearing has been rising. The federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention pegs the average age of mothers at first childbirth at 25.8 in 2012, up from 21.4 in 1970. "It's really much more a stepping stone into adulthood than it ever had been before, in part because our adolescence is so elongated," said Bryan Melmed, vice president of insights at advertising intelligence firm Exponential.

One factor cutting across such lines is the need for convenience, and this gives ecommerce an opening with mothers. Indeed, its appeal is sometimes simply that it spares mothers the ordeal of going to a store with their kids. A June 2014 YouGov survey for group shopping site Cartonomy asked online mothers to catalogue the frustrations entailed in shopping with and/or for the family, and just 15% declared, "I am never frustrated when I go shopping with my family."

Leading Frustrations When Shopping for/with Family Members According to US Mother Internet Users, June 2014

% of respondents



Source: Cartonomy, "2014 Shop-of-Mom Report" conducted by YouGov, June 27, 2014

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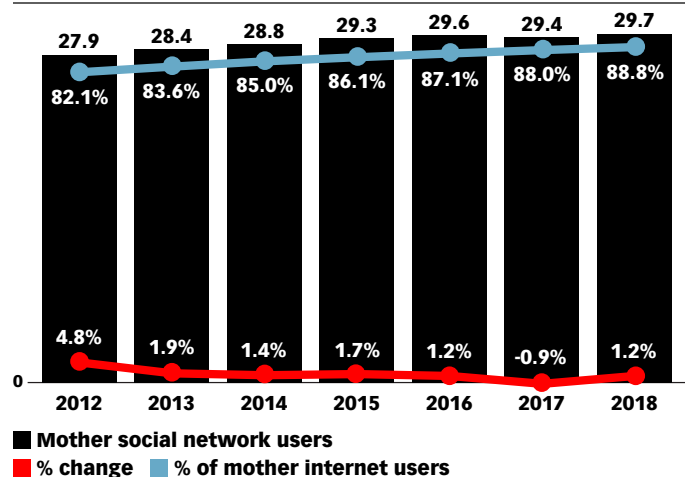
MOTHERS AND SOCIAL MEDIA

Mothers are avid social networkers—an activity well suited to easing the isolation that motherhood can entail. Many have mixed feelings about the role it plays in their lives, though. And its influence on their shopping behavior tends to be modest, at least by their telling.

Mothers who shun social networking are the exception. eMarketer estimates that 85.0% of online mothers in the US will use social networks at least once a month in 2014. For internet users in general, the figure is 68.5%.

US Mother Social Network Users and Penetration, 2012-2018

millions, % change and % of mother internet users



Note: female internet users ages 18+ with children under 18 in the household who use social networks via any device at least once per month
Source: eMarketer, Feb 2014; confirmed and republished, Aug 2014

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Predictably, Facebook is their chief social venue. eMarketer estimates that nine in 10 mothers who use social networks will use Facebook this year. Even amid the proliferation of competing networks, Facebook penetration among social mothers is expected to lose just a couple percentage points between now and 2018.

eMarketer estimates Twitter penetration among mother social users at 25.7% and among mother internet users at 21.8%. It also forecasts that growth in the number of mothers using Twitter will fall into mid-single digits this year. Elsewhere in the online social whirl, Edison Research found that 29% of mothers use Pinterest and 24% use Instagram. Few reported using Vine (8%) or Tumblr (5%).

In her firm's research, MtoM Consulting's Wilson has seen a rise in mothers using Instagram. But they are less likely to go there many times a day, as they do with Facebook. "We're not seeing that kind of habitual usage yet on any other platform quite like we still do at Facebook," she said.

The figures on mothers' usage (and non-usage) of social sites suggest they are better described as intense users than as early adopters. With less time and energy to experiment than non-mothers have, mothers may bring a stick-with-what-works-for-me sensibility to their choice of social networks.

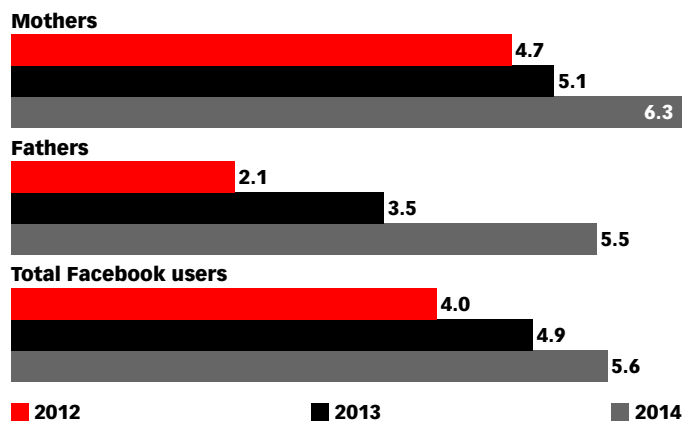
Blogs are enough of a presence in mothers' lives to have added the term "mommy blogger" to the vernacular. This does not mean, though, that reading (let alone writing) blogs is standard maternal practice. eMarketer estimates that 36.9% of mother internet users will read blogs of any sort at least once a month in 2014—which, of course, means a sizeable majority do not read motherhood blogs. This dovetails with pre-Mother's Day 2014 polling by SurveyMonkey, in which 49% of mothers said they don't read "mommy blogs" at all.

Conventional wisdom says social networking is crucial for stay-at-home mothers, who are most vulnerable to feeling isolated from the grown-up world. Exponential's Melmed notes a geographical caveat, though. While acknowledging that many stay-at-homes do rely on social networking in this way, he added, "But that's certainly less true in cities where there's a park a few blocks away where moms are meeting every morning to gossip while their children are on the jungle gym."

HOW MUCH IS TOO MUCH?

For lots of mothers, social networking is a more-than-daily habit. SurveyMonkey found 60% go on Facebook "multiple times a day," up from 47% in 2013. In the "2014 Millennial Mom Survey" by MtoM Consulting, about three-quarters of millennial mothers reported going to Facebook "many times a day" and nearly one in five reported using Instagram that often. In Edison Research's survey, Facebook mothers averaged 6.3 daily visits to that network.

Average Number of Times per Day US Mother and Father Facebook Users Check Facebook, 2012-2014



Source: Edison Research, "Moms and Media 2014," sponsored by Triton Digital, May 8, 2014

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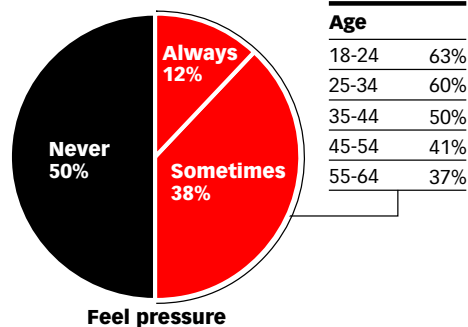
In one indication that mothers are not sloughing off Facebook, Edison Research found the average number of "friends" among Facebook mothers rose from 303 in 2013 to 352 in 2014. More broadly, there is little indication so far of mothers en masse cutting their social usage. The Current Lifestyle Marketing survey shed light on this when it asked mothers whether their usage of networks had changed from the previous year. Five percent said they stopped using Facebook and 19% said they were using it less. But they were slightly outnumbered by the 28% using it more.

Amid all this social usage, though, mothers have qualms. A white paper released in September 2014 by Exponential carried a section headed "Social media and the pressure to have it all." While noting that mothers of all generations "are challenged to 'keep up with the Joneses,'" it said millennial mothers feel especially pressured "as the proliferation of social media amplifies the degree to which their lives are publicly showcased."

Similar sentiment was evident in Current Lifestyle Marketing's findings, as Colton put it, that mothers feel "the stress of curating a perfect life through imagery and posts about your fabulous recipes or your beautiful children." The survey found half of mothers felt pressured to present an image of a "perfect life" in what they post to social media, including 12% who "always" feel that way.

US Mother Social Media Users Who Feel Pressure to Create an Image that Their Life Is Perfect on Social Media, by Age, July 2014

% of respondents



Source: Current Lifestyle Marketing, Sep 24, 2014

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An inevitable irony is that some mothers use social media to let people know they've had enough of it. "We see a lot of trending topics with moms on Facebook saying, 'Everybody, I will be taking a break from Facebook for 30 days. If you need me, you have my cellphone number,'" said Lauren Fitzgerald, managing director of consultancy The Mom Complex.

Then there are the mothers who create social accounts for their babies, distinct from their own. Describing a recent survey by Gerber.com, an October 2014 article in Today.com's Parents section said "close to 40% of moms aged 18 to 34 created social media accounts for their baby before the child's first birthday." It quoted one mother who had set up an Instagram account for her son "as a way to maintain her personal identity." She explained, "I think everything my son does is cute and I would love to post pictures all day long of what he does—but I didn't want him to hijack my page." So, "it's a step I took to make sure I remained me."

SOCIAL AND SHOPPING

Mothers mainly use social media to socialize. But it plays a role in their interaction with brands and retailers, albeit not to the degree marketers might wish.

In Edison Research's polling, 45% of mothers who use social media (vs. 39% of social users in general) said they follow brands via social sites. Focusing on food brands and grocery stores, a February 2014 survey by ad agency Sullivan Higdon & Sink found that 18% of online mothers follow those via social networks. As for actual purchases, 65% of mothers in SurveyMonkey's polling said they bought something in the previous 12 months due to a review they saw online.

A pair of surveys on 2014's back-to-school shopping give a more specific look at how social media affects (or fails to affect) mothers' shopping. In July 2014 polling from engagement platform PunchTab, the most striking figure was the proportion of mothers—75%—who said they would not use any of four major social networks in deciding on back-to-school purchases. Facebook was the only one reaching double digits as an influencer; Twitter barely scored at all.

Social Networks US Mothers Plan to Use When Making Back-to-School Purchase Decisions, July 2014

% of respondents



Note: mothers with children under the age of 18
Source: PunchTab, "Back-To-School Shopping & Decision-Making Moms," Aug 14, 2014

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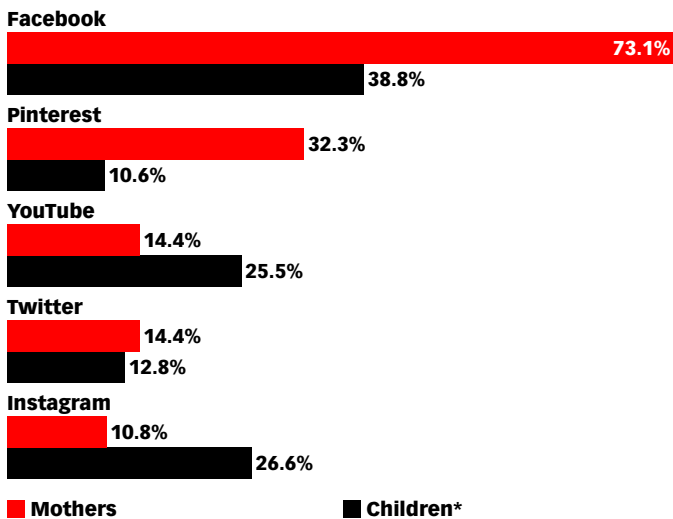
In the "Back to School" survey by women's lifestyle media platform SheKnows from the same month, 56% of mothers said they are "not greatly influenced" by social media when making back-to-school purchases. They mostly use social to seek coupons/deals, cited by 69%, product reviews (55%) and pricing information (54%).

While social networks can provide a kind of crowdsourcing of opinion about possible purchases, Colton stresses that this does not displace guidance gleaned closer to home. "It's really their family they trust, and friends," she said. Mothers include the views of online experts in their purchase process, but "it's usually either after or in conjunction with talking to their own friends and family." When her firm asked mothers whether they regard people they talk to online but "don't know in your everyday life as a trusted source, the answer was 'not really.'"

SheKnows found a further wrinkle in social media's effect on back-to-school shopping: Some of the influence comes from its impact on the kids. And the sites shaping kids' opinions are not always the ones affecting the mothers. Thus, YouTube and Instagram loomed larger as influences on kids' preferences than they did on mothers' thinking. And while Pinterest was influential for many mothers, it was the least influential of five social venues among kids.

Social Networks Used by US Mothers vs. Their Children* as a Resource for Back-to-School Shopping Decisions, July 2014

% of respondents



Note: children are under 18; *as reported by their mothers
Source: SheKnows, "Back to School Survey," July 29, 2014

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MOTHERS AND SMARTPHONES

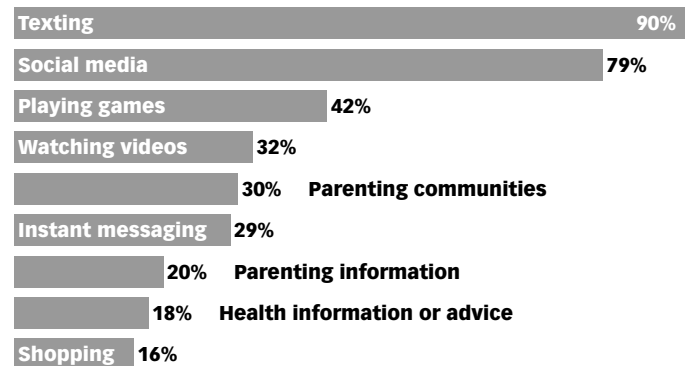
Smartphones help mothers accomplish practical tasks while also letting them grab fragments of "me time" throughout the day. Little wonder BabyCenter found about six in 10 mothers describing the device as "like my backup brain."

Many mothers are miles from their children for hours each day, but few will allow such distance between themselves and their smartphones. In Edison Research's survey, 83% of smartphone mothers said they keep it "within arm's length" either always or most of the time. Constant proximity gives the smartphone preeminence among digital devices. According to Google Consumer Surveys in April 2014, "New and expecting parents are 2.7 times more likely than non-parents to use a smartphone as their primary device."

This primary status is reflected in the range of functions the phones routinely perform for mothers. BabyCenter found that 90% of smartphone mothers said they text daily. Large numbers also used it that often to access social media, play games and watch videos.

Daily Smartphone Activities Conducted by US Mother Smartphone Users, July 2014

% of respondents



Note: expectant females or mothers with children under age 9
Source: BabyCenter, "US Mobile Mom 2014 Report: Mobile Powers Mom's Life," Sep 8, 2014

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The hierarchy of activities displayed in this chart rebuts any illusion that mothers' smartphone usage is wholly tied to maternal chores. Rather, mothers often use it to get a breather from motherhood and reassert their own identities. "Moms tend to use mobile to decompress, whether they're on their way home from work and just spot-checking their favorite pages or playing a game," Colton said. "Game playing is pretty active among moms. It's a quick way for them to disengage."

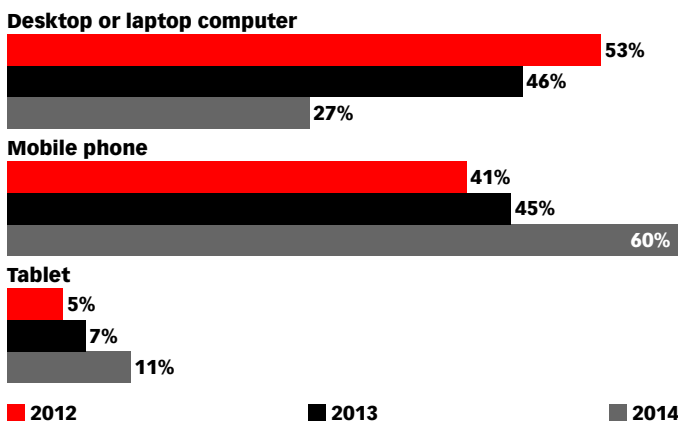
Indeed, the proliferation of mobile options has helped make gaming an activity mothers do by themselves and for themselves, and not just as a family pastime. "It is definitely a form of escape for moms," The Mom Complex's Fitzgerald said. "There are entire websites that have emerged just for moms like CandyCrushMom.com and GamingMom.com."

MOBILE MEETS SOCIAL

A symbiosis between social networking and smartphone usage helps explain why mothers indulge in both at moments throughout the day. As recently as 2012, a majority of mothers in Edison Research's polling cited the desktop or laptop computer as their preferred device for accessing Facebook. This year, more than twice as many cited their phone as their computer (60% vs. 27%). Social networking fits most easily into mothers' peripatetic lives as a mobile activity.

Preferred Method for Accessing Facebook According to US Mother Facebook Users, 2012-2014

% of total



Note: who have a profile page on Facebook; numbers may not add up to 100% due to rounding
 Source: Edison Research, "Moms and Media 2014," sponsored by Triton Digital, May 8, 2014

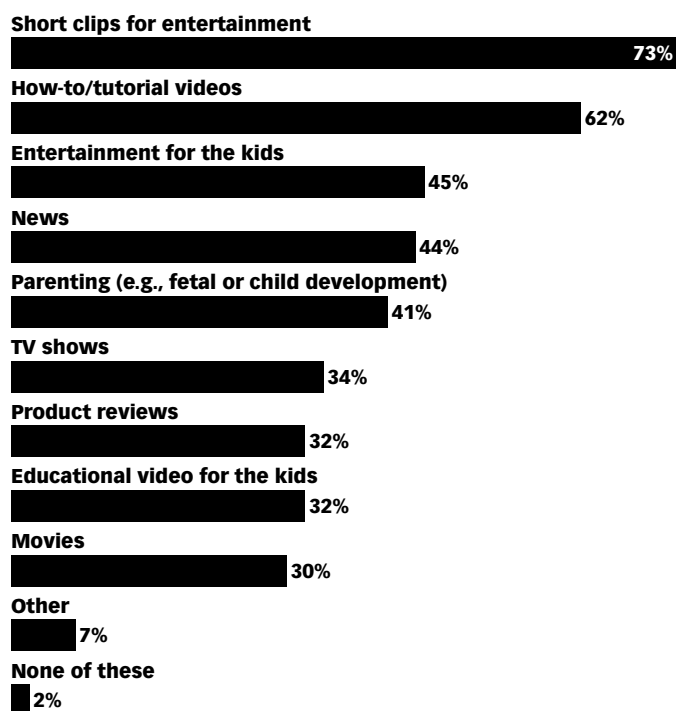
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There is also a connection between social and the phone's camera function. Noting that 93% of smartphone mothers used their phone's camera in the week before being surveyed, SurveyMonkey's report speculated, "Maybe they're posting those pictures to Facebook."

Mothers are certainly comfortable using their smartphones to access visual content. As the BabyCenter chart earlier in this section shows, about one-third use their phones daily to view videos. The foremost kind of video mothers access via smartphone is "short clips for entertainment"—a sign of their propensity for creating moments of leisure when they can.

Types of Video US Mother Smartphone Users Watch on Their Smartphone, July 2014

% of respondents



Note: expectant females or mothers with children under age 9
 Source: BabyCenter, "US Mobile Mom 2014 Report: Mobile Powers Mom's Life," Sep 8, 2014

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SMARTPHONE AS SHOPPING TOOL

The convenience of prepurchase research by smartphone is evident to mothers. In SurveyMonkey's polling, 48% said they used their phone for this purpose in the previous week. And sometimes the phone simply helps mothers keep track of information they have, particularly when shopping for baby products as a new mother. "It's a really important organizational tool for them, and there's a lot of stuff that needs organizing," Meredith's Points said.

When a marketer tries to connect with mothers via smartphone, it had better make the intrusion worth their while. A mother is more receptive to mobile ads “if they’re offering some kind of deal or coupon or if they’re touting something local that might benefit mom in some way,” Fitzgerald said. “Moms like being introduced to new things near them and are more likely to purchase if the ad is location-specific.”

However, a marketer eager to reach mothers on the fly cannot assume they will receive its messages if they have young kids in tow. “Many times the mother has given the phone away to the child in the cart to keep them quiet while she’s shopping,” Fitzgerald said. “The role we see the mobile device playing is really to be able to do the cost comparison first to see what stores have what she’s looking for, and then see who has the cheapest prices to avoid the legwork.” Likewise, BabyCenter found more than half of mothers use shopping apps, often doing so from home. “They’re most likely not in a store when they’re using an app to make a purchase,” Michaelson said. “They could be feeding an infant and making a purchase with the phone in their other hand.”

On the other other hand, smartphones let mothers grab mobile coupons while in a store, and many do so. In December 2013 polling by Allrecipes.com, 55.0% of smartphone mothers said they use their phone in grocery stores to find coupons. Digital coupons supplement rather than replace the old-fashioned kind, though. “[Mothers] still love paper coupons,” Points said.

The smartphone also enables a mother to involve family and friends in a purchase decision, even when she is in a store and they are elsewhere. In a May 2014 study by comScore (as cited in an October report by Ansible and Millennial Media), 50% of smartphone millennial mothers said they took a picture of a product, and 40% said they sent it to family and friends. Nearly four in 10 texted or called those people about a product. These figures exceed the numbers of mothers who reported using the smartphone to compare prices or research product features.

In-Store Shopping Activities Conducted via Smartphone Among US Mother vs. Father Smartphone Users, May 2014 % of respondents

	Mothers	Fathers
Took picture of a product	50%	47%
Sent picture of product to family/friends	40%	37%
Texted or called friends/family about a product	39%	35%
Found coupons or deals	39%	35%
Scanned a product barcode	32%	39%
Found store location	27%	35%
Compared product prices	24%	38%
Researched product features	21%	29%
Checked product availability	14%	23%
Purchased goods/services (on device)	13%	18%

Source: comScore Inc. as cited by Ansible and Millennial Media, “Millennial Moms & Mobile: Are We There Yet?” Oct 13, 2014

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Despite all this usage of the smartphone, it is not a constant shopping aid, to judge by PunchTab’s back-to-school findings. Many mothers expected to use it to seek coupons, compare prices, research items, etc. But more than one-third did not plan to use it for any such purpose.

Ways in Which US Mothers Plan to Use Their Smartphone to Assist with Back-to-School Shopping, July 2014 % of respondents



Note: mothers with children under the age of 18
Source: PunchTab, “Back-To-School Shopping & Decision-Making Moms,” Aug 14, 2014

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This is consistent with what BabyCenter found in asking mothers about ways they use smartphones for their children. Half said they use the device to purchase items for the kids—which means half do not.

Meanwhile, a gap persists between using the phone for research and using it to buy. In a Q1 2014 survey by Rhythm NewMedia, about two-thirds of mothers with smartphones (and half of those with tablets) said they were likely or very likely to use the device to research products. But even among these researchers, a significant minority rated themselves less than likely to buy via a mobile device.

Likelihood of US Mother Smartphone/Tablet Owners to Research and Purchase Products via Their Device, Q1 2014

% of respondents

	Smartphone	Tablet
Research		
Very likely	46.0%	32.3%
Likely	20.1%	17.7%
Neither likely nor unlikely	10.1%	15.1%
Unlikely	10.1%	9.9%
Very unlikely	13.8%	25.0%
Purchase*		
Very likely	47.5%	46.9%
Likely	24.6%	28.1%
Neither likely nor unlikely	13.9%	11.5%
Unlikely	9.0%	6.3%
Very unlikely	4.9%	7.3%

Note: numbers may not add up to 100% due to rounding; *among respondents who are likely to research products via smartphone/tablet
Source: Rhythm NewMedia, "Audience Insights: Demographic Trends in Mobile Video," March 1, 2014

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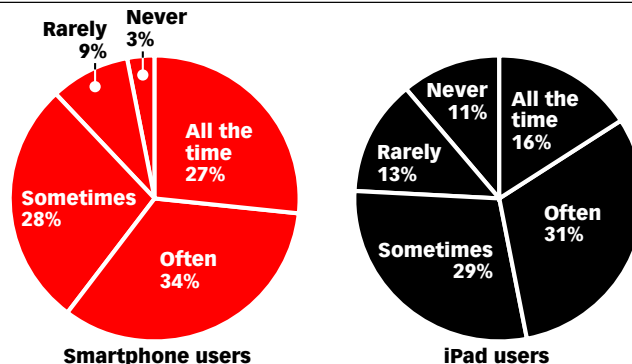
MULTITASKING AND ITS DISCONTENTS

With all they need to do, plus some of what they want to do, it stands to reason that mothers are chronic multitaskers. But while their facility in multitasking is an accomplishment of sorts, it is not one they always relish.

If a mother cannot quite recall what happened in a TV show she just watched, it is not hard to see why. Edison Research's survey found 76% of mothers share their TV-viewing time with internet usage, up from 66% in 2013. Yahoo's report said 57% of mothers multitask TV and internet usage daily. In the BabyCenter survey, large numbers of mothers reported using mobile devices "all the time" or "often" while watching TV.

Frequency with Which US Mother Smartphone vs. iPad Users Use Their Device While Watching TV, July 2014

% of respondents



Note: expectant females or mothers with children under age 9; numbers may not add up to 100% due to rounding
Source: BabyCenter, "US Mobile Mom 2014 Report: Mobile Powers Mom's Life," Sep 8, 2014

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Some of this multitasking takes place while mothers are sort-of-watching TV with their kids. In a press release reporting a wave of its LMX Family research, Ipsos in May 2014 said more than eight in 10 millennial mothers were "simultaneously going online while watching TV with their children—significantly more than moms of other generations." Social networking was prominent among their multitasking activities.

CONCLUSIONS

MtoM Consulting's Wilson suggests that multitasking is such an ingrained behavior that some mothers may not even be aware they are doing it. The smartphone has become an extension of themselves, she said, "so when they're using it and doing things while they're also at the park or walking the baby, they may not actually realize that they are multitasking."

In some cases, the mother is trying to sustain interests she has apart from her role as mother. "Many times we assume that when a mother becomes a mother, she is no longer interested in any of the things that she was before, and it's simply not true," Fitzgerald said. "She just has a lot more competing for her time. While she's still very much interested in the same things, she's just trying to be a little more economical about how she's fitting it in."

Multitasking allows mothers to cram more socializing and more entertainment into their day. But it does not close what the title of an October 2013 Pew Research Center bulletin termed "The 'leisure gap' between mothers and fathers." While noting the federal data that shows a comparatively small gap in total free time for fathers vs. mothers, it went on to describe the difference in kind between their leisure—for instance, the fact that "mothers feel more exhausted than fathers during their leisure time, and their stress level associated with leisure time is higher as well." To explain this difference, it cited research showing that mothers' free time "is often interrupted, which may make it hard for them to relax."

Multitasking itself is part of the problem. In another study Pew cited (written up in the *American Sociological Review*), researchers found that mothers in dual-earner families "spend 10 more hours a week multitasking compared to fathers," with the extra hours largely connected to childcare and housework. "For mothers, multitasking activities at home and in public are associated with an increase in negative emotions, stress, psychological distress and work-family conflict," said an abstract of the journal article.

When mothers use smartphones to grab some "me time" while nominally hanging out with their kids, this kind of multitasking can bring a dose of parental guilt—or, alternatively, glaring disapproval from people who think the smartphoning parent ought to feel guilty. "Every few months, there is a new article voicing concerns about how we're all being terrible parents because we just can't stop staring at our phones," said a July 2014 piece from *The New York Times*. "There's an entire cottage industry devoted to shaming parents whose noses are buried in their devices."

Mothers are indeed a highly digital bunch. Nearly all are internet users, and a large majority have home Wi-Fi. A majority also own smartphones, and nearly half have tablets. TV remains important to them, but they consume lots of digital video as well.

Online social networking is a mainstay of mothers' digital activity. More than eight in 10 of all US mothers use social networks, a far higher proportion than among adults in general. Most are on Facebook and go to it multiple times a day. Twitter has a following among mothers—as do Pinterest and Instagram—but not on Facebook's scale.

Mothers do have qualms about social media. It's the digital venue where many feel they aren't measuring up to the domestic perfection on display in places like Facebook and Pinterest. A significant number say they have considered taking a break from social, though there's no sign of a mass exodus actually taking place. Social's role as an influence on mothers' shopping is spotty.

Mothers deploy their smartphones throughout the day—sometimes to accomplish tasks motherhood imposes on them, sometimes to escape those demands. The phone's role as a shopping tool remains more prominent for prepurchase research than for transacting purchases.

Multitasking helps mothers squeeze all this digital activity into their day. But while enabling them to create snippets of "me time," the always-on nature of such activity can undercut mothers' attempts to relax.

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Julie Michaelson

Vice President, Global Sales

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Christine Wilson

Founder

MtoM Consulting

Interview conducted on October 13, 2014



Amy Colton

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Interview conducted on October 8, 2014



Lauren Fitzgerald

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The Mom Complex

Interview conducted on October 10, 2014



Bryan Melmed

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