



Ipsos Connect



Thought Piece  
2016

# THE MANY FACES OF MODERN MOTHERHOOD



**THE FACE OF MOTHERHOOD IS CHANGING.  
AS ONE OF THE UK'S 18 MILLION MOTHERS,  
I'VE GOT DIRECT EXPERIENCE OF THIS. I AM  
ALSO A RESEARCH DIRECTOR HERE AT IPSOS,  
HEADING UP THE QUALITATIVE DIVISION  
WITH IPSOS CONNECT, WHICH SPECIALISES  
IN COMMUNICATIONS.**

**IN THE PAST COUPLE OF YEARS, I HAVE SPENT A LOT OF TIME THINKING ABOUT HOW PARENTHOOD IS CHANGING, BUT ALSO IMPORTANTLY, LOOKING AT HOW ADVERTISER ATTITUDES TO PARENTHOOD AND SPECIFICALLY MOTHERHOOD ARE CHANGING: HOW ADVERTISERS AND MARKETERS MAKE SENSE OF, AND COMMUNICATE ABOUT, MODERN MOTHERHOOD.**

**Ipsos Connect recently partnered with Saatchi and Saatchi on some innovative research for Mumstock the annual Mumsnet conference. As an intriguing starting point to the study, Saatchi teams analysed internet parenting forums and collected what they described as 66 different 'identities' that mothers were self-defining as at any given point. These ranged from being a lone parent to having a child with special needs. Saatchi and Saatchi tasked Ipsos Connect with taking this starting point and building out a clear vision of motherhood in the UK.**

**WHAT WE DID**

First of all we undertook a nationally representative survey of 1977 mothers aged 16-60. We asked mothers to select and rank the 'identities' that defined their outlook and behaviours in order of significance. We then ranked the identities in order of impact and influence on outlook for UK mothers.

Next we then took a deep dive into the worlds of six mothers and their friends from around the country with the ambition of capturing their lives in their own words in a natural and non-inhibiting context. The deep dives initially involved in-depth home interviews. We then gave the mums a series of tasks they had to complete over the following week, including video blogs and a self-filmed evening with friends. After a week we collected the extensive video footage for analysis.

The first phase of the research confirmed that there was a huge raft of identities which mothers said defined their outlook and behaviour. The sheer breadth of identities and the fact that so many respondents related to so many of them simultaneously gave us a tantalising insight into how much the 'universalistic' understanding of motherhood has dissipated to be replaced with a 'particularised' definition of motherhood in the UK.

On average, each respondent had six identities they said defined them most. Modern mothers are a complex ecosystem of identities and some struggled with the idea of defining themselves narrowly. As a respondent in the survey said:

“I can empathize with many of these groups as I have been divorced, I have a son with autism, and I have twin daughters in their teens of which one is dyslexic. I have suffered miscarriage and the death of a younger sibling. I am supporting a parent who is terminally ill with cancer. My stepson is in a multi-cultural marriage and my children are mixed race. All of which are important factors in family life. I also run my own business and attempt to support all my family however I can.”

From personal experience as a working mother I know what it is to have multiple identities at any point in the day. And as our research demonstrated these multiple roles and identities are the norm for modern mothers. But are these multiple identities and roles reflected in current advertising which is trying to reach, engage and build loyalty amongst mothers? Our qualitative deep dives suggested not. There was a commonly held perception that advertising was projecting a one dimensional, alienating image of motherhood which failed to pick up on the increasingly varied and nuanced characteristics of modern mothering. As Michelle, a rural mother said,

“Adverts portray an idealised version of what being a mother should be, which doesn't feel representative of real mums. Being a mother is complex, from juggling a career to managing household chores – I want to see this in advertising”.

Why is there a sense that motherhood today is more complex and nuanced? What are the drivers of this change? And how should the advertising industry and brands respond to these changes?

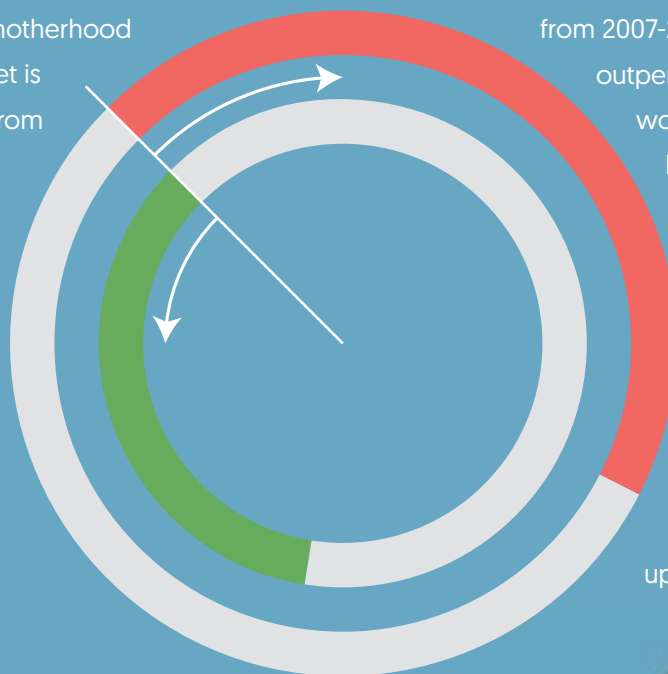
There are two fundamental shifts that have occurred that are changing the face of motherhood globally. The first of these is the internet.

Prior to the internet the experience of motherhood and one's hopes for it were dictated primarily by the immediate community of peers and relatives. The media, TV soaps, documentaries, newspapers and magazines offered a wider 'peek behind the curtains' of other people's experience of motherhood. But it was distant, fictional or marginalised – even women's magazines tended to steer clear of regular conversations around motherhood. Women had to rely on niche titles such as Women and Baby to hear how other women mothered.

Then came the internet, which has been instrumental in accelerating the pace of change for women and

mothers. It has given ordinary women a voice for the first time in history – a platform to share what were traditionally considered to be ‘private’ experiences. As a consequence, it has transformed the mainstream media ‘voice’ to include the voices of women and mothers. The traditional view of how to mother is being eroded. In a sense, motherhood has fragmented. The internet is enabling mothers to learn from other mothers about the ways of being a mother – beyond your immediate physical circle. Mothers are seeing that there are hugely different ways of mothering, choices to be made, and are actively seeking ways to make it work for them.

The second factor is education – around the world and in the UK. Globally, women are becoming mothers later than ever before, motherhood and parenthood is therefore more ‘considered’ than ever before. The number of pregnancies among Under 18s in England and Wales has plummeted 45% from 2007-2014 (ONS 2016). Girls are outperforming boys in school and women are now 35% more likely to go to university (UCAS 2015). It follows then that mothers in the UK are becoming more self-aware and self-reflexive than ever before. They know they are making choices about the sort of way they bring up their children.



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Source: ONS, 2016

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Source: UCAS, 2015





It's also worth bearing in mind that many millennial women are now becoming mothers (millennials are aged 16-35) with the average age of first time motherhood now 29 (ONS 2015). As with all millennials, new mothers have grown up in the UK in a mature media market, they are savvy to marketing and media messages and able to deconstruct messages with a critical eye. In many ways, millennial mums are more defined by their 'millennialness' than by the fact they are mothers.

## **HOW MARKETERS ARE RESPONDING TO THE CHANGING FACE OF MOTHERHOOD**

There is an industry-wide acknowledgment, as underlined by our research for Mumsnet and Saatchi and Saatchi, that marketers need to reflect the characteristics of modern motherhood better. What we found through our research was that UK mothers have a hugely diverse range of needs and outlooks currently untapped by advertisers.

The mothers we spoke to shared a sophisticated understanding of their own life experiences, the challenges they faced as a consequence of their core identity and also, very importantly, a highly articulate critique of the advertising industry in relation to how it spoke to mothers. Advertising needs to work harder to truly engage and inspire them, to

reflect their different needs and fundamentally, their lives. Manon, mother of a teenager said:

"I saw an advert when they said, 'C'mon girls, let's get cooking'. And even my husband said, 'That's a bit sexist!'".

Whilst Helena, a single mother, said advertising needed to portray single parenthood in a positive light.

Marketing departments have a lot of mothers in them. But it appears as if, when marketers think about mothers as a 'target group' they stop thinking about themselves and focus instead on an idealised 'universalist' image of motherhood. But as a mother, it is absolutely important not to forget or discount one's own responses to advertising rather than falling back on a generic view of motherhood. Monique, a self-employed mum said:

"A lot of the ads look like they've been made by people who don't have a clue what it's like to be me. There must be [mum's in advertising], they can't have an entire advertising industry without having mums involved, but it doesn't show."

Another insight from our mothers is that if you speak to a specific sub category of mothers you're more

likely to ring 'true'. You'll be communicating with a recognisable form of motherhood which is more engaging than a bland two dimensional image that grabs nobody. Connect with a truth or need and you're more likely to inspire a broader section of mothers. This is a very millennial viewpoint – where authenticity in messaging is vitally important.

The new generation of UK mothers wants to see an authentic picture of motherhood, where cleaning is a means to an end and not an aspiration, where mothers look like they do, where they are complex and nuanced and clever and witty. Just like they are.

#### **Key implications for advertising:**

1. More diverse teams in advertising agencies will better reflect the needs states of real mothers (3% of creative directors in ad agencies are female). I would argue its specifically about having more women in creative teams in advertising agencies – in my experience there are plenty of women in other areas. But creative departments are overwhelmingly young, white and male.
2. Embrace the complexity and multifarious nature of motherhood today, don't advertise to a 'universal' mum.

3. Remember, they are the most educated mothers in history – consequently aspirations around motherhood have changed.
4. Mother Marketers: Listen to your own instincts. Don't be afraid to challenge out of touch messaging.
5. Get as close as you can to your broader target of mums – not just your current consumers. Take a deep dive into their world. Meet the mothers who reject, or couldn't care less, about your brand.

**FOR MORE INFORMATION,  
PLEASE CONTACT:**

**QUALITATIVE DIRECTOR**



Hanna heads up our Ipsos Connect Closer team and is a highly experienced qualitative and quantitative researcher. She has a particular interest in the changing face of Motherhood.

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# Ipsos Connect

## ABOUT IPSOS CONNECT

Ipsos Connect are experts in brand, media, content and communications research. We help brands and media owners to reach and engage audiences in today's hyper-competitive media environment.

Our services include:

- **Brand & Campaign Performance:** Evaluation and optimisation of in-market activities to drive communications effectiveness and brand growth.
- **Content and Communications Development:** Communications, content and creative development from early stage idea development through to quantitative pre-testing alongside media & touchpoint planning.
- **Media Measurement:** Audience measurement and understanding.

Ipsos Connect are specialists in people-based insight, employing qualitative and quantitative techniques including surveys, neuro, observation, social media and other data sources. Our philosophy and framework centre on building successful businesses through understanding brands, media, content and communications at the point of impact with people.

