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Recommended Citation

Larson, Lindsay R.L. and Shin, Hyunju, "Utilitarian and Hedonic Shopping Behavior in the Face of Natural Disaster" (2017). *Association of Marketing Theory and Practice Proceedings 2017*. 50.
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Utilitarian and Hedonic Shopping Behavior in the Face of Natural Disaster

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ABSTRACT

Terror management theory suggests that events which make one's mortality salient also lead to compensatory processes and behaviors meant to alleviate existential anxiety. Applications within the field of consumer behavior have led to the proposal that any such event may also impact materialism and consumption decisions as a protectant from such anxiety. With this in mind, the current study sets out to investigate the personal experiences and subsequent shopping behavior of those impacted by Hurricane Matthew in the coastal southeastern region of the United States. While Hurricane Matthew had nowhere near the destructive impact of Katrina within the continental United States, as the most powerful Atlantic tropical storm in nearly a decade, Hurricane Matthew caused widespread disruptions to services and difficulties for consumers over a very large area, to include Florida, Georgia and the Carolinas. A survey (n = 268) was administered in this region within two weeks from the time the hurricane subsided, regarding both utilitarian (preparation) shopping and hedonic (enjoyment/stress-reduction) shopping activity, both at times directly before and directly after the hurricane. Several scales such as fear during the storm, general tendency for risk aversion, and present temporal presentation were also administered to investigate the relationships between individual differences and their influences on consumer's perception about the impact of natural disaster on consumers. Results reveal that respondents in our sample engaged in significantly more utilitarian shopping than hedonic shopping both before and after the hurricane. However, initial findings reveal that groups with higher levels of fear during the storm, general tendency for risk aversion, and those with present temporal presentations were more likely to report feeling that they must purchase more 'of everything' during the storm, delay purchase of unnecessary/luxury goods, and show concern about crowded shopping areas and becoming a more conscious shopper than low-fear participants.

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