Holiday Shopping Starts Earlier and Gets Smarter: BSM Media Study Finds Moms Turning to Social Video, Creators and AI

A five-year comparison shows holiday shopping shifting sharply, while moms continue to prioritize children's gifts despite economic pressures.

POMPANO BEACH , FL, UNITED STATES, September 15, 2026 / EINPresswire.com/ -- Moms are not waiting for Black Friday to start holiday shopping, and they no longer rely on the same sources they used just five years ago to discover what to buy.

New research from BSM Media, a marketing agency specializing in reaching moms and families, finds that the 2026 holiday shopping journey is starting earlier and becoming more influenced by short-form video, content creators, and artificial intelligence. The findings are based on BSM Media holiday consumer research conducted in 2021 and again in 2026. The studies included 501 completed online responses. The five-year comparison reveals a consumer who is still highly committed to creating a meaningful holiday for her family, but who is shopping earlier, researching differently, and using more tools to stretch both her time and budget.

The Original Marketing to Moms Agency



Moms don't cut down when it comes to their children's holiday gifts

Holiday Shopping Is Starting Earlier

In 2021, just 6% of respondents said they expected to begin holiday shopping in September, while 45% identified October as their starting point.
In 2026, 18.75% say they expect to begin in September, while another 13.89% plan to begin before September. An additional 12.73% say they shop for holiday gifts year-round. The shift suggests that brands and retailers may need to rethink the traditional holiday marketing calendar and begin reaching moms well before November.

“Holiday shopping is no longer a six-week season,” said Maria Bailey, CEO of BSM Media and author of "Marketing to Moms." “Moms are discovering products and making purchase decisions earlier, but the bigger change is how they are getting there. Social video, creators, retail platforms, and now AI are all playing a role in a much more fragmented shopping journey. Brands that wait until Black Friday to become relevant may already be too late.”

Social Video and Creators Are Reshaping Holiday Discovery
The way moms find gift ideas has changed considerably since BSM Media’s 2021 study. In 2021, Pinterest influenced 43.56% of respondents’ gift ideas, TikTok influenced 18.81%, and Instagram Reels influenced 28.71%.

In the 2026 research:
- 56.28% say Instagram Reels are a source for discovering holiday gift ideas
- 40.58% cite TikTok
- 41.55% cite influencers or content creators
- 41.55% cite Instagram Stories or posts
- 76.33% cite Amazon
- 22.22% cite Pinterest

“Consumers are moving between inspiration, validation, and purchase faster than ever,” Bailey said. “A mom might discover a product in a Reel, see another parent use it on TikTok, check Reddit reviews, ask an AI assistant to compare it with another product, and then purchase it at Target or Amazon. That is the new holiday path to purchase.”

AI Has Entered the Holiday Shopping Journey
One of the study's most significant findings is the emergence of AI as a shopping resource. Among respondents:
- 19.57% say they already use AI for shopping
- 30.43% have used AI for other purposes and would consider using it for shopping
- 24.40% have not used AI but would consider doing so
- 22.95% say they would not use AI for holiday shopping

Among the ways respondents would use AI during the holidays:
- 55.31% would use it to find gift ideas
- 46.62% would use it to compare prices
- 39.61% would use it to compare products

- 38.65% would use it to find gifts for someone difficult to shop for
- 36.71% would use it to find deals
- 25.12% would use it to find age-appropriate gifts for children
- 21.74% would use it to summarize product reviews

According to Bailey, the rise of AI shopping has implications beyond technology. “For marketers, AI is becoming another point of discovery,” Bailey said. “Brands now have to think about whether their products can be found not only on social media and retail sites, but also when a consumer asks an AI tool for the best gift for a 7-year-old, a hard-to-shop-for spouse, or a product under a specific budget. Marketing to moms increasingly means being discoverable wherever she asks the question.”

Economic Pressure Is Changing How Moms Shop, Not Eliminating Holiday Spending
The study also finds that moms are navigating significant financial pressure.
The factors most likely to affect holiday spending include:
- 65.99% food and grocery prices
- 64.85% higher everyday household expenses
- 46.71% higher prices on gifts
- 45.80% fuel costs
- 36.05% travel costs

Yet 43.77% of respondents expect their total holiday spending to be somewhat or significantly higher than in 2025, while 38.55% expect spending to remain about the same.The research suggests moms are responding by becoming more strategic. Nearly 47% say they begin shopping when they do to spread purchases across several paychecks, while 72.45% cite taking advantage of sales as a factor.

Children’s Gifts Remain Protected
Even when budgets tighten, moms appear reluctant to reduce spending on their children.
When asked where they would cut back if money were tight:
- 65.53% would reduce gifts for adults
- 58.50% would reduce gifts for extended family
- 53.06% would reduce gifts for themselves
- Only 12.47% would reduce gifts for their children

“This is something we have seen throughout decades of studying mothers as consumers,” Bailey said. “Moms may change where they shop, when they shop and what they spend on themselves, but they work very hard to protect the experience they create for their children.”

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