

## Consumption Adjustment in the Process of Post-disaster Recovery

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### Introduction

In 2005, Hurricane Katrina slammed into the Gulf Coast causing substantial short- and long-term negative effects on the economies of southern Louisiana and Mississippi. Although considerable resources have been devoted to restoring the economic foundation of the areas, there continues to be a scarcity of research related to the consequences of natural disasters on consumers' coping with loss at both the micro (i.e., individual or family) and macro (i.e., public and retail infrastructure) levels.

Valuable insights into the issues facing individuals can be seen in how they react as consumers and adjust their consumption practices under a new economic situation. Research on how disaster-affected individuals, acting as consumers, adjust their everyday consumption practices will enhance understanding on how consumer goods, services, and experiences improve or exacerbate the situation of those in distress in the process of recovery.

The overall purpose was to determine the adjustments that consumers make in their consumption patterns after a natural disaster. Specific questions addressed included: (a) What is your opinion of several activities that people like you might use to be "smart shoppers" to aid in recovery? and (b) How much did you do several consumption activities before and right after the hurricane, as well as how much you do them today?

### Methodology

A survey questionnaire was developed by the current researchers. Data were collected by members of community organizations during Spring 2009. Questionnaires were completed by 141 Hurricane Katrina-affected consumers.

### Results and Conclusions

Descriptive analysis was conducted to determine the activities "smart shoppers" use to aid in recovery. More than 70% of the sample responded: make purchase decisions carefully, focus on reducing wasteful spending, shop at local stores if at all possible, think about it before buying something on sale, buy necessities rather than luxuries, and shop for sales. More than 50% of the sample reported: shop at stores that support the community, do things themselves instead of paying, and search for information before deciding to buy. Smaller percentages of the sample stated: travel far to get what is needed, rely heavily on brand names, make impulse purchases, pay higher prices to avoid crowds, and pay higher prices for convenience.

Comparing responses to "how much you did the following consumption activities before and right after the hurricane, as well as how much you do them today," results indicated that consumers do adjust their consumption patterns to aid recovery. Downsizing and waste reduction are increased following a disaster and continue to be adjustment patterns used 3 years later. Impulsive buying, which may not be constructive to resource conservation, is decreased following a disaster and during the process of recovery. Preference of shopping locally appeared to increase over time, indicating that local retailers may perform better in terms of meeting affected consumers' daily consumption needs. Although relying on brand names was increased right after the hurricane, overall consumers' brand preference was not dramatically changed by experiencing the disaster.

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