Dynamics of Self-Regulation

Session Chair: Suresh Ramanathan, University of Chicago
Discussion Leader: Tanya Chartrand, Duke University

Special Session – ACR San Antonio 2005

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“Self-Regulatory Resource Depletion Makes People More Extreme in Their Emotions and Judgments: A Possible Mechanism for Ego-Depletion” Kathleen Vohs, University of Minnesota Nicole Mead, Florida State University Brandon Schmeichel, Texas A&M University Sabrina Bruyneel, Katholik University Leuven Research on the self-regulatory resource depletion model has shown that earlier acts of self-control render people less able to self-regulate later. Why is this so? We hypothesized that one reason is that subjective feelings of sensations and impulses are stronger after episodes of self-regulation as compared to responses experienced in the absence of prior self-regulation. Five studies supported this hypothesis: ratings of emotional movies or photos (Studies 1-2), abstract characters (Studies 3-4) and the experience of pain (Study 5) were more extreme if people had first engaged in self-regulation than if they had not engaged in self-control. 2. “Moment-to-Moment Pursuit of Hedonic Goals” Suresh Ramanathan, University of Chicago Geeta Menon, New York University One of the key unresolved issues in the study of self-control is the precise nature of the dynamics of conflict between desire and willpower. Our research focuses on the timeline of affective reactions to tempting stimuli and suggests that there are systematic differences between impulsive and prudent people in terms of how they manage goal conflict – while both impulsive and prudent people experience spontaneous positive affect in response to tempting stimuli after being primed, the former manage subsequent ambivalence by choosing to go with the unsatiated hedonic goal, while the latter show a rebound effect by devaluing the primed hedonic goal significantly over time.3. “Attention Mechanisms in Goal Management” James Shah, Duke University Shawn Bodmann, University of Wisconsin-Madison An important, perhaps under-examined, component of effective self-regulation is the manner in which we prioritize and “juggle” our various pursuits and resolve goal conflict in order to best ensure the successful attainment of as many goals as possible. Our research examines the mechanisms involved in such goal management and the degree to which they may unfold automatically. We present a series of studies that consider the fundamental regulation of attention and the goals themselves. Specifically, we present evidence of four key processes – 1) goal shielding, in which goals are automatically shielded from the distraction of other pursuits, 2) goal shifting, in which one’s attention switches amongst one’s various goals, 3) goal synthesis, in which goals may be managed by regulating the pursuits themselves and 4) goal shedding, in which some pursuits may be strategically dropped for the sake of those remaining.

[to cite]:


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**SPECIAL SESSION SUMMARY**

**An Examination of the Concept of Postmodern Home and the Role of Consumption in Home-Making Practices**

Fleura Bardhi, Northeastern University  
Eric Arnould, University of Arizona

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**OVERVIEW AND CONTRIBUTIONS**

Home is a fundamental construct in social sciences that represents the emotional and meaningful relationship that consumers form with place (Altman and Werner 1985). However, consumer research on home is scarce (McCracken 1989; Sherry 2000). Home has been studied mainly as a context for decision-making and commercial exchange (e.g., Frenzen and Davis 1990; Grayson 1998). But previous work argues that home constitutes an important place for self-development and family life (Claiborne and Ozanne 1990; Hill 1991; McCracken 1989; Venkantesh, et al. 2001). These studies suggest that home is a symbolic and sacred object, and allude to consumers’ use of possessions and consumption practices to transform place into home environments. However, we lack studies that focus on the role of the marketplace in home practices as well as studies on the concept of home per se. Furthermore, this session suggest that consumer researchers move beyond an outdated conceptualization of home as a fixed place, typically identified with the house or the homeland, and in which the consumers’ display a strong, affective, nostalgic, and permanent connection to a place. By focusing on the concept of home, this session advances our understanding of the ways that consumers relate to place in postmodernity as well as the role that the marketplace plays in consumers’ home related practices, such as indwelling and constructing a home.

Consistent with a current movement in social sciences that re-examines the ways that consumers relate to place in postmodernity, the three papers in this session investigate the ways that contemporary life conditions have transformed the notion of home and argue for an increasing role of the market in the social construction of home. The first paper by Bardhi and Arnould investigates a mobile notion of home among contemporary nomadic consumers. They find that the home in postmodernity is not necessary defined in terms of place, but in terms of relationships, possessions and spatial patterns. Mobile professionals actively engage in practices that transform public, commercial spaces into private and salient spaces of home. The second paper by Rosenbaum focuses on aged informants’ consumption of a diner. This study demonstrates the social role this consumption landscape plays in the lives of aged consumers—becoming either an extension of their homes or a replacement home. The study investigates how consumers and service providers co-construct the consumption experience in this diner as a home experience through their social relationships, the regularity of consumption practices in the diner, and the domestic activities that take place there. The third paper by Venkatesh is part of an ongoing research project, “Family Portal Design.” This research shows how the integrative use of technology in multiple aspects of domestic life blurs the traditional boundaries between the home as private sphere and society as public sphere. In the postmodern home, work and domestic lives are interpenetrating, while home takes on nomadic qualities and is no longer fixed to a place (see also Venkatesh et al. 2001). This study argues for a polysemous understanding of technology at home.

“Making a Home on the Road: A Mobile Concept of Home among Transnational Mobile Professionals”

Fleura Bardhi and Eric Arnould

Global geographical mobility is a normal condition of postmodernity. Seven hundred million people move daily across borders while eighty million people reside outside their native home country (Beck 2000). Many people live between and betwixt several homes and others are in a continuous state of mobility without a fixed place to call home (Featherstone 1995; Urry 2002). How do these contemporary nomads construct a sense of home on the road? What is the meaning of home for these mobile populations? How do they use possessions and commercial setting in the process of home making? These research questions are addressed in this study.

Home is one of the central social concepts that consumers orient themselves in time and space as well as a highly symbolic and often sacred object. However, consumer research on home is scarce (Sherry 2000). Mobile consumers’ connections to home and the influence of this relationship in consumer behavior have been discussed in the acculturation literature. However, acculturation studies have examined mainly sojourner consumer segments—sedentary consumers for whom mobility is only a temporary condition and they sustain the connection to a place they call home. We also do not know much about the ways that mobile consumers construct a home on the road (Thompson and Tambyah 1999). The focus of existing studies has been on the ways that sojourners sustain connection with existing homes while on the road. Finally, consumer research has been informed by an implicit notion of home as fixed to a place (homeland or dwelling).

This study addresses these issues by studying the notions of home among consumers who willingly live nomadic lifestyles, such as transnational mobile professionals (TMPs) (Featherstone 1995). TMPs are members of a mobile professional class that has emerged worldwide with the development of the global economy. This global consumer segment is characterized by cosmopolitan orientation and voluntary nomadism, always on the road from one global city to the other, without a clear anchoring of identity to place or nationality (Featherstone 1995; Hannerz 1996). The data for this study is comprised of 35 semi-structured, long interviews with highly mobile global professionals. The informants were selected on the bases of sampling criteria derived from the literature on TMPs. The sample includes roving professionals, business travelers, and expatriates located in different parts of the world. The researchers traveled in the informants’ places of residency or work to conduct the interviews, which lasted from 1 to 5 hours. N*Vivo was used to code the data following a preliminary list of codes and the recommended techniques of qualitative data analysis.

The study found that TMPs desire to have a home and engage continuously in practices that enable them to maintain or recreate a sense of home on the road. We find that TMPs define home in a mobile sense, in three different ways. First, TMPs define home in terms of order: home is found in places where certain spatial and temporal patterns exist or are created. Second, TMPs define home in terms of salient relationships. Findings show that TMPs experi-
ence places where certain family or kinship relationships take place as homes. Third, TMPs define home in terms of cherished possessions; homes are places that serve as “vaults” of precious memories represented and stored in cherished possessions. These three notions of home represent mobile notions of home that differ from traditional concepts of home in several ways. Home among TMPs is not only a place, but can be defined in terms of relationships, possessions, or spatial patterns. TMPs have multiple homes and the relationships they form with place are temporary where departure from home-places is not experienced negatively.

Since TMPs have a mobile notion of home not affixed to a place, the study found that TMPs engage in an ongoing process of making a home on the road. TMPs attempt to create a sense of home in the hotels in which they reside during travel, blurring the line between the private space of home and the public, commercial space. Informants engaged actively in several practices of appropriation of commercial spaces that transform them into home-like environments. For example, informants talked about moving hotel room furniture so that they create a similar spatial order to the one at home. They request certain furniture and appliances in their rooms that they consider “necessary” home objects. They find the room ambiance, such as color, light, and smell important in constructing the sense of home. Personalization of space through decorating with family photos, flowers, food, etc is another practice that informants used to transform commercial hotel rooms into homes. Informants also emphasized social elements of hotel service as important in making the hotel more like home.

We believe that the findings of this study make a two fold contribution. First, this study contributes to the social sciences literature on the constructive of home by identifying a mobile concept. In this way, our research provides an empirical response to calls for more portable, fluid notions of home in postmodernity (Rapoport and Dawson 1998). Second, this study shows that home remains an important construct that influences consumer behavior even in the postmodern context. Facile postmodern notions of decentred subjects and fragmented identities require revision in light of TMP consumers’ active construction of home-like environments.

“From a Diner to a Home: Understanding How Customers Find Home in the Marketplace”  
Mark S. Rosenbaum

The concept of place is well engrained in the marketing discipline as a marketing mix tool that refers to distributional and to organizational activities associated with making products and services available to targeted consumers. Marketers tend to conceptualize places in isolation from consumers’ personal lives and experiences. Places are mainly considered as mere points-of-exchange. Sherry (2000) posits that places have different dimensions of meaning for consumers on based of personal experiences in them. The goal of this paper is to offer a conceptual framework that explains how and why consumers experience places in the lives. As such, the paper advances our understanding of why and how consumers may transform places from consumption settings to home-like settings. This article contributes to several research paradigms including commercial friendships, (Price & Arnould 1999), customer communities (McAlexander, Schouten, and Koenig 2002; Muniz & O’Guinn 2001), commercial social support (Kang & Ridgway 1996), and loneliness (Goodwin and Lockshin 1992).

The study employs Grounded Theory Methodology (Glaser & Strauss 1967) to develop a parsimonious, relevant, and modifiable framework regarding how and why consumers imbue places with different meanings. The study is based upon fifty-six interviews with customers (44), employees (8), managers (2), and owners (2) at Sammy’s, a casual dining restaurant located in a suburb of a large Midwestern city. During the initial stage of data gathering, customers were asked to explain what Sammy’s means to them. The data revealed that customers explain three types of meanings in the restaurant, and hence, experience it in three different manners. First, some customers view the restaurant as a place to fulfill a consumption need; hence, they experience place-as-practical. Second, other customers perceive the restaurant not only as a place to eat, but also, as place to socialize, or to “kibitz” with friends; therefore, they experience place-as-gathering. Third, other customers, referred to as the regulars, view the restaurant not only as a place to eat, or to socialize, but also, as their home-away-from-home. Place-as-home is conceptualized as a place that consumers experience in order to satisfy consumption, companionship, and emotional support needs.

The next stage of theoretical development concerns understanding why consumers imbue the restaurant with different meanings and experience it so differently. The data revealed that customers who experience the restaurant as place-as-gathering or as place-as-home do so in order to prevent, or to remedy, feelings of loneliness. In order to alleviate social and emotional loneliness, individuals typically turn to traditional sources of support, including family and friends (Weiss 1973). However, findings show that life events, such as retirement, chronic illness, or death, may deplete aged consumers’ traditional sources of support. In the study, aged informants turn to a kind of neo-tribe and commercial friendships to fill these voids. I found that “regular” customers who experience the restaurant as home are older-aged adults, most of whom are widows or widowers, retired, and who reside alone. These customers no longer had access to sufficient traditional sources of social support, and hence, turned to employees and other customers in the restaurant for supportive resources that were metaphorically imbued with domestic meanings. For example, customers talked about how the owner of Sammy’s was like their son, and that they were part of his family. Other customers discussed the love, the care, and feelings of belonging that they received from simply being at the restaurant. Thus, for these customers, the supportive relationships that they held with others in the restaurant resembled familial and friendship bonds, and led them to perceive the restaurant as their home-away-from-home (Hill 1991).

Similar to the customers who required social support, so too, did the employees and the managers at Sammys. Several of the waitresses discussed that they were in abusive relationships, and that working at Sammy’s was a temporary escape from reality. Gallo, a waiter, and recent émigré from Ecuador, discussed how he relies on his regulars for information about living in America, such as information about applying for credit, taxes, as well as, legal and medical issues. The restaurant is home not only to its customers, but also, for its employees.

The manner in which consumers experience a place affects their relationship with the place. The data reveals that customers who experience the restaurant as place-as-practical are satisfied, but not necessarily loyal to the restaurant. Customers who experience the place-as-gathering exhibit a “community loyal.” These customers are loyal to a group of people that happen to gather in the restaurant. However, customers who experience the place-as-home are customers who are fused together with a variety of individuals in bonds of human togetherness and care, so that customer and place become a social unit.

“Designing the Family Portal as Home Information System and Home Networking”  
Alladi Venkatesh

This study is part of an ongoing project that aims at designing an interface for home use that would address the specific needs of
families in the context of their domestic information based activities and routines. This project examines the use of technology at home attempting to design an information infrastructure that uses Internet technologies for home management and external networking, called the “Family Portal”. Our recent work on home networking (Venkatesh, et. al. 2003) indicates that the focal point of the Family Portal is the home as an activity and information center. Table 1 provides some examples of the link between the activity center and the household information system.

This paper attempts to a) identify the ways that families use technology at home; and b) examine the influence of technology in family life and notions of home. The study was conducted through in-depth interviews with ten families followed by concept testing of the Family Portal. The key respondent (usually a female adult) provided information on current computer usage at home and other daily activities. After the interview, the respondent was presented a screen shot of “the Family Portal.” This was used to encourage them to talk in detail about their potential usage of the internet for various applications. This was followed by the introduction of a more realistic version of the Family Portal.

Most published literature on computer use at home cites three major uses for the computer: communications, information and entertainment. The findings of this study confirm these results. However, there are other uses which point to the fact that family computer use is more complex or diverse. As the technology becomes more domesticated and integrated into the family life, other uses become more prevalent. Thus, families with children use the computers as part of their parenting responsibilities and child oriented activities including school. Findings suggest that family priorities and activities determine the varied use of technology in the home.

In a larger sense, many household activities involve several themes. For example, when families communicate with family members, friends, shops, service agencies, banks etc., one way to describe this is simply to say that the computer is used for communication—which suppresses a lot of finer details. This is because each act of communication has its own distinct quality and content which should be uncovered meticulously. For example, communication with family can mean family interactions on various matters or organization of family events. Communicating with children implies some parenting activities or following everyday routines. Similarly, online shopping may involve communicating with stores (online or physical), community agencies or medical sources.

While this study argues for a polysemous use of technology at home, the findings also illustrate the domestication of technology to carry parental roles, social communicator and networking roles, as well as domestic consumption roles. Additionally, by examining the influence of technology on the home and family dynamics, the study finds that domestic use of technology has enhanced family’s social networks, enabled formation of different levels of social bonds, and empowered the family members. For example, communication technology and the human decision to employ it expand the social network by increasing the emotional web of social contacts and by making it more feasible for new relationships to enter the network. The technology has provided individuals with different levels of bonding (e.g. high and low levels) in their social networks. Further, the breadth of communication technology provides more options for families to manage family and community events. For instance, the convenience of scheduling a family party is not more apparent than in a communication scenario where other families can be contacted through one correspondence. Finally, the data shows that family members are empowered by the negotiation process of communication technology. The tech-enabled network allows its members to choose a mode of communication that suits their experiential needs.

Finally, to conclude, the role of the Family Portal in this complex set of activities is that it permits families to plan events, contact friends, relatives and outside agencies, keep family records, follow news, and perform various activities that the computer is suitable for. The family portal has the potential to become a central unit that systematizes family computer use, collectively and individually. It is a meeting point for the family members and shared virtual space. At a very basic level, the family portal is an information or communication portal. At another level, it permits families to use it for different organizing needs.

**SELECTED REFERENCES**


SESSION OVERVIEW

There has been considerable research in the social psychology and marketing literature on the topic of self-regulation and self-control (e.g., Carver and Scheier 1981; Fishbach, Friedman and Kruglanski 2003; Hoch and Loewenstein 1991; Ramanathan and Menon 2005; Shah, Friedman and Kruglanski 2002; Shiv and Fedorikhin 1999, 2002; Vohs and Schmeichel 2003). These have looked at self-regulation through a variety of lenses including goals and motivation, spontaneous and higher order affect, and mental resources. This session seeks to integrate some of these perspectives in presenting a dynamic view of self-regulation.

The broad purpose of this session was to present work that adds to this growing body of research, and to delineate the intrinsic dynamics of self-regulation and its influence on goal pursuit and goal management. In doing so, we identify several new dimensions to these phenomena. For example, we show that efforts at self-regulation may cause greater levels of intensity in subsequent emotional reactions (Vohs et al.). We also show how hedonic goals and regulatory goals come into conflict on a moment-to-moment basis and how people’s pursuit of these goals and their emotional reactions are influenced over time (Ramanathan and Menon). Finally, we also show how people adaptively manage or regulate their goals over time through a variety of techniques such as goal shielding, goal switching, goal shedding and goal synthesis (Shah and Bodmann). The specific purposes of the session are: (a) to outline the theoretical processes at play, whether cognitive, affective or motivational, (b) to determine the conditions that facilitate and impede these processes and to understand the boundary conditions thereof; and (c) to explore these effects in different domains, across multiple research paradigms.

The papers in this session explore the mechanisms by which efforts at self-regulation may influence and in turn be influenced by affective and motivational processes. For instance, the paper by Vohs and co-authors shows that trying to exert self-regulation leads to more intense experience of both positive and negative emotions. In other words, people experience higher peaks and lower troughs in subsequent affective experiences. The paper by Ramanathan and Menon provides evidence of both affective and motivational processes at play in self-regulation, as it explores the moment-to-moment experience of approach/avoidance reactions in response to hedonic or healthy stimuli. Shah and Bodmann argue that successful self-regulation requires an adaptive mechanism of goal pursuit to be followed, such that people could dynamically decide on whether to pursue their current goal and shield it from other goals, switch from it, or even shed it totally.

The first paper by Vohs, Mead, Schmeichel and Bruyneel shows that people who were depleted of resources via a variety of novel tasks reported more intense positive and negative emotions. For example, participants who had to suppress their thoughts (not think of a white bear) reported more intense positive emotions while watching a comedic film. In a second study, participants in a Stroop task involving words and colors that were inconsistent with each other (depletion condition) displayed more polarized evaluations of subsequently presented emotional pictures compared to those in a control condition with consistent words and colors. In anther study, participants, after completing a depletion task, were asked to keep their hand in freezing water for as long as they could. Depleted participants were less able to keep their hands in the water and reported more intense pain compared to a control condition. Viewed together with prior research on self-regulation and depletion, this paper makes a case that failures at self-control due to depletion may be driven by these intense emotional states.

The second paper by Ramanathan and Menon focuses on the dynamic experience of approach/avoidance motivation as people are faced with temptations. After establishing in a first study that there are significant differences in reward sensitivity between people classified as impulsive or prudent and in response latencies to the measures of impulsivity, the authors ran a second study in which half the participants pre-classified as impulsive or prudent were primed with a hedonic goal. They were then shown a tray filled with cookies or vegetables and asked to use a joystick continuously over three minutes to indicate how much they felt drawn towards the items on the tray or how much they felt like avoiding it. The dynamic traces of the like-dislike reactions showed interesting differences for impulsives and prudents, depending on whether they were primed with the hedonic goal or not. While both impulsive and prudent people who were primed with a hedonic goal showed an immediate spike in their evaluations of the cookies, the former showed greater ambivalence over time that resolved in favor of an increasing desire for the cookies. The latter however showed a marked decline in evaluations of the cookies over time that mapped on to a concurrent increase in evaluations of the vegetables, indicating goal switching.

The final paper by Shah and Bodmann looks at how people manage their goals in self-regulation. The authors present a series of studies that show how people prioritize and juggle their goals as they engage in self-regulation. They show that people might regulate the attention they pay to concurrent multiple goals via “goal shielding.” In other words, they inhibit other goals and keep them from becoming salient while pursuing a focal goal, particularly when the goals in question fulfill the same regulatory need. Interestingly, they also show that certain emotional states, notably anxiety, are more conducive to such inhibition while depression actually hinders goal shielding. Even more interestingly, the authors show that goal shielding has important consequences for how intensely goals are pursued and how likely they are to be attained. Other studies by the authors also show evidence of other regulatory mechanisms. In particular the authors will present data that articulates how individuals shift from goal to goal and when they might consider shedding goals entirely. Together, these studies are powerful evidence of the way people manage multiple goals and goal conflict, important concepts in any discussion on self-control and self-regulation.

Two of the three papers in this session (Vohs et al.; Ramanathan and Menon) focus on failure in self-regulation, suggesting that these are due to more intense emotional states being created by demanding extrinsic situations or due to the pursuit of hedonic goals that continue to strengthen over time and override any ambivalence. A third paper (Shah and Bodmann) shows how good self-regulation involves adaptive goal management techniques that can potentially influence well-being over time. Together, the three papers look at different domains of self-regulation, thereby attesting to the generality of the findings presented.