

Decision Processes Colloquia

Monday, October 9, 2017

Where: 250 JMHH

When: 12:00 – 1:15 pm

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The Distinct Psychology of Smartphone Usage

ABSTRACT:

One of the most important trends in today's marketplace is consumers' increased reliance on smartphones not only as a communication device but also as a central platform for accessing information, entertainment and other consumption activities—the so-called “mobile revolution.” Given this, it is perhaps surprising that the psychology of mobile consumption has received little attention in the fields of consumer and decision research. In this seminar I review the findings of a program of research designed to fill this void. I focus on two completed projects. The first investigates the particular type of relationship that many consumers form with their smartphones. Specifically, I advance the hypothesis that smartphones often fulfill the role of “attachment objects” for consumers. That is, smartphones are now used by many consumers in much the same way as pacifiers or security blankets are used by children—which I refer to as the Adult Pacifier Hypothesis. Consistent with this hypothesis, results from three controlled lab experiments show that relative to a comparable device such as one's personal computer, engaging with one's smartphone provides a greater sense of comfort as well as faster recovery from a stressful situation, both of which are defining characteristics of attachment objects. Likewise, under feelings of stress, people actively seek out and engage with the device over other objects in much the same way that a child would seek out and engage with his or her pacifier. Also consistent with this hypothesis, a fourth study shows that the drive to use one's smartphone becomes especially pronounced among consumers who have recently quit smoking—that is, consumers who are particularly susceptible to anxiety and stress. In the second project I document an important consequence of consumers' increased reliance on their smartphones: its impact on user-generated content. Across six studies I show that using one's smartphone results in the generation of online content that is significantly more emotional compared to content generated on PCs, and that this effect is driven by a heightened tendency to focus on the gist of one's experiences while on the device. I demonstrate this phenomenon through both analyses of field data (from TripAdvisor as well as Twitter) and controlled experiments. Overall, these findings provide insight into the psychology of the mobile consumer and its downstream marketing implications.