

The Smith Behavioral Lab at the Robert H. Smith School of Business provides faculty and Ph.D. students with resources to conduct experimental research on human behavior. For more information visit www.rhsmith.umd.edu/behaviorlab or contact participate@rhsmith.umd.edu.

Does Using Cell Phones Make Consumers More Selfish?

Does a simple action like spending a few moments using their cell phones affect the subsequent choices of consumers? Assistant Professors of Marketing Anastasiya Pocheptsova and Rosellina Ferraro and doctoral student Ajay Abraham have been investigating this issue over the past year in the Smith Behavioral Lab.

Cell phones tend to be viewed as an "extension of oneself." Pocheptsova, Ferraro, and Abraham predicted that using cell phones would increase participants' self-focus, potentially increasing their selfishness and impatience when making choices immediately following cell phone use. Given the pervasiveness of cell phone use, such an effect could have far-reaching consequences.

At the beginning of most sessions conducted in the Smith Behavioral Lab, participants are instructed to switch off their phones. Thus, some participants were pleasantly surprised during recent sessions when they were instructed to turn on their phones and use them as they normally would. Although phone conversations were prohibited to avoid distracting other participants, participants engaged in texting, emailing, playing games, and internet browsing.

To provide a comparison to using cell phones, the other participants were asked to play with a toy given to them by the researchers for the same amount of time. After using their cell phone or a toy, participants made a series of choices. Choices were designed to measure

participants' selfishness and impatience. For example, as a measure of selfishness, participants were asked to specify how much of their time they would donate to a charitable cause. To increase realism, this cause was described in great detail and participants were asked about their willingness to volunteer on specific days.

Results supported the researchers' hypotheses, suggesting that using cell phones has systematic effects on decisions made immediately after the devices are used. In a follow-up study, the research team is comparing cell phone use with other common uses of technology that also focus on the self, such as logging onto Facebook and updating one's profile.

The MBA GA's Lessons



I have spent about 10 hours a week over the past two semesters working in the Smith Behavioral Lab. This work outside of the classroom has given me several invaluable insights that I will take with me to my new position at Bank of America after graduation.

1. Conducting specific primary research to solve a specific problem could yield much better solutions. A lot of data is collected in industry, but often this data is from existing transactions or databases purchased from vendors. This kind of research may not perfectly fit the problem the business is trying to solve. After my experience in the lab, I will consider conducting primary research when the problem requires it rather than relying on secondary data.

Philip Whitley, MBA Candidate 2011

2. Incentives are critical. The Smith Behavioral Lab and eLab recruit participants by offering course credit or the chance to win prizes such as gift cards. The business community understands incentives when it comes to employees, but they still have much to learn about customers. The 21st century trend has been about giving customers as little as possible without losing them to a competitor. Instead of trying to subtly squeeze the customer, businesses can work to really understand what motivates the customer.

3. Simple procedures can have far-reaching effects on consumer behavior. I am amazed at how what is top of mind affects the way one sees the world, whether it's eating fatty foods or identifying a favored brand. Academic research regularly examines effects like these, but practitioners are only beginning to understand these contextual influences on consumer behavior.

By the Numbers

During the 2010 calendar year...

94

Academic research studies were conducted in the behavioral lab.

3,927

Participant hours were spent in all lab sessions.

Since the lab opened in 2003...

49

Academic papers have been published based on research conducted in the lab.

4. Bank of America is starting to use eye-tracking devices just like those in our lab to improve their website interface and ad placement on other sites. With new regulations in place, the bank has to find new ways to make money while still giving the customer innovative solutions in a commoditized industry. Understanding the customer has never been more important, and while I don't have all the answers, thanks to my work in the lab I now know how to get them.

Research Spotlight

• Matt Pearsall, Assistant Professor, Management & Organization

Examining Team Learning and Performance

Please briefly describe your research.

We are examining how employees' expression of their opinions, recommendations and ideas affects team performance. While researchers believe that these expressions, referred to as "employee voice," should benefit teams, there has been little direct examination of the consequences of members' voice for team learning and performance. Nor do we know much about the team processes and emergent states that result from these ideas and might help explain how voice influences team interaction and performance.

How have you used the lab to conduct your research?

We are using the Team Processes Lab to study this question. Sixty teams, each comprised of five students, work

together on a complex, shared, computer task over multiple rounds of decision-making. In each round, teams must allocate their resources and coordinate their actions to discover, identify and engage a series of environmental opportunities and threats.

Why is the Team Processes Lab suited for this type of research?

The lab is ideally suited to examine this issue. The room contains five tables where team members can sit together, each working from their own networked laptop computer. The room is wired for sound and video, with two small adjustable cameras and two staggered ceiling microphones connected to a DVD recorder. This equipment allows us to unobtrusively record all of the communications between the team mem-

bers as they work together on their task, capturing their actual ideas, suggestions and disagreements over time. This ability to objectively examine the interactions between team members should provide critical insight into the roles of voice and conflict within problem solving and action teams. The lab also provides a large screen monitor where the actions of the entire team can be displayed so that all team members can simultaneously view the same task information to jointly develop strategies and plan coordinated actions.



To learn about the Team Processes Lab visit: www.rhsmith.umd.edu/behaviorlab

Student Participants: The Pros and Cons

Jordan Etkin, Ph.D. candidate, Marketing

Every semester, hundreds of University of Maryland undergraduate students participate in research in the Smith Behavioral Lab. This research is published in academic journals and insights drawn from studies are touted as having implications for managerial practice.

Does studying undergraduates allow us to generate insights into consumer and employee behavior that are applicable to the wider population? University undergrads are not very typical of the population at large. For example, our students tend to be smarter and wealthier than average. Another concern that arises when using students as study participants is the frequency with which they may participate in academic research studies. Over time, and with practice, students may become "professional participants" who have more expertise than other participants about the kinds of questions typically asked.

To reduce these concerns about the validity of insights generated in the lab, researchers take a number of actions. One way to address these limitations is to design studies appropriate for this population, using products and sce-

narios they are familiar with. Another way to address potential limitations is to replicate studies using a different sample. The Smith eLab was developed to give researchers at Smith access to a more representative sample of the population, with varying ages, occupations, etc. Third, researchers try to avoid creating "professional participants" by not exposing students to an excessive number of studies. By limiting the number of studies in which students participate, we allow them to gain exposure to research as undergraduates but avoid problems with over-participation.

Despite these limitations, researchers have also pointed out advantages to using student participants. Student samples tend to have less

variation relative to the general population, allowing experimenters to be more confident that the results of their manipulations are due to the causal factors they have identified instead of underlying differences across study participants.

While there are pros and cons to using student participants in academic research, there are several precautions that can be taken to protect the validity of the insights generated.

A Send-Off for Lab Manager Amir Khoddami



After three years as Manager of the Behavioral Lab, Amir Khoddami has accepted a new position in Consumer and Market Knowledge with Procter & Gamble.

Front Row (left to right): Dr. Rebecca Ratner, Marketing; Ajay Abraham, Marketing PhD; Jordan Etkin, Marketing PhD/Lab GA; Jenny Zeng, STI Fellow; Dr. Rebecca Hamilton, Marketing; Dr. Rosellina Ferraro, Marketing. **Back Row:** Dr. Anastasiya Pocheptsova, Marketing; Philip Whitley, MBA GA; Amir Khoddami, Lab Manager; James Kim, Marketing PhD; Zac Arens, Marketing PhD; Yu-Jen Chen, Marketing PhD; Heather Johnson, Marketing PhD