

How do consumers cope with abundance?
Exploration of consumers decluttering and time management practices

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The President:

Prof. Dr. Bernhard Ehrenzeller

Dedicated to my dad, my mom, and my brother.

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SUMMARY

Consumers face abundance, which means owning more objects or being presented with more opportunities than consumers can realistically use. The abundance forces consumers to decide about the disposal, disconnection, and reorganization of their consumption objects and time. However, prior research on consumers' decision-making around disposal and reorganization is scant. Existing theories build strongly on consumer identity concerns. This perspective made previous research center around the relationship between the consumer and a consumption object, with a special interest in meaningful consumption objects.

Research is required, which widens the perspective: Additional research should consider the relationship between consumption objects. Further, explore the role of mundane consumption objects. Additionally, prior research focused strongly on analog consumption objects. However, digitalization brings up challenges of abundance also in the digital sphere. Little research is conducted on how consumers handle the increasing temporal demands.

We investigate how consumers handle material, immaterial abundance, and increasing temporal demands through ethnographic and interview studies. The thesis contains four papers, which are presented in chronological order. The first paper explores how consumers re-organize their domestic classification systems. This paper offers a conceptualization of domestic classification systems and clutter and a description of how it emerges. A sociological category research lens allows us to describe how consumers re-organize their domestic classification systems. The second paper investigates consumers' digital decluttering behavior. First, we elaborate on the different demands between digital and analog objects. Then we present the motivations for consumers to start a digital decluttering process and the practices consumers engage in to declutter digitally. The third article is also concerned with the phenomenon of digital decluttering. This paper focuses on how consumers explicitly engage in digital decluttering practices to regain time. We present a process model which describes how consumers become more reflexive about their choices around time allocation. The last paper investigates in-depth consumers' time management and planning behavior. This paper presents a model of how consumers allocate their time.

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Konsumenten sind mit Überfluss konfrontiert, d. h. sie besitzen mehr Gegenstände oder haben mehr Möglichkeiten, als sie realistisch nutzen können. Der Überfluss zwingt die Verbraucher dazu, über die Entsorgung und Neuorganisation ihrer Konsumobjekte und ihrer Zeit zu entscheiden. Die bisherige Forschung über die Entscheidungsfindung der Konsumenten im Zusammenhang mit der Entsorgung und Neuorganisation ist jedoch dürftig. Bestehende Theorien stützen sich stark auf die Identität der Konsumenten. Aus dieser Perspektive konzentrierte sich die bisherige Forschung auf die Beziehung zwischen dem Verbraucher und einem Konsumobjekt, wobei ein besonderes Interesse an bedeutsamen Konsumobjekten bestand.

Es ist sinnvoll die Perspektive der Forschung etwas zu erweitern: Zusätzliche Forschung sollte die Beziehung zwischen Konsumobjekten berücksichtigen. Darüber hinaus sollte die Rolle von alltäglichen Konsumobjekten untersucht werden. Außerdem hat sich die bisherige Forschung stark auf analoge Konsumobjekte konzentriert. Die Digitalisierung bringt jedoch auch in der digitalen Sphäre Herausforderungen des Überflusses mit sich. Wie Konsumenten zusätzlich mit den anwachsenden zeitlichen Anforderungen umgehen, ist wenig erforscht.

Wir untersuchen anhand von ethnographischen Studien und Interviews, wie Konsumenten mit materiellem und immateriellem Überfluss sowie mit steigenden zeitlichen Anforderungen umgehen. Die Dissertation umfasst vier Beiträge, die in chronologischer Reihenfolge präsentiert werden. Im ersten Beitrag wird untersucht, wie Verbraucher ihre häuslichen Klassifizierungssysteme neu ordnen. Dieser Beitrag bietet eine Konzeptualisierung von häuslichen Klassifizierungssystemen und Unordnung. Mit Hilfe der soziologischen Kategorienforschung beschreiben wir, wie Verbraucher ihre häuslichen Klassifizierungssysteme umgestalten. Im zweiten Beitrag wird das digitale Entrümpelungsverhalten der Verbraucher untersucht. Zunächst gehen wir auf die unterschiedlichen Anforderungen an digitale und analoge Objekte ein. Wir stellen die Beweggründe der Verbraucher für einen digitalen Entrümpelungsprozess dar und die Entrümpelungspraktiken anwenden. Der dritte Beitrag konzentriert sich darauf, wie Verbraucher explizit digitale Entrümpelungspraktiken anwenden, um Zeit zurückzugewinnen. Wir stellen ein Prozessmodell vor, das beschreibt, wie die Verbraucher ihre Entscheidungen in Bezug auf die Zeiteinteilung reflexiver treffen. Der letzte Beitrag befasst sich eingehend mit dem Zeitmanagement und dem Planungsverhalten der Verbraucher. In diesem Beitrag wird ein Modell vorgestellt, das zeigt, wie Verbraucher ihre Zeit einteilen.

INTRODUCTION_(Frame)

Consumers own more stuff than they can use. The average American home is estimated to contain 300,000 objects (MacVean 2014). However, many of these objects are superfluous: A recent study tried to assess what categories of items are most often unused. The study suggests that 35% of the most unused items belong to the category of clothing (Statista 2020). Other numbers back this: For example, it is estimated that 3.6 billion clothing items are left unworn in British consumers' closets. With an average closet size of about 152 items, it comes down to 57 clothing items being unworn, 16 items only worn once, and 11 items still having their tag on (Oxfam 2016). 15% of the least used items belong to the category of toys (Statista 2020). British research revealed that, on average, ten-year-old children own about 238 toys, of which they play with 12 daily (Telegraph 2010). The last category we take as an example is unread books (13%) (Statista 2020). The Japanese term "Tsumdoku" describes consumers' tendency to buy books that pile up and remain unread (Gerken 2018). The examples reveal: We have more things than we can use, groom, handle, or pay attention to. Consumers face challenges through this accumulation.

Many consumers own more stuff than they can manage. It is estimated that consumers spend 153 days during a lifetime searching for misplaced items (Daily Mail 2012). Although the size of an American house has doubled since the 1950s (Adler 2006), one in ten Americans still needs to rent offsite storage (Mooalem 2009). One-fourth of consumers with two-car garages have no room to park even one car, while 32% of households have at least room for one car (Vig 2018). We have more things than space where we can store them, and all of these situations are a sign of abundance.

We define abundance as a state where consumers have more than enough (Cambridge English Dictionary 2014). Sometimes consumers even face excessively too much, which we could call overabundance (Britannica 2022). Advertising and marketing efforts follow a consumerist ideology linking product purchase and ownership with happiness (Baudrillard

2017; Jansiz 2014). Many consumers have believed the marketing messages and accumulated things in their life accordingly (UCTV 2013). More and more consumers now realize for themselves, and research underlines this insight that materialism does not bring the promised happiness – quite the contrary (Moldes and Ku 2020). Pursuing materialistic goals can negatively affect happiness and consumer health (Van Boven 2005; Burroughs and Rindfleisch 2002). Adverse logistical effects are not the only disadvantages of this abundance: 84% of Americans are concerned that their homes may not be organized (or clean) enough (Chatzky 2017). Additionally, living with and fighting clutter, which can be defined as “an overabundance of material possessions that collectively create disorderly and chaotic home environments” (Roster, Ferrari, and Peter Jurkat 2016, 32), is a significant source of stress (Roster et al. 2016) and impacts consumers life negatively (Chae and Zhu 2014).

However, consumers are not only facing abundance in the material world: With the emergence of the digital consumption sphere, they have also integrated digital objects into their lives (Belk 2013b). These include digitalized versions of analog objects, which replace physical ones (Venkatesh and Dunkle 2013; Lehdonvirta 2012), and new types of consumption objects (e.g., Denegri-Knott, Jenkins, and Lindley 2020; Orth, Thurgood, and Van Den Hoven 2019). To consume these digital objects, consumers need to connect to a device such as a computer, phone, cable, or screen (Denegri-Knott and Molesworth 2010; Leonardi and Barley 2008; Orlikowski 2007). The digital sphere and its services can be alluring (Kozinets et al. 2017; Lupinacci 2021) and demanding (Schoenebeck 2014). Consumers may spend more time with the devices than they want (Schoenebeck 2014; Jorge 2019). With increasing digitalization, we entered an attention economy (Hanin 2021), where companies (and intermediaries like influencers) woo consumers for their time and attention (Smith and Fischer 2021). So, consumers face increasing demands on their time.

Digitalization and technologization are also increasing the perceived pace of life (Husemann and Eckhardt 2019; Rosa 2005). Consumers are presented with growing temporal demands and may be motivated to partake in as many offered activities as possible. This tendency is fueled by social media and a fear of missing out (Tandon et al. 2021; Brown and Kuss 2020). Fear of missing out describes the “pervasive apprehension that others might be having rewarding experiences from which one is absent” (Przybylski et al. 2013, 1). However, existing social expectations around busyness and the potential of reclaiming busyness as a “badge of honor” may also lead consumers to strive to squeeze as many things as possible into their day (Bellezza, Paharia, and Keinan 2016; Gershuny 2005; Lupu and Rokka 2021).

How do consumers cope with abundance? How do they approach abundance in the physical versus the digital sphere? How do consumers cope with abundant temporal demands in their lives? These are some of the research questions that we will address in this thesis.

LITERATURE REVIEW_(Frame)

In the following literature review, we will discuss previous research on the emergence of (im-)material overabundance and how consumers battle the state of (im-)material overabundance. We will also address why the overabundance of temporal demands needs to be addressed separately. We will show what causes an overabundance of temporal demands and what consumers do to manage these temporal demands. We will conclude by showing literature gaps in both fields.

How does overabundance emerge, and consumption objects become obsolete?

The state of overabundance is fueled by constant acquisition in consumers’ lives and when consumption objects become obsolete to the consumer and their lifestyle. Consumers form relationships with their consumption objects (Shimp and Madden 1988). Like consumer-brand relationships, these consumer-object relationships are constantly in flux (Fournier 1998;

Alvarez, Brick, and Fournier 2021; Karanika and Hogg 2013). Most objects follow a path of acquisition, maintenance, and disposal (Cherrier et al. 2014; McCracken 1986). Several incidents can be the root cause of why consumption objects may lose relevance to consumers and their lives.

First, consumption objects can become obsolete when the consumers' identity changes. Some objects aim to develop, negotiate, or communicate consumers' identities (Ahuvia 2005; Belk 1988; Holt 1995) through the meaning attached to them (McCracken 1986). Consumers strive for alignment between the meaning of a consumption object and their desired identity: Consumers want to own objects with a meaning which enhances their desired identity (Ahuvia 2005; Belk 1988) and dispose of objects with unwanted meaning (Phillips and Sego 2011; Lastovicka and Fernandez 2005). Changes in identity in the form of rites of passage are often assisted and accompanied by specific goods and services which enhance each stage of transition (Appau et al. 2020; Belk et al. 1989). However, the relationship with consumption objects changes when consumers' identities change, e.g., at times of role transition (Schouten 1991; Young-Martin 1991), the relationship with consumption objects changes. So the meaning of an object can be perceived as no longer matching consumers' current life and their understanding of their identity after such a transition (Kleine, Kleine, and Allen 1995; Lastovicka and Fernandez 2005). This is how objects not aligned with the consumers' identity become obsolete.

Second, consumption objects can become obsolete when the object's meaning changes (e.g., Pedeliento, Andreini, and Dalli 2020). Meaning transfer to an object is an active process that needs to be maintained over time; otherwise, it may deteriorate (McCracken 1986; Thompson and Haytko 1997). Consumers can actively adapt the meaning of objects through divestment practices that rid the object of special meaning (Gregson et al. 2007; Marcoux 2001) or revive and change the meaning of consumption objects (Türe and Ger 2016). As we already discussed, previous research showed that consumers feel uncomfortable with owning

things that have an undesired meaning. Keeping these objects endangers the meaning of existing objects (Belk, Wallendorf, and Sherry 1989) and threatens the consumer's identity (Lastovicka and Fernandez 2005). So, objects with undesired meaning become obsolete to the consumer.

Third, consumption objects can become obsolete when the object loses its functionality. A loss of functionality can occur through changes in the object or the consumer's lifestyle and practices. Consumer experience value through the use of products (Peñaloza and Venkatesh 2006; Prahalad and Ramaswamy 2004; Türe 2014). However, there are two reasons why consumers may no longer benefit from the functionality of an object: Either the object breaks, deteriorates, or stops to function (Cherrier and Türe 2020), or the practice the object was embedded in is no longer conducted (Phipps and Ozanne 2017; Thomas and Epp 2019). Some objects fulfil a functional role in a consumer's life because they are embedded in specific consumption practices. A change regarding these consumption practices may be voluntary (e.g., Albinsson and Yasanthi Perera 2009; Thomas and Epp 2019) or forced (e.g., Phipps and Ozanne 2017; Sayre 1994). Nevertheless, objects representing the material component of such consumption practices may become obsolete when the consumption practices changes (Bardhi et al. 2012; Thompson et al. 2018; Thomas and Epp 2019; Price et al. 2000; Phipps and Ozanne 2017). Through this process, many mundane objects with no identity-relevant meaning lose relevance to consumers (Cherrier and Türe 2020).

Fourth, consumption objects can become obsolete when consumers' tastes change. Some consumption objects have aesthetic value to consumers (Hoyer and Stokburger-Sauer 2012; Postrel 2003). Taste has been theorized as a mechanism through which individuals judge, classify, and relate to objects and acts of consumption (Bourdieu 1984; Arsel and Bean 2013). "Taste regimes orchestrate visual and material order in many aesthetic domains of consumption, including cooking and eating, fashion, travel, and home decoration" (Arsel and

Bean 2013, 902). Every consumption object within the household is embedded within a “network of materiality” (Borgerson 2005; Miller 2005; Arsel and Bean 2013). The surrounding objects and their meaning reflect the consumer’s tastes (Miller 2008; 2010; Shove and Pantzar 2005). Through “problematization” processes, consumers continually question the alignment between consumption objects and their desired aesthetic (Arsel and Bean 2013). Through this reflective process, consumers can identify “matter out of place” (Douglas, 1984, p. 36) or consumption objects which do not align with the desired order. These objects are then “threatening (.) the taste structures of the home” (Cherrier and Türe, 2020, 222). Taste is an evolving process (Maciel and Wallendorf 2017; Arsel and Bean 2013). With a change in taste, specific consumption objects may become outmoded to consumers (Laitala 2014). These objects that may be perceived as a threat to domestic taste become obsolete to consumers.

Finally, consumption objects can become obsolete when consumer experience changes in their space or through being moved in space. For example, Bardhi and Eckhardt (2012) found while studying global nomadism that the new, mobile lifestyle required consumers to dissolve their relationship with many consumption objects and change their attitude towards such items. Further, space in consumer households can “promote” or “discourage” keeping a specific consumption object (Cherrier and Türe 2020). Transient or transitional spaces for temporary storage are often used to let go of particular consumption objects (Gregson et al. 2007; Hetherington 2004; Thompson 1979).

Table 1 Incidents that make consumption objects obsolete to consumers

Type of incident	Exemplary References	Example Description
Changes in consumer identity	Kleine et al. 1992; Lastovicka and Fernandez 2005; Young-Martin 1991	e.g., objects can be linked to past (and undesired) selves
Changes in object meaning	Belk et al. 1989; Epp and Price 2010; Lastovicka and Fernandez 2005; McCracken 1986	e.g., object meaning can be “contaminated”
Changes in object use-value	Bardhi et al. 2012; Thompson et al. 2018; Thomas and Epp 2019; Price et al. 2000; Phipps and Ozanne 2017	e.g., possessions lose value when practices change
Changes in consumer taste	Arsel and Bean 2013; Maciel and Wallendorf 2017	e.g., consumer’s expectations regarding their objects change
Changes in space	Bardhi et al. 2012; Belk et al. 1989; Epp and Price 2010; Thompson et al. 2018	e.g., objects cannot remain in their initial place (in the household)

Source: Own summary.

How do consumers battle overabundance of (im-)material objects?

Consumers can follow three different approaches toward overabundance:

First, consumers can create and find spaces for things by sorting, stacking, and storing (Cherrier and Türe 2020; Cwerner and Metcalfe 2003; Maycroft 2009). Often this means using up a considerable amount of storage space for these unwanted and unneeded objects or adding new storage space (Mooalem 2009). Consumers can accumulate clutter at varying degrees over time (Frost et al. 2008). Keeping unwanted objects can, in some cases, lead to them being reused, but most often, consumers just forget about them (Gille 2010).

The second approach encompasses several practices to exclude specific consumption objects from the home, like disposing of, gifting, or donating (Jacoby, Berning, and Dietvorst 1977). The consumer, product characteristics, and situational variables influence a disposition

process (Hanson 1980). Individuals vary, for example, in their ability to dispose of consumption goods (Coulter and Ligas 2003). Further, object characteristics such as a special meaning make a disposal process more difficult (Lastovicka and Fernandez 2005; Roster 2014; Phillips and Sego 2011). The decision about the disposal of consumption objects is often accompanied by a negotiation process around value (Cherrier and Türe 2020; Thompson 1979). This goes as far as consumers tending to be careless with products to provoke damage or even ruin it once an update is offered and they desire the upgrade (Bellezza, Ackerman, and Gino 2017).

As a third approach, consumers can consider acquiring less in the future. To cope with the abundance, consumers see value in reducing and owning less (Cherrier 2009; Cherrier and Murray 2002). This is reflected in trends like consumer minimalism (Ross, Meloy, and Bolton 2021; Wilson and Bellezza 2022). This trend shows itself in various facets and phenomena. For example, some consumers prefer monochromatic, simple aesthetics, or striving for a versatile capsule wardrobe, to becoming part of the tiny house movement or a voluntary downshifter. In all these phenomena, consumers are de-emphasizing extreme consumerism (Chayka 2021; Currid-Halkett 2018; Wilson and Bellezza 2022). Simplicity in many areas of life has become aspirational (Chayka 2021). Consumers are not simply buying less but in a more conscious and curated way (Ozanne et al. 2021; Williams and Poehlman 2017).

This trend is accompanied by consumers who prefer to build a more fluid relationship with possessions (Bardhi et al. 2012; Bardhi and Eckhardt 2017), emphasizing the temporary situational value, objects' use-value, and immaterial objects (Bardhi et al. 2012). To gain the use and situational value of objects, consumers opt for access-based consumption over ownership (Bardhi and Eckhardt 2012; Belk 2014; Hamari, Sjöklint, and Ukkonen 2016; Atanasova and Eckhardt 2021). The quest for more liquid relationships and access-based consumption is facilitated through digital technologies and digital consumption.

The rise in digital consumption also enables an increase in liquid consumption. Despite a counter-narrative, digital consumption does not always “save time” and “increase efficiency” (Mick and Fournier 1998; Feenberg 2010; Sabelis 2001). Much more often, modern technology creates a “hurried life” (Davis 2013) and accelerated experience for consumers (Husemann and Eckhardt 2019; Rosa 2005). New digital business models have made time an even greater resource as consumer time can be directly monetized (Davenport and Beck 2001; Lambrecht et al. 2014). This creates increasing competition around consumer time. For example, the average smartphone user in the US is bombarded with 46 push notifications daily (Coops 2022). Additionally, the lines between private and work life are blurred through technology (Kaufman-Scarborough 2006). Consumers are faced with increasing temporal demands.

Why are consumers faced with increasing temporal demands?

Consumers are challenged to cope with increasing temporal demands and “manage” their time (Sabelis 2001; Strzelecka 2022). This development is fueled mainly by three significant developments: First, Consumers are faced with more opportunities to spend their time. Secondly, consumers have more freedom to self-structure their time. Lastly, a mindset emerged that busyness is desirable, and time needs to be used optimally.

Consumers are faced with more opportunities to spend their time because consumption shifts increasingly from materialism to experiences, and experiences demand the dedication of time for consumption. Expenditure on experience (e.g., traveling, leisure activities, food services) is expected to grow to US\$8.0 trillion by 2030 (Bremner and Boumphrey 2017). Research also suggests that this shift may bring more happiness to consumers (Aaker, Rudd, and Mogilner 2011; Van Boven 2005; Van Boven and Gilovich 2003). In particular, for consumer groups who already are more affluent and own life’s necessities, pursuing self-actualization experiences can be a great source of happiness (Lee et al. 2018).

Consumers have more freedom to self-structure their time because, in the past 150 years, working hours have decreased, and the trend continues (Ortiz-Ospina, Giattino, and Roser 2020). Consumers are facing more “leisure” time now (Ramey 2007), which is the time “not used for gainful employment” (Merriam-Webster 2022). Also, work time has become more “flexible” (BLS 2019), and more unpredictable work arrangements have become more common (Gerstel and Clawson 2018; Presser 2003).

A mindset emerged that busyness is desirable, and time needs to be used optimally. While Thorstein Veblen stipulated at the beginning of the last century that having access to time and wasting it signaled higher status and class (Veblen 2005). A shift occurred over the past decades: Higher social status is now associated with being busy (Bellezza et al. 2016; Gershuny 2005). Consumers avoid being idle (Yang and Hsee 2019; Hsee, Yang, and Wang 2010). Social media increases consumers’ “fear of missing out” (Abel, Buff, and Burr 2016; Tandon et al. 2021). So, the decisions on leisure time can even become “very stressful” (Imtiaz 2021).

How do consumers handle the abundance of temporal demands?

Some consumers escape the pace through deceleration to overcome the challenges of accelerated life and increasing temporal demands (Husemann and Eckhardt 2019). This means consumers escape into “protected spaces” (Rosa 2013, 87) with a slower temporal logic (Husemann and Eckhardt 2019). Consumers create these spaces by engaging in slower modes of transportation, decreasing their use of technology, and simplifying their experiences by reducing their consumption choices (Husemann and Eckhardt 2019).

In an everyday context, consumers use time-saving or time-management practices to cope with increasing temporal demands. As time is a finite resource (Lallement and Gourmelen 2018), consumers are open to buying products (De Langhe and Puntoni 2016) or engaging in practices that promise them to save time (Alreck et al. 2009). Time management

“(…) means to control, to plan, to colonize and to map our future“(Sabelis 2001, 390).

Organizational research delivered already insights into time management practices in the organizational context (Ancona et al. 2001; Granqvist and Gustafsson 2016; Reinecke and Ansari 2015). However, the “design” of life becomes increasingly reliant on thorough planning. Consumers see the concern for “rational plannability” advancing into areas of life (e.g., home time) where it was not intended to be applied (Sabelis 2001).

Prior research around time management highly reflects the “process of individualization in our society” (Sabelis 2001). We see this twofold: First, the individual consumer is attributed a lot of responsibility and agency over time (Strzelecka 2022; Sugarman and Thrift 2020). Secondly, prior research highlights, in particular, the individual perceptions (Graham 1981), differences, and preferences regarding how consumers want to spend time (Bergadaa 1990; Cotte et al. 2004; Feldman and Hornik 1981; Francis-Smythe & Robertson 1999). Oriented around specific goals, consumers have to reflect, select, and prioritize activities and tasks (Kremser and Blagoev 2021; Fernbach, Kan, and Lynch 2015). Despite granting consumers agency over time, previous research takes institutionalized temporal structures for granted (Jalas and Rinkinen 2016; Shove 2009). This is an interesting paradox.

Engaging in practices around time management gives consumers a sense of reliability by giving consumers the impression that they can influence their future. They feel a sense of rational control (Sabelis 2001). Time is often “wasted” when consumers perceive a lack of control over their time (Lallement and Gourmelen 2018).

Why do we need to study the overabundance of temporal demands separately?

We will most likely not be able to transfer the insights generated in the field of (im-)material overabundance to understand how consumers battle temporal abundance for several reasons: First, the research in the field of (im-)material abundance is primarily centered

around solving and changing consumer-object-relations and object-networks. Consumers must cope with competing activities and experiences in decision-making processes around time. We, therefore, cannot rely on the same literature streams for both topics. Moreover, the time has diverging characteristics compared to (im-)material objects. Time is a highly complex construct (Lallement and Gourmelen 2018). While physical objects can be accumulated, placed on each other, and exchanged, this is not true for time (Zauberman and Lynch 2005; Lallement and Gourmelen 2018). The value of time is harder to determine because more complex factors than just the passage impact temporal experience (Woermann and Rokka 2015; Husemann and Eckhardt 2019). Therefore, the value of time invested is to be assessed at the end of a period of time (Soster, Monga, and Bearden 2010). All these aspects create unique challenges for managing consumer time.

Where does prior research fall short?

In the following, we will present the points where prior research falls short and how our research projects respond to these lacunae. Not all projects will equally address the research gaps; each has a specific focus and contributes uniquely to the research interest. For clarity, we address the research gaps for different contexts separately. We will start by focusing on research gaps in the field of (im-)material overabundance (*Research Gap 1-5*). Then we present the research gaps for the field of overabundance of temporal demands (*Research Gap 6-8*).

Research gaps on managing (im-)material abundance

Research Gap 1. Prior consumer research approaches focus on acquisition and are less targeted at objects already within the household (e.g., Coupland 2005). We showed in the previous section that there are many incidents in which consumption objects become obsolete for consumers – and with that, an unwanted burden in the household. There is surprisingly

little research on consumers' disposal decisions (Lastovicka and Fernandez 2005; Jacoby et al. 1977). So far, disposal and reorganization have been approached separately. However, prior research alludes to consumers moving objects and reorganizing their homes rather than disposing of unneeded objects (e.g., Epp and Price 2010). The existence and organization of objects within the household are mostly taken for granted (Coupland 2005).

Research Gap 2. This focus on disposal decisions led to investigating the relationship between the consumer and one object. Although prior research acknowledges that object constellations are relevant to consumer behavior, e.g., in collections or to create a particular aesthetic (Arsel and Bean 2013; Belk et al. 1989; Belk 2013a), little is known about object constellations, in particular, those containing mundane objects (Coupland 2005; Dion, Sabri, and Guillard 2014).

Research Gap 3. Following this research emphasis on the relationship between the object and the consumer, research mainly was concerned with the bond between consumers and their special possessions (Grayson and Shulman 2000; Ahuvia 2005; Belk et al. 1989; Belk 1988; Price, Arnould, and Curasi 2000). Only a few papers are concerned with mundane consumption objects (e.g., Coupland 2005; Dion et al. 2014; Kleine, Kleine, and Kernan 1993; Kleine and Schultz Kleine 2014).

Research Gap 4. This strong focus on special consumption objects may be due to prior research's strong focus on consumer identity concerns surrounding ownership (Cherrier and Murray 2007; Kleine et al. 1995; Lastovicka and Fernandez 2005; Phillips and Sego 2011; Roster 2001; Young-Martin 1991; Trudel, Arg, and Meng 2016). Prior research investigated how consumers use objects with a special meaning to represent part of the self (Belk 1988; Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton 1983) or to negotiate the self (Ahuvia 2005). However, the research alludes to disposal and reorganization decisions being influenced by more than just consumer identity concerns (e.g., Coupland 2005).

Research Gap 5. Overall, the literature on disposal is mainly concerned with analog objects. However, consumers have started to increasingly interact with digital consumption objects and form new relationships with these types of objects (Atasoy and Morewedge 2018; Hoffmann and Nowak 2018; Watkins, Denegri-Knott, and Molesworth 2016). While the immateriality of digital consumption goods may at first be a promise to overcome material abundance (Bardhi et al. 2012), additional research shows a more complex picture: Instead of solving the struggles around material abundance, consumers are now faced with digital abundance as well (Nadolu and Nadolu 2020; Montag and Diefenbach 2018; Zolfagharian and Yazdanparast 2017).

So far, we lack a holistic theory to explain how consumers make disposal and reorganization decisions around their consumption objects. The objective of our research is to provide a more holistic understanding.

Research gaps in managing increasing temporal demands

Research Gap 6. While there is research on consumers' temporary escape from a decelerated, digitalized world (Husemann and Eckhardt 2019; Syvertsen and Enli 2020; Hesselberth 2018) or on consumer groups who withdraw from consumerism (Lee, Dewhirst, and Cherrier 2018; Guillard 2018), little is known about how the average consumer handles that mass of temporal demands daily. In particular, time management in the private sphere rises in interest (Sabelis 2001). Organizational research gained insights into project and time management (Ancona et al., 2002). However, this research can be only partially transferred to the private sphere as organizational factors impact individual temporal decisions. For example, individuals often operate on a shared concept of time in an organizational context (Yakura 2002) or are confronted with more explicit roles for the involved parties and clearer hierarchies and power dynamics (Zerubavel 1981; Yakura 2002).

Research Gap 7. There is a strong focus in sociological research on the assortment of activities (e.g., work, leisure, care for children, and parents) (Gerstel and Clawson 2018). In this research field on how consumers allocate their time, we see a strong focus on the individual consumer and their identity issues (Bergadaa 1990; Cotte et al. 2004; Robinson and Nicosia 1991). Few other factors are considered that most likely may impact decisions about temporal structuring. For example, research alludes to challenges that emerge through alignment processes between different temporal logics (Sugarman and Thrift 2020; Hassan 2003).

Research Gap 8. We briefly touched on a research paradox in time management literature: While it is assumed that consumers have the agency to dedicate their time actively (Cotte et al. 2004; Bergadaa 1990), institutionalized temporal structures are widely taken for granted (Jalas and Rinkinen 2016; Shove 2009). However, previous research already alluded that these institutionalized temporal structures are also in flux (e.g., Kunisch, Blagoev, and Bartunek 2021). The impact of consumers exercising their agency on temporal structures, or the restrictions temporal structures put on consumer agency, is less discussed. Additionally, consumers face more and more temporal unpredictability or flexibility, which creates additional challenges for time management (Gerstel and Clawson 2018; 2014). One question arises from this research „who controls (work) hours and schedules?“ (Lyness et al. 2012; Moen et al. 2016; Gerstel and Clawson 2018; e.g., 2014)

Research Gap 9. Although time management has been addressed in some previous research, the aspect of time planning has been discussed in selected publications (e.g., Pellerin and Perrier 2019). Previous research already alludes to potential differences in consumer time planning and time management capabilities (Burt and Kemp 1994; Eilam and Aharon 2003; Francis-Smythe and Robertson 1999). There is a demand for more extensive research on time planning practices (Claessens et al. 2007).

Research Study Contexts

Study Context I: Decluttering

To understand more about consumers' decisions about the disposal of their consumption objects, we investigate the recent consumer trend of „decluttering“. The trend has received significant attention due to the hype around Mari Kondo, her books, and the Netflix series (Rojas Weiss 2019; Grady 2019; Khamis 2019; Curtis 2015). Decluttering is “(...) an episodic practice with a beginning but no definitive end. Before decluttering, individuals may not realize that others judge their environment as cluttered or overcrowded. After initial decluttering, the space – physical and/or mental – has been transformed from disordered and messy to ordered and tidy and a plan is set in place to keep it so” (Cherrier and Belk 2015, 1).

We chose the decluttering phenomenon because the decluttering process involves both disposal and reorganization decisions. Decluttering requires disposal and reorganization decisions around various objects and for objects from different categories. So, decluttering processes involve mundane and special consumption objects. Decluttering is also concerned with the spatial environment, function, aesthetics, and design. Decluttering can be practiced in an analog and digital context.

In our first project, we are studying consumers' analog decluttering practices (Paper 1). We aim to answer the research question: *How do consumers revise household classification systems?* We conducted an ethnographic study in 26 households, including consumer interviews and data triangulation. Then we shift our focus for our second project to explore consumers' digital decluttering practices (Paper 2), aiming to answer the research question: *How do consumers (re-)organize their digital lives through digital decluttering?* For this, we conducted nine consumer interviews and triangulation of the data. For our third project, we further investigate consumers' digital decluttering efforts; however, in this project, the role of time is more apparent (Paper 3). We aim to answer the third research question:

How do consumers manage technologically induced scarcity of time through digital decluttering practices? We conducted 19 consumer interviews for this project. Next, we shifted our focus to another phenomenon to better understand how consumers cope with temporal demands.

Study Context II: Highly busy consumers

To understand more about consumers' time planning practices, we investigated the lives of highly busy consumers. An increasing number of consumers strive to avoid idleness (Hsee et al. 2010) and have a busy mindset (Bellezza et al. 2016; Chattopadhyay, Wadhwa, and Kim 2018). We sought out consumers who are active not only in their work life but especially in their private life. This was because, on the one hand, research on time management in the organizational context already exists (e.g., Bakker et al. 2016; Ballard and Seibold 2016), while on the other hand, consumers are much freer in structuring their time in their private lives (Southerton 2006).

The members of our sample freely choose this high temporal demand and enjoy being busy. For that reason, we assumed that they found a way to manage their time satisfactorily because they are not actively seeking escapes from their busy lifestyle. Prior research also suggests studying more detail consumers with different time management skills (Claessens et al. 2007). These consumers face conflicts around timing and temporal demands and must actively plan. This allowed us to follow their reflective process of building new temporal structures.

So, the last project focuses on consumers' time planning practices (Paper 4). We aimed to answer the research question: *How do consumers plan their time?* We conducted 25 consumer interviews and triangulated the data with netnographic data and popular books on time management.

Table 2 Research project overview

<i>Focal Phenomenon</i>	CONSUMING IN AN ABUNDANT WORLD			
<i>Focal Research Question</i>	HOW DO CONSUMERS ORGANIZE THEIR HOMES AND SCHEDULES?			
<i>Project No.</i>	Project 1	Project 2	Project 3	Project 4
<i>Project Research Question</i>	How do consumers revise household classification systems?	How do consumers (re-) organize their digital lives through digital decluttering?	How do consumers manage technologically induced scarcity of time through digital decluttering practices?	How do consumers plan their time?
<i>Project Study Context</i>	Analog Decluttering	Digital Decluttering	Digital Decluttering & Time Management	Time Management

Table 3 Overview of research articles

Project 1	<i>Consumers and their Household Possessions: Why and How Do Consumers Revise Their Domestic Classification Systems?</i>
Publication Status	Prior research alludes to consumers using classification systems that create mental order and a material structure to help organize their possessions. However, we note the lack of a holistic conceptualization of domestic classification systems and why and how consumers revise these. We rely on ethnographic and netnographic data to fill this lacuna. We analyze our data using concepts from sociological category research and offer a holistic conceptualization of domestic classification systems (DCS). We then shed light on why and how consumers begin to revise the existing DCS. We discuss classification dynamics in domestic settings, consumer practices of disposing of mundane consumption objects, and how consumers take control of the abundance of household possessions.
<i>Under revision</i>	
Publication Outlet	
<i>Journal of Consumer Research</i>	
Next steps	
<i>Resubmission</i>	
Project 2	<i>How Do Consumers (Re-)Organize Their Digital Lives Through Digital Decluttering?</i>
Publication Status	Consumers are facing an abundance not only of analog consumption objects but also of digital ones. Just as consumers try to organize their possessions in the analog world, they actively engage in practices to manage their digital lives. This includes the management of apps, emails, notifications, documents, folders, and pictures. So far, previous research revealed little about these efforts and practices that the authors frame under the term „digital decluttering”. The authors rely on in-depth interviews and netnographic data to identify why and how consumers engage in digital decluttering practices.
<i>Published</i>	
Publication Outlet	
<i>Book Chapter</i>	
Next steps	
-	
Project 3	<i>How Do Consumers Manage Technologically Induced Scarcity Of Time Through Digital Decluttering Practices?</i>
Publication Status	Technology has become all-consuming and tempts consumers to waste time online. To combat technologically induced time scarcity, consumers engage in digital decluttering practices. Consumers are increasing intentionality and regaining agency over their consumption practices. With our research, we further explore the role of time in consumption decisions.
<i>Published</i>	
Publication Outlet	
<i>Proceedings of the Association of Consumer Research Conference 2021</i>	
Next steps	
-	

Frame

Project 4	<i>How Do Consumers Plan Their Time?</i>
Publication Status	Consumers increasingly try to manage their time. This means allocating time so that they can achieve their life goals optimally. Research on time management has been conducted mainly in the organizational context, but the question of time management has also been transferred to private spheres. Prior research focused on the individual and their preferences when allocating time and overlooked additional elements which impact an allocation decision. We conducted 25 semi-structured interviews with busy consumers who must handle various demands for their time. We triangulated our data with netnographic data. We showed how consumers determine a place within a time frame and manage conflicts between competing temporal demands. Our research expands consumer research on how consumers allocate their time.
<i>Preparation for submission</i>	
Publication Outlet	
<i>Journal for Consumer Research</i>	
Next steps	
<i>Submission</i>	

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PAPER I

**CONSUMERS AND THEIR HOUSEHOLD POSSESSIONS: WHY AND HOW
CONSUMERS REVISE THEIR DOMESTIC CLASSIFICATION SYSTEMS?**

ABSTRACT

Prior research alludes to consumers using classification systems that create mental order and a material structure to help organize their possessions. However, we note the lack of a holistic conceptualization of domestic classification systems and why and how consumers revise these. We rely on ethnographic and netnographic data to fill this lacuna. We analyze our data using concepts from sociological category research and offer a holistic conceptualization of domestic classification systems (DCS). We then shed light on why and how consumers begin to revise the existing DCS. We discuss classification dynamics in domestic settings, consumer practices of disposing of mundane consumption objects, and how consumers take control of the abundance of household possessions.

Keywords: household possessions, category research, decluttering, disposal, ethnography.

INTRODUCTION

In most developed countries, possessions enter consumers' homes faster now than at any other time in recent history (Belk et al. 2007; MacVean 2014; Miller 2008; Mooalem 2009). Consumers desire and accumulate stuff (Belk, Ger, and Askegaard 2003) but at the same time struggle to manage and organize it in their homes (Dion et al. 2014; McCracken 1986).

To organize and make sense of all the accumulated possessions in their homes, consumers draw upon some kind of classification structure (Coupland 2005; Dion et al. 2014; Epp and Price 2010; Sherry 2000). This structure helps consumers locate individual possessions "within a broader system of meaning or classification" (Glynn and Navis 2013, 1125). In the case of household possessions, this structure is shaped by cultural norms of tidiness and order (Dion et al. 2014) that facilitate consumer action about the location and choice of different possessions within the home (Arsel and Bean 2013; Epp and Price 2010).

However, we lack a systematic, holistic conceptualization and definition of such household classification systems beyond that they are "micro" instances of "macro" cultural understandings (Dion et al. 2014). We identify two problematic outcomes from this lack of systematic conceptualization and emphasis on cultural understanding. Past research implicitly assumes that domestic classification systems are more or less stable and that consumers have a limited agentic role in revising these systems (Coupland 2005; Epp and Price 2010) but doesn't explore in depth what happens when classification systems are destabilized (Dion et al. 2014). We argue that domestic classification systems are more dynamic and that consumers have a more active role to play in revising the systems than is theorized in past research (Coupland 2005; Dion et al. 2014).

To conceptualize and highlight the dynamism of domestic classification systems, we study episodes of decluttering - a specific mode of household re-organizing aimed at reducing

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the “overabundance of material possessions that collectively create disorderly and chaotic home environments” (Roster, Ferrari, and Jurkat 2016, 32). We ask the following research questions: How can a domestic classification system be conceptualized? Why do consumers revise an existing domestic classification system? How do consumers revise an existing domestic classification system?

The rest of the paper is organized as follows: first we review past research that deals with the organization of household possessions. Then we elaborate on our theoretical lens – sociological category research – and its suitability to further our understanding of household organization. Through our findings we conceptualize a DCS, delineate why consumers take action and show how consumers actually revise their DCS. We conclude with theoretical implications.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Consumers have to make numerous decisions to “produce the home as a cultural form” (Arsel and Bean 2013, 900; Dion et al. 2014; McCracken 1986; Douglas 1984). For almost all western cultures, the home is predominantly a site of “structured domesticity” brought into being by a “pattern of regular doings” (Douglas 1991, 287–93). Consumers make many decisions about possessions - to keep them, throw them away, display, store or hide them or to identify the right place for them. The home starts to take shape as dwellers bring domestic “space under control” (Douglas 1991, 289) by drawing on broader cultural systems and knowledge. Consumers repeat these actions regularly to keep the household ordered or to conform to a particular vision (Belk et al. 2007; Dion et al. 2014; Epp and Price 2010; Miller 2001; Douglas 1967).

Prior research tells us that consumers use some sort of classification system to organize household possessions (Coupland 2005). These classification systems are often

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theorized as macro cultural norms “in action” in a given micro-social setting (Dion et al. 2014). For instance, macro-social norms of order, familiarity and predictability translate to a micro-social setting through a rule that every object in the house should have its own space and place, otherwise the household space becomes disordered (Cutright 2012; Ross, Meloy, and Bolton 2021; Douglas 1991).

However, we note the lack of a more holistic conceptualization of domestic classification systems, and an enumeration of its building blocks. Past research has offered metaphors such as networks and circuits or patterns of action such as taste regimes to refer to the system that ensures visual and material organization in the household (Arsel and Bean 2013; Dion et al. 2014; Epp and Price 2010). Consider Dion and colleagues (2014) who allude to the non-hierarchical and non-exclusive nature of symbolic classification systems at work in consumer homes. They explain symbolic classification systems as a micro-level example of abstract cultural systems that govern the assignment of household possessions to their rightful place. Epp and Price (2010, 829)’s explanation is oriented more to material culture: they see the organization of household possessions as an “interplay of spaces, objects, and practices” where household possessions sometimes complement and at other times compete with other possessions within the household. But they don’t fully delineate the building blocks and possible dynamics of the system. Similarly, Cutright (2012, 776) alludes to “organized environments” that “represent the establishment of order and structure” but explains the organization through the common-sense idea of “everything has a place”. Arsel and Bean (2013, 912) hint at the presence of an organizing system, governed by specific taste regimes, that helps consumers “navigate through the world of objects” to help bring a specific consumer worldview to life. Their main question is about how consumers “translate desired states of material order ... into routines that achieve these states” (Arsel and Bean 2013, 892). But they don’t focus on domestic classification systems that necessarily mediate the translation of a taste regime into daily practices.

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Further, prior research assumes that domestic organization systems are relatively stable. The underlying assumption is that existing domestic classification systems will continue to remain stable as long as consumers follow the rules and norms that constitute the system (Dion et al. 2014). Practices such as “tidying up” household objects make “the cultural meaning that organizes the domestic environment visible and concrete” (Dion et al. 2014, 583) and reinforce the classification system’s structural solidity. Linked to this, prior research theorizes domestic classification systems as incarnations of broader cultural conventions and codes that are slow to change (Arsel and Bean 2013; Dion et al. 2014; McCracken 2009). Consequently, existing research has rarely focused on the instability and dynamism of household classification systems, even though such dynamism can often be found in empirical accounts. Consider, for instance, the “internal battle for space” that puts stress on the existing classification system in the Kitz-Mahl household (Coupland 2005, 112). The newly independent son asserts divergent worldviews about product choice and storage that, over time, destabilize the existing household classification system. Epp and Price (2010) speculate about similar “network transformations” as objects move in and out of consumer households, but they stop short of explaining the mechanisms and dynamics of such transformations. Arsel and Bean (2013) too assume the relative permanence of existing symbolic boundaries within a household system. We on the other hand argue that household classification systems are always in flux as new consumer lifestyles (e.g., minimalism) or contextual shifts stress existing classification systems.

Lastly, we see a lack of insights into how consumers revise domestic classification systems. Existing research emphasizes the relatively “received” nature of domestic classification systems (Dion et al. 2014, 574) and rarely focuses on consumers’ abilities to revise them. One of the corollaries of seeing domestic classification systems as more-or-less static is that past research over-emphasizes the efficacy of tidying-up – the process of putting objects out of place back into their respective places as suggested by the existing household

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classification system (Belk et al. 2007; Dion et al. 2014). However, the system may break down or become ineffective at producing order, at which point consumers would have to revise the system. When empirical accounts describe consumers revising classification systems, for instance when an informant changes the logic of ordering books on a shelf from alphabetical to color, the implications of this revision are not fully explored (Dion et al. 2014). Additionally, the popularity of a downsized/minimalist orientation to possessions and homes (Chayka 2021; Minimalism.co 2021) constitutes one of the starting points for consumers to revise classification systems (Wilson and Bellezza 2021) and reflexively re-organize their possessions (Ross et al. 2021). However, a holistic understanding of why and how consumers take such actions is still lacking.

We build on previous research and ask the following research questions:

How can we conceptualize a domestic classification system? Why do consumers revise existing domestic classification systems? How do consumers revise existing domestic classification systems?

ANALYTICAL LENS: SOCIOLOGICAL CATEGORY RESEARCH

Category research traces its origins to anthropological explanations of how possessions are related to people and to other possessions (Douglas 1967). Categories invite order and arrangement, reduce ambiguity and ease cognitive load for humans (Rosch et al. 1976).

Related disciplines, such as organization studies (Durand and Thornton 2018; Vergne and Wry 2014) have taken category research further, with two distinct streams of research emerging – one that is focused on categories from a psychological perspective, and one that approaches categories from a sociological perspective. The sociologically attuned category research perspective (Durand, Granqvist, and Tyllstrom 2017; Khaire 2017; Khaire and

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Wadhwani 2010) provides a valuable frame for our analysis and findings for the following three reasons: 1) it highlights broader systems of classification (e.g. the art market) within which categories (e.g. the Indian art market) and objects (e.g. the individual art piece) are located (Glynn and Navis 2013), 2) it emphasizes the socially-constructed nature of categories and highlights possibilities for dynamism and change (Khaire and Wadhwani 2010), and 3) it ascribes agency to different interested actors (such as consumers and intermediaries) and highlights their role in shaping categories (Delmestri and Greenwood 2016).

We frame our findings through four key constructs from sociologically-attuned category research. We briefly explain each of the constructs below.

Categories and classification systems

Categories are socially-constructed “groups which are distinct from each other, and are separated by clearly determined lines of demarcation” (Durkheim and Mauss 2009, 2). They play “a key role in imposing coherence on the social world” (Vergne and Wry 2014, 8). Categories work on the principle that objects in the same category share a family resemblance (Rosch 1978) and are more similar to each other according to certain criteria than to objects outside the category (Negro, Hannan, and Rao 2011; Rosa et al. 1999).

In our findings, product categories such as furniture, toiletries, make-up, pantry items, emotional items or any other class of objects that are present in the household are categories (Coupland 2005). These categories are embedded in a classification system - a “relational structure of categories” (Wry and Lounsbury 2013) that specifies how categories relate to each other. Ideally, a classification system should consist of “a set of categories that are mutually exclusive [and] a consistent set of rules for assigning objects to categories” (Ruef and Patterson 2009, 488).

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Membership criteria

Stakeholders such as consumers assign objects to categories partly based on membership criteria. Membership criteria are the minimum set of necessary conditions that an object must fulfil to be assigned to an existing category (Rosa et al. 1999; Vergne and Wry 2014). They help consumers to better understand and remain consistent with broader classification systems (Zuckerman 1999). For instance, to be classified as a table in the household an object would need a flat surface and some legs.

Evaluation criteria

However, the assignment of objects to categories is not only dependent on an object fulfilling the membership criteria, but consumers can also develop and apply evaluation criteria. Consumers and other market actors can use evaluation criteria to create a ranked organization of objects within a category (Navis and Glynn 2011). This ranked organization then gives consumers an indication of what is a better category member according to a given set of criteria, e.g., what is a better-performing hedge fund or which is a higher value piece of art (Coslor, Crawford, and Leyshon 2019; Khaire and Wadhvani 2010). Each category can support multiple evaluation criteria. In other words, the same set of category members can be ranked according to different evaluation criteria. For instance, members of the category Modern Indian Art can be ranked by their price (i.e., evaluation criteria 1), level of connection with historical events (i.e., evaluation criteria 2) or painting style (i.e., evaluation criteria 3) (Khaire and Wadhvani 2010).

Category labels

A category label is “a type of symbol used to signify membership in a particular ...category” (Granqvist, Grodal, and Woolley 2012, 395). It is a linguistic resource that different stakeholders can use to make the assignment to a category visible and stable. In the

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context of household consumption, labelling can be used to solidify one home dweller's categorizations of home possessions, for instance when a householder labels their pantry items (Coupland 2005).

Drawing on these key concepts from sociologically-attuned category research, we will be able to better explain what a domestic classification system is and how consumers work on it.

CONTEXT

Middle-class homes in most Western countries are “overflowing with an accumulation of goods” (Löfgren 2017; Ross et al. 2021, 959). During an ethnographic household study researchers counted 2,260 visible possessions in a three room home (Arnold et al. 2019). The average British consumer accumulates over a ton of undesired possessions (Maycroft 2009; Hattenstone 2009). Consumers often struggle to control this influx of material possessions that can produce “disorderly and chaotic home environments” (Roster et al. 2016, 32).

The term clutter – commonly referred to a disorganized state of objects - can be traced back as far back as the 1550s (Online Etymology Dictionary 2021). Decluttering, though, the consumer response to clutter, has a much more recent history (Macmillan Dictionary 2019). The last decade especially has seen an explosion of decluttering advice: self-help books that teach consumers the best ways to declutter, thousands of Instagram posts (1.370.428 posts under the hashtag “declutter” on Instagram, last accessed 12.10.2020), television series such as “Hoarders” (A&E 2021), Facebook groups with thousands of members (e.g., Facebook 2021). Frustrated consumers have also called in decluttering coaches and experts to give themselves the best chance to fight clutter in their homes (Belk et al. 2007). The most popular proponent of decluttering's virtues has been Marie Kondo with her KonMari method (Curtis 2015). The profession has even gained formal recognition with

more formalized educational programs and institutionalized, professionalized unions (e.g., NAPO 2021).

Decluttering is an ideal context to study the dynamics of domestic classification systems, especially as consumers engage in reflexive action for revising the domestic classification system (DCS).

METHODOLOGY

We conducted 35 semi-structured in-depth interviews (25 of them supplemented with ethnographic data), and netnography to explore cultural and social dimensions of the consumer practice of decluttering (Arnould and Wallendorf 1994). The data collection was focused on the German speaking region in Switzerland and Germany. We began collecting empirical material in July 2019 and continued till we reached theoretical saturation in July 2021 (Glaser and Strauss 2017). Please see table 1 for an overview of data collection and the web appendix for a more detailed description of our informants.

Table 4 Overview of data collection

TYPE OF DATA	DESCRIPTION	OBJECTIVE
<i>Semi-structured interviews</i>	<i>In-depth consumer interviews</i> (Nb. 25, 7,400 mins of interview audio in total, ranging from 37-84 mins, average 57 mins per participant, 134 transcribed pages of interview transcripts (1.5-spaced), 14 photographs)	<i>To understand consumers' perspectives on decluttering</i>
	<i>In-depth expert interviews with decluttering coaches</i> (Nb. 3, 217 mins of interview audio in total, ranging from 57-85 mins, average 72 mins per participant, 73 transcribed pages of interview transcripts (1.5-spaced))	

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<i>Ethnographic immersion</i>	<i>In-situ participant observations combined with in-depth consumer interviews (Nb. 25)</i> <i>1) In-situ participant observations</i> (94 hours in the field in total, ranging from 0.5-8 hours, average 235 mins per participant, 295 pages of fieldnotes (1.15-spaced), 976 photographs) <i>2) In-depth consumer interviews</i> (1312 mins of interview audio in total, ranging from 22-143 mins, 52 average mins per participant, 460 transcribed pages of interview transcripts (1.5-spaced))	<i>To understand consumers' lived reality of decluttering</i>
<i>Netnographic data and triangulation</i>	<i>Netnographic data</i> (49 photographs and screenshots, 96 extracted pages with content from social media threads and discussions on decluttering (single-spaced)) <i>Triangulation</i> (14 popular books, 145 extracted pages with content from newspaper and blog articles, 129 photographs from autoethnographies of authors)	<i>To understand specific challenges and to triangulate data</i>

NOTE: This table provides an overview of all the data collected for this project.

Data collection

Semi-structured interviews. In the first round of data collection, the authors conducted 7 semi-structured consumer interviews (Bernard 2005) with consumers who had recently decluttered parts of their households. The interviews resulted in 400 minutes of interview audio in total. The interviews lasted between 37 and 84 minutes (average: 57 minutes). Each

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interview was recorded and transcribed (resulting in about 134 1.5-spaced pages of interview transcripts). Additionally, some of the interviews were enriched with photographs (n=14).

We recruited informants through a purposive snowballing approach. We excluded any consumers who might have been on the spectrum of mental health issues such as hoarding. We have included the full list of consumer interviews in Web Appendix A. We wanted to understand informants' lived experiences of decluttering (McCracken 1988; Thompson, Locander, and Pollio 1989). Questions focused on triggers, reflections, and feelings in their current or past decluttering drives. These questions were followed by prompts related to setting-up of ground rules and decisions. We revised the interview guide as additional themes of interest, for instance future purchasing behavior, emerged. The interviews provide reflexive accounts of consumers' challenges and strategies of decluttering (Alvesson 2003). In addition, we also conducted in-depth interviews with three decluttering experts who coach consumers in decluttering. These in-depth expert interviews resulted in 217 minutes of interview audio in total. The interviews lasted between 57 and 85 minutes (average: 72 minutes). Each interview was recorded and transcribed (resulting in about 73 1.5-spaced pages of interview transcripts).

Ethnographic immersion. In order to better conceptualize the practices of decluttering, two of the authors participated in decluttering drives at 25 consumer households (Van Maanen 2011). The researchers visited these households and engaged in participant observation as informants engaged in decluttering processes (Agar 2011). During this part of the fieldwork, the researchers took on a supporting role (Maciel and Wallendorf 2017; Snow, Benford, and Anderson 1986). This meant following and helping the participant in their decluttering process by carrying, cleaning, or sorting consumption objects based on clear directions from the participant, like a "good friend" would do. During decluttering sessions, the researchers used nondirective probes to encourage consumers to share their thoughts and motivations. The researchers spent 94 hours in the field in total. The in-situ participant observations varied in duration from half an hour to eight hours. On average the authors spent

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235 minutes with each participant. Each observation was recorded through fieldnotes (resulting in about 295 1.15-spaced pages of field notes) and photographs (n = 976). The photographs capture different elements of the decluttering process: for instance, how specific areas looked before and after decluttering, or piles of possessions that had been sorted out to be trashed, gifted, donated, or given back to people. At the end of each observation, we conducted semi-structured in-depth interviews (Arsel 2017). The in-depth consumer interviews resulted in 1,312 minutes of interview audio in total. The interviews lasted between 22 and 143 minutes (average: 52 minutes). Each interview was recorded and transcribed (resulting in about 460 1.5-spaced pages of interview transcripts).

Netnographic data and triangulation. For triangulation purposes (Jonsen and Jehn 2009) the authors gained access to and immersed themselves in relevant Facebook groups and followed discussions on Reddit. In these online spaces, consumers asked for advice and exchanged tips, as well as sharing before-and-after pictures of their decluttering attempts. We extracted photographs (49 screenshots) and group discussions (resulting in about 96 single-spaced pages) as a means of engaging with new ideas and developing consensus among the research team. Further, triangulation happened through consulting popular books (n=14), newspaper, and blog articles on decluttering.

In addition, all the authors engaged in several rounds of decluttering themselves to add an auto-ethnographic element to our understanding of decluttering (Holbrook 2005). Following prior research, the authors considered the auto-ethnographic, emic account would be key to understanding the phenomenon holistically (Scott, Cayla, and Cova 2017; Husemann and Eckhardt 2019; Maciel and Wallendorf 2017). They documented their individual experiences with photographs (n=129) (Stoller 1989).

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Data analysis

Aligned with the tenets of qualitative research, we embarked on an iterative process for data analysis (Belk, Fischer and Kozinets 2013). In the first step of the process each author coded the textual and photographic data (semi-structured interviews, fieldnotes and netnographic data). Our focus was to better understand the phenomenon of decluttering – the building blocks, practices, tools, and techniques. We focused on what informants found easy or difficult, where they got stuck, and what result they were looking for from decluttering drives. We drew on concepts from category research (categories, membership criteria, evaluation criteria and category labels) to substantiate our data analysis and discovered the presence of domestic classification systems (Fischer and Otnes 2006). Over several rounds of going back and forth between the empirical material and existing literature, we coded the data in line with the three research questions as presented in the findings. Our final interpretation of the data then emerged as we moved continuously between our collected data, our analytical lens, popular literature on decluttering and prior literature (Miles and Huberman 1994; Spiggle 1994).

FINDINGS

We first conceptualize domestic classification systems (DCSs) and highlight two functions, (1) categorization (where DCSs assign objects to categories) and (2) spatialization (where DCSs assign objects/categories to specific places inside the home). While these functions are not mutually exclusive, we discuss each of them separately for analytical clarity. We then answer the second research question and explain why consumers revise their DCSs. Consumers may feel that they are living in cluttered homes when their life circumstances change, when they have new ideas about how household possessions should be arranged, or when new possessions enter the household. We then delineate the practical actions that consumers take as they reformulate the categorization and spatialization functions.

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Conceptualizing DCSs and their functions

Domestic Classification Systems. Consistent with prior research, our informants highlight the need for a system to organize household possessions (Belk et al. 2007; Coupland 2005). For instance, Samantha believes that “whoever has possessions must also create some kind of structure for them” and Mathew highlights the “need for a certain system” in the house.

We build on our informants’ quotes to provide a definition for a domestic classification system. Abby describes the characteristics of domestic classification systems as she strives to find the perfect place for possessions: “This has something to do with an internal mental system. Maybe to someone else it does not look organized on the surface, but I have an internalized structure. I collect a lot of things in categories. I have a box for unused postal cards and letter sets, another box where you find all of the written letters. All the things that belong together (...) Similar things go together in the same categories.” From Abby’s quote, we distill four characteristics of domestic classification systems (DCSs). First, it is a mental map that sorts objects into categories and arranges them in household space. Second, the DCS is subjective. Different consumers can have different ways of organizing household possessions. Katherine, a decluttering coach, reinforces the subjective aspect of DCSs: “Order and disorder are something really personal. Everyone has a different understanding of what they perceive as disorder.” Thus, the same classification system can come across as effective at organizing possessions to one consumer while to another it comes across as ineffective. Third, the DCS organizes mundane (e.g., unused postal cards) as well as cherished possessions (e.g., written letters). We know that consumers use household systems to organize mundane objects such as pantry items and groceries (Coupland 2005), but we can see from all our informants that DCSs include mundane as well as cherished possessions. Fourth, it is a system. The DCS is a “meaningful structure” that guides “what I keep, what I

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do not keep... and what I keep and where it goes” (Claire). According to Annabelle it is like an “automatism” that runs in the background, simplifies her life and reduces the amount of “mental capacity” she usually needs to organize her possessions. When the system is effective at organizing possessions, consumers don’t need to “search” for objects (Mathew).

The categorization function of the DCS. DCS’s categorization function assigns household possessions to specific categories. Ella highlights the categorical impulse, saying that “our brain likes to think in categories”. She further explains that a well-functioning DCS helps her to group “things together in categories”. The following photograph from our fieldwork illustrates how consumers think in categories.

Figure 1 The categorization function of a dcs



NOTE: Autoethnographic record from one of the authors. A well-functioning DCS assigns objects to categories. Labels added to the photograph to make categorization clearer to readers.

DCSs can assign possessions to categories based on family resemblance (e.g., this is a sock and belongs with all the other socks) or functionality (e.g., a ski mask categorized as skiing supplies). To be part of the existing DCS, each category should contain at least one possession and no possession should be without a category (Durand et al. 2017).

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We found that consumers often think in terms of two kinds of categories. First, retention-oriented categories that keep possessions inside the household, for instance, decorations, cutlery, living-room furniture. Second, disposal-oriented categories that expel objects from the household, for instance “to-be-sold”, “for-friends” or “trash” (Thompson 1979). Together, retention- and disposal-oriented categories organize household possessions.

The spatialization function of the DCS. The DCS also performs a spatialization function where it assigns either an object or an entire category to a specific place in the household. Mary, a professional decluttering coach, highlights the importance of having a clearly assigned place for an object and/or a category in the household: “You have a dishwasher at home. When the dishwasher has run and the dishes are clean (...) where do we put the glasses? We could put them on the bed. What about the forks? Maybe they go into the toilet. And what about the plates – could we put them on the sofa? This is definitely not what we do. There is an automatic action. We take the plates and we put them in the bottom cupboard. The glasses go to the upper cupboard. The forks go into the drawer for cutlery. And then after two minutes it is done. Wouldn’t it be great to have something like this for the entire apartment? Mary highlights how household possessions are assigned to specific places (Dion et al. 2014). Erica notes that “it is important that we have well-defined places for things”. Gianna underlines the spatialization function when she says that “all of my things have their specific place in the house”. Consumers can then draw on this object-place link and place objects in the right place, for instance when tidying up.

To sum up, a well-functioning DCS is a mental system that runs in the background and assigns household possessions to retention- or disposal-oriented categories and then links retention-oriented categories and their members to specific places within the house. Together, these two functions organize household possessions for consumers.

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Contextual shifts strain the DCS

Contextual shifts can include changes to consumers' living arrangements, new visions for their homes (Arsel and Bean 2013) or the accumulation of newer objects (Belk et al. 2007). Consumers' living arrangements can change through a number of triggers, for instance when they move into a smaller or bigger house or when they include or exclude co-habitants (e.g., new roommate moving in, moving in with a partner or welcoming a baby into their home). These changes can pose a challenge to the effectiveness of existing DCSs. Lily describes one such contextual shift and how it challenges the effectiveness of the existing DCS: "Our last move was kind of a traumatic experience. We moved two households' stuff into one house that was the same size as my previous place. We had a lot of stress. I realized that I have too much stuff...and that I do not need 5 garlic presses." Lily describes one of the key challenges to the effectiveness of the existing DCS when it has to organize almost twice as many possessions as it organized originally. Lily and her boyfriend need to re-categorize certain possessions (e.g., some garlic presses might go into "trash") and find the right place for the retention-oriented categories and their members within the new household. Similarly, Stephanie struggles with her existing DCS after moving to a smaller apartment. The existing DCS becomes less effective at keeping possessions organized as the spatialization function does not work as it did earlier. The result was that Stephanie "felt like I had to declutter" (Stephanie).

In addition to changes in life circumstances, contextual shifts can include consumers modifying their visions about their homes. We understand consumer visions as concrete ideas on how specific spaces within the house should look. Katherine, a decluttering coach, explains the importance of consumer visions: "With all of my clients, I first do a vision board. This is the first step. To visualize your ideal life. To know that this is where you want to go." Consumers might want to own less stuff and live in a "minimalist" home (Ella), to have a "leaner household as they have a lot of stuff" (Spencer) or "to have a house with more free

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space” (Angelina). Each of these new visions can pose a challenge to the effectiveness of the existing DCS. For instance, to live in a minimalist home would involve large-scale re-categorization of possessions from retention-oriented categories to disposal-oriented categories as well as changing the object or category-place linkages for many objects and/or entire categories.

Another case which poses a challenge to the effectiveness of an existing DCS is when consumers want to incorporate newly acquired objects into the DCS. For instance, Gianna and her husband want to add a new sauna into their home. Others want to add a guest bed (Mary) or replace their old bed with a new one (Stephanie). Stephanie describes the problems that ensue when new objects enter the household: “The new bed just created a new level of chaos. Because all the boxes that used to go under the old one cannot go there any longer (...). This is why the bedroom looks like a bomb site. And the new stuff that I got last week just stays around in its packaging (...). It will take me more than a few days to deal with this mess because I still need to think about what to do with it, what do I keep and so on.” We can see from this quote how some consumers can struggle to integrate a new set of possessions in the existing DCS. In Stephanie’s case, the accumulation of a new bed can weaken the effectiveness of her existing DCS because it breaks the linkage between some household possessions (“boxes”) and their correct place in the home (“under the bed”). Stephanie will need to spend significant cognitive effort (“more than a few days”) to make the DCS effective by reassigning the household objects to a new place.

Clutter emerges

Clutter emerges when a DCS can’t perform the two functions – categorization and spatialization – effectively. When existing DCSs can’t help consumers to assign an object to either retention- or disposal-oriented categories (i.e., loss of categorization function) and/or a

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specific place in the household (i.e., loss of spatialization function), consumers get the feeling of living in a cluttered home.

We understand clutter as that state of the household when household objects haven't been assigned to an appropriate retention- or disposal-oriented category and/or haven't been assigned a particular place within an existing DCS. Thus, clutter is not about one or more specific objects, but about the state of the household or its parts.

We distinguish clutter from other concepts such as untidiness/disorder with the help of the following photograph taken at Lily's home.

Figure 2 The difference between untidiness and clutter



NOTE: Photo of Lily's living room to illustrate the difference between untidiness and clutter.

On first glance, this photograph has much in common with past empirical examples of untidiness (Dion et al. 2014). However, the participant observation element of our fieldwork helps us peel back different nuances within this photograph. For instance, let's consider the trousers thrown over the chair. In past accounts, the trousers would be an example of untidiness/mess. Lily explains to us that the trousers are part of the retention-oriented category "office wear". This particular category has a clearly assigned place in Lily's wardrobe. When the photograph is taken, the room is untidy/disordered as the trousers are out

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of place and have transgressed their category's boundary (Dion et al. 2014). Lily can restore order by tidying up the room and putting the transgressing trousers back in their right place in her wardrobe. Thus, tidying up can be done with objects that have a categorical assignment to a retention-oriented category and can be put back "in their place" (Lily). Tidying up also works for objects that can be clearly assigned to a disposal-oriented category as those objects then can be put into the trash.

However, a different story plays out in the balcony. Lily explains that she feels that the balcony is in a state of clutter. Lily points out that she does not have a clearly assigned category for the pots that we see in the balcony. Are they members of the retention-oriented categories "gardening supplies" or "interior decoration" or are they members of the disposal-oriented category "trash"? The pots also don't have a clear spatial assignment – Lily does not know where to keep the pots because she hasn't yet decided to which category they will be assigned. Note that like other informants, Lily says that clutter is a localized state, in this case only in the balcony, which does not necessarily need to affect the whole house.

Below, we explain two necessary conditions for clutter to emerge.

Figure 3 Absence of categorical assignment leads to clutter



NOTE: The contents of one of Erica's bags placed on her work desk.

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Firstly, consumers experience clutter when objects don't have a clear assignment to a retention- or a disposal-oriented category. Different objects come together without any clear boundary (Cutright 2012) and a "clear line that differentiates objects from each other is missing" (Spencer). Erica describes the chaotic situation of a bag from her work desk: "This is a kind of chaos bag, where all kinds of things are in it. Pens, ribbons, stationery, leftover material from different conferences, promotional material (...). Everything is mixed up. It's not like it is just one kind of thing, for example stationery, but it is a wildly mixed pile. And some of it is also just trash." At first pass, Erica struggles to differentiate between different categories of objects from this pile. She cannot tell apart and properly categorize useless trash (i.e., disposal-oriented category members) from useful objects (i.e., retention-oriented category members): "That was actually not so easy. There were two or more of some things. The extra items brought me no added value from owning them (...). First of all, I had to sort them into categories. And then group them a bit by the broad categories of garbage or non-garbage. Then I could at least make some sense of the contents." One of the distinctions Erica finds useful is between retention-oriented ("I keep the object") and disposal-oriented ("I dispose of the object") categories. This distinction helps her discern useful category boundaries amidst the chaos (Ross et al. 2021).

Secondly, consumers experience clutter when objects or categories don't have a clear spatial assignment in the existing DCS. One of the ways in which consumers experience this missing spatial assignment is through regular struggles to find things. For instance, consumers cannot find the object they are looking for in crowded drawers (Evan) or freak out about their inability to find objects (Nathalie). Another case is when consumers struggle to even access specific possessions in a given location of the household. Linda explains one such incident that gives her a feeling of living in a cluttered house: "The cupboard that you decluttered with Maxwell drove me nuts when I was trying to get out the vacuum cleaner. I did not manage to get certain items out because the cupboard was so full. This really stressed me out. There is

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just too much stuff in it (...) there is too much stuff for the space. It stressed me that there is too much stuff in the cupboard and that something always falls out when I want to get something else out of there.” What Linda describes above is the overcrowding of household space where multiple items compete for the same space. There is no discernible linkage between one specific object and a particular place because other objects block the effectiveness of that linkage (“did not manage to get certain items out”). The result of this failure of spatialization is a feeling of stress triggered by the cluttered state of the cupboard in question (“drove me nuts”). Mathew echoes Linda’s frustration when he reports how another household member puts things in places where they do not belong and how this annoys him.

At times, consumers could experience the two necessary conditions simultaneously. Claire described how spatialization and categorization functions become less effective: “At some point I find that the system overloads. You start to have different needs. And I always have the feeling that then usually the system no longer works. When the system doesn't work anymore, it just becomes too much for me and I want to throw everything away. For example, I have a system for storing things with folders. And at some point, the folder is too full for me to continue with the system. It somehow just doesn't organize as well anymore.” The folder becoming “too full” points to the simultaneous loss of effectiveness of categorization as well as spatialization functions. The simultaneous problems immediately make the DCS ineffective (“doesn’t organize as well anymore”) and clutter emerges as Claire can’t find the right category or the right space for other possessions.

The immediate impact of clutter emerging is a feeling of being frustrated and even overwhelmed (“I want to throw everything away”). Other informants recount similar feelings of frustration as overcrowding of household places hampers actions and leads to “chaos in the end. Things don’t belong to any place in the system” (Lily). Annabelle vividly characterizes clutter as “a monster out of control, which eats me alive”. This feeling of being overwhelmed also appears frequently in our analysis of netnographic material, where stressed consumers

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repeatedly ask group members' advice on how to re-organize their homes so that they can get rid of the stress-inducing state of clutter. Some consumers even hire decluttering coaches to better re-organize their households and to revise existing domestic classification systems to make them more effective at preventing clutter.

Consumers revise the domestic classification system

When a DCS works effectively, it runs almost automatically in the background and consumers don't have to make reflexive, explicit judgments about an object's correct categorization and spatialization. But when the DCS does not perform well and clutter emerges, consumers try to revise the DCS to regain its effectiveness. Evan enumerates the multiple objectives of revising the DCS in the following quote: "The goal is to let go of things, to clean up, to rearrange, so that is easier to find things again. We can repurpose space. The system has to become efficient [again]" Decluttering is not just about getting rid of objects, but also about revisiting the very system that underpins the organization of the home. We find that consumer actions to revise the DCS (including all the actions that fall under the umbrella term of decluttering) displayed the following three characteristics:

Firstly, because of continuous contextual shifts, the DCS always grapples with instability, and revising the DCS necessarily becomes a *recursive act*. All our informants report doing multiple rounds of decluttering. Revising existing DCSs through decluttering is not a one-time event, but an iterative, recursive process.

Secondly, in contrast to tidying up, which is more of an everyday practice, revising the DCS is more of an *episodic act*. Most of our consumers "explicitly set-up the time for it" (Nathalie), for instance a weekend or a day before or after moving. Most of our informants also start the decluttering process by setting clear goals and use methods that are different from everyday tidying-up, which further distinguishes decluttering from everyday tidying-up.

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Thirdly, revising existing DCSs through decluttering is an explicitly *reflexive act* where consumers expend significant cognitive effort in decision-making. Some of our informants report feeling “very exhausted” (Mary) and “mentally tired” (Rachel) after completing a round of decluttering. Others recount being “overwhelmed with the many decisions that need to be made in the process” (Ella).

The following table gives an overview of the decisions that consumers need to make during the decluttering process in terms of categorization and spatialization. We use this table as an overview for this section of the findings and explain it in greater detail. Some of these decisions may require more explicit cognitive effort, others less so, but taken together, we can see that consumers expend a significant amount of cognitive effort in revising the DCS.

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Table 5 Overview of how consumers revise categorical and spatial assignment

Nr.	Household objects	Consumers revise object categorization				Consumers revise object spatialization				
		Consumers assign the object to the same retention-oriented category	Consumers move the object from one retention-oriented category to another	Consumers assign the object to a disposal-oriented category	Consumers experience a categorical dilemma for this object	Consumers assign the object to the same place	Consumers assign the object next to other category members	Consumers singularize an object	Consumers re-position the whole category to a new place	Consumers compartmentalize the space
1	Scarf	x					x			
2	Old phone		x				x			
3	Sleeping mask		x		x			x		
4	E-reader	x				x				
5	Frog (toy)		x		x		x			
6	Test tubes			x	x					
7	Guardian angel medal			x	x					
8	Earplugs	x				x				
9	Mini glass tube (new)		x				x			
10	Loyalty card			x						
11	Old passport		x		x		x			
12	Earplugs (II)	x			x	x				
13	Curtain hangers		x				x			
14	Coins	x				x				
15	Lint brush		x				x			
16	Lighters		x				x			
17	Lighters (II)			x						
18	Pocket knife	x				x				
19	Hand creme		x				x			
20	Cards			x	x					
21	Earplugs (III)			x	x					
22	Selfie cam		x				x			
23	Lip balm		x		x		x			
24	Bag holder		x				x			
25	Bottle opener		x				x			
26	Gift ribbon		x						x	
Y	Compartmentalization									x

NOTE: We derived this table from decluttering a small box with our informant Norah (she also decluttered other areas of the home; for analytical purposes we focus on the small box). She normally kept the box at her apartment's entrance. Compartmentalization affects the whole decluttering process and is listed with a "Y" at the bottom of the table.

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Consumers revise object categorization

The first step in revising existing DCSs is to revisit object categorization. Consumers categorize the focal object into one of two broad categories, namely retention- or disposal-oriented. Our informants often begin with the question of whether to retain or dispose as they engage with each object one-by-one. Consider how Lea reports that a big “part of decluttering for me is when I look at everything and ask myself: Do I still need this? Do I no longer need this?”

Our findings show that for most household items, consumers can answer the above question – whether the object merits or does not merit a place in the DCS – easily, as they more or less retain the existing categorization. In the first case, our informants, often with minimal cognitive effort, make the decision to retain objects, i.e., they assign them to a retention-oriented category. For instance, consumers easily assign certain favorite, regularly used, or essential items such as favorite beauty products (Arianna), or a favorite dress (Angelina), purse (Norah), or music equipment for a musician (Joshua), sports equipment for a sports-oriented consumer (Gianna) to a retention-oriented category (column “consumers assign the object to the same retention-oriented category” in table 3). For some other objects, it is once more an easy decision when consumers move one object from a retention-oriented category to another retention-oriented category (column “consumers move the object from one retention oriented to another retention-oriented category” in table 3). For instance, Jo moves postal cards from the retention-oriented category of “emotional items” to the retention-oriented category of “decoration”. Aiden moves some of his cutlery from the retention-oriented category of “kitchen supplies” to the retention-oriented category of “travel supplies”. Oscar moves games that he used to play in his childhood from the retention-oriented category of “board games” to the retention-oriented category “emotional items”.

The third column in the table deals with household objects where consumers, once again often with minimal cognitive effort, decide to assign an object to a disposal-oriented

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category, i.e., they trash, donate, or sell it. Examples are broken objects like old, ripped clothes (Aiden), broken pens (Spencer, Erica), empty grill cartridges (Maxwell), cartons and old papers (Jonathan). (Column “consumers assign the object to a disposal-oriented category” in table 3).

In certain cases, answering the retain/dispose question can be quite tricky and full of dilemmas. We frequently find consumers grappling with categorical dilemmas - cases where consumers couldn't decide easily whether to assign an object to a retention- or disposal-oriented category. While past research explains the difficulties of divesting cherished possessions (Lastovicka and Fernandez 2005; Marcoux 2001), we also find consumers struggling to dispose of mundane objects. Based on our fieldwork we identify four types of categorical dilemmas that we summarize in the following table 4.

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Table 6 Categorical dilemmas

Type of categorical dilemma	Description of categorical dilemma	Objects (examples)	Reason to put it into a retention-oriented category	Reason to put it into a disposal-oriented category
Use dilemma	Consumers think about retaining an object (because of use value), but also think about assigning it to a disposal-oriented category.	wrapping paper (Erica)	potential use value	Consumers experience a capacity constraint.
		towel (Rachel)	potential use value	Consumers experience a capacity constraint.
Monetary dilemma	Consumers think about retaining an object (because of monetary value), but also think about assigning it to a disposal-oriented category.	sunglasses (Madison)	monetary value	Consumers do not like the aesthetics any longer.
		expensive clothes (Nathalie)	monetary value	Consumers do not use the object often.
Emotional dilemma	Consumers think about retaining an object (because of emotional value), but also think about assigning it to a disposal-oriented category.	family sofa (Wanda)	emotional value	Consumers do not like the aesthetics any longer.
		postal cards (Joshua)	emotional value	Consumers do not use the object often.
Future dilemma	Consumers think about retaining an object (because they might need it in the future), but they also think about assigning it to a disposal-oriented category.	party supplies (Oscar)	future value	Consumers do not use the object often.
		scarves (Arianna)	future value	Consumers do not use the object often.

NOTE: Overview of the most common categorical dilemmas as experienced by our informants.

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Madison explains her struggles in getting rid of some documents, postal cards and her own drawings: “The paper things – can I throw them away or should I make an album with them? Earlier I thought I would throw all of them away. But then you hold one in your hand, and then it is very difficult to really put them in the trash.” Madison embarks on a decluttering drive with the goal of having a “lean” home. Yet even with an explicit goal, she is frequently caught in a dilemma when trying to answer the retain-dispose question for some items – are they useless trash (i.e., they belong to a disposal-oriented category) or valuable memories (i.e., they belong to a retention-oriented category)? (Column “consumers experience a categorical dilemma for this object” in table 3). This constitutes a categorical dilemma with compelling arguments for both possible categorical assignments. The cognitive effort in resolving these categorical dilemmas triggers feelings of stress as well as cognitive and emotional exhaustion (Cropanzano, Rupp, and Byrne 2003). For instance, Wanda describes feeling especially “stressed” and “annoyed” after decluttering sessions because so many difficult decisions are to be made and dilemmas need to be resolved. Some consumers completely give up trying to resolve categorical dilemmas and continue living with the cluttered status quo because they don’t want to expend such significant cognitive effort. Nathalie explains how she could not revise the DCS effectively as she got exhausted in trying to resolve multiple categorical dilemmas: “The first few times when I decluttered, I couldn’t let go of anything. I did not manage to ask the relevant questions. This is why I also could not find the right answers on what will stay and what will go. When I was in doubt, I did not take a difficult decision, but kept it anyway.” At times, Nathalie is unable to satisfactorily resolve the dilemmas that she faces and chooses to conserve her cognitive resources instead of spending the time and cognitive resources needed to take “difficult” decisions (Hobfoll 1989). However, over multiple rounds of decluttering, Nathalie (and others) learn to ask the kind of questions which help resolve dilemmas satisfactorily so that the existing DCS can be revised. One powerful method to resolve categorical dilemmas and at the same time conserve

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cognitive resources involves consumers adopting an explicit, almost algorithmic sort of decision-making style.

We find that for this style of decision making, consumers do not solely rely on membership criteria but also on evaluation criteria. In category research, evaluation criteria indicate what is a “good” category member, in contrast to membership criteria that solely indicate the minimum characteristic required for potential membership (e.g., a vase can be part of the decoration category by its nature, but consumers can judge it to not be good enough) (Khair and Wadhvani 2010). With those evaluation criteria, consumers are able to better delineate the boundaries between retention- and disposal-oriented categories, and thus satisfactorily resolve categorical dilemmas. Consider how Rachel applies evaluation criteria to retain and dispose of certain pieces of bed linen: “I knew that I need at least three sets of bed linen. So I took three good ones, the three that I like best. And I compared these three to the others. If others were as good as these three, I would have to keep them. So, if they were as good as new, untorn and ironed, or not even ironed, but if they do not get crumpled as easily as the ones that I would keep, then I would know, okay, I should probably keep two. And the question is just whether I like it as much. If it is even a little bit crappier than these three, if it crumples more or anything, then I would know, okay, I am not going to keep this.” As Rachel reflects on the category of bed linen, she identifies several evaluation criteria that each piece of bed linen must fulfill to be assigned to the retention-oriented category “bed linen” - “as good as new” (evaluation criteria = aesthetics), “as good as these three” (a comparative evaluation criteria), “not get crumpled easily” (evaluation criteria = functionality). If a particular piece of bed linen does not fulfill any of these criteria, Rachel assigns it to the disposal-oriented category “to trash” or “to donate”. In a similar vein, Spencer comes up with his own evaluation criteria – intensity of usage – and he disposes of drawing supplies that do not fulfill the evaluation criteria, i.e., objects that he had not used for a certain amount of time.

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Consumers take those evaluation criteria as a basis for an algorithmic sort of decision-making style. For instance, Lily tells us how she has evolved from being lenient towards objects to being stricter with them: “I have now become strict. There were many things that survived several rounds of decluttering. Earlier, I always thought: ‘Oh maybe I want to keep it. I do not want to give it away.’ But this time, no. I will be very strict.” We can see that Lily needs “strictness” to counter the attraction of retaining the objects as well as to continue the exhausting path of resolving categorical dilemmas. Lily’s initial lack of strictness in finding and applying evaluation criteria dispassionately plays a major role in possessions being wrongly categorized in retention-oriented categories when they should have been in disposal-oriented categories. In addition to attempts to take the emotion out of decluttering through tactics such as “strictness”, we also discover a more algorithmic mode of thinking as we analyze how consumers resolve categorical dilemmas. We find that consumers develop explicit conditional statements, often formulated as IF/THEN rules to decide the fate of household possessions (e.g., “if it crumples easily...I am not going to keep it”).

Producing these categorical rules eases the cognitive load that consumers necessarily experience as they attempt to resolve categorical dilemmas. Once the rules are well-formulated and strictly applied, they begin to impact everyday decisions, for instance what and how much to buy when shopping. Consumers are able to manage the flow of objects into and out of their households much better. Norah explains: “I would never buy a lighter, because [the last time I decluttered] I found I have 10 of them at home. (...) If I know I have three at home, then I wouldn't buy it. Then I would go home and get it or do without it at that moment instead of buying a fourth one.” We can see that once Norah knows the structure and contents of her domestic classification system well enough, this knowledge can impact future purchases. Conversely, consumers also spot “gaps” in the DCS and stock up on items that were disposed of but are now needed in the system e.g., replace worn-out jogging pants (Simon) or buy a new pullover because they gave away the one that was a nice color but had

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unwanted emotions attached (Arved). The following table summarizes different examples of such conditional IF/THEN statements that draw on evaluation criteria and develop clear rules for assigning objects to categories within existing DCSs.

Table 7 If-Then Rules

QUOTE	IF	Household object	Evaluation criteria	THEN
“We kept cutting boards that looked more beautiful” (Linda)	IF the object is aesthetically appealing...	Kitchen accessories	<i>Aesthetics</i>	Retain
“It could be that in four years I want to go full ultra-hipster and then these "vintage things" have a coolness factor where you frame them and hang them on the wall.” (Evan)	IF the object will be valuable in the future...	Home decorations	<i>Potential future value</i>	Retain
“I know that I need a certain number of towels or bed linen. I'm going to keep the ones that are less used and in good condition.” (Rachel)	IF an object is in good condition AND IF there is capacity to keep...	Bed linen, towels	<i>Condition + Storage Capacity</i>	Retain
“We haven't used fabric softener for many years and won't be using it anytime soon (...) we gave them away. And the same with Calgon tabs.” (Nathalie)	IF an object hasn't been used AND IF it won't be used in the future...	Laundry chemicals	<i>Current Frequency of Usage + Expected Frequency of Usage</i>	Dispose
“I don't plan to continue using all this stuff on the desk. I don't even have a desk in my new apartment, so I won't keep stuff like this.” (Madison)	IF object does not align with revised spatial assignment	Writing materials and papers	<i>Alignment with spatial assignment</i>	Dispose
“It's relatively easy with food. I threw away what was expired or already opened.” (Nathalie)	IF packaged food is in an open container	Food	<i>Safety of Consumption</i>	Dispose

NOTE: Examples for illustration the IF/THEN rules – based on evaluation criteria - of our informants.

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Consumers revise object spatialization

Another way in which consumers revise the DCS and make it more effective is by revising the object- or category-place assignment. Often, this step is a follow-up to revising object-category assignment and applies to those objects which have been assigned to a retention-oriented category. It involves consumers asking the question: What is the perfect place for this object or entire category inside my household? For most objects assigned to a retention-oriented category, this question is easy to answer (see column “consumers assign the object to the same place” in table 3) as they are already in their optimal place. Consider the ease with which Mathew assigns certain objects to places in his home: “For me, in principle, the form of the object determines the place. A jacket goes onto the hanger, a shoe goes on the shoe-holder, and a book goes into the bookshelf.” Here Mathew can find near-ideal places within the DCS. Similarly, Abby shares that some places are just “perfect” for a specific object. Rachel follows up on the idea of perfect places: “Especially in the kitchen you have perfect places. There is the bin under the sink, and the nice decoration things go onto the windowsill. But this is dependent on the objects. I think that photos can have a perfect place in the room, as well as furniture.” Note the ease with which Rachel can find object-place linkages in the kitchen while expending hardly any cognitive effort. The perfect places to assign to certain objects are almost obvious. Spencer highlights another characteristic of “perfect” places when he states that they are the places that make it easy to “find the items that you are looking for.” (Column “consumers assign the object to the same place” in table 3).

Another class of possessions which consumers find easy to place is members of an existing retention-oriented category. Note that each retention-oriented category has already been assigned a correct place in the DCS. Consider the case of Annabelle who found cleaning supplies in her basement during the decluttering process. Annabelle easily and correctly

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places the newly found cleaning supplies in a kitchen cupboard that already contains other cleaning supplies (column “consumers assign the object next to other category members” in table 4). In the case of such objects, consumers can put those items back in the place where they should belong. Consumers do not have to change existing object-place linkages, nor do they have to produce new ones. Thus, they do not necessarily revise the existing DCS. Rather, this action is closer to what Dion and colleagues (2014) refer to as “tidying up” where the objective is to put things in an already-existing “right” place to reduce category transgressions.

However, finding the right place for those objects which are not part of an already “placed” category can be far more mentally challenging. For instance, we saw Ella struggle for over an hour to find the “correct place” for candles, thinking about putting them into the living room or even the basement until they finally found a place in the cupboard in the kitchen. Finding the right place is sometimes a trial-and-error process where consumers “often move objects from place A to B” (Mary, decluttering coach). Gianna highlights the amount of effort needed when changing the spatial assignment of objects: “Only after living here for two years have I been able to figure out where I want to have things. You need those years to really figure out which kind of things you need and then you put them in the right place so that you do not need to walk too far. And you also realize which kind of things you do not need too often. For instance, our skiing equipment is really in the farthest corner.” Gianna finds that coming up with an effective spatial assignment is a reflexive and time-consuming process, without clear guidelines that helps consumers along, and takes a certain amount of consumer learning (Maciel and Wallendorf 2017).

We find three inter-related ways in which consumers revise object-place assignments:

- 1) singularize - consumers physically separate one specific possession from other members of the category,
- 2) re-position - they re-position an entire category to a new place or
- 3) compartmentalize - they divide existing space into smaller units.

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Consumers can singularize an object for a number of reasons – beauty, functionality, emotional connection or alignment with everyday habits, among others. For instance, Arianna puts her everyday perfume in a more accessible spot. Gianna places her husband's jacket separately as it is more convenient for him when leaving home in the morning. Spencer places some medication next to his bed while others are in the medicine cupboard. Ella puts a bottle of whiskey not next to the other bottles, but next to her craft materials because the bottle is special to her as it was a gift (column “consumers singularize an object” in table 4).

Another way is to assign a new place to an entire category. This involves finding a new place within the same room or moving it to an entirely new area of the house, for instance a basement for storage (Belk et al. 2007). Abby and Samuel move the tires in their cellar from behind the entrance door to below a window to gain a more accessible and ordered space. Gianna moves Easter decorations closer to the Christmas decoration. She also places her used skiing equipment into the furthest corner in the basement. Similarly, Angelina puts all her sports gear onto an outside shelf because it is easier to reach there (column “consumers reposition the whole category to a new place” in table 4).

Sometimes consumers also compartmentalize existing space, i.e., they divide existing space into a number of smaller units. For instance, we find Maxwell who uses small plastic boxes to re-organize his office supplies drawer. Evan compartmentalizes his big beauty drawer into smaller compartments to get a more intuitive arrangement. Linda uses plastic boxes to divide her kitchen area into smaller, more manageable units. Erica repurposes boxes and containers from the basement to compartmentalize the kitchen into smaller units that reinforce the new spatial assignment. Other consumers report buying new shelves and boxes to divide existing space and reinforce the revised system. Please consider the following example of Gianna. (column “consumers compartmentalize the space” in table 4).

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Figure 4 The compartmentalization of space



NOTE: Gianna, one of our informants, compartmentalizes space.

This photo of Gianna's basement shows the outcome of a compartmentalization process. Gianna uses storage racks to divide the room into smaller compartments with more explicit category and spatial boundaries (Cutright 2012). She had three goals: First, to make the underlying system (the DCS) more effective at differentiating between different categories of objects; second, to ensure that the number of members of a particular category does not exceed either her needs or the category's capacity; third, to ensure that everyone in the household (including the cleaner) share the same understanding of object-place linkages and can easily find objects. The initial spatial assignment does not fulfill her goals. She then repositions household objects according to the following logic: On the lowest level she places everyday use items that should be easy to reach, e.g., shoes. On the smaller middle-level

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“compartment”, she puts clothes in a way that they do not take up much space. On the topmost level, she places rarely needed things such as replacement shoes and wrapping paper. This compartmentalized arrangement also strengthens the spatial function as smaller units of space can have more clearly demarcated boundaries that can help “arrange everything in a wonderful way” (Lily).

Consumers cement categorical assignments using labels (e.g., Layla, Lily and Evan). Labels ensure that objects and categories are strongly connected to specific places so that consumers know where to keep or find things. Labeling can add “clarity and efficiency” (Spencer) to the existing DCS. Labels also reinforce the existing DCS as they make it easy for other household members to “follow the same system” (Simon), even in the case of objects that sometimes become invisible, for instance objects placed in large, opaque boxes (Layla). We analyze one specific labeling scheme (Evan) and the process that leads to its conceptualization.

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Figure 5 The use of labeling



NOTE: The picture on the left shows Evan’ spatial scheme. The picture on the right shows the scheme brought to life.

Evan’s conceptual diagram illustrates the cognitive effort that underpins spatial assignment in the household. Evan uses PowerPoint to conceptualize his kitchen pantry’s spatial arrangement. He spends time tinkering with and optimizing the arrangement and tries to allocate items to different places. He then figures out the kind of containers he needs to purchase and brings his conceptualization to life by making the appropriate object-place linkages. As a final step, once he finds a spatial assignment that works, he sticks labels onto all the objects or containers. He has to deal with significant setup cost to develop and bring to life the labeling scheme, but at the same time highlights the subsequent automatization of

action and reduction of cognitive effort. For instance, he can now “distinguish the basil from the oregano just by looking at the box.”

DISCUSSION

To better conceptualize the building blocks of household (re)organization, we interviewed, and observed, consumers who undertook what is known in popular culture as “decluttering”. We offer three primary contributions to existing theorization about household consumption. First, by mobilizing a category-research lens, we extend previous research on household possessions and uncover dynamics within domestic classification systems. Second, we provide a novel perspective on consumers’ difficulties of detachment from mundane possessions. Third, we highlight the learning process that equips consumers to better manage and control the accumulation of goods as they participate in an affluent, abundant Western society.

The dynamics of domestic classification systems

Consumer researchers have studied household consumption in a number of ways, especially as it relates to questions of identity and the doing of family (Csikszentmihalyi and Rocheburg-Halton 1981; McCracken 1989; Douglas 1991). Yet we know surprisingly little about the dynamics of domestic classification systems that organize consumer homes. Existing studies offer initial insights into home organization but lack a conceptualization that moves beyond possessions being organized through mainly static, culturally informed classification systems (Arsel and Bean 2013; Dion et al. 2014).

Mobilizing the analytical lens of category research, our findings provide a conceptualization of domestic classification systems that highlights their dynamism and

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shows how consumers have the agency to change them. In Dion and colleagues' (2014, 565) conceptualization, "the social order inscribed in the scheme of cultural categories" determines the home's symbolic classification system. Mess, disorder and symbolic pollution result when things are not in their culturally agreed-upon "right places" (Douglas 1967). Thus, consumer action is focused on "tidying-up" - minimizing transgressions and reinforcing the existing symbolic classification system. They briefly speculate about the dynamic nature of domestic classification systems when they call for future research to better understand how contextual shifts "disrupt home classifications [and] impose the development of new classifications" (Dion et al. 2014, 585). We detail the different actions that consumers can take to revise the very structure of domestic classification systems. Consumers are no longer enslaved by their possessions or "locked in by their symbolic domestic classifications" (585). Instead, consumers revise ineffective domestic classification systems in several ways with the goal of setting up an efficient DCS.

Further, we detail how this dynamism facilitates the expulsion of certain objects from the DCS. Past research (Arsel and Bean 2013; Epp and Price 2010) shows that those objects aligned with desired meanings and doings deserve to be retained and embedded in the existing DCS. Their practice and taste-oriented approaches are powerful in explaining which possessions remain in the household. However, they don't shed much light on the dynamics of object disposal from the home. For instance, Arsel and Bean (2013) show how consumers create a liminal space within the home where they place those objects that need to be "cooled down" before they are removed from the household. However, the underlying mechanisms of object disposal – why, when and which objects are chosen for disposal – remain absent. Our study offers a complementary explanation of disposal choices that do not depend on taste and identity but are about inter-relationships between the objects.

This study focuses on the domain of household consumption as it relates to physical possessions. Yet increasingly consumers spend a significant amount of their lives in online

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environments that contain virtual goods. Future research might explore how consumers organize their possessions and connections in the online sphere, i.e., digital decluttering.

Detachment from mundane objects

We know that consumers can form strong emotional connections with their possessions (Ahuvia 2005; Ferraro, Escalas, and Bettman 2011; Fournier 1998; Kleine and Baker 2004; Trudel, Arg, and Meng 2016). The more an object is linked to a consumer's identity, the less likely it is to be removed from the household (Trudel et al. 2016). Existing research argues that the move from "me" to "not me" determines the move from valued possession to garbage (Lucas 2016; Roster 2014) and that in the case of special possessions, consumers often undertake elaborate divestment rituals to "re-commodify" objects (McCracken 1986).

The question of identity rarely arises in the case of mundane, everyday possessions, which are often transient, invisible, or limited in value (Tuan 1980). Past research tells us that consumers have a qualitatively different relationship to mundane objects than to cherished, meaningful possessions (Coupland 2005). Based on this literature one could assume that letting go of mundane objects is an easy task that does not require a lot of consumer reflexivity.

Yet our findings demonstrate that the disposal and detachment of mundane possessions is not without difficulty. For instance, consumers struggle against a variety of categorical dilemmas (only one of which pertains to emotional/identity connections) as they try to figure out whether to retain or dispose of a specific object in their household. Even mundane, everyday objects exert a certain inertia in the domestic environment. They hide, they blend in (Coupland 2005), they form connections with other objects. They fight to be retained within the existing DCS.

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We offer a complementary explanation of why “consumers hold on to ordinary objects” that foregrounds the challenges of disposing of objects with respect to the existing DCS instead of consumers’ ability to place objects in one of many disposition conduits (Türe 2014). This explanation finds a parallel in other contexts where a connection exists between objects, consumers and a “household system” (Coupland 2005, 116). We argue that it is not only consumers who have a propensity to retain objects (Haws et al. 2012), but also objects which are embedded in an existing DCS.

How then do consumers dispose of mundane consumption objects? (Türe 2014, 68). We show the shift from an ad-hoc, idiosyncratic mode of thinking to a more rule-governed, programmatic or algorithmic mode of thinking when it comes to making retention/disposal decisions for mundane objects. This programmatic thinking promotes object detachment and accelerates the shift from an identity-oriented perspective to a system-oriented perspective. Our informants develop IF-THEN rules that enhance decision-making capabilities, especially related to disposal-oriented decisions. The more such rules consumers are able to formulate and follow, the more they shift from idiosyncrasy to systematization in the revision of the existing DCS, and the more easily they are able to let go of mundane objects. As a corollary, programmatic thinking also helps our informants to avoid the negative emotions – sadness, loss or grief – associated with disposing of consumer possessions (Young and Wallendorf 1989).

Evaluation criteria for dealing with the affluent society

Consumer homes don’t have limitless capacities to accumulate possessions (Lastovicka and Fernandez 2005). Yet, fueled by the “fire of desire”, consumers accumulate new possessions in significant numbers (Belk et al. 2003). As the intensity of accumulation increases, an affluent home might turn into a cluttered home with “an overabundance of

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material possessions that collectively create disorderly and chaotic home environments”

(Roster et al. 2016, 32).

Our research shows how consumers develop and use evaluation criteria to regulate the flow of objects in and out of their homes, to find the right balance between accumulation, retention and disposal. Consumers use these evaluation criteria to facilitate disposal of objects from their homes even though some of those objects might fulfil membership criteria (Khair and Wadhvani 2010). When put into practice, evaluation criteria trigger an evaluative competition between possessions assigned to the same retention-oriented category.

Consumers learn to refine evaluation criteria over several recursive iterations of decluttering, as they engage in a form of learning-by-doing. We argue that a consumer’s detachment expertise is a contributing factor in explaining the success or relative failure of decluttering, downsizing or disposal attempts in consumer homes. Consumers refine evaluation criteria over time and find new ways to enforce stricter application of these criteria. We see these attempts as a way for consumers to stabilize and build upon their learning from past attempts at decluttering (Llewellyn 2021).

Revising the existing DCS through decluttering is a recursive process, where the output of one decluttering drive becomes the input for the subsequent one. Consumers learn to create and apply stricter evaluation criteria – whether it is about getting rid of a certain number of objects or creating a particular “look” for the home. Over time, consumers get better not only at ensuring that the home does not remain in a cluttered state, but also at creating new avoidance “rules” for purchases or gifts.

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PAPER II

**HOW DO CONSUMERS (RE-)ORGANIZE THEIR DIGITAL LIVES THROUGH
DIGITAL DECLUTTERING?**

ABSTRACT

Consumers are facing an abundance not only of analog consumption objects but also of digital ones. Just as consumers try to organize their possessions in the analog world, they actively engage in practices to manage their digital lives. This includes the management of apps, emails, notifications, documents, folders, and pictures. So far, previous research revealed little about these efforts and practices that the authors frame under the term „digital decluttering“. The authors rely on in-depth interviews and netnographic data to identify why and how consumers engage in digital decluttering practices.

Keywords: digital lives, decluttering, qualitative research, consumer research.

INTRODUCTION

Consumers experience an abundance in digital consumption (Lehdonvirta and Castronova 2019). The average consumer has installed about 60-90 applications on their phone, although they spend most of their time on only three of them (Blair 2020). The number of digitally available products and services is rising (Koiso-Kanttila, 2004; Lehdonvirta, 2012; Watkins et al., 2016). Digital consumption objects can be of different forms, including apps, emails, notifications, documents, folders, and pictures.

Some consumers experience negative consequences through this abundance of digital consumption objects in their life. Newport states that consumers feel “exhausted” by the masses of digital tools and digital consumption objects (2019, p. x). Time spent online influences consumers’ moods, specifically on social media apps (Pantic 2014). Some consumers even feel a lack of control over their digital life (McKillop 2017). What do consumers do to battle the negative consequences of abundance in their digital life?

Emerging research enlightens our understanding of how consumers battle the negative consequences of abundance and accumulation in the analog world: Consumers engage in the disposal and reorganization of consumption objects (Roster, Ferrari, and Peter Jurkat 2016; Phillips and Sego 2011). Research found that consumers dispose of objects and reorganize their lives, particularly during transitional periods (Price, Arnould, and Curasi 2000; McAlexander 1991). Disposal and reorganization have been viewed as helpful in negotiating or enhancing consumers’ identity (Fernandez and Lastovicka 2011; Roster 2001; Phillips and Sego 2011). These practices are framed in popular media and academic papers as “decluttering” (Cherrier and Belk 2015; Kondō 2014).

We know less about how consumers battle the negative consequences of abundance and accumulation in the digital world. We study decluttering practices in the digital world to learn more about them. We define digital decluttering as an episodic practice that aims at

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transforming digital spaces (as well as consumption practices). Consumers are reorganizing and disposing of digital consumption objects to increase efficiency, functionality, and well-being (while decreasing inefficiencies, time-wasting, etc.). Digital decluttering aims at establishing a new structure to manage consumers' digital lives more efficiently (Newport 2019). The following table (see Table 26.1) gives an overview of how digital decluttering compares to neighboring concepts.

Table 8 Overview of neighboring concepts to digital decluttering

CONCEPT	DEFINITION
<i>Disposal</i>	« 'the separation of people from their things' (Gregson et al., 2007: 187) that comes as the last of the consumer behavior stages of acquisition, consumption, and disposal (Hanson, 1980; Jacoby et al., 1977).» (Phillips and Sego 2011, 435)
<i>Divestment</i>	« managing meaningful possessions' private and public meanings to facilitate satisfactory detachment from self and transfer to another.» (Lastovicka and Fernandez 2005, 814)
<i>Decluttering</i>	« an episodic practice with a beginning but no definitive end. Prior to decluttering, individuals may not realize that others judge their environment as cluttered or overcrowded. After initial decluttering, the space – physical and/or mental – has been transformed from disordered and messy to ordered and tidy and a plan is set in place to keep it so. » (Cherrier and Belk 2015, 1)
<i>Digital Detox</i>	« as a periodic disconnection from social or online media, or strategies to reduce digital media involvement. » (Syvertsen and Enli 2020)
<i>Digital Decluttering</i>	We define digital decluttering as an episodic practice that aims at transforming digital spaces (as well as consumption practices). Consumers are reorganizing and disposing of digital consumption objects to increase efficiency, functionality, and well-being (while decreasing inefficiencies, time-wasting, etc.). Digital decluttering aims at establishing a new structure to manage consumers' digital lives more efficiently (Newport 2019). (own definition)

Source: own elaboration.

LITERATURE REVIEW

We argue that we cannot transfer previous insights on the disposal and reorganization of analog consumption objects to the digital sphere without scrutinizing them. In the following, we synthesize literature across different disciplines (e.g., consumer research, information systems, and media studies). We identify five relevant characteristics to distinguish analog from digital consumption objects: immateriality, replicability, accessibility, moldability, and alluringness.

Immateriality. Immateriality refers to the intangible nature of digital consumption objects (Kirk and Swain 2018; Mardon and Belk 2018; Koiso-Kanttila 2004). This means the object itself cannot be touched. Though, digital consumption objects are consumed through some form of materiality or technical infrastructures, such as computers, phones, cables, or screens (Denegri-Knott and Molesworth 2010; Leonardi and Barley 2008; Orlikowski 2007).

This immateriality has implications for how consumers relate to consumption objects. First, some researchers argue that the intangible nature of digital objects may hinder the process of singularization (Belk, 1988; Kopytoff, 1986; McCracken, 1986). The process of singularization allows consumption objects to become special and meaningful to consumers. Belk (2013) theorizes that digital consumption objects cannot be ‘contaminated’ by the ‘essence of a person’ that may ‘rub off onto the object’ (Belk, 1988; Belk et al., 1989). Further, consumers perceive digital consumption objects differently in a digital space. Belk reasons that consumers consider consumption objects as invisible (2013). Odem and colleagues (2014) presume that consumers struggle to capture the size of digital consumption objects. Overall, digital consumption objects may “not clutter consumers’ homes in the way that material possessions have a tendency to” (Watkins, 2015, p. 46).

Replicability. Replicability refers to the possibility of endlessly copying digital consumption objects (Mardon and Belk 2018; Belk 2013). Digital consumption objects themselves do not change in the process of replication.

This characteristic is relevant because it impacts how consumers form relationships with digital consumption objects. According to Belk (2013), consumers struggle to single out digital consumption objects and turn them into something special. Digital consumption objects do not show a form of visible patina or ‘wear and tear’ that could help to distinguish one digital object from another (Watkins & Molesworth, 2012). Therefore, consumers may struggle to tell copies apart from an ‘original’ (Odom et al. 2014).

Accessibility. Accessibility refers to the characteristic that digital consumption objects (despite a necessary material component) can be accessed through multiple devices. Digital consumption objects can be present in various locations simultaneously (Odom et al. 2014; Kallinikos, Aaltonen, and Marton 2010). The access can be granted to single or multiple consumers (Belk 2013; Moeller and Wittkowski 2010). This characteristic is the basis to enable access-based products, services, and consumption (Bardhi and Eckhardt 2012).

The characteristic of accessibility has implications on how consumers relate to consumption objects. The opportunity to share and divide access produces more complex and fragmented forms of ownership (Watkins et al., 2016). New questions around agency over digital consumption objects arise.

Moldability. Moldability refers to the characteristic that digital objects’ form (e.g., adapted for various devices, merged with other objects) can be modified (Kallinikos et al. 2010; Odom et al. 2014). This quality also ensures that digital objects can be regularly updated (Kallinikos et al. 2010; Kallinikos 2009). Some researchers even argue that digital consumption objects are constantly in ‘incompleteness’ (Garud, Jain, and Tuertscher 2008). Moldability makes digital consumption objects more unstable than analog consumption

objects (Ekbia 2009; Kallinikos, Aaltonen, and Marton 2013; Siddiqui and Turley 2006). We acknowledge that analog objects can be adapted to a degree as well. Being able to adapt a consumption object is one premise for singularization practices (Kopytoff 1986; Epp and Price 2010). However, third parties (e.g., content creators or other users) can adapt digital consumption objects even after a successful purchase.

This characteristic is relevant because those ever-changing objects may lose their initial value to the consumer (Kleine, Kleine, and Allen 1995; Lastovicka and Fernandez 2005).

Alluringness. Alluringness refers to the addictive qualities of digital consumption objects (Alter 2017). Although analog objects can also have an alluring character, companies frequently design digital consumption objects to hook consumers and prolong the interaction with the object (Singer 2015).

This characteristic is relevant because it impacts consumers' relationship with digital consumption objects. The interaction with digital virtual consumption objects can become compulsive (Meerkerk et al. 2009; Roberts, Yaya, and Manolis 2014). Consequently, cutting the interaction with digital consumption objects with alluring features may be a struggle (Schoenebeck 2014).

The literature review shows that digital consumption objects differ in their nature from analog consumption objects. We argue that these characteristics force consumers to adapt their practices when striving to reorganize their digital lives.

METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

To explore how consumers manage their digital lives, we rely on in-depth interviews and netnographic data. We interviewed nine consumers about their digital decluttering practices who had recently digitally decluttered (Qu and Dumay 2011).

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In our data analysis, we relied on an iterative coding approach (Strauss and Corbin 1990; Holton 2012). First, we read through the verbatim transcripts of the interviews, video content, and Reddit threads to develop an understanding of relevant themes. We then iteratively went back and forth between the interview transcripts, our specific research interests, and selected themes (e.g., motivations or practices) (Thompson 1997; Arnold and Fischer 1994). For triangulation, we went through the transcripts of the video content and Reddit threads to see whether naturally occurring data would reveal additional insights. The authors grouped the codes into more abstract concepts (Spiggle 1994).

Table 9 Data collection table overview

TYPE OF DATA	DESCRIPTION	GOAL OF DATA COLLECTION
<i>In-depth interviews</i>	▪ 9 interviews (30 – 150 mins, average 90 mins) ▪ Interviews were transcribed verbatim (178 pages of transcripts (single-spaced))	▪ The sample consists of consumers who had recently digitally decluttered or were about to. ▪ The participants shared their current computer, iPad, and/or phone organization in real-life or via screen sharing with the research team. ▪ The transcripts were systematically coded, focusing on consumption practices (Deterding and Waters 2021).
<i>Netnographic data</i>	▪ YouTube videos (308 mins.) ▪ Video content was transcribed verbatim (111 pages of transcribed content) ▪ Threats from Redditt (99 document pages (single-spaced))	▪ As consumers actively seek advice online, we considered it relevant to turn to digital outlets for triangulation (Kozinets 2002a; 2002b). ▪ YouTube is a platform with strong relevance for ‘practices of cultural production’ (Arthurs, Drakopoulou, and Gandini 2018). On YouTube, consumers shared their digital decluttering journeys and advised others how to approach the process. ▪ The Reddit discussions provide an additional, naturally occurring, rich data set (Proferes et al. 2021). Consumers on their threads ask for tips for decluttering, share their experiences, and engage in discussions.

Source: own elaboration.

FINDINGS

In this section, we reveal why consumers start to reorganize their digital life:

Consumers digitally declutter when they reach maximum storage capacity, experience mental overload, waste time, lose the overview, and/ or struggle with compromised functionality.

Next, we illustrate how consumers reorganize their digital life through digital decluttering practices. We find consumers cutting the interaction, archiving it, limiting it, or simplifying the interaction with their digital consumption object.

Why do consumers reorganize their digital lives?

Consumers reach maximum storage capacity

Some consumers feel the need to start a digital decluttering process once they reach the maximum storage capacity in a digital space (e.g., brimming hard drive). Consumers want to free up some of their storage with their digital decluttering process. Reaching maximum storage capacity forces consumers to trade between digital consumption objects. Dylan, a 24-year-old student, explains how he proceeds when reaching the storage capacity of his apple watch: “Then suddenly, I had six Spanish podcasts that I never listened to. But my Apple Watch has limited storage. That means if you have ten podcasts on the watch and don’t listen to any of them, that blocks the new ones. And then it was a relatively smooth process; I deleted a few after the motto, ‘What makes sense? How much can I listen to per week?’ And now, out of ten or eleven podcasts, I have four or five.” Dylan explains that the number of podcasts he is subscribed to overwhelms his apple watch. The storage limits of his apple watch force him to delete old podcasts and select a smaller number of podcasts to follow. Other consumers experience similar struggles. Sandra received a new work phone with less storage capacity than her previous phone. The new restriction motivates her to declutter some of her photos. Consumers can circumvent those storage capacity restrictions by buying

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additional storage. However, consumers' eagerness to purchase additional storage capacity may differ: Abby is "happy to make that deal", while Dylan refuses to pay more money for it.

Consumers experience mental overload

Some consumers feel the need to start a digital decluttering process once they experience mental overload. With their digital decluttering process, they want to free their mental space. The constant accessibility of digital consumption objects can seduce consumers to be constantly connected. The constant connectivity can become exhausting and stressful for consumers. The alluringness and persistent demands from digital consumption objects can drain the mental capacities of consumers. Mathew, a 65-year-old, self-employed doctor, a very neatly organized person, describes how he feels about the number of emails he receives: "Every email needs attention from me. I must decide when an email comes [in] whether it's relevant or not. And it's best if I don't get it in the first place because I've organized it away beforehand. Then I don't have to make that decision. [...] I must give attention to things I don't want to give it to. They are not worth the attention. And I must be economical with my attention. As you know, I'm a little older. And my energy for quality attention must be used sparingly." Mathew, Interview

Mathew describes how every email demands his attention and drains his mental capacities. For Mathew, his "attention" is a scarce resource and limited. Mathew is not alone in this struggle. Linda, a 30-year-old art expert, and scholar who decided to "fast" social media, explains that she is tired of filling every minute of her life with digital content. Linda complains that her "brain never has a break". At the end of the day, she feels "knackered". Dylan complains about being "torn out of [a] current activity" through, for example, notifications. These distractions mean he is "no longer 100 percent on the job, no matter what

that job is”. In a similar vein, David states that “[t]his serenity, this mental clarity is what I want to achieve with decluttering”.

Consumers waste time

Consumers feel the need to start a digital decluttering process once they realize that they waste time in digital spaces. With their digital decluttering process, they want to find more time for the activities they truly want to engage in. Digital consumption objects have alluring qualities, and their use can become (to a degree) addictive. Dylan, a self-proclaimed efficiency maximizer and optimizer in all parts of his life, shares his dissatisfaction with his YouTube consumption: “For me, a very extreme ‘time waster’, during my bachelor’s degree YouTube, that was a perfect television replacement for me. [...] I don’t watch series because I’m afraid of them. I’m like, ‘Okay, if I start a series - my self-discipline is not that good.’ [...] YouTube was great, of course, because you have a vlog that’s 25 minutes long, and at some point, you know what it’s about. You have a relationship with the influencer, and you understand this influencer. That ate up so much time at some point. And of course, when you’re in a stressful exam preparation, and suddenly every detail is more important than preparing for the exam, that’s dangerous. That was a big point. I then tried to declutter.” Dylan describes how unhappy he was with how much time his YouTube consumption would consume in his day. He consciously refrains from starting to watch series because he fears getting too involved. He admits to not having the self-control to stop himself from bingeing the whole series. Other respondents share a similar concern. Abby admits that she purposefully does not go on TikTok because she “notice[s] the potential for seduction, that you’re then there forever a bit like YouTube”.

Wasting time is seemingly not about the absolute time consumers dedicate to media use but how well the time spent aligns with the consumer’s overall goals in life. Abby and

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Dylan are concerned that their media use distracts them from more important things (e.g., studying for an exam). In Abby's opinion, content on TikTok has only entertainment value, so she views TikTok just as a "pastime". Similarly, the 21-year-old creative, David, wants to purposefully avoid "content that doesn't get you anywhere in life". Consequently, he transitions from "consuming videos and books and all that just because it entertains [him] to consciously consuming media that [he] can benefit from, that [he] can learn lessons from".

Consumers lose the overview

Some consumers feel the need to start a digital decluttering process once they lose the overview of their digital consumption objects. With their decluttering efforts, they want to regain control over their consumption objects. Claire, who also went through an analog decluttering process before her digital decluttering, describes her motivation: "And then those are just data battles that you have. You've got photos of all the events everywhere [...]. I mean, it's nothing big, but it's full of data. [...] Then I had an SD card. But I didn't remember if I had saved the photos on the SD card. Then I backed up the whole SD card somewhere. It was just a huge mess. I thought everything was already backed up somewhere. But I just didn't have an overview anymore. [...]." Claire explains how she accumulates photos without any system and, in that process, loses track of the data. For her, the abundance of digital consumption objects poses a challenge for proper organization. Often consumers lose the overview when they store different types of digital consumption objects together. Erica describes her dissatisfaction with "documents [being] wildly cluttered with images and different file formats". Increased storage capacity and the possibility of replicating consumption objects also enable thoughtless data management, as we see in Claire's case.

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Consumers struggle with compromised functionality

Consumers feel the need to start a digital decluttering process once they experience compromised functionality, e.g., they do not find their digital consumption objects (fast enough), or the device becomes slow due to data overload. Our respondent Sean, a 27-year-old marketing scholar, complained about not being able to use his photo collection properly: “I really can’t find anything anymore. I already had a bit of a problem in the past [...], and the problem still has not been solved today. But now, coupled with this increase in the number of photos, videos, and WhatsApp images, this pushed the problem extremely. I just can’t find images I need from time to time that I would like to send anymore. By the way, I think it’s still amazing that it’s so poorly managed to this day. There are timelines and locations which you can use to filter them. But that’s not where AI helps.” Sean complains that the IT infrastructure is unable to support his sorting and organizing processes. There are many photos, and he must go through them and sort them by hand. The suggested sorting mechanisms, like timelines or locations, do not help him get the photos in his desired structure. With the abundance of photos without a clear structure, Dylan struggles to navigate the digital space. Dylan is not alone in his frustration. Mathew, who grew up with still limited storage capacities, declutters his phone regularly because he wants it to “remain functional”. He is confident that “[a] lot of data also always means that a technology system tends to be overloaded”.

How do consumers reorganize their digital lives?

We find that consumers reorganize their digital lives by cutting, archiving, limiting, or simplifying their interaction with digital consumption objects. Those practices – and their interplay – allow consumers to organize their digital lives in a better way. For analytical clarity, we will present the practices as distinct.

Cutting the interaction with the consumption object

Consumers are cutting off the interaction with a digital consumption object by removing it from their live. This practice is comparable to the analog practice of “trashing”. Cutting the interaction with the consumption object can be achieved through various practices. It entails practices like deleting, unsubscribing, unfollowing, muting, blocking, or disabling whole networks or single applications, content, notifications, or creators. Dylan engages in a few of these activities with his Instagram application: “I turned off the notifications [for Instagram] a long time ago because I quickly realized that it becomes very dangerous. I used to follow 12 travel accounts. Now there are only two or three. [...] The dark symbols, they’re all muted stories. [...] The girlfriend of a good buddy of mine, of course, I follow her. But she [runs] a beauty page [...]. I don’t want to see her stories. Then I have a travel site whose pictures I like very much but whose stories do not interest me or are too much. Then, for example, I have a rap artist who I think is cool but whose daily life doesn’t interest me. Some personal life people I follow because they follow me, but I don’t find the stories interesting. Yeah, that’s pretty much it. That’s also a very clear procedure. If an app does too many stories - no matter how important they may be - it’s immediately muted. Because it then takes up too much of my life.” Dylan customizes his Instagram feed by blocking notifications, unfollowing accounts, and muting stories. His decision criteria to mute stories are the frequency of posting and the content’s relevance for him. He is not interested in, for example, the beauty content of his friend’s girlfriend or the personal life of a musician. He wants to avoid this type of content now and does not plan on engaging with it in the future.

Archiving the interaction with the consumption object

Consumers are archiving the interaction to a digital consumption object by using external storage, doing a backup, or using a “hide” function. Abby explains why she is archiving some of her digital consumption objects: “And otherwise, some hard drives have just to fulfill the purpose of archiving old stuff. [...] It would be stupid if it were all gone. It would be a real shame and make me sad because photos or something from ten years ago would be gone. But yes, they serve as an archive because otherwise, I would need a laptop with probably ten terabytes of memory. Because then you accumulate a lot over time, so they don’t get lost.” Abby shares the struggle that she wants to keep more digital consumption objects than her computer storage allows. Therefore, she creates separate storage for objects she is not using too often (e.g., photos or other memory objects). Coping with limited active storage capacity is a common struggle. Erica is concerned that data would “[...] clutter up the internal hard drive, [so she] now store[s] a lot externally”. Storing objects in separate spaces also happens in analog decluttering processes (Epp and Price 2010). Increasingly digital spaces offer opportunities to ‘hide’ digital consumption objects. For example, applications are then placed in less visible and accessible spaces. Archiving the connection to digital consumption objects makes them invisible at first glance but allows consumers to retrieve the object, if necessary, easily.

Limiting the interaction with the consumption object

Consumers are limiting their interaction with digital objects by adapting time (e.g., technology-free periods), duration (e.g., overall screen time), or frequency of interaction (e.g., unlocking the phone or apps). Consumers may not want to fully remove a digital consumption object (e.g., an app) when satisfied with the content they are provided. Linda tells us how she

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limits her interaction: “Once a week, my screen time is automatically displayed. [...] I always put my phone into airplane mode at night; accordingly, you can set such a bedtime. So, when I set my alarm clock and the sleep time, that yes automatically puts the phone in such a mode that you would not see any push notifications in that set sleep time. [...]” Linda limits her phone use to specific hours. She puts her phone in sleep mode at night. She does not receive notifications during that time, which may motivate her to check her phone. Dylan, for example, chooses to define a limit by only watching YouTube during mealtimes. Linda is also aware of her overall screen time through a weekly report. Erica gets a weekly report on how often she unlocks her phone and her top three most-used apps.

Simplifying the interaction with the consumption object

Consumers are simplifying the interaction with their digital consumption objects by aligning objects with their daily routines. Consumers can simplify their interaction by merging the access to digital consumption objects, placing digital consumption objects to make them more (or less) accessible, naming them, and creating hierarchies (e.g., for folders or documents). David, a 21-year-old self-development enthusiast, describes how he went from using several applications to just one: “But everything, to-dos, and notes on projects I then digitized for the first time. I did that with Todoist and Apple Note. I used that for notes. That’s when it bothered me that it was in different places. So, everything was kind of, that was in notebooks, that was in the journal, that was in the second journal. My to-dos were there. If I had to-dos on projects, I didn’t know, do I have to put the to-do for the project in with the to-do lists now or with the project notes. It was just a little messy. The whole transition was very, very messy. Until I finally discovered a tool called Notion and finally found the tool there where I had absolute freedom over the design of my workflow. [...] If it doesn’t all go in one place, I just forget where I put the stuff down. Then I haven’t achieved

my main goal. I want to create order in the chaos. If I have chaos in my order, I've missed the mark. [...] To be honest, I don't want to ask myself: Where did I put that? Did I make a note in Evernote? Did I write it in my physical journal? That's why I now have everything here in Notion." David is bothered by having relevant information, which belongs together, in different places. Having the information spread over different applications makes his workflow "a little messy". As a result, he does not find relevant information or question about where to store which information. His system is not running smoothly. The application he now uses allows him to design a space that fits his workflow and thinking. Consumers strive for a structure in their digital life that aligns with their daily routines and thinking. Dylan explains that his "thought structure is also a big part of [his] folder structure". With the mental structures that change, the digital structures change too. As Erica goes through a folder with pictures and states that "[t]his arrangement is still from teenage times. Maybe I would sort it completely different now". Consumers can simplify interactions by establishing new interactions (e.g., creating new folders or downloading a new application like David). Then consumers can consciously place objects (e.g., on the desktop, into specific folders) to be more easily accessible. Further, they can rename digital consumption objects (e.g., folders or documents) to find and interact with them more easily. They can also merge digital consumption objects as they are moldable (e.g., pulling different email addresses together).

DISCUSSION

Our study enlightens our understanding of how consumers organize their digital lives and dispose of digital consumption objects. We respond to calls for further research on how consumers manage digital possessions (Dion, Sabri, and Guillard 2014) and how they engage in techno-consumption (Kozinets et al. 2019).

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Like analog decluttering (Cherrier and Belk 2015), consumers engage in digital decluttering as they feel overwhelmed by clutter or lose the overview of their possessions (Cwerner and Metcalfe 2003). One significant difference in why consumers declutter is the importance of aesthetic criteria. In the analog world, the aesthetic dimension seems to play a substantial role (Dion et al. 2014; Douglas 2013), i.e., consumers orchestrate their household possessions according to their idea of a taste regime (Arsel and Bean 2013). We find that consumers are less concerned with aesthetic criteria during their digital decluttering processes. We concur with Kallinikos and colleagues (2013) that digital spaces “(...) derive utility from the functional relations they maintain” (p. 357). Other researchers suggested that consumers approach digital spaces more goal-orientated (Denegri-Knott and Molesworth 2013). We argue that the decreased importance of aesthetic criteria is rooted in the immaterial nature of digital consumption goods. Future research could tease out when consumers apply aesthetic criteria to digital spaces and how these criteria impact consumers’ reorganization and disposal decisions.

Further, prior research about digital consumption objects also theorizes that consumers perceive those objects as “invisible” (Belk 2013; Odom et al. 2014). Researchers theorize that due to the invisible nature and increased storage capacities, consumers seem to care less about how much of these consumption objects they own or have access to (Belk 2013). In our findings, we show that even ephemeral, access-based consumption might as well be burdensome for consumers. Our informants describe feeling overwhelmed, losing overview, and being mentally drained through too many demands from and interaction with their digital consumption objects. We also see how consumers try to cope with this burden of access in the digital world. In our case, consumers engage in decluttering practices. Future research could investigate other ways how consumers cope with the burdens related to digital consumption (e.g., digital detox or not owning digital consumption objects).

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PAPER III

**HOW DO CONSUMERS MANAGE TECHNOLOGICALLY INDUCED SCARCITY
OF TIME THROUGH DIGITAL DECLUTTERING PRACTICES?**

ABSTRACT

Technology has become all-consuming and tempts consumers to waste time online. To combat technologically induced time scarcity, consumers engage in digital decluttering practices. Consumers are increasing intentionality and regaining agency over their consumption practices. With our research, we further explore the role of time in consumption decisions.

Keywords: time scarcity, time management, digital decluttering, reflexive consumption.

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, scholarly interest in the impact of resource scarcity on consumer behavior has been increasing (Goldsmith, Griskevicius, and Hamilton 2020). Resource scarcity can be defined as “a subjective sense of having more needs than resources” (Mullainathan and Shafir 2014, 184:86). When resources are limited, ever-increasing need-creation and the abundance of market offerings can boost perceptions of scarcity. This is what consumers experience, for example, around time, which is finite and can neither be acquired nor stored (Feldman and Hornik 1981; Woermann and Rokka 2015; Cotte, Ratneshwar, and Mick 2004). Consumers must allocate time between consumption opportunities and tasks (Holbrook and Lehmann 1981; Kaufman, Lane, and Lindquist 1991). When consumers try to “save time”, they reallocate time between different activities to increase efficiency (Feldman and Hornik 1981; Fernbach, Kan, and Lynch 2015). Consumers start to prioritize what to spend time on (Fernbach et al. 2015). So far, little is known about these reallocation decisions of consumers. We follow the call for research to work on a resource-based model for consumers and improve our understanding of how consumers perceive and invest resources (Arnould and Thompson 2005). Our paper aims to address the research question: How do consumers manage the scarcity of time resources through digital decluttering practices?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Time is a relevant concept for consumption decisions and experiences as it can mediate the quality and attractiveness of offerings in the market (Woermann and Rokka 2015). Previous research focused on how retailers can adapt experiences of time to accommodate their consumers’ preferences (Arnould 2005; Kozinets et al. 2004). Retailing research has focused strongly on minimizing the duration of consumers’ waiting time (Berry, Seiders, and Grewal 2002; Hui, Thakor, and Gill 1998; Messinger and Narasimhan 1997).

However, additional research showed that the temporal duration of an activity does not equate to the perceived temporality of a consumption experience or practice (Woermann and Rokka 2015). For example, Husemann et al. (2019) showed that unwanted technological interruptions were associated with feelings of acceleration. Consumers slowed down temporal experience by limiting and controlling device usage. Woermann et al. (2015) found that the misalignment of practices can cause temporal rush and stress. Practice misalignment is a negative state for consumers, who then engage in efforts to realign the practices (Phipps and Ozanne 2017; Thomas and Epp 2019).

Paradoxically, modern technology is often acquired to save time and increase productivity; however, it often ends up wasting time (Mick and Fournier 1998). Consumers face diverse opportunities to engage in specific consumption practices in the physical and, increasingly, in the digital realm. Digital spaces enable “new opportunities for transformational spaces and, therefore, new forms of pleasure and experience. What we are only just able to see and document is the range of new practices that these spaces are allowing” (Denegri-Knott and Molesworth 2010, 116). Research shows that digital spheres can have this alluring character and even increase consumers’ desire to consume (Hoffman and Novak 2018; Kozinets et al. 2017). The alluring nature of technological devices then seduces consumers into spending a considerable amount of time online, which can lead to feelings of wasting time and decreased productivity (Gonzalez Rodriguez 2020). For many consumers, time feels like a scarce resource anyway (Bellezza, Paharia, and Keinan 2016), and techno-consumption can increase the experience of resource scarcity. Consumers are confronted with conflicts and trade-offs, e.g., between the online and offline worlds or leisure and work activities (Kozinets, 2008). Little is known about how consumers efficiently and effectively allocate time in their techno-consumption.

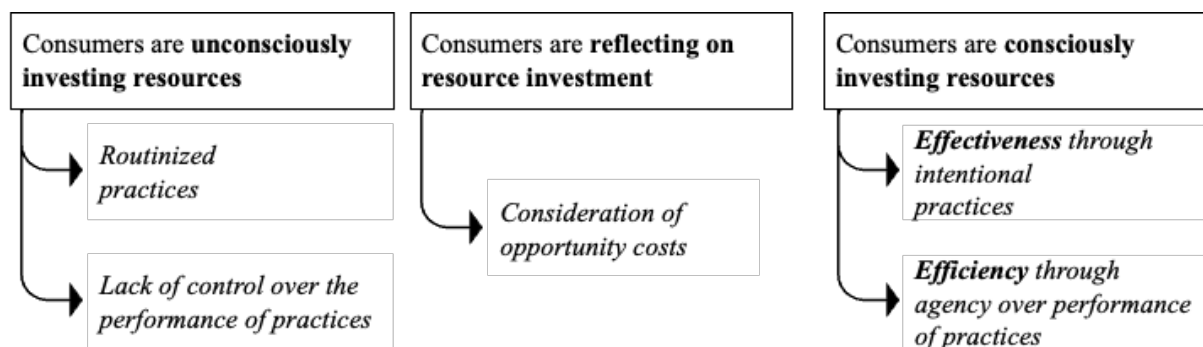
METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

To gain insights into consumers' techno-consumption, we studied the phenomenon of digital decluttering (Newport 2019). Overall, decluttering has become a major societal trend in the analog and digital spheres (Cherrier and Belk 2015). For this study, we examined 19 in-depth interviews with consumers who shared how they organized and decluttered their digital life. The interviews ranged from 40 – 153 minutes, averaging 67 minutes. The interviews resulted in 300 pages of transcripts (single-spaced). Further, we examined 29 videos (308 minutes) on digital decluttering from YouTube, which were turned into 111 pages of transcribed content (single-spaced). We extracted discussions on digital decluttering from Redditt, resulting in 99 pages (single-spaced).

The transcripts were then systematically coded based on a grounded theory approach (Glaser and Strauss 1967). Time and time scarcity was identified as a central concept, which consumers kept referring to repeatedly. We then started to develop a theory around how consumers gain time.

FINDINGS

Model 1 Stages of consumers combating technologically induced scarcity of time through digital decluttering practices



Consumers invest resources unconsciously

Resource investment in the online sphere is unconscious for many consumers before they start decluttering. For example, Linda, a well-organized respondent, shared this with us: “I think it was more of a rational decision [...]. I thought it would be healthy to give it up for a while and then do it again more consciously. And that was the intention with Instagram, too. [...] It was more rational for me in the sense of an alarmingly high screen time or this awareness of constantly looking at it. Then at the end of the day, you’re totally knackered because you always have your brain running on three channels” Linda describes making the rational choice to distance herself from technology to be able to approach it more “consciously” and more intentionally afterward. She confronted herself with the time she had invested in using these apps and realized that she was constantly directing her attention to her phone. She became aware that this harmed her well-being and left her feeling drained by the end of the day.

While in traditional marketplaces, consumers consciously exchange money for material goods (Kozinets, 2002), the exchanges in digital marketplaces can involve exchanging alternative resources (e.g., time or attention), which is often less conscious. Many offerings in the digital sphere are free of direct monetary charge; however, consumers pay with their attention or time (Davenport and Beck 2001). Consumption in the digital sphere is less material and focuses on access instead of traditional ownership (Bardhi and Eckhardt 2017; Bardhi, Eckhardt, and Arnould 2012). Consumers must first realize that they are trading resources, like time and attention, and that they are paying the price for the investment of their resources. In Linda’s case, she realized that her well-being suffered. But why do consumers still engage in practices which bring them undesirable outcomes?

Consumer behavior online consists of many highly routinized practices. This permits the unconscious investment of resources (i.e., time and attention). A deliberate choice is not

made in advance. This is what David, a 24-year-old student with a strong focus on optimizing many parts of his life, described: “It [using a specific app] kind of became a routine. A routine that I did not question. But at some point, it became too much and felt out of my control. It was not that I was addicted or anything. It just was a very routinized procedure. It was tough when I wanted to break with that routine.” David describes how he did not question that behavior. Giving his time and attention to the application had become his default setting. He needed to break the routine and reset his behavior at a certain point. However, material setups often support specific routines and practices (Phipps and Ozanne 2017). David described how he felt he had “lost control”. This is not an uncommon feeling in digital spaces.

Consumers can feel that they lack control over their online behavior because the spaces are designed to grab their attention. Claire, a 32-year-old researcher, described her struggle with spending less time on Facebook like this: “It’s just a little annoying. Facebook is pretty smart about that. They always want to incentivize you to have the app too, and then limit your app use when you’re not there anymore. It used to be easy to look at everything on Instagram online, without an account, if you wanted to, maybe for personal research and stuff. And that’s not so easy now.” Claire describes how the technological setup of social media applications forces her to download and engage with the app. She experiences limited functionality when using Facebook only through a browser, for example, and downloading it seduces her into spending more time online. Digital spaces have become alluring, which drives investment in the application (Kozinets et al. 2017). Some research has started to critically reflect on the agency consumers have while interacting with technology (Hoffman and Novak 2018).

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Consumers are reflecting on resource investment

Consumers are motivated to start a digital decluttering process when they realize their attention and time are not well used. While reflecting on how they spend their time online, consumers begin to consider opportunity costs and become aware of potential trade-offs they are (unconsciously) making. Our respondent Linda, when asked about her digital decluttering motivation, shared that she wanted to reallocate the time to other activities: “Yes, on the one hand, I spend less time with it. So I have more time for other things. For example, I love reading and have read little in recent years, I would say. Of course, it also has to do with the fact that we have a job where we already read enough during the day. But it also has to do with the fact that before I pick up a book or a newspaper, I often look at the Spiegel [news] app or something.” With the awareness that she is missing out on doing other things, Linda becomes more intentional and reflects on things that would be more rewarding. Consumers may also realize how their technology use affects the pursuit of long-term goals.

Consumers are consciously investing resources

Consumers want to increase the effectiveness of their resource investment. They start to make sure that they are spending time with things they want to do, which helps them to attain their goals. The aim of curating the experience is to increase the quality. This leads to more effective resource investment. Dylan, a passionate photographer in his early twenties, described how he designed his use of the Instagram app: “Instagram is a platform of inspiration for me. [...] On Instagram, I’ve decided only to follow other photographers whose content I find inspiring. I don’t follow friends; I don’t follow any celebrities or anything. When I look at my feed, it’s just photos that I like. [...]. I’m not in contact with, let’s say, people who are revealing themselves on social media or any personal opinions about people, about political issues, because I’m not interested in that.” Dylan clearly defines a goal for

using the application and designs the feed to meet his needs. He clearly defines criteria for which type of content he wants to see and which he does not. Others also engage in this by (un-)following creators, unsubscribing to newsletters, or limiting access to unwanted information in their life. Consumers often struggle with the fact that the use can be prescribed by technology itself (Shove 2003). They must adapt the material infrastructure to support more desirable practices (Phipps and Ozanne 2017).

Consumers increase the efficiency of resource investment by regaining agency and breaking with habits and routines that make them waste their time. Besides adapting the material setup of their digital spaces, they also create intangible, temporal boundaries to help structure their consumption.

Consumers set temporal boundaries and compartmentalize their time to ensure that certain activities do not take over their day. This can mean, for example, setting specific start or end times to engage in a behavior. It is relevant to ensure that the technological features do not cross these temporal boundaries that consumers set for themselves. David elaborates on his annoyance with being confronted with digital banners: “Just this being torn out of my inner peace of mind again. I just google for a gift, and then I get some banners. When I do something, I only want to do that. And above all, I can influence that; if I’m walking on the street and someone honks, I can’t do anything, but here I can influence it myself.” David wants to decide for himself what he wants to do and when and then be able to pursue that activity without interruption. Features like pop-up ads, banners, or notifications disrupt the activity and distract consumers. Therefore, they engage in activities to limit access to themselves through installing ad-blockers or disabling notifications. Consumers prefer to proactively search for information instead of being contacted by third parties.

While outside distractions can lead to overstepping the set temporal boundaries, the alluringness of technologies may lead to unwanted temptations and distractions. Managing

these temptations was the main reason our respondent Abby deleted the app TikTok: “One of those that I downloaded, but where I said to myself, no don’t start, is TikTok. Somehow, I found it exciting, and I wanted to understand at least what it is and exactly how it works. But I also notice the potential for seduction. Then you’re there forever, a little bit like YouTube [...]. TikTok is pure entertainment for me. Leisure activity and a lot of nonsense as well - which is a pastime that I don’t want to add it because other things are more important to me.” Abby explicitly noticed the “potential for seduction” to spend a lot of time with the application. She then made a trade-off between the value or entertainment she may get from the app and other things in her life and decided to delete the app. She did not expose herself to the risk of having to perform a lot of self-discipline. Besides deleting applications, other practices to reduce the alluringness of digital devices may be putting a phone far away, turning the phone screen to black and white, or hiding specific applications (e.g., in folders) to make them less accessible.

DISCUSSION

Previous research on techno-consumption started to explore consumers’ conflicting experiences with technology use (Kozinets 2008; Mick and Fournier 1998). We respond to the call for further research on techno-cultures (Kozinets et al. 2019) by expanding the research on how consumers solve these inner tensions (i.e., productiveness versus pleasure). By highlighting how practices in techno-consumption are taken for granted, we show that consumers are wasting time. Like the household, the digital sphere has unquestioned routines which are based on “conventions of comfort” and “convenience” (Phipps and Ozanne 2017, 363). In digital decluttering processes, the technological structures, and the practices they support are critically reflected on and singularized by consumers. Much research has been done on deliberate and more public engagement in the web sphere (Kozinets et al., 2017;

Schau & Gilly, 2003), so future research could further explore the tacit and private aspects of techno-consumption.

Prior research on household organization emphasize consumers' conscious efforts to assign physical places for their consumption objects (see Arsel and Bean 2013; Dion, Sabri, and Guillard 2014). Our research alludes to the role of temporality in digital decluttering processes and consumers' efforts to assign and protect a 'temporal place' for a specific consumption practice. This means consciously deciding when and how long consumers will engage in that practice. Prior research focused on how practices produce experiences of temporality (Woermann and Rokka 2015); our research highlights the role of temporality in the performance of practices, which further research could explore in more depth.

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PAPER IV

**MANAGING TEMPORAL ABUNDANCE: HOW DO CONSUMERS PLAN THEIR
TIME?**

ABSTRACT

Consumers increasingly try to manage their time. This means allocating time so that they can achieve their life goals optimally. Research on time management has been conducted mainly in the organizational context, but the question of time management has also been transferred to private spheres. Prior research focused on the individual and their preferences when allocating time and overlooked additional elements which impact an allocation decision. We conducted 25 semi-structured interviews with busy consumers who must handle various demands for their time. We triangulated our data with netnographic data. We showed how consumers determine a place within a time frame and manage conflicts between competing temporal demands. Our research expands consumer research on how consumers allocate their time.

Keywords: time, time planning, time management, structuration theory, consumer agency.

INTRODUCTION

Every consumption choice requires the investment of time (Holbrook and Lehmann 1981; Southerton, Díaz Méndez, and Warde 2012; Jacoby, Szybillo, and Berning 1976). With the rise in (online) business models that generate revenue through advertising, there is an ever-increasing interest in keeping consumers engaged for longer (Davenport and Beck 2001; Ayyagari, Grover, and Purvis 2011). New business models incentivize engagement and time spent online by creating highly alluring applications (Kozinets et al. 2017; Reyes et al. 2015). Companies are vying for consumers' attention and time.

Time is an inherently limited resource because the contingent of 24 hours cannot be expanded (Holbrook and Lehmann 1981; Lallement and Gourmelen 2018). Consumers experience several struggles around their time: With the increasing demands for consumer attention and time in the market, consumers are often left with the feeling of “time poverty”, meaning “having too much to do and not enough time to do it” (Perlow 1999, 57)(Rose 2017). Consumers experience time pressure and an increasing pace of life (Manfred, 2002; Rosa, 2005). Consumers have to cope with higher “time intensity”, which means they are “multitasking and merging work and home boundaries” (Rose 2017, 116). Consumers take increasingly more agency in their time allocation choices (Bakker et al. 2016; Wenzel et al. 2020; Bauman 2007). The limitation of time as a resource forces consumers to make reflective choices around their allocation of time (Fernbach, Kan, and Lynch 2015; Cannon, Goldsmith, and Roux 2019).

Time management is of growing interest to consumers. This is, for example, reflected in the vast number and ongoing success of self-help books around the topic (e.g., Allen 2015; Ferriss 2011; Tracy 2017). Time management has primarily been studied in the organizational context (Claessens et al. 2007). The debate around it started as early as in the 1950s and 60s (e.g., Drucker 2018; Lakein 1973; Mackenzie and Nickerson 2009; McCay 1995). Generally,

“time cannot be managed because it is an inaccessible factor. Only the way a person deals with time can be influenced“ (Claessens et al. 2007, 256).

Building on research and definitions from organizational literature, time management is concerned with planning and allocating time (Burt and Kemp 1994; Claessens et al. 2007; Francis-Smythe and Robertson 1999) to have enough time to complete relevant tasks (Claessens et al. 2007; Orpen 2010; Slaven and Totterdell 1993; Woolfolk and Woolfolk 1986) or even to increase the time available for task completion. The purposeful and structured use of time (Bond and Feather 1988; Claessens et al. 2007; Sabelis 2001; Strongman and Burt 2000) allows consumers to reach desired goals (Claessens et al. 2007; Hall and Hirsch 2008).

This paper is organized as follows: First, we will discuss prior research about how consumers view and plan their time. Then we will present the theoretical lens which is chosen for this paper. Next, we briefly elaborate on the context of busy consumers and their time management and planning practices. The subsequent section will give more insights into our methodology and the data collection and analysis procedures. Our findings have three parts. First, we elaborate on consumers’ motives for planning; then, we present the timing components consumers make decisions about and how they alter them. Thirdly, we show how consumers negotiate temporal structures. Lastly, we will discuss the contribution of our research and future research directions.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Time is a complex and multifaceted construct that has been approached from different perspectives (Woermann and Rokka 2015). Research on time management shows that consumers encounter time in two functions: Time as a resource and an organizing principle. We will elaborate on each of the different views in the following.

Time as a resource. Time can be viewed as a resource (Feldman and Hornik 1981; Jacoby et al. 1976; Leclerc et al. 1995; Robinson et al. 2022), which consumers allocate to different activities (Holbrook and Lehmann 1981; Kaufman, Lane, and Lindquist 1991; Okada and Hoch 2004). This view of time was introduced with industrialization (Sugarman and Thrift 2020). From then on, time had to be distributed between activities in the social and economic spheres (Southerton et al. 2012; Thompson 1967). Time became commodified (Adam 1995; Crossan et al. 2005; Thompson 1967). In combination with the dominant Protestant work ethic allocating time efficiently has become an important goal in Western nations (Southerton et al. 2012). Thompson described this new orientation around the clock time and the related work discipline as the “inward notation of time” (Thompson 1967, 57).

Prior consumer behavior research focused on individual differences to explain how consumers allocate their time (Feldman and Hornik 1981; Cotte, Ratneshwar, and Mick 2004; Bergadaa 1990). Consumers’ time allocation decisions are driven by the specific “value” consumers give to particular activities, and these preferences can change over time (Robinson and Nicosia 1991). Or consumers use the allocation of their time to specifically construct an image of themselves (Cotte et al. 2004; Bellezza, Paharia, and Keinan 2016; Gershuny 2005; Schultz and Hernes 2013; Caldwell and Henry 2020). Prior research emphasized the role of the individual, while many other aspects may play a role in creating temporal structures. With our research, we aim to elaborate on additional aspects.

”With space disappearing as a coordination device for many people (e.g., going to an office away from home), time is often the most salient coordination mechanism that structures days and weeks.” (Kunisch, Blagoev, and Bartunek 2021, 1411)

Time as an organizing principle. Consumption is not only located in space but also in time. Heidegger refers to the “spatio-temporal” determinacy of humankind’s existence, which is inevitably existence “in space and also in time” (2002, 367). To describe consumers’ position in time, time was standardized with the concept of clock time (Pulk 2022). Clock

time is considered to be “objective“, measurable, and linear (Lee and Liebenau 1999; Orlikowski and Yates 2002), open to “manipulation, management and control, and subject to commodification, allocation, use and abuse” (Adam 1998, 11). Therefore, clock time, as a “shared temporal reference“, became a key organizing principle for social groups (Zerubavel 1981; Pulk 2022). The concept of clock time became highly relevant in the context of industrial organizations and their productivity issues (Adam 1995; Thompson 1967; Zerubavel 1981).

This view considers time as “objective time“, which is independent of human activity or understanding (Schatzki 2009). This perception is a specific ontology of time (Hussenot, Hernes, and Bouty 2021) for which Bardon coined the term “temporal realism“ (Bardon 2013). It is based on a “mechanical view“ of the world (Jaques 1982; Dyer-Smith 2006). Merleau-Ponty states, “it is indeed clear that I am not the creator of time any more than of my heartbeats. (...) once I am born, time flows through me, whatever I do.” (Merleau-Ponty 2005, 496).

However, another view of time perceives it as socially constructed (Southerton et al. 2012). Durkheim (1961) emphasized that humans have solely developed this kind of abstract understanding of time that we previously discussed. In this contrary view to “temporal realism“, the temporal rhythms of society and, with it, the shared understanding regarding the passage of time are determined by social events (Southerton et al. 2012). Time is viewed as a mental construct, which has subjective meaning to the consumer (Bergadaa 1990). This concept is referred to as “social time“ (Lee and Liebenau 1999) or “event time“ (Bluedorn and Denhardt 1988; Crossan et al. 2005). Coordination depends on the event and acts “as a reference point for things that happen before and after” (Ancona et al. 2001). Bluedorn (2002) suggests that these different approaches of temporal organizing principles should not be interpreted dichotomously but rather on a continuum. There can be many types of events, e.g., social (e.g., rites of passage), biographical (e.g., careers or retirement), biological (e.g.,

puberty), or natural (e.g., days, seasons). The structure of events does not need to be regular or fixed but can be dynamic, impacted by conventions and norms (Crossan et al. 2005).

The social construction of time is reflected in social norms around timing. Social conventions are a core characteristic of “sociotemporal order” in contrast to “physiotemporal and biotemporal orders”. These conventions become internalized by consumers (Granqvist and Gustafsson 2016) and are seen as “given, inevitable, and unalterable” (Zerubavel 1981, 42). These norms around timing can be viewed as a lens that embeds all consumer practices in a temporal frame (Adam 1998; Ancona et al. 2001). Through contact, consumers become accustomed to expecting specific sequences, durations, temporal locations, or occurrence rates (Barley 1988). Consumers draw on these timing norms as heuristics to estimate time (Ancona et al. 2001; Dille et al. 2018; Dille and Söderlund 2011; Ngyuen Huy 2001). But time can also give sense to activities (as an integral part of sensemaking) and create expectations (Weick, Sutcliffe, and Obstfeld 2005; Patriotta and Gruber 2015). Deviations from temporal norms around sequence are used to judge the pace of activities as “fast” or “slow” (Zerubavel 1981).

The sum of norms around timing a consumer operates in can be referred to as temporal structures. Temporal structures are created through allocating, scheduling, and synchronizing consumer practices (Zerubavel 1981; Patriotta and Gruber 2015). Temporal structures set temporal boundaries and limit the unfolding of activities (Orlikowski and Yates 2002; Yakura 2002; Patriotta and Gruber 2015). Activities are structured around “time-based structures” like deadlines, schedules, plans, or routines (Patriotta and Gruber 2015; Reinecke and Ansari 2015). Temporal structures control the flow of tasks (Patriotta and Gruber 2015; Perrow 1967; Thompson 1967). They operate as an interpretive framework to create meaning for specific actions (Barley 1988; Patriotta and Gruber 2015).

Temporal structures shape and are shaped in human interaction: They are “both the medium and the outcome of people’s recurrent practices” (Orlikowski and Yates 2002, 685).

Temporal structures are provisional and only stable for a moment. In the phases of stability, research may treat temporal structures as “objective“, but actors can modify these structures (Orlikowski and Yates 2002). Temporal structures then offer regularity for consumers (Zerubavel 1981). How temporal structures are changed, who the change agents are, and what triggers these change processes have only been scarcely researched so far. Increasingly consumers are confronted with a “flexibilization“ of time for tasks like work, shopping, or banking because temporal limits no longer exist (Garhammer 1995; Southerton et al. 2012). The rise in flexibility increases the need for coordinating practices consumers engage in (Southerton 2003).

We define consumer time schedules as a procedural plan that indicates the time and sequence of events (Merriam-Webster 2022). Every event has a specific temporal profile which consists of several dimensions: event timing, event sequence, event duration, and event frequency (Zerubavel 1981). These dimensions need to be negotiated and aligned in a time-planning process. How consumer time planning processes unfold is so far not specified. Our research aims to understand the change processes of temporal schedules and structures. We are exploring in more detail who sets them up and adapts them and which role consumers can take in the processes.

ANALYTICAL LENS: STRUCTURATION THEORY

Time and practice theory view

We structure the findings through a structuration theory lens, partially based on a practice-theory view. The practice-theory lens has previously been applied to research time (e.g., Orlikowski and Yates 2002; Woermann and Rokka 2015; Shove 2009). Previous studies found it an insightful lens to investigate the (mutual) construction of time and space in the everyday life of consumers (Liu 2020; May and Thrift 2003; Schatzki 2009; Shove 2009; Shove et al. 2007). The practice-based lens views the home “as an active work of doing and

making the temporal and spatial dimensions of domestic lives and relations that compose and constitute the social, material, political and emotional meanings of home” (Liu 2020, 344).

Temporalities “hold practices stable“ although “practices shape temporalities and temporalities shape practices“ (Southerton 2013). Practices compete for time in consumers’ life (Blue 2017; Salvato and Rerup 2018; Shove, Pantzar, and Watson 2012). Some practices have preferred places in the temporal (e.g., a dinner party will most likely be held on a weekend, not a weekday) (Southerton 2013). Temporal structures act as temporal maps for the performance of practices (Zerubavel 1981). Current societies are highly structured around time (Southerton 2013). Further, the practice-theory approach integrates the objectivist and more subjectivist view of time (Wenzel et al. 2020), which we discussed in the literature review. Both views of time play a role in consumers planning processes: Time as a resource can be individually constructed, while time as an organizing principle includes elements of “objective“ clock time.

Structuration theory as the theoretical lens

We examine our data and structure party of our findings using a structuration theory approach (Giddens 1984). This approach captures the interactive dynamic between the consumer and specific structures (Hardcastle, Usher, and Holmes 2005). Giddens defines the domain of study, based on the theory of structuration, as “neither the experience of the individual actor, nor the existence of any form of societal totality, but social practices ordered across space and time” (Giddens 1984, 2). The basic premises of the structuration theory approach are: Individuals are influenced by structures; however, individuals themselves maintain or adapt these structures (Gibbs 2013; Warde 2005; Fuchs 2003).

We chose this lens to structure our findings because it has successfully been used to investigate temporal processes (Bakker et al. 2016). Further, prior literature already alludes to a dynamic similar to the development of temporal structures: Consumers are confronted with

temporal norms (e.g., Dille and Söderlund 2011; Granqvist and Gustafsson 2016); however, they can alter these norms. Structuration theory suggests that being compliant with norms reinforces the existing structure. By refusing to follow the norms, consumers can break down the structure. Reflexivity is essential to modify social structures (Gibbs 2013). We will define key elements of structuration theory, which we will be referring to in the findings.

Key elements of structuration theory

Structure. With our research, we want to investigate how consumers plan and schedule events in their life. Previous research emphasized the role of temporal structures, which influence consumers' temporal decision-making processes. Giddens conceptualizes structure "as two aspects of rules — normative elements and codes of signification" (Giddens 1984, xxxi). Structures are abstract templates guiding human behavior in social settings (Busco 2009). Therefore, the structure is nothing "external" to consumers but rather an "internal" set of norms that are perceived by consumers as both constraining and enabling (Busco 2009). Structures "exist only as memory traces" (Giddens 1984, 377). The structures are figuratively brought to life through knowledgeable consumers (Hardcastle et al. 2005). Giddens attributes three dimensions to structures (Giddens 1984, 16–18): structure (rules) of signification, structures (allocative and authoritative resources) of domination, structure (rules) of legitimation (Hardcastle et al. 2005; Jones and Karsten 2008; Gibbs 2013).

Practices. Giddens (1984) sees the intersection of consumption practices as "transformation points" for the structure. Therefore, it is important to take practices into account. Giddens sees "human social life (to be) formed and reformed in praxis — in the practical activities carried out in the enactment of everyday life (Giddens 1984, 242). Practices are performed with regularity and continuity (Whittington 2010). Practices establish the causal significance of materiality for social life (Schatzki 2002; Loscher, Splitter, and

Seidl 2019). Order is attained through the production and reproduction of practices (Busco 2009).

Agency. Agency can be defined as the "capacity to do otherwise, to follow one system of practices and to refuse another" (Whittington 2010). "Agents' interaction lies at the base of the process of structuration where social systems are produced and reproduced across varying periods of time and space. Accordingly, the constitution of agency and structure are not two independently given sets of phenomena, a dualism, but represent a *duality*" (Busco 2009, 250). Systems are defined as "some kind of 'patterning' of social relations or social phenomena" (Giddens 1984, 16). Social systems can only exist if social practices reproduce these systems across time and space (Giddens 1984; Gibbs 2013). Consumers often participate in more than one system, which may overlap or contradict each other (Busco 2009). In these situations, consumers are forced to prioritize one system over another. This could, for example, mean working longer hours (prioritizing the economic system) instead of having dinner with the family (de-prioritize the domestic system) (Whittington 2010). Consumers' agency determines whether consumers follow a system's rules or not. This is not only a question of consumers' preferences and desires. Structural resources and rules influence consumers' agency. Agents are not coerced into action but are affected by cultural conditions (norms and social conduct) or the presence/ absence of resources and act in somewhat predictable ways. But consumers always have the opportunity to act otherwise (Busco 2009).

Signification. Structures of signification are interpretative rules which provide a language to discuss and give meaning to the world. These meanings offer regulative and interpretative rules instituted in social conduct and resources of authority, which then facilitate or restrain communication (Hardcastle et al. 2005). Structures of signification are reinforced through communication and stabilized through interpretive schemes (Whittington 2010).

Domination. Structures of domination distribute power between agents, and these structures are shaped through resources. Resources can be allocative, meaning power over material objects, or authoritative, having power over other people (Whittington 2010; Gibbs 2013; Hardcastle et al. 2005). Hence, authority is always granted relative to others (Giddens 1984; Hardcastle et al. 2005). Research on temporality revealed that consumers face multiple temporalities within a web of temporal power relations and agency (Hoy 2012; Liu 2020).

Legitimation. Structures of legitimation are rules about social conduct, interpreted and verbalized as rights and obligations and accompanied by sanctions and rewards (Hardcastle et al. 2005). Hence, structures of legitimation regulate what is right or wrong. These structures are manifested in norms and rules and are reinforced through sanctions. Rules encompass legislative structures, informal routines, habits, and conventions (Whittington 2010). For example, if social conduct is inadequate, a person can “lose face“ or be socially marginalized (Hardcastle et al. 2005). Rules and resources cannot be seen separately, as both impact social practices' production and reproduction (Giddens 1984). Through “reflexive monitoring“, consumers may expose or contest and subsequently change dominant beliefs (Hardcastle et al. 2005).

CONTEXT

Our study focuses on a group of busy consumers and their planning practices. We understand busyness as a subjective label assigned by the self or others to a person. Interestingly, consumers generally have more leisure time while work time decreases (Ortiz-Ospina, Giattino, and Roser 2020; Ramey 2007). More evidence occurs that counters the narrative of consumers being busier than ever before (Economist Briefing 2015; Sullivan and Gershuny 2018; Thompson 2015). However, consumer experience and perception differ; they report feeling busier than ever (Kim, Wadhwa, and Chattopadhyay 2019; Darrah, Freeman, and English-Lueck 2007; Schulte and Gilbert 2015). This perception of the self as busy is

referred to as the “busy mindset” (Kim et al. 2019). Prior research also alludes to the subjective component of temporal experience (Woermann and Rokka 2015). Therefore, we rely on a definition of busyness as “the perception of the density of events and tasks to perform in one’s daily life (Gershuny 2005; Levine 2005)—in other words, how crowded one perceives one’s schedule to be” (Festini et al. 2019, 2). This definition distinguishes our research from other conceptualizations that define busyness as committing time to work or workaholism (Aziz 2019). The narrow definition of time over-commitment to work may be due to the concept being often studied in an organizational context (e.g., Gershuny 2005; Lupu and Rokka 2021) and around employees (e.g., Jackson and Martin 1996; Major, Klein, and Ehrhart 2002; Palmer and David Schoorman 1999). We take a more holistic perspective on the feeling of busyness.

The feeling of busyness is determined by speed and activity (Levine 2005). “Speed refers to the rate at which an activity is performed. It is the amount of activity per unit of time. (...) over longer, more sustainable intervals, (...) we speak of the accelerating tempo of modern life” (Levine 2005, 356). Research suggests that the perceived pace changed (Claessens et al. 2007; Manfred 2002) - particularly in highly industrialized and individualistic countries (Levine and Norenzayan 2016). This phenomenon is often referred to as social acceleration, which is “the setting-in-motion of the material, the social, and the cultural world at an ever-increasing speed” (Rosa et al. 2017, 58). This acceleration is sometimes perceived negatively and as a state consumers want to escape from (Husemann and Eckhardt 2019; Rosa 2005).

The other component of busyness, activity, can be defined as the “absence of unscheduled time. It is the amount of time consumed with activity; or, the ratio of doing things to doing nothing” (Levine 2005, 356). Consumers strive to spend their time productively and purposefully (Hsee, Yang, and Wang 2010). More prolonged states of

idleness, “the involuntary vacant passing of time— is, in a sense, a waste of the individual’s life” (Yang and Hsee 2019, 15).

The state of busyness is a complex experience as consumers want to feel challenged (Agarwal and Karahanna 2000) — but in the optimal amount (Lupu and Rokka 2021; Sharif, Mogilner, and Hershfield 2021). Therefore, consumers try to manage their time for an optimal experience. In prior research, being comfortable with busyness is associated with the feeling and excursion of control (Claessens et al. 2007; Lupu and Rokka 2021). Consumers struggle with the lack of control over their time and the unpredictability of temporal demands (Gerstel and Clawson 2018). Consumers are trying to plan and manage their time and regain control through time management and planning practices (Bakker et al. 2016; Claessens et al. 2007; Macan 1994).

Our modern, western understanding of time and how it should be used is rooted in industrialization. The rise of factory labor fundamentally changed consumers’ relationships with time. Not only did the goal of using time most effectively gain a broader notion (Thompson, 1967), but industrialization also led to people moving away from home for work. This resulted in a split between work and leisure, which was the start of conflicts between the two spheres (Sabelis 2001; Ingold 2016). Consumers started to engage in time management and planning practices to manage time optimally and handle conflicts.

To represent the timeline of consumers’ planning attempts, we can look at a central artifact, the planner. The first planner was developed in 1773 and was called the Aitken Register (McCarthy 2013). While planners initially started as journals, the focus shifted to planning the future (Schmidt 2016). Initially, planners were unsuccessful, not reaching the mass market until the mid-1800s (McCarthy 2013). Since then, the topic has evolved. In the 1950s, the first book on time management was published (Ward 2019). Today with advancements in the technological sphere, planning and organizing have been highly digitalized (Mele 2016).

METHODOLOGY

In the following section, we will briefly describe the data collection and analysis procedure. Table 1 gives an overview of the data collected for this study.

Table 10 Overview of data collection

TYPE OF DATA	DESCRIPTION	OBJECTIVE
<i>Semi-structured interviews</i>	25 consumer interviews, 1526 mins of interview audio in total, ranging from 27-89 mins, an average of 61 mins per participant, 319 transcribed pages of interview transcripts (single-spaced, translated to English), 23 photographs)	<i>To understand consumer time management practices and experiences</i>
<i>Netnographic data and triangulation</i>	<i>Netnographic data</i> 13 YouTube videos, 147 mins of audio, ranging from 6-27 mins, an average of 11 mins per video <i>Triangulation</i> 8 popular books on time perception and time management	<i>To understand specific challenges and practices and to triangulate data</i>

Data collection

Semi-structured interviews. For our research, we conducted 25 semi-structured interviews with extremely busy consumers. We specifically selected consumers facing many temporal demands using purposeful and snowball sampling approaches. Often these consumers have various responsibilities in their private and business life (e.g., studying while working or extracurricular activities). The more activities consumers engage in, the higher the likelihood that these practices must be aligned. The sampling approach was chosen because we sought a specific and extreme sample.

We were specifically interested in highly active consumers outside their work. Although, we did not explicitly exclude consumers who are very busy in their work life. However, following a similar reasoning to that of Southerton (2006), work responsibilities come with many outside constraints, and allocating consumer time is less a matter of individual agency. That was also why we did not focus on household maintenance practices (Southerton 2006). The sample consisted of 16 male and eight female participants, one identified as non-binary. The age ranged from 25-67, with a mean age of 33. An overview of the participants will be provided in the WebAppendix.

The interviews were audio recorded. We collected 1526 minutes of audio material in total. The interviews ranged from 27 to 89 minutes, with an average duration of 61. Due to another Covid-19 wave and the resulting restrictions, most interviews were conducted via phone. All the interviews were transcribed verbatim, first in the original language (primarily German or Swiss-German). The interviews were translated into American English using DeepL. The English interview transcripts resulted in 319 pages of transcripts (single-spaced). The interviews were enhanced with screenshots and photographs to illustrate consumers' narratives (23 photos).

Netnographic data and triangulation. For triangulation purposes, netnographic data was collected. We downloaded video material from YouTube. We searched for the terms like "Time Blocking", "Organize my day", or "Tracked my day". We extracted all relevant videos which were listed first. In total, we extracted 13 videos. The videos range from 6-27 minutes, with an average duration of 11 minutes. This resulted in 147 minutes of video content. Further, we consulted the most popular books on time management.

Data analysis

For our analysis, we followed a grounded theory approach (Glaser and Strauss 1967). First, we identified relevant themes and topics we could explore. In the subsequent coding round, we investigated consumers' understanding of the main concepts and explored their

dynamics. The coding process was iterative. Following the procedure of the hermeneutic circle, we switched between reading literature and expanding our understanding through prior research, data analysis, and further data collection (Arnold and Fischer 1994; Thompson, Pollio, and Locander 1994; Thompson 1997).

FINDINGS

In our findings section, we will address three central questions: First, we elaborate on consumers' motivation for planning processes and answer the question, *why do consumers plan events?* In the second part, we present specific timing components consumers can decide about and the practices they engage in to alter these components. There we answer the question: *What do consumers make timing decisions about?* Finally, we shed some light on the negotiation processes that impact consumer agency around timing and scheduling. We answer the question: *What impacts consumer agency in temporal decision-making?*

Motivations for consumer planning processes

Many consumers plan a lot in their life. During a trip to a Buddhist monastery, our respondent Jay was challenged not to plan anything for a whole day. The experiment was called "lazy day". This made them realize how much they plan their time regularly. In their reflection, they describe how they view time planning processes: "I first realized how blatantly planned my life is all the time, even in my leisure time. I meet this person, and then I do sport. Then I want to read this. Then I want to do this. There are a lot of people who [...] schedule their whole day to optimize it. [...] They also use a calendar for that. The invitation from this Buddhist monastery on a 'lazy day', is to let go of any form of planning [...]. Planning is always somehow also a form of future gear. It's always future-oriented. You anticipate something. And in doing so, you also pull yourself out of an experience of the now."

The quote allows us to identify some key elements of planning processes: Planning is a future-oriented practice that requires envisioning or “anticipating” future experiences. In the planning processes, consumers decide on specific activities (e.g., “meet this person”, “do sport”, “read”) and put these activities in a sequence (“first”, “then”, “then”). This is how consumers create an individual schedule. As Jay mentions, consumers often manifest these structures in artifacts, e.g., calendars (Yakura 2002; Zerubavel 1981). Jay states that consumers are motivated by the goal of “optimization” with their planning. In the next section, we will elaborate on these temporal optimization processes.

We define consumers’ temporal optimization processes as attempts to maximize the time spent on desirable activities. Consumers must actively feel agency over time and pursue desirable activities. To ensure consumers can go through smoothly with their activities, they must align every activity with other events in a schedule, other individuals (if they are involved), and institutional structures and requirements. Once a schedule is set up, consumers commit to its execution. Optimization also means that consumers want to avoid spending time on things they don’t want to. This can either be a period of idleness or less desirable activities “sneaking in”. In the following paragraphs, we will present each of these aspects in more detail. We present the aspects in a specific order. However, this form of presentation does not imply a procedural sequence. Any of these aspects can be a starting point for a planning process.

A prerequisite for planning processes is that consumers feel agency over time. Consumers who feel this agency over their time share a particular mindset. Emilia describes: “I think I’ve paid attention to the wording more often now. Because people often say, ‘I don’t have time’. But I would also confirm more often that I don’t take the time for various reasons. It could be because I don’t feel like being in a bad mood. For example, I know that if I call that girlfriend, then I’m rather the comforter and the listener (and sometimes I don’t want to be that).” For Emilia, time and how she spends it is something she can actively shape and

takes responsibility for. Emilia describes time as something she “takes” instead of something she passively “has”. If an event, like talking to a specific girlfriend, is something that makes her feel bad, she takes the freedom not to do it. But there are “various reasons” why she may not schedule an activity.

Consumers who aim to use their time optimally don’t waste any time or feel inclined to plan their events to maximize their experiences (e.g., Matteo, Milo). This can be event specific, that consumers want to use their time efficiently for a particular project. It can be a general attitude for every sphere of life or related to a specific period (e.g., weekends, a special trip somewhere) (e.g., Owen, Kate). Similar to other mid-twenty consumers (Weinberger, Zavisca, and Silva 2017), Jasper, a mid-twenty student in his last semesters of university, decided that he must make the most of his current life period: “I just think that now, at 25, 26, it’s a very special time. And when you get older, when you have more responsibility in your job, maybe you can’t take time off so easily, or you have family obligations that you can no longer take this time. That’s why it’s good to take this time now.” Matteo, a passionate photographer and extreme sportsman felt the pressure to make the most of his vacation time because he had “a bit of a natural feeling that (he is) not going to be in Canada so quickly again”.

Consumers plan because they must align every event with other events in a schedule. As time is experienced as a limited resource, time planning requires trade-offs (Fernbach et al. 2015). There is a constant rivalry between practices if they fight for resource time (Shove 2009; Reckwitz 2002). Silas, a teacher at several schools with a girlfriend and an active social life, described how temporal limitations force him to plan more: “When I don’t have much to do, then of course (I do things) more spontaneously. Because then I have more time.” Temporal demands are ever-increasing, as Oswald describes. Oswald is a 67-year-old currently self-employed in various projects in his second career after a highly successful life in the corporate world: “There are many things and many goals that are being pursued

(nowadays). The number of goals and topics has increased dramatically there.” Oswald sees it as a new challenge to consumer time management; they feel they must handle many goals and activities simultaneously. Consumers strive to manage all the temporal demands from different spheres. Liam, a 27-year-old consultant and a highly organized person, uses a color code to visualize his commitments from different spheres: “I scroll through the weeks and see roughly if there’s enough red (the color code for private activities). [...] Could I see more friends, or is it too red that I think I should scale down (on private commitments)? [...] Sometimes I think: ‘Oh, there’s nothing yellow (color code for sports activities) yet, maybe I should do more sports?’ or something. So that signals to me, [...] whether I’m in control of my life or my life is just the way I want it to be.” Through planning and documenting the plan with a color scheme Liam makes sure he has a balanced number of activities or groups of activities (e.g., private commitments, sports) in his life. Alongside negotiating temporal demands of different activities, consumers also must negotiate temporal demands between different individuals.

Consumers plan because they must align events with other individuals (if they are involved). Examples are sports activities, like a joint golf or tennis session (Jeffrey, Mason, Liam), or joint trips with a partner or friend. Alignment with others requires information about their schedules. Therefore, Jasper, a very socially active and adventurous student in his last semester, wants to know what his friends are doing: “I like to know which of my friends also have days off. Because I am someone who likes to spend my free time with people who are important to me. [...] I like to know what my friends are doing. Then there are either activities I can join or if there’s nothing, [...] I organize something myself.” The relevant information for Jasper is when his friends are doing a particular activity that could be shared or when they are free so that he can schedule a joint activity. Finding a time that suits both (or more) involved parties is often a negotiation process. Sometimes these negotiation processes

go back and forth (Miles). Miles, an early-stage entrepreneur, shares his calendar and availability through a digital tool to avoid long exchanges with his contacts.

Making plans with other consumers requires a commitment to the scheduled plan. Consumers can differ in their commitment to their plans. For respondents like Mason or Sarah sticking to a commitment is essential: “A deal is a deal. Because I’m a very reliable person, I would never disappoint my friends like that and cancel something at short notice. [...] If I don’t feel like it, I go anyway. (In particular, if it is not a big group and) it’s up to me whether the whole thing takes place or not.” Sarah is highly committed to the plans she made. Among other respondents (Oswald, Mason, Owen), she fears disappointing her friends when she does not stick to the plan (and promises attached to them). Sarah is highly reliable regarding scheduled activities with just one other person. She explains that these activities would fall flat without her participation.

If the alignment with others does not work out, this creates stress for consumers. Demi, a start-up coach currently working remotely, describes her discomfort: “When people are unreliable [...]. I have a lot to do with other people privately, in business, when they don’t show up or are late or cancel again, and so on. That doesn’t work at all; it stresses me out. [...] I can’t stand it at all.” Demi experiences discomfort when her plans do not work out because other people lack a commitment to the schedule. Instances that show a lack of commitment to a schedule could be “not showing up”, “being late”, “or canceling” on joint plans. It is even worse if this happens on short notice because it either requires consumers to reschedule or, this time, remains idle (Liam).

How long in advance the negotiation process with others must start depends on the planning horizons of the parties involved. Kate, a 30-year-old sales manager in the fashion industry, met with a friend to schedule dates a few months in advance: “I had a call with a friend today, and we scheduled two things, one for the end of January, one for April, just because she knows how the schedule works.[...] (It is) a certain way my life is structured.

[...] I say, ' Well, I can't meet with you this week because I'm busy.' Or 'I've got plans'."

Kate had a call with her friend in December to schedule joint events one respectively four months in advance. The options for common time slots are greater the more in advance the alignment process starts as consumers fill their schedules as the respective time comes closer. As we saw with Kate, she is unavailable on short notice to meet spontaneously during the week. Also, Liam's friends must plan with him three weeks in advance.

Prior research has already revealed that consumers can have different approaches to planning (Cotte et al. 2004). These different approaches to time planning can create conflicts. Mason, a German consultant currently living with his foreign girlfriend in her home country, struggles to align his desire for in-advance planning with his girlfriend's preference for spontaneity: "I want to fly on that date. Then I book the flight as soon as I can. And I am done. Then I would check again just before if I can still do that. If not, then I either must rebook or it's canceled. [...] She [his girlfriend] doesn't like to do it. She likes to book things practically in the week or the day before, [...] She wants to keep it more open, and I don't understand that. [...] We must talk about it a lot. [...] Experience teaches me that nothing happens if you don't have a plan. And [events] happen less with her. I don't like that. After all, I want to do these things. The effects are usually only negative if you don't plan. Then you get expensive flights, or you don't get any flights at all. Suddenly, [what you wanted to do] is no longer possible. But it would always have been possible if you had simply made the plan and known that you could adjust it." Mason describes how different his and his girlfriend's approaches to planning are and points out the downside of her more spontaneous approach. Without proper planning, some events cannot happen (e.g., only expensive or no flights). So, we also must consider another type of alignment process: Consumers must negotiate temporal demands between individuals and institutional structures.

Consumers plan events to align with other (institutional) structures. For example, these applied to more complex events involving third-party companies or service providers (Brody,

Jeffrey, Reese); for a vacation, consumers must align their plans with vacation time offered by their employer, flight plans set by an airline, or with hotel vacancies. Our respondent Monica, a pregnant consultant partnered with an equally busy consultant, describes her planning preference as not solely personal: “I plan a lot. I also regularly look at the weekends in the next few weeks to see what we're doing there. Will we be in Zurich? Are we traveling there? Do we have to organize anything else? In Zurich, you must book all the restaurants four weeks in advance if you want to get a seat.” Monica shares that her planning horizon depends on what is required for a specific activity. She reserves a table in a restaurant a lot in advance and adheres to the temporal requirements to make it happen. Consumers also consider in their planning other structural limiting factors, like weather (e.g., for outdoor activities) (Mason, Matteo) or daylight (Axel).

With all their planning, consumers try to avoid the misalignment of their consumption practices. Misalignment of practices causes “an interruption of experienced temporality; peculiar and uneasy experiences occur, such as frenzy, stress, dullness, or boredom.” (Woermann and Rokka 2015). That is why consumers strive to align the events in their life (Phipps and Ozanne 2017). The temporal experience remains unremarkable when the elements align smoothly (Woermann and Rokka 2015; Lupu and Rokka 2021). Misaligned practice elements “stick out” and demand consumers’ attention (Woermann and Rokka 2015). Therefore, consumers try to avoid a misalignment of practice by planning specific events which require planning or when they have clear expectations regarding how they want to spend their time.

Consumers also want to avoid undesirable activities, such as idleness or “laziness” (Yang and Hsee 2019; Kim et al. 2019). Consumers plan because they fear “otherwise, nothing happens” (Mason). But there are also Consumers, like Axel, who is not afraid to be idle without planning. He said that he does not “plan anything privately. It pops into (his) head, and then it gets done”. Axel has an impressively long list of hobbies, projects, and

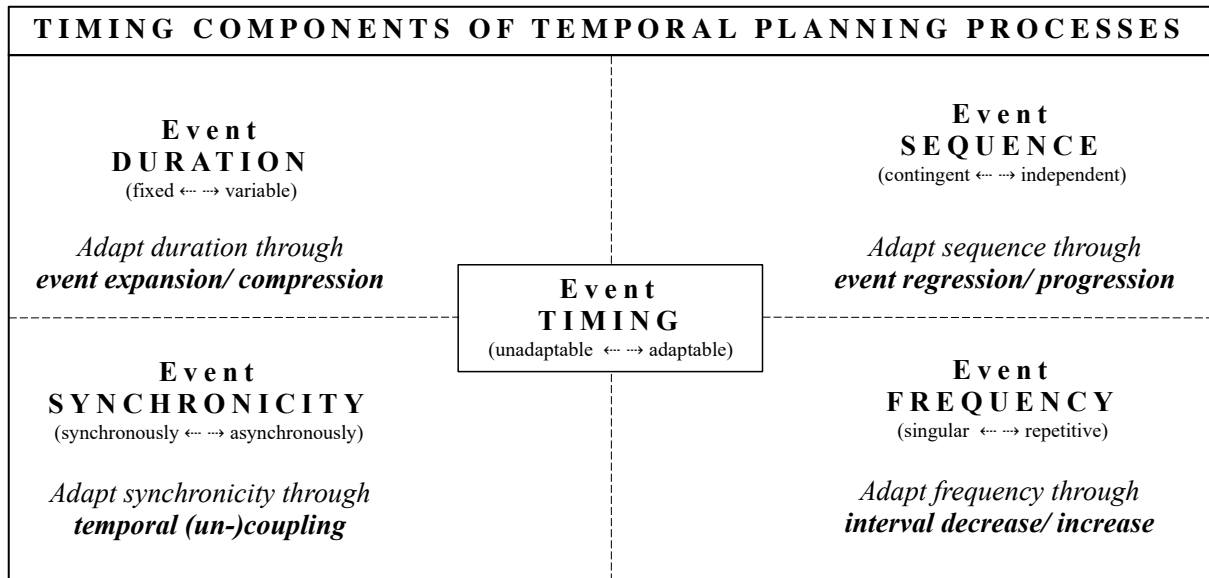
responsibilities. These encompass caring for several dogs, conducting several DIY projects within the house, or volunteering in several associations. He constantly finds something to do “because [he does not] like standing still [or] sitting around”, even without having anything planned.

To prevent idleness, some consumers even plan “time filler activities”, which are more loosely planned activities that can be included in consumers’ schedules more short notice. Mason, for example, would loosely plan a museum visit after meeting up with a friend for Squash. Consumers may also actively prepare these time-filler activities, for instance, by bringing a book to a doctor’s appointment (e.g., ready to read) or downloading an audiobook for a journey (e.g., preparing to listen to an audiobook).

Some consumers fear that unwanted events may sneak in if nothing is planned. Stuart describes this: “There are times when you’re lying on the couch watching TikTok and think maybe 20 minutes of rest would have been better. But then you’re on TikTok for 30 minutes, wasting time and not feeling good about it because you didn’t schedule it as rest time beforehand. And I never get any rest that way.” Stuart is frustrated when unwanted events like scrolling a social media channel just “happen”. If he had planned that time explicitly for a specific purpose (e.g., rest), he would have been better rested and achieved that goal.

Timing components of temporal planning processes

Model 2 Timing Components of Temporal Planning Processes



Event timing. Event timing refers to events' social synchronization and coordination (Adam 1998). The timing describes the location of a specific event within a temporal schedule. Event timing can be *unadaptable* or *adaptable* for the consumer, and this means some events may be more freely scheduled and more readily moved within a temporal schedule than others. The place within the schedule can be highly specific (e.g., doctor's appointment at 11.00) or encompass a specific period (e.g., gym scheduled for Friday night). The timing can be oriented around clock time (e.g., 5 p.m.) or event time (e.g., starts after the meeting).

Different components can influence the timing and adapting the components can lead to changes in the timing. The components are all relevant to the planning process of time: duration, *sequence*, *synchronicity*, and *frequency*. These components resonate with prior conceptualizations around time (Adam and Adam 2008; e.g., Adam 1998; Grzymala-Busse 2011; Southerton 2006; Southerton et al. 2012). We will describe each component more

closely in the next section. We will define each component and show the associated practices and how they can be adapted.

Event Duration. Event duration refers to the time (i.e., number of minutes) consumers dedicate to a specific event (Southerton 2006), i.e., the length of an event. This is another key dimension of temporality (Southerton et al. 2012). The duration of an event can be either *fixed* (i.e., for example, a sports class) or *variable* (i.e., a walk). Liam, a 27-year-old consultant, who prefers flexible events during the week, describes flexible events as the following: “If you have free time [during the week], then spend it nicely by yourself, go for a walk, enjoy nature, or play the piano, do something else that you can stop quickly. [...] I can play the piano for an hour or ten minutes. That is, where the time slots are variable. The same goes for going for a walk, but not necessarily for meeting friends or going to the movies.” Liam describes flexible event duration as a duration that can be stopped at any time. This is often true for events with no clear goal and not involving other parties. For Liam, these are events like piano playing or walking, which he does alone.

Various aspects can impact flexibility regarding the length and end of a duration. Either the duration is known in advance (e.g., scheduled meetings or sports training), or the consumer must estimate the duration of an activity (e.g., meeting with friends). To make these estimates, consumers either refer to general knowledge about activity duration (Burt and Kemp 1994; Roy, Christenfeld, and McKenzie 2005), their own prior experience or sometimes even track their activities for some time to get precise estimates. For example, Owen elaborates: “If we go go-carting, I know that it takes half an hour to get there, and driving takes two hours. With the return trip, three hours are gone. You eat something, and four hours are gone. Half the day is taken. But I don’t put down 2 p.m. to 6 p.m. I estimate when I could be back because I plan something later. [...] [If we plan something on Friday or Saturday night], no, I don’t know the duration. I take my time. [...]. Go with the flow. In the evening, it lasts as long as it lasts. In the afternoon, it always depends.” In the quote, Owen

describes how he takes each part of the event, estimates how long these things may take, and then adds them up.

After making this estimate, he can add another activity to the day. Owen also describes in his quote that some events are open-ended, e.g., meeting with friends on a Friday night. There are closed and open-ended temporal orientations (Orlikowski and Yates 2002). Closed temporal orientations are less flexible compared to open temporal orientations. Kate describes this experience: “I want to be in the flow [...] when I’m at it because the rest of my life is so organized and boxed. The little to-dos that I have, that I set for myself, like spring cleaning [...] or sorting out cupboards: I know it could take me anywhere from half an hour to four hours, just because I might get really into the process, and I might enjoy it. And then I see it almost as a mini meditation. [...] If I’m already investing time, I wouldn’t want to distract from that flow.”

In her quote, Kate describes the two approaches consumers can have to plan a duration. Either they set a specific time in advance or let everything unfold. Some activities let consumers immerse themselves fully (Agarwal and Karahanna 2000). The end of an activity can be determined by the practice itself (i.e., if a specific goal is reached). For example, Emilia would not schedule a lunch break under 45 minutes “because below that it doesn’t give me the recovery effect”. The purpose of a lunch break is not reached if she cuts the duration shorter. Monica, currently pregnant and needs rest, has set up a similar rule for her lunch break and sleep hours: “I have always had a super strong need for sleep, even as a child. [...] I’m not a person where the solution is that I only sleep four hours a night so that I can manage everything. That has never worked for me. I always must sleep seven hours.” Monica’s sleep duration cannot go below a certain limit; otherwise, she does not achieve the desired outcome and does not function. Sometimes external deadlines set the end for an activity. Miles, a 29-year-old entrepreneur and what would be classically considered a “workaholic”, explicitly utilizes deadlines to motivate himself by signing up for events like a

marathon because it forces him to prepare and train because “then you have a certain point when you have to deliver something”. It can create conflict if groups with different understandings of what to base the duration on interact. Gersick (1994) documented a conflict between managers oriented around deadlines and venture capitalists motivated by achieving outcomes. Additionally, subsequently planned events can cut short the duration of activities. Ida, for example, who worked a lot with various clients, shares her approach how she manages the duration of her meetings: “I try to set appointments very tightly. If the appointments run the risk of getting out of hand [...]. But I try to set some limits or to signal that I don’t have forever.” Meetings are types of events that sometimes lack a natural end, so Ida utilizes the fact that upcoming events can cut off specific other events and limit their duration to limit her time during meetings.

Additionally, consumers face norms around a practice’s duration, which may impact the prospects to adapt the duration. While shortcuts may be sensible, taking time for something is associated with performing a practice “properly” (Shove 2009). Consumers face tensions between care and convenience (e.g., Warde 1997). If the other side does not fulfill the expected duration of a practice, consumers may feel uncomfortable (Zerubavel 1981; Southerton 2013).

Consumers plan the duration of events to avoid overlapping two or more events. Events that happen at the same time can stress out consumers. Jayden, who loves to go out, meet with friends regularly, and never misses an opportunity to be social, describes a very classical situation: “That annoys and stresses me out. When I get invited by friends to a birthday on the weekend, have another brunch or something planned, and want to do both, I feel stressed too.” Or Jasper complains that it stresses him to be invited to multiple parties around New Year. The problem with these elements is that the events are “exclusive”, which means that he has “two activities going on at the same time. Those are exclusive activities (when he) can either do one or the other” (Jasper). But not all events which are at the same

time are exclusive. Jasper explains how he handles these demands: “Exactly, I try to use my time as efficiently as possible [...], I try to fill my car trips as completely as possible with phone calls. That means calling my parents again or calling good friends I haven’t seen or talked to. I always find video calls difficult because you can’t do them that well on the side.” Jasper can drive and have a call at the same time. He purposefully schedules these two activities at the same time. Axel does the same when he takes his dog to his duty in the bird park instead of having a separate walk with him. These events are not exclusive. This is what prior research refers to as consumer multitasking, meaning consumers switch rapidly from one task to another or juggle several tasks at the same time (Duff et al. 2014; Ie et al. 2012; Han and Broniarczyk 2021). Once consumers compress the duration of an activity, they may result in doing more activities in less time. They may need to increase the tempo of their activity. This may create the feeling of being rushed (Southerton 2003; Shove 2009). Multitasking also gives consumers a sense of control (Han and Broniarczyk 2021).

Consumers fixate the duration of an activity through practices like “time blocking”, which means planning to set aside a specific time duration for an activity. Emilia regularly blocks particular time periods: “I estimate roughly how much time [the event] will cost me. If [there is] another appointment request or another to-do [that] comes up, I can also estimate whether I can manage that on that day. Nevertheless, it happens again and again that I move blockers.” Time blocking helps consumers to estimate whether they can fit in all the desired events in a particular time period (e.g., a specific day). Consumers only schedule activities that take up a significant amount of time. Things of short duration are either done immediately (Demi) or squeezed in as filler tasks. Consumers may also apply specific heuristics, e.g., if it takes 2 minutes (Demi) or “if it takes over half an hour, three-quarters of an hour, then it’s something that can go in [my calendar]” (Jasper). Some consumers plan extra time as a “buffer” if a duration is not precisely known. Liam, who is highly committed to sticking to his plans and plans most of his life, describes this procedure: “If [...] I know

we're meeting at half past seven and it takes about 20 minutes to get there, then I plan at least half an hour [buffer], because I need maybe five minutes to stand at the traffic light, and five minutes for, I don't know, selecting matching clothes or because I can't find my wallet. That means I know I can be delayed five minutes at my house and maybe on the way there too. I leave the house half an hour earlier and arrive there early." Liam went through the activity in his head. He envisioned scenarios extending the temporal duration of his way to the location, and then he added this extra time on top.

Consumers can adapt the duration through event expansion/compression. Consumers either extend or compress the duration of an event. This is how Liam describes his procedure: "Most of the time, my first strategy before prioritizing is calendar squeezing. That is, if I'm invited to a birthday on Saturday afternoon and dinner on Saturday night, the first thing I think is, 'Crap, that's both Saturday!' but then I try to think whether it would make sense if I shorten dates. And then I would sort of haggle with the other person, so I'd say, 'Okay, can we meet for coffee at 5, and then is it okay if I come to dinner at 7?' So that's my first round of considerations." Liam tries to squeeze in both events by shortening the end of the first and pushing back the beginning of the next event. He attempts to "squeeze in" events instead of making clear trade-offs and prioritizing one over the other are preferred by consumers. As squeezing "feels like getting 'something for nothing'". In contrast, priority planning feels bad, like a loss" (Fernbach et al. 2015, 1205).

Event expansion/compression can be done more easily with any event which is flexible regarding the duration. For some super busy consumers like Stephanie, it sometimes means cutting sleep: "What I always try to do is sleep seven hours. But in the last two weeks, I've managed that less, and it was more like five to six, which I also noticed because that's not good." What Stephanie describes here is a prevalent pattern. Because she has so many other demands for her time, she stays up later or gets up earlier, which cuts her overall duration of sleep. Many consumers give up "sleep" to have enough time for other events.

Event Sequence. The event sequence refers to the ordering of events, and specific events require particular sequences (Southerton 2006). Most of our daily practices cannot be performed simultaneously and are exclusive, which means that the events are segregated into a “before” or “after” (Zerubavel 1981; Southerton 2013; Merleau-Ponty 2005). A sequence can be *contingent*, meaning it is connected to other practices, or *independent*, meaning that it is a stand-alone practice. Consumers’ decisions about the proper sequence are determined by different aspects, which also may differ for independent sequences versus more contingent sequences.

Consumers often consider the investment resources (i.e., energy), in particular, for more independent events. Consumers contemplate how much energy an activity may require or give them. Jayden, a very sportive employee in Marketing, explicitly schedules his sports training to gain energy and motivation from them at the right time of the week: “On Mondays, I like to do sports in the evening. CrossFit gives me mega energy for the week. For a while, I didn’t do it on Mondays, but on Tuesdays. But that was something different. The sport on Monday gives me mega energy, and I always looked forward to it.” Jayden made sure to schedule specific recreational events in the week where he would need energy, like hitting the gym or meeting friends. At the same time, events that require a certain level of motivation or energy can also be scheduled at a specific time. Massimo, who just moved to a new city and must manage a lot of flexibility in his work and private life, described: “If possible, I [want to] manage [my activities] from my motivation. [...] So, what must be done and what is the important thing comes at the beginning. [...] [Events] are then prioritized based on the potential effort and partly on the importance or where it would do the least harm if I postponed it even further. For example, [...] tomorrow I have [scheduled] that I must continue writing the report. I have a project meeting at 10 o’clock via Zoom [...]. Then I wanted to familiarize myself with the library here, and then I wanted to deal with electricity contracts and stuff like that in general. [...] You notice now, in the order and the tonality, the

decision that I attach different meanings to these tasks.” Massimo explicitly placed the most strenuous and impactful activities at the beginning of the day, like writing his work report due in the following weeks. After his work to-dos, he schedules personal to-dos, like managing electricity contracts or visiting the library. He also considers the “harm” that postponing a specific activity would have. If he would not go to the library that day, that probably could just be done the next day without any implications. Stephanie, who currently studies and works simultaneously, schedules events and tasks based on her abilities: “I can work very well in the morning because my work doesn’t require that much cognitive ability. Then if I must prepare a lesson, I usually do it in the morning. Whereas if I get up at 06:00 and start to study, it’s a big struggle. Different factors go into how I manage my time. On the one hand, efficiency.” She wants to perform her best at tasks and make the most of her time. Therefore, she schedules the tasks based on when she is most capable of doing them. In the early morning, she is cognitively not fully present. Hence, she can do work but not learn new things and study.

Even if events are independent, consumers ensure that the events’ sequence is efficient and logical. For example, events that are location bound and that follow each other need to be put in an order that makes sense: “If I have an appointment on Saturday morning in the north of the city, at noon in the south, and then in the evening in the west, then you would also say that it’s not perfectly planned.” Liam described how he would want to avoid a situation in which he would go from one end of the city to another. Cotte and colleagues (2004) reported one of their respondents planning out a route like this: “If I’m going out shopping or on errands, like today on my way here, it was like, okay, drop off the videos, and there’s a copier in there, and I have to make a copy of an insurance thing, so I’ll drop off the videos, make a copy of the thing, then I’m going to go to the gas station that’s on the way to the hardware [...] Like I think all this out before I go [...] I will schedule those where they fit in, what route

would be best.” This quote illustrates that consumers cluster activities to make the most of their resources (Brooks, Kaufmann, and Lichtenstein 2004).

Another practice that consumers engage in to increase efficiency is grouping activities. Consumers may set a specific time for activities or set particular times when activities will not be pursued. Demi, for example, set up the following rules: “I don’t have calls on Thursdays at three and then again on Fridays at eleven, but I make sure that I always have them one after the other. That I then do maybe two, three hours of just calls and then maybe several hours of no calls and everything else apart from calls, so you can also focus a little bit.” For Demi having all the calls grouped gives her undisturbed periods. With a specific sequence, Demi tries to protect her time plan from distractions in advance. This means that she has more periods of concentrated work.

Some events inherently require a specific sequence of what needs to be done before another because they are contingent on each other. We already discussed that some events might require preparation in advance, and these requirements determine the event sequence. Getting a visa needs to happen before a trip; otherwise, the trip becomes impossible (Jasper). Owen described his laundry routine as washing on Wednesdays and ironing on Thursdays. This sequence is also impossible to adapt, as the washing needs to happen before the ironing. Emilia always sets a reminder to cut her nails one day before she goes bouldering, which is essential before she can safely carry out her plan.

Consumers can adapt the event sequence through practice regression/progression.

Consumers adapt the sequence of events by either moving events forwards or to a later point in time. Liam describes the shuffling process of events as an “If-rule: If I do this and that, then I have the time window open here and there.” Stephanie, who manages several jobs, her studies, and her active private life, moved the task to clean her basement, considering the other responsibilities in her life: “I also postpone things. There are things where I say I’ll do them during my semester break. Or I do them only when I no longer have university. [...] I

know very well that I urgently need to clean up my basement. [...] I know that it won't happen before summer. [...] In the summer, when I know I have a three-month semester break. I don't mind standing around for three hours and cleaning up. [...] But then] in winter, when I have time off, I'll be in the mountains often. And I don't feel like sitting in the basement or the attic and cleaning it up." Stephanie postponed cleaning the basement until the summer semester break. It is not super pressing to do, but it should happen. She also considers other temporal demands, like going skiing in winter. For some consumers, particular events cannot be moved. For Reese, a 35-year-old currently enrolled in two study programs while working, these events are important personal events: "In the personal realm, you can't move things around. You can postpone them, but it is never the same. You should celebrate the festivities as they fall. Sometimes I must tell myself where I think, I didn't plan it that way today, and I didn't want to, but it's turned out that way now. And it's good that way. And that's why I go along with it." For Reese, private events are so important that she refrains from postponing or moving them in her temporal schedule. She expects that the experience will not be replicable at a later point. Monica tries to stick to her schedule, but if something special and time-dependent comes up, e.g., a friend asking her to go wedding dress shopping, she would postpone, e.g., a beautician appointment.

Consumers often compare trade-offs to determine an activity's importance and place within a temporal schedule. Jasper describes his approach: "I think what helps there is just looking at the options. Either make a list or mentally list things you can do. And then just weigh those against each other. It doesn't necessarily have to be a tally list of advantages and disadvantages. It's also very much about gut feeling. But you must think about it calmly. That you take a little time to decide what you want to do or in what order things are important now, even if it is something in professional life. In which order do these things have priority? And you then either decide on something when you must decide, or if it's important in different ways, but that can also just happen one after the other. I decide in what order I want to do

them.” Jasper describes how once he has an overview and set of activities he wants to do, he can assign a temporal space based on specific criteria (e.g., importance). Prior research found that a lack of budget could be a reason to postpone an activity to a later point in the temporal sequence (Fernbach et al. 2015). Decision criteria can also be combined. Stuart described this approach: “I had an Eisenhower matrix earlier in my studies with the work and exchange semester. There was so much to do, so I said, we’re doing these axes now; they’re urgent and necessary. And everything urgent and important comes first. And then the other two.” Stuart took the classical time management model of the Eisenhower Matrix to make decisions about the temporal sequence of events. The matrix combines two criteria, urgency and importance, within a matrix and allows one to make decisions based on the two.

Sometimes consumers prioritize to-dos to get them “out of the way” because it would otherwise be distracting. However, these to-dos are not particularly important or urgent. Mason explains this: “That means prioritizing in the sense that you say this type of task is more important for now, and the other comes afterward. It can also happen that administrative tasks are given priority for half an hour, and then the other tasks are done to enable concentration.” Mason sometimes does administrative work first to have an undisturbed work period afterward.

Contingent events are more complex to move. It would require the whole sequence to be moved. The longer the duration of an event, the more challenging it may be to move the entire block. Liam describes this struggle: “Doing laundry takes longer, which means it takes three hours. And if I can’t do the laundry on a Tuesday afternoon, I can’t say I’ll just do it on Tuesday evening. Because in the evening plus three hours is just impossible. Whereas with washing up, I know it takes 15 minutes.” Liam struggles to move an event with a longer duration, like doing laundry, because he would need to free up a more extended slot (i.e., 3 hours) in his schedule at another time to move to do laundry.

Synchronicity. “Synchronicity is a result of an interpretive, reflective process where actors adapt to what they perceive as external and given timing norms, but also purposively and strategically articulate these and pace activities to serve their desired outcomes.” (Granqvist and Gustafsson 2016, 6). Sometimes this process is referred to as “entrainment” (e.g., Ancona and Chong 1992; Pérez-Nordtvedt et al. 2008). Consumers attempt to synchronize the tempo and/or of more than one activity within a system (Ancona and Chong 1992; Pérez-Nordtvedt et al. 2008; Standifer and Bluedorn 2016). This means orienting activities around naturally occurring environmental rhythms (Pérez-Nordtvedt et al. 2008). Events can be scheduled *synchronously* or *asynchronously*. In an organizational context, fit between organizational routines and the external environment resulted in higher performance (Bluedorn 2002; Geiger et al. 2021; McGrath and Rotchford 1983). At the same time, a temporal misfit can lead to inefficiencies and reduced performance (Ancona and Chong 1992; Bluedorn 1993; Gersick 1994; Pérez-Nordtvedt et al. 2008). Consumers follow one rhythm, which is considered a “zeitgeber” (Bluedorn 2002; Granqvist and Gustafsson 2016). Often these “zeitgeber” are assumed to be external and unmodifiable (Granqvist and Gustafsson 2016). Previous research distinguished personal and environment time (Cotte et al. 2004). The “collective ordering of social times” is increasingly contrasted with the patterns of the individual consumer’s use of time, making coordinating events with others more difficult (Southerton 2003; Southerton et al. 2012). The synchronicity with an external zeitgeber can also shape temporal experiences. Misfit of pace creates discomfort in consumers. Having a fast pace than the group is experienced as less straining and less satisfactory compared to when the work group’s pace exceeds the consumer’s pace (Jansen and Kristof-Brown 2005). Matteo, passionately pursuing extreme sports activities and excessive traveling, likes to savor every day and fill it with many activities. He explains what it feels like to plan activities with friends who are not as active: “Yes, that decelerates, I would say [...] when I’m out with people who don’t live at the same pace. For example, when

I'm out with a group of friends I like but who simply don't do all the sports that I do. Then there's just a lot more time for other things. They're just much more comfortable." Matteo's life is fast-paced, and he permanently pursues an active lifestyle. To him, aligning with the pace of less active people feels like deceleration. For Stuart, it feels like giving up control: "Whenever I'm in other people's places, or you have visitors in your place, then you can't say, I'll do my chores in two hours. Then I must get up an hour earlier to do things because other people want something from me. Then I'm always dependent on other people. When I have a private weekend alone, which is also rare, maybe 20% of the time, I have 100% control." Stuart feels more in control over his time when he is alone. Otherwise, he needs to respond to them and align their temporal demands when he is with others. He feels this when he visits people or has visitors over.

Consumers use specific practices to keep in touch with their "zeitgeber". One of these could be using a reminder. Consumers may get out of touch with the temporal timeline, and a reminder can help them to get back on track. Kate describes her struggle this way: "Just to keep me in line sometimes as well. Because I'm normally very focused and organized when it comes to my time. But sometimes, I get 'dissolved' in the moment. And then my phone would come up with a notification saying, 'Hey, you've got the next thing in two hours maybe' Time to get your act together." Getting out of touch with a zeitgeber showed in Kate's case like being "dissolved in the moment". A reminder then gets her out of that space and ensures that she follows her schedule. This also frees up mental space as Ida shares with us: "It also gives me more freedom to let myself go into that flow [...]. So, if I have set the alarm, I know I'll be reminded when it's time critical. That's why I'm free to go with this flow [...]. So, on a Sunday, [...] maybe I'll simply listen to podcasts. I'm free to surrender to this flow now completely. Or working in the garden is also something like that. There you also forget the time. So, I'm free to dig up these [flower] beds until the alarm goes off and I'm reminded. I no longer have the stress of having to look at the clock all the time." The knowledge that she

had set a reminder enabled Ida to be in the moment comfortably and allow herself to focus on a task. The reminder will put her on track with the “zeitgeber”, when required.

Consumers use calendars or planners to keep on track with events even more in the future (Yakura 2002; Zerubavel 1981). Otherwise, consumers may lose track of or forget events (e.g., birthdays, deadlines). The scheduled event in the calendar determines the rhythms of their life. Demi, a 34-year-old start-up coach, explains how appointments drive her life: “So during the week, during the day, everything goes according to the calendar [...] Monday to Friday is relatively busy, there are a lot of appointments, and you’re a bit, I don’t want to say fully booked, I don’t want to be that either, but there’s a lot of appointments there because that’s just part of this lifestyle.” In this quote, Demi shares how much she relies on her calendar to keep on track with her life, and the calendar gives her the rhythm. As consumers feel committed to sticking to their plans, many appointments can stress them out once they schedule an appointment.

Consumers actively check their calendars to be on track with their timing. Liam, a consultant in his early career stages, describes that process: “You asked how often I look at the calendar. I would say 30 percent of my work time. Twenty percent consciously, and 10 percent this checking what’s next. ‘Oh yes, I’m on top of everything. I can eat then; I can do this and this then.’ This almost mantra-like thing that sometimes when I’m reading the emails in Outlook, I quickly switch to the calendar again and know, ‘That’s right, the next meeting isn’t for another hour. Phew, you have everything under control. You go for a walk then, then you have that.’ I just check that as a reassurance, like a confirmation.” By keeping in touch with his calendar, Liam makes sure he strictly follows the plan he made in advance. Checking the plan assures him that he is on track with the plan and in touch with the planned timeline.

Consumers adapt the synchronicity through uncoupling. Matteo describes how he could potentially decouple while being out with friends who live at a different pace: “With a photographer friend, I would be on the mountain top, at sunrise, just to take photos there,

while with the other group [of friends who live a less paced life], they don't have brunch until eleven. Or at ten. And well, either I say okay, I'll do my thing alone, or I join them [...] get up relaxed and have breakfast. A little stroll through the city, a little time on the beach, dinner, and that's the day. So now, when I'm out and about with my photographer friend, we're on the mountain top for sunrise, taking photos, having breakfast somewhere early, and doing some sport in between. Getting to know some people, something unplanned, can still always be fitted in between. And so, it goes on until sunset. And then we go out somewhere." When Matteo is out with a friend who has a similarly active life (like his photographer friend), he can maintain his pace.

Once he teams up with less active people, he can choose whether to synchronize with them or do something independently. Liam and Demi described how their calendar dictated the structure of their life to keep up with all their different appointments. For some people, decoupling can mean distinguishing between work and private life. For that reason, some consumers keep a separate work calendar: "I don't want to mix private life and business. Therefore - no. It's because I love scheduling. I love organizing. I love making appointments. But when it's about my private life, I don't want to be reminded of my business life. So, I prefer to keep the two separate." Kate decided to have separate calendars not to be reminded of her work in her private life.

Event Frequency. Event frequency (sometimes referred to as "periodicity") refers to the rhythm of the activity, the frequency, and the repetition of events and activities (Southerton 2006). An event can be *singular* or *repetitive*. Some specific events have a "uniform rate of recurrence", e.g., events associated with personal grooming or eating (Southerton 2013). This can refer to a single event (e.g., cycling) or a group of events (e.g., sports training during the week). Consumers can cancel a singular event (e.g., one training session) or a series of events (e.g., the whole sport). When consumers make and find time for new practices, they may adapt the frequency of already existing practices (Shove 2009).

Consumers set the frequency based on their personal goals. As Demi describes:

“That’s what I want to focus on. When it comes to sports, there are three sports that [...] are my focus sports and for which I want to take the time. Everything else is simply: If it fits, then it fits, and otherwise [not]. I just haven’t been hiking for a year or going skiing just twice a year. It’s just not a focus sport, and then I also stop doing it. That is just how it is. But it is also a learning process. Then you just must let it go. Then just no tennis will be played this year.” Demi made a clear decision about the type of sports she wanted to focus on (i.e., yoga or golf). Subsequently, she prioritizes these sports. Other types of sports (i.e., hiking, skiing) are either squeezed in if there is time, or she just accepts that she doesn’t do them.

Consumers can adapt the frequency through increasing or decreasing the intervals between events. This is a decision Liam faced: “I did karate up to the brown belt. I was 16 years old. And then, I did a year abroad in the States when I was 17. Before that year abroad, my coach said, ‘Cool, you can also do black belt. You must increase your training consumption a lot,’ which means less time for friends and family. And that was one of the first times in my life where I thought, now I must prioritize. And the answer was obvious: No, I don’t want to do black belt. That is when it was clear to me, [comparing] required Commitment versus Benefits. It’s not worth it to me. I think I need to draw a line here.” Liam was not ready to increase his training frequency and make the trade-off with other activities like time with family and friends. He decided not to pursue the goal (e.g., black belt) anymore.

Similarly, Silas planned to cancel his duty as a referee because the temporary demand would clash with other things he would instead do: “I know that next year, I’ll be working at two schools for the last time. I underestimated a bit how much time it would take. And yes, I have been a referee for a long time now, over ten years. And yes, it’s mostly about ten times a year, in the season between September and March. And that’s also when a lot is going on otherwise. I want to bring that down a bit there so I can go skiing more. Last year, when the

season was canceled, I also liked not having anything on the weekend and went skiing.”

Because Silas wants to have more time for skiing, and being a referee would require him to pursue that activity at least ten times a year, he will give up the whole role.

Consumers’ temporal negotiation processes

In the previous two sections, we alluded to one crucial aspect: Consumers often make choices about time within a social setting. Therefore, time, timing, and schedules are often the result of consumers’ negotiation processes (Kavanagh and Araujo 1995). In the following, we will elaborate more on a critical aspect of temporal scheduling and consumers’ temporal negotiation processes: Consumer agency.

Consumer agency. Consumer agency is defined as the ability of consumers to make choices around an event’s timing. In structuration theory, agency was defined as the ”capacity to do otherwise, to follow one system of practices and to refuse another” (Whittington 2010). Monica describes how she experiences agency over her time: “I decide, do I finish this now or do I finish this tomorrow morning, do I take a longer break now and go eat versus do I finish this now? That’s the main reason for me why I’m still in consulting. The first few years, when you were so controlled by others, and you weren’t sure whether [plans] would work or not, I couldn’t do that anymore.” Monica describes how she has more agency over her time than in previous years. The quote illustrates that having agency is concerned with deciding whether to pursue an activity or attend an event, at which point and for how long. Consumers have high agency once they can freely adjust the timing components and set a specific timing; if their agency is low, the event’s timing may be less adaptable. Brody, professor and entrepreneur, describes this state: “You have to be careful that you have the opportunity to manage (temporal demands) yourself so that you don’t feel like you’re being driven.” In previous sections, we highlighted the importance of consumers perceiving agency over time and taking responsibility as an essential precondition for time planning. But there is more to the

negotiation processes. Three aspects determine how much agency consumers have regarding the timing of a specific event: *Signification, domination, and legitimation*. These three aspects are all prevalent in their timing decisions. For theoretical clarity, they will be presented as distinct.

Signification. Structuration theory defined structures of signification as interpretative rules and a language to discuss and give meaning to the world (Hardcastle et al. 2005). Structures of signification are strengthened through communication and stabilized through interpretive schemes (Whittington 2010). Sensemaking is a critical process for planning (Kaplan and Orlikowski 2013). Consumers ask themselves what the event means to them when deciding about timing. As well as negotiating the interpretations of the past, present, and future (Robinson et al. 2022). The signification approach regarding consumption objects sees each object as a carrier of meaning, which consumers acquire with acquiring the object (McCracken 1986; Richins 1994; Holt 1997). The same goes for specific events in consumers' lives. The events carry meaning, and consumers must decide which meaning they care about. It is a reflective process that determines what events consumers want to have. Mason, a consultant with various social and cultural interests, explains: "This self-knowledge, who am I, what are my core interests, what also overlaps? And what is, therefore, particularly important to me in terms of people and activities that fit together very well?" Mason shares that he thinks about himself and his life goals and then selects and prioritizes events.

Several criteria can determine the prioritization of specific events. Jasper describes some heuristics: "I think there are just people who enjoy a greater priority than others. Family or partners, or close friends should always be a priority. Then, how long have I not seen these people? How much do I feel like doing that activity in and of itself? For example, if I have the opportunity to go skiing with fewer seen friends or go out to eat with better friends that I may have seen the weekend before, maybe I'll go skiing instead. Those are kind of heuristics that I use." Jasper describes how he considers the importance of the person (Kate, Owen, Reese),

the enjoyment he would get from the event and how important the event would be for him, and the interval since last seeing the person.

The last criterion shows that specific event components can also give an event more priority. In the case of Jasper, it was the long intervals between meeting friends. Liam shares a similar prioritization approach. “I would say that meeting routine friends, really meeting the good friends, that’s more important to me as well. This perhaps also explains the paradox of whether I prioritize sporadic contact or these firm friendships. And I think it’s important for me to know that with regular friendships, you see each other at least every three weeks.” Liam has a heuristic that he will prioritize meeting close friends if he has not seen them in a few weeks. This is important to him. Stephanie shared that she followed a similar way of prioritizing an event she had not pursued so intensely for some time to get back on track: “And that’s why I was a bit behind with my university work. And now I had to start catching up a little bit. I think I started last week on Monday. Or the week before last.”

The prioritization of specific goals in life makes consumers prioritize specific events as well. For example, Demi explains: “My absolute priority number one is myself, my mental and physical health. And everything that pays off on that is a top priority. (...) It’s just that I must do yoga because of my back, that’s just not a nice-to-have, that’s just a must because I want to stay healthy.” Planning the event of yoga in her schedule is a priority for Demi because her health is a priority and doing yoga supports that goal. Jasper is concerned with “(s)taying in touch with the people who are important to me. Of course, it’s nice to call them and zoom in. That all works great. But I think nothing replaces dropping by in person, at least every few months. And you must be willing to get in the car, or sit on the train, or sit on the plane” Because his social contacts are a priority to him, he must plan travel periods and is willing to do so.

Prioritization of specific goals (and with that events) can be either a more general life prioritization or happen for a specific period. One of the most common prioritization shifts

happens between workdays and the weekend or work time and leisure time. While consumers may be highly focused and driven in their work, in their private sphere, they pursue different goals. Emilia elaborates on this in more detail: “Because this recreational factor also plays a role at the weekend. To find a balance for work. I also want to relax when I’m on vacation, so I’ll take a day at the beach or something. [...] I don’t want to do anything for work on the weekend. When finalizing my doctorate, I sometimes had to work on the weekend. And I almost always kept one day completely free. Except when I was super motivated and said, no, I want to finalize this now. [...] So, the weekend is already free of work. So now I don’t do anything on the weekend for the job.” Emilia emphasizes her goal of recreation during the weekend. Therefore, she prioritizes recreational activities like going to the beach or having a SPA Day. On the weekends, she does not want to work, and having at least one free day is something she sticks to even during busy periods. There were times while she was finishing off her dissertation project when she would prioritize getting done with her work more than her goal to relax. However, since she started to work, the weekends have been sacred again.

Domination. Structures of domination distribute power between agents. When making decisions about timing, consumers must consider much power they have in a specific context. Power is determined by the resources available to the consumer. Allocative resources refer to power over material objects (e.g., a supermarket has power over its products). Authoritative resources are concerned with having power over other people (e.g., an employer over their employees) (Whittington 2010; Gibbs 2013; Hardcastle et al. 2005). Power is revealed by following or rejecting temporal rules or norms (Whittington 2010). When synchronization with another temporal system is required, consumers must negotiate the temporal schedules (Whittington 2010).

Consumers must make the other person follow their temporal structure, or they must follow the other person’s temporal structure. The more tightly planned a person is, the less likely it is that they can respond to another person’s temporal structure, which is often

acknowledged by others. Emilia describes her attitude like this: “But otherwise, I’m also relatively flexible in the allocation of time. Sure, if there are appointments with people who have children, for example, or fixed working hours that are not as flexible as I am there, sometimes these are still limiting factors. But that’s always the case that you must coordinate with other people to see when it fits best. And depending on how willing the other person is to compromise, how much that is also possible, that the person is also willing to compromise, that can also be exhausting sometimes.” Emilia describes how there are increasing difficulties in agreeing on a joint timing the less willing another party is regarding a compromise. She also accepts specific temporal demands in the schedules of others, such as fixed work hours or temporal demands related to managing children. A meeting may never happen if both parties have different planning horizons and busy schedules. People higher up the social hierarchy may have more power regarding the temporal structures. Jay, who currently works in a very hierarchical setting, describes how little he feels like having a choice once he gets a request from his superior: “You also have to look a bit, whether there are certain obligations. I would prioritize those [obligations]. If my professor assigns me to something, then I wouldn’t necessarily prioritize the lunch meeting. Then it just must happen. I’m also totally dependent on the hierarchical apparatus and the authorities of the situation in which I work.” Jay fully accepts that he has no agency over his time and prioritizes his superior's demands over his personal desires. This is what Oswald describes from the other side. He worked in a large corporate environment for years and now is self-employed: “Yes, yes. Time management has become more difficult because I very often had this situation where a meeting takes place when I have time and would like to have it, of course, and then they were all present when that fit into my calendar. y, however, I also had the situation, even in a large corporation [...] I still have a few above me who do the same, and then a management visit is just announced, and you can no longer make other appointments. [...] it’s the case now that this simple time management has become more difficult. I often must ask myself about the availability of the

right people. In my consulting company, we have had this issue for some time now, and each of us also has many other projects. We have only one managing director. All the others have many other projects. [...] Time management has become much more difficult for me.”

Oswald clarifies that the social role can be a potential resource for consumers to dominate temporal negotiations. Him being higher up the hierarchy in a work setting made it easier for him to create schedules that worked for him. Now that Oswald is self-employed more negotiations arise about timing. Our respondent Monica had the reverse experience while advancing her career over the past years: “I’m now in the situation at my work that I manage the project. That means the work is not necessarily less, but the flexibility is. And if I now say I have dinner [at this time], unless there’s now an ultra-important customer meeting in the evening, which virtually never happens unless you have an American customer, that always works out. That’s my decision, and then maybe when I come back, I must do some work or get up earlier the next morning. But now I’m no longer in the externally controlled situation, in the position where I am now. It was different in the first three years at [my company], where you have someone who puts in the appointments for you.” The workload feels much more manageable for Monica when she has more flexibility and power over designing her own schedule.

Institutionalizations of specific temporal norms can also make it difficult to adapt or negotiate temporal schedules: “So opening hours of various things play a role. It starts with the authorities. I have applied for a new ID card. The collection times are fixed [...] The latest possible time is 5 p.m., or rather, that’s when they already close. [...]. Exactly such opening hours or similar [...] restrict me sometimes [...] sometimes also social expectation. This sounds somewhat crasser than it should, but for example, that one does not throw garbage in the glass after 8 p.m. or on Sunday. So, I often think to myself: ‘oh, glass garbage [would be good to throw away], today is Sunday, that means I’d better not do it, or it is already very late’. The same applies to vacuuming in the apartment; sometimes you have such a frenzy in

the evening or on the weekend that you say, ‘Oh man, now (I would like to do some) vacuuming, (and then you realize) ah it’s (too) late’.” Emilia describes how she must work around institutionalized temporal structures like the opening hours of powerful institutions, which other respondents like Ida also experience. The more institutionalized temporal structures are, the less flexible they are, and consumers rather have to accept instead of negotiate temporal schedules. Emilia also mentions the restrictions imposed on her through social norms around timing, such as not pursuing loud activities (e.g., throwing away glass or vacuuming) in the evenings or on Sundays.

Legitimation. Structures of legitimation refer to rules about social conduct. The rules are articulated as rights and obligations and come with sanctions and rewards (Hardcastle et al. 2005). Consumers must consider what happens if they do not adhere to the temporal norms when negotiating timing. As Emilia already mentioned, there are social norms around when to do what (Ancona et al., 2001; Zerubavel, 1981). In some cases, a deviation from existing temporal structures or norms is more difficult than other times, as Stuart describes: “When I’m [at home] with my parents, like just over Christmas recently, then the day is determined by others, then there’s lunch at 11:30. If you say, I’m not eating today, I’m going for a run, then it’s already difficult. No deviation from their daily schedule is tolerated. [...] if you leave, you hurt the family’s feelings.” Stuart describes how he must follow the set temporal norms within his parents’ house when he spends time with his family. This means, for example, having lunch together at 11:30. Deviation has consequences. Probably, he would hurt his parents’ feelings. When he considers not adhering to these norms, he must live with the consequence of upsetting his family. Jay explicitly verbalizes the impact of norms on his behavior: “I could say, no, it’s not only our motivation but also the norms and values that we are exposed to, which are perhaps not reflected so strongly. [...] There are, I think, only a few moments in life or everyday life that are not influenced by norms and values. Somehow, we live in a world where there are shared structures. Expectations from others developed over

time. [...] It's certainly also something that's kind of normative. *And I must come to terms with that. I must deal with that, fit in somehow.*" Jay describes how it is important for him to adhere to these norms to "fit in". If consumers do not adhere to the norm, consumers experience sanctions.

As Kate did, consumers can establish their own temporal norms: "Mornings are sacred for me. I have taught my team well. I've taught my clients well. That up until 9:30 in the morning, I'm not to be bothered. Or I'm not to be expected to respond. Weekends are the same. Holidays are the same. Nobody's trying to ambush me with any kind of emails or whatever past working hours or weekends." Kate created specific expectations around when and when she is not available. The people who want to interact with her successfully learned to adhere to these norms. To teach her team and clients, Kate "punished" them by not responding well to inquiries earlier in the morning. She did not fear upsetting any of the other parties involved.

Sanctions that consumers experience can be not being able to execute a task or experience a specific event (e.g., being at the grocery store after opening hours or not being allowed on the tennis court without a reservation) or being punished explicitly (e.g., when not handing in the tax report on time). The strength of temporal norms is impacted by the sanctions consumers may face or fear if they do not adhere to them. Oswald, for example, describes a situation in which he willingly accepts the penalty for not adhering to institutionalized temporal norms: "Otherwise, there are also priorities that I have a different assessment of, and they are mostly in the administrative, bureaucratic part. There I am - how should I put it? I usually don't take that seriously enough. Then some colleagues are a little more disciplined and say, 'But now the tax office is impatient, there is some sales tax form, and why have you not taken care of it?' And then I always say, 'Well, I'll just get a 20 euro fine. In the end, there's always a sales tax return that we can use to fix it all.' But that's where I often downplay priorities that the others might value more highly." For Oswald, a fine of 20

euros is a sanction he would be willing to accept. Therefore, he does not feel strongly bound to adhere to the tax office's temporal norms. On the other hand, it is important to note that the recurring adherence to temporal structures reproduces and reinforces their legitimacy and influence in organizational life (Orlikowski and Yates 2002).

DISCUSSION

Time is a complex construct (Woermann and Rokka 2015). It is vital to further our understanding of this concept as it influences and impacts consumer research in many ways: For example, time functions as a resource that consumers make allocation decisions about (e.g., Fernbach et al. 2015; Okada and Hoch 2004). Time acts as a coordinating mechanism between consumers and institutions to align social life and practices (e.g., Reinecke and Ansari 2015; Schatzki 2009). Temporal orientation gives meaning to consumption (e.g., Robinson et al. 2022). Time determines consumption experience (e.g., Husemann and Eckhardt 2019; Woermann and Rokka 2015). Temporal experiences are a precondition for other consumption behavior and choices (e.g., Kim et al. 2019; Linh and Rhee 2020).

Future-oriented consumer research

Much consumer research that addresses time as temporal orientation was preoccupied with the past. For example, they were investigating consumers' reconsumption of hedonic experiences (Russell and Levy 2012), consumers' heirloom rejuvenation (Türe and Ger 2016), consumption (e.g., tattoos or souvenirs) to remember past events (Marcoux 2017; Steadman et al. 2018), heritage-themed consumption (Goulding et al. 2018; Thompson and Tian 2008), or nostalgic consumption (Brunk, Giesler, and Hartmann 2017). Some consumer research investigates the negotiation processes around temporal orientations of the past, present, and future (Robinson et al. 2022; Türe and Ger 2016). However, much less research has been conducted on future orientation: Thomas and Epp (2019) investigated how young

parents plan the accommodation of new consumption practices around their children.

Weinberger and colleagues (Weinberger et al. 2017) found that young adults adapted their consumption in the present with their imagined future selves in mind.

Our research expands prior research by elaborating on individual motivations for planning processes of time and negotiation processes around time allocation. We highlighted consumers' efforts to align their time schedules and tempos with other consumers or institutional structures. Future research could further explore consumer resource allocation decisions with a future-oriented mindset. There is prevailing short-term thinking in modern western societies (Hahn et al. 2015; Pulk 2022). To shift to more sustainable behavior, a change to a more future-oriented, long-term perspective would be required (Arnocky, Milfont, and Nicol 2014). However, intertemporal tensions often emerge between short-term and long-term orientation when planning a change to increase more sustainable behavior (Slawinski and Bansal 2015; White, Habib, and Hardisty 2019).

Embedded temporal practices: Gender, Status, and Negotiation Power

Prior research on time planning and allocation in consumer research was centered around the individual consumer. Either by making time planning and management an identity project (Keinan, Bellezza, and Paharia 2019; Bellezza et al. 2016; Gershuny 2005) or by making consumers' time planning and time management decisions an issue of personality and personal preferences (Claessens et al. 2007; Cotte et al. 2004; Francis-Smythe and Robertson 1999). For example, Bond and Feather (1988) investigated the impact of personality traits like neuroticism and extraversion and their implications for time structure and management. Williams et al. (1995) explored the connection between different personality types and self-management practices. Francis-Smythe and Robertson (1999) suggested a scale measuring time-related individual differences with punctuality, planning, polychronicity, and impatience. Kaufman-Scarborough and Lindquist (Kaufman-Scarborough and Lindquist 1999) elaborated

on consumers' individual preferences for performing more than one task at a time. Feldman and Hornik (1981) introduced the concept of timestyles, which reflects the individual locus of time's meaning in the choice of daily activities. Cotte and colleagues (2004) explored consumers' timestyles as individual orientations.

While consumers personalities and preferences indeed play a part in consumers' decisions around time planning, prior research alluded to consumers' timing decisions being embedded in social and functional contexts (Gerstel and Clawson 2018). Consumers act not under fully "self-selected circumstances (but) they must constantly engage with already-existing timestructures imposed on their bodies, spatial and technological consumption, and social and institutional participation." (Robinson et al. 2022 108). However, prior research addressed this only scarcely (Claessens 2004; Perlow 1999).

Our research highlights the interaction mechanisms between the individual, other consumers, and other temporal structures and the constraints that come with that. Social norms or functional constraints influence timing in a myriad of ways. With that, our research lays the foundation to explore how contextual factors, like social power dynamics, determine consumers' time schedules.

First evidence suggests that gender, class, or race impact the temporal structures and experiences (e.g., Gerstel and Clawson 2015; 2014). Focusing on aspects like social class, gender, and race/ethnicity can help to unravel the social patterning of (temporal) consumption (Holt 1997). Some prior research suggests that, for example, women experience busier lives and less voluntary time schedules: For example, Thompson (1996) highlighted the increasing temporal demands for women, who were expected to effortlessly do it all and keep "juggling" (Crosby 1991). But still today, women reported being significantly busier than men, even when controlling for employment status (e.g., working full-time vs. being retired) (Festini et al. 2019). Mothers still have to manage high levels of time pressure, which often distorts their perceived quality of time and temporal experiences (Rose 2017). Often, women need to adapt

to the temporal structures they operate in (Sabelis 2001; Pech, Klainot-Hess, and Norris 2021). Although often assumed otherwise, women with higher income and higher occupational status have not subsequently greater power in their domestic relationships (Commuri and Gentry 2005; Tichenor 1999). This evidence can be interpreted from the lens we introduced: Women's lack of (perceived) social power leads to a lack of consumer agency over their time schedules. Expanding on organizational and psychological research (e.g., Ancona and Chong 1992; Labianca et al. 2005; Standifer and Bluedorn 2016) on temporal alignment processes, consumer research could benefit from further investigation of this field. Future research could explore how minority groups can gain power in temporal negotiation processes and how political and institutional structures impact the power dynamics around time. Additionally, the service sector could be a relevant research context as temporal coordination between client and service personnel is required, and power dynamics are at play.

With our research, we are also following the demand for insights on consumer agency, time allocation, and status (Bellezza et al. 2016; Keinan et al. 2019). The research of Bellezza and colleagues suggests that the perceived agency moderated favorable inferences associated with busyness over time (i.e., the extent to which the busy lifestyle was perceived as a deliberate choice) (Bellezza et al. 2016). Having autonomy was associated with greater coolness (Warren and Campbell 2014). Autonomy in setting one's schedule augments the "symbolic value of time" (Keinan et al. 2019; Tonietto and Malkoc 2016). For example, consumers can show autonomy and be ascribed a higher status through non-conforming behavior (e.g., wearing red shoes in a work setting) (Bellezza, Gino, and Keinan 2014).

Further research could explore whether these insights are also valid for time. Violating temporal norms, e.g., by being late, could be interpreted as non-conformation to social norms as a sign of higher agency or status or as having little agency and control over time due to being disorganized. Research could investigate the relationship between agency and control

over time, power, and social status in more depth. Insights on this could not only be insightful to understand consumer behavior better but used for branding purposes. Time is, for example, a central dimension of luxury perception. Time, in particular waiting times, are used in luxury marketing to increase the desire for luxury products (Kapferer and Bastien 2017).

The dark side of flexibility: Insecurity and the quest for consumer agency

With our research, we also join the debate around consumer flexibility. Insights gained on consumers experience of flexibility so far are contradictory. There is a strong positive connotation surrounding flexibility. In the narrative of contemporary neoliberal capitalism, flexibility is highly valued and associated with innovation and change, while stability and commitment are dreaded (Bauman 2000; Mimoun and Bardhi 2021). Consumers strive increasingly for less commitment in their consumption (Bardhi and Eckhardt 2017; Bardhi, Eckhardt, and Arnould 2012). Consumers perceive precarious and flexible lifestyles as offering freedom and empowerment (Standing 2011; Mimoun and Bardhi 2021). Temporal flexibility in a work setting is operationalized as the opportunity to schedule vacations and leaves, to adapt the start and end times as needed, to compress or extend work time, and to choose the work location (Correll et al. 2014; Gerstel and Clawson 2018). In the work setting, flexible time arrangements are perceived as, for example, the solutions to a more family-friendly work setting (e.g., Christensen and Schneider 2011; Correll et al. 2014; Gerstel and Clawson 2018). However, there are downsides to flexibility. In organizational settings, flexible arrangements are not used due to fear of being punished with negative career repercussions (like wage penalties, lower evaluations, and fewer promotions) (Gerstel and Clawson 2018; Williams et al. 2013). Flexibility is also often granted to more high-income employees (Glauber 2011; Lyness et al. 2012). When the employer controls flexibility, it can create insecurity rather than flexibility for employees (Gerstel and Clawson 2018), when flexibility means that employees are expected to be always available (Williams et al. 2013).

This reveals that flexibility and unpredictability are two sides of the same coin. The examples from the work setting show that flexibility often is not status neutral (e.g., gender and class), and power dynamics determine the experience of flexibility (Gerstel and Clawson 2014).

Flexibility needs to be accompanied by consumer agency to be perceived as pleasant (Mimoun and Bardhi 2021; Moen et al. 2016). Our research offered first insights into consumer agency over time and temporal experience. Further research should investigate the relationship between flexibility and unpredictability concepts in more detail.

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