

Russell Ackoff Doctoral Student Fellowship for Research on Human Decision Processes and Risk Management: 2012 Application

The Influence of Speed on Time Allocation Decisions in Social Connection

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Requested Support: \$3600

Description of the Research Project

Time is one of our most precious resources; it is a finite quantity and how we choose to allocate it has direct consequences for our well-being. However, individuals must make tradeoffs when deciding how to allocate time, and this allocation decision may change under different circumstances. For example, time does not always seem to move along at the same speed. The pace at which we live our lives appears to be speeding up at an ever-increasing rate. Since the dawn of the machine era, speed any faster than a horse or a sailboat was impossible. Now we travel at the speed of airplanes, trains, and cars, and communicate at the rate it takes to click “send” on an email. Recently scientists have discovered that even the speed of light is not the fastest rate of travel imaginable (Mann, 2011). A question that has yet to be answered is how does the increasing speed at which we live our lives affect how we choose to allocate our time, and what are the consequences for connecting with others? The purpose of the current research is to investigate how consumers view the benefits of living life fast vs. slowly and its influence on time allocation decisions and social connection.

One can imagine benefits both from living life fast and living life slowly. Modern conveniences are fast and were designed with the intention to give us more time to do other things. This efficiency can increase our productivity and allow us to do more. The resulting increased spare time can be used to spend more time for the things that make us happy, such as connecting with others, or can be filled with an unlimited supply of fast modern gadgets that make our time efficient, packing more and more into every day. When individuals’ attention is directed to the benefits of slow as compared to fast time, how will they choose to allocate their time in each mindset, and how will this affect their well-being and feelings of interpersonal connection?

Previous research has shown that activating the general concept of time has been shown to increase desire for social connection (Mogilner, 2010), but time has many dimensions that could have been activated in this construct. For example, when someone thinks of time, he or she may be focused on the speed of time, the amount of time left in life, the amount of time in a day, time as a resource, or time as a constraint. In this line of research with my collaborator, Professor Cassie Mogilner, we hypothesize that thinking of the benefits of time being slow as compared to fast will increase one’s desire to connect with others. In addition, we hypothesize that this will have consequences for the quality of social interactions that take place; individuals will have more positive social interactions, evaluate their interaction partners more positively, and choose to spend more time interacting with a social partner when their attention is focused on slow as compared to fast time. After exploring these hypotheses, we plan to examine the potential mechanisms of the effect, or why thinking about the benefits of slow time increases individuals’ desire to connect with others.

There have been many studies that have activated fast or slow speed through priming tasks and looked at the consequences for attitudes and behavior, but they have not examined the differences between the benefits of fast versus slow time. Most of the studies that have used some type of construct to prime speed have focused on the negative or neutral aspects of fast time, such as feeling rushed or short on time. For example, Zhong and DeVoe (2010) found that incidental exposure to fast food can make people more impatient even outside the domain of food and eating, and increase people’s preference for time-saving products. If individuals’ preference for products that allow them to make the most of time when it is fast can be increased by implicitly activating the concept of fast, then preferences for products that allow individuals to make the most of time when it is slow may be altered by implicitly activating the benefits of slow.

Results from preliminary studies show that there does seem to be a link between the benefits of slow time and social connection. In two different studies we found evidence for the main effect of

thinking of the benefits of slow versus fast time on interpersonal connection with two different manipulations of speed and measures of social connection (Hypothesis 1). An initial study revealed that compared to participants who were asked to think of the benefits of fast time, those who were asked to think of the benefits of slow time felt more loved and loving, and reported wanting to spend more time with relatives in the coming week. In another preliminary study, participants wrote more positive letters to close others when they were told that the letter would be sent slow (in the mail) than when it would be sent fast (by email).

Professor Mogilner and I plan to replicate the effects found in our preliminary studies using behavioral measures of social connection, as well as examine actual social interactions when fast versus slow time is emphasized (Hypothesis 2a, Hypothesis 2b). In the Wharton Behavioral Lab, we plan to run two social interaction studies with different manipulations of fast and slow time. In our first study, we will ask participants to think about the benefits of slow or fast time, and in our second study we will simulate the feeling of time actually moving slower or faster with the sound of a slow-paced or fast-paced metronome. We will then examine how participants feel, how positively participants evaluate their interaction partners, and for how long participants choose to interact after the required amount of interaction time has ended.

We also want to examine how exactly does thinking about the benefits of slow time increase an individual's desire to connect with others. We propose that thinking of the benefits of slow time increases an individual's mindfulness or present engagement (Hypothesis 3). The Buddhist perspective describes mindfulness as greater attention and awareness paid to present-moment events and occurrences (Brown & Ryan, 2004). Time has been shown to be full of personal meaning (Mogilner & Aaker, 2009), and it may be the case that this meaning is derived from being more engaged in the present.

Hypothesis 1. Thinking of the benefits of time being slow as compared to fast will increase one's desire to connect with others.

Hypothesis 2a. Thinking of the benefits of time being slow as compared to fast will increase the quality of social interactions and individuals will evaluate their interaction partners more positively.

Hypothesis 2b. Thinking of the benefits of time being slow as compared to fast will increase the amount of time allocated to interacting with a social partner relative to other alternatives.

Hypothesis 3. The effect of thinking of the benefits of slow time rather than fast time on one's desire to connect with others (Hypothesis 1) will be mediated by mindfulness, or increased attention to the present moment.

I plan to test the above hypotheses across six studies. Identifying the factors that make individuals more or less likely to connect with others is crucial to understanding how to increase well-being. I believe that this research will contribute to a better understanding of how consumers choose to allocate their time under different circumstances, and different tradeoffs they must make when faced with these decisions. This research will also illuminate the potentially important influence of speed in the research on time and social connection. In addition to working toward a journal publication, I also intend to share my findings at the Society for Consumer Psychology Conference next year. The Wharton Marketing Department allocates some funding for research and travel, but it is only sufficient to cover a small percentage of the research and travel expenses that I intend to incur over the next year, and I currently have no other sources of funding.

I am grateful for the research support that the Wharton Risk and Decision Processes Center provides students through the Ackoff Doctoral Student Fellowship program. I thank you for your consideration and welcome any questions you may have about my research.

Estimated Budget

Data Collection (\$2 x 6 studies x 200 participants)	\$2400
Society for Consumer Psychology Conference (Feb 2013, San Antonio, TX)	
Conference registration	\$200
Travel (flight, taxi, parking)	\$500
Hotel (4 nights, shared by two students)	\$500
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Total Costs	\$3600
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Total Requested from the Ackoff Doctoral Student Fellowship	\$3600

References

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