Influence of Social Context on Consumption in the USA: An Abstract

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Abstract The present study explores co-consumption—consuming in a social context—in the USA. It takes advantage of publicly available, individual-level survey data on time use and presence of others, as well as utility models. The activities of interest include shopping for two types of goods and exposure to varied media. Simultaneous equation models help capture the endogenous relationship between the utility of (a) spending waking time on any given activity and (b) sharing this time and activity with others. Overall, individual utility does not change with respect to the average when the utility-generating activities are using media, or shopping. The utility of sharing time and activity with others though does increase while shopping—especially for durable goods and clothing (DG&C), watching theatrical movies and television, as well as listening to recorded or streamed music. Listening to radio has negative effects, especially after 2010. Historic trends reveal that, in the otherwise “individualistic” USA, co-shopping for DG&C has been growing (representing 70% of minutes spent shopping in 2015) and co-shopping for groceries has been stable (51%), whereas media co-exposure has had a weak tendency to decrease but remains high for television (52%) and theatrical movies (95%).

References Available Upon Request

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