

Jolien DE SCHEPPER et al.

jolien.deschepper@uantwerpen.be

University of Antwerp, Belgium



Phone in Hand – A Boredom Demand? Studying the Regulation of Boredom Through Smartphone Use

It is easy to imagine situations where we lose our attention to a task (e.g., reading a project proposal). This can be due to insufficient stimulation or because the task is mentally challenging. Both situations can make you feel bored. If available, a smartphone at your desk provides ample opportunities to combat this boredom. When will you grab your phone, what apps will you use, and what content will you search to escape this uncomfortable feeling? And will boredom eventually disappear and make room for something more meaningful? Relying on Mood Management Theory as applied in media psychology research (Bryant & Zillman, 1984) and recent models on boredom (cfr. MAC-model, Westgate & Wilson, 2018), we aim to investigate how using a smartphone and the selection of specific content (e.g., enjoyable vs. interesting) is used for emotion regulation, defined as “the processes by which individuals influence which emotions they have, when they have them, and how they experience and express these emotions” (Gross, 1999, p. 275). At the time of writing this abstract, we are running two parallel and separate studies for which the data and results will be available at the time of the conference. The first study entails a diary study (ESM) to gather insights about daily media choices that young adults make when they feel bored. Participants are therefore asked to take the survey every time they feel bored, where they subsequently report their situation, feelings, and media choices. Study two takes place in a lab setting and investigates the bodily reactions (of arousal and meaningfulness) caused by different types of boredom and, in turn, the media choices made as a result thereof. During this process, we will also check if there is any change in their psychophysiological measures after making their media choice to check if there is successful emotion regulation. The media choices for both studies are between enjoyable and interesting content (pre-tested). Overall, interesting things require cognitive resources to be successfully

comprehended and increase attentional demand; while enjoyable things are familiar and do not require resources. Westgate and Wilson (2018) propose that people who are understimulated will be more likely to pursue interesting content to match the environmental demand with the resources that they have available. In contrast, overstimulated people will be more likely to choose enjoyable content that does not require many cognitive resources to process. Our studies allow us to empirically test and validate these findings, in the context of smartphone use more specifically. The results of our studies are expected to give insights into people's everyday behavior during boredom and opening insights on the need and desirability of steering these into the most adaptive direction (i.e., making sure people act in their best interest when consuming media to combat boredom).