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# Suzanne Slaughter and Georgiana Grigore

## Exploring the Post-Recession Experiences of the 'Cocooning' Consumer: The Importance of Core Values and Rituals

*This paper explores the experiences of 'cocooners'; consumers who are continuing to perform behaviours as the economic crisis eases. These behaviours were considered as necessity during the peak of the recession. Drawing on nine phenomenological interviews, this paper investigates how effects of recession and transitional periods in life heighten consumer price consciousness, attachment to finances, and the desire for a simpler life. Ritual-like activities took the place of many experiences that would happen outside the home in stores, cinemas and restaurants, in order to return to core values of relationships with family and the creation of things for the self. The paper does not attempt to categorise consumers based upon the severity of their adaptations to spending or consumption behaviour, instead explores their experiences inside and outside the home. Discussion provides a description of the characteristics of the cocooning consumer.*

Keywords: Cocooning consumer, post-recession experiences, rituals, core value

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### INTRODUCTION

Consumers are entertaining in the home more than they did five years ago, are spending more on in-home meals than dining out, watch box sets instead of visiting the cinema, and purchase increasing proportions of their goods online rather than in stores (Mintel 2013). In the UK, footfall to retail stores decreased by 2.9% in November 2013 compared to November 2012, while in the same month online purchases rose to a monthly record of £10.1 billion (Butler 2013). Success of TV shows such as Masterchef and The Great British Bake Off are further fuelling the trends which frequently emerge out of recessions, such as the desire to revive 'lost skills' and cooking in the home from scratch (Mintel 2013). Although shopper confidence is on the increase (Holland 2014), many consumers are staying in their homes; for example, a quarter of UK adult consumers are continuing to spend more on at-home luxury meals as a substitute to going out (Mintel 2013). These consumers have turned into 'stay at home shoppers' or, as this study will

define them, 'cocooners' - substituting going out for staying in, remaining in the home and reducing their visits to spaces owned by the market (Harris 2013).

It is predicted that these trends will continue to grow and that consumers will simplify their lives and purchases even when they regain the ability to spend (Flatters and Willmott 2009). Consumers seem prone to change behaviours quicker or reduce spending in response to economic crisis, and it is often inaccurately assumed that these behaviours return to normal post-crisis (Hampson and McGoldrick 2011). Recession accelerates the consumer demand for simplicity, whereby consumers desire to be discretionally thrifty and buy into simpler offerings with the greatest value (Flatters and Willmott 2009). As a trend, 'cocooners' and their habits are fuelling this desire to simplify life and to remain thrifty, and it is therefore important to understand a plethora of practices and attitudes of 'cocooning' consumers. Cocooning consumers are radically reducing the frequency of visits to physical shopping environments and other places of leisure, as well as spending less time and money on each shopping trip (Brady and Hale 2010). They are adopting behaviours that limit their interaction with the market. By listening to consumer stories and understanding their experiences, academics and practitioners alike can realise the cocooning consumer's motivations for staying inside the home.

Previous studies attempt to classify consumers into categories based upon adaptive behaviours during or after economic recessions have occurred (Hampson and McGoldrick 2013). However little is known about adaptations to broader behaviour and attitudes in times of recession, such as the desire to remain in the home. This study aims to contribute to consumer behaviour knowledge, by understanding experiences of the cocooning consumer while at home and within spaces owned by the market. The broader motivations of the consumer to retain their recessionary behaviours are questioned, as well as their current attitudes towards the market. This paper brings together previous research on changes to consumer behaviour in recession, but explores deeper attitudes towards their experiences with the market and spending their hard-earned finances. More specifically, the research aims to identify the characteristics of the 'cocooning' consumer, constructing an original perspective and contribution to marketing knowledge. The paper starts by presenting consumer behaviour alterations in recession, and the impact of the resulting price conscious effect on consumers' attachment to money. Then changes to consumer priorities and values during recession, and consumer valuations of purchasing by visiting physical market spaces or from their own homes are investigated. Then research methodology is presented. Finally key themes are discussed and conclusions are highlighted.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

This study draws upon previous work of adaptive shopping behaviours in recession (Hampson and McGoldrick 2011) and brings light to consumers' behaviours inside and outside the home as we emerge out of recession (Allen 2014).

### Price Consciousness in Recession

Price consciousness is presented as related to the changes consumers make to their shopping behaviour during recession (Swait and Sweeney 2000, Flatters and Willmott 2009, Ang 2001, Bondy and Talwar 2011). This theory suggests that consumers increase their price knowledge as an economy weakens (Estelami et al 2001) and weigh price more heavily when making purchase decisions (Howard and Sheth 1969). McKenzie

(2003) discovered that in many cases consumers adapt their consumption to minimize the impact on their food spending, as this routine purchase cannot be avoided in the same way as the need to buy other goods (Bondy and Talwar 2011). Consumers are more able to correctly recall or estimate the prices of grocery items in their trolley during recessionary times (de Chernatony et al 1992). The social impact of recessions also has a profound impact on shopper behaviour. Consumers who suffer no direct effects of recession become more price conscious, creating a culture of thrift on a larger scale and at national level (Hampson and McGoldrick 2011). Whilst these studies provide practitioners with an understanding of the changes consumers make to their concentration on spending amounts during recessions, it does not however allow us to understand cocooning consumers' broader attitudes towards the market when the frequency of their visits to physical shopping environments decreases.

Related to price consciousness we also note studies of consumer attitudes towards spending and the market in general during recession (Shipchandler 1982), and more specifically, studies of consumer attitudes and behaviours while shopping in stores (de Chernatony et al 1992). A prominent stream of literature deals with the increase in purchases of store brands (Lamey et al 2007, Sinha and Batra 1999), or with consumers' near exclusive focus on lower prices when shopping in stores (Lichtenstein et al 1993). When questioning consumer attitudes during or after recession about their broader habits and social life rather than purely as shoppers, Manning's (2005) study on variations of consumer attitudes towards debt and financial struggles between generations is significant. Younger generations of consumers viewed the use of budgets negatively, and felt a need for immediacy in owning consumer products, which was often followed by regret at a later stage (Manning 2005). Further research can be conducted in this area to fully understand how the cocooning consumer feels that recession and price consciousness has affected their broader lives, rather than just their purchasing habits.

It is a logical assumption that consumers remain in the home and limit their visits to spaces owned by the market because the recession or other personal situation has impacted their finances, and the consumer now feels the need to save money (Shipchandler 1982). Studies investigate how and why people save money, and what attachments they place on their money (Furnham 1984, Wernimont and Fitzpatrick 1972, Furnham 1998). Money saving habits are often influenced by a person's life events, their social networks and the strategies they employ to cope with periods of low income or limited funds (Livingstone and Lunt 1993). Livingstone and Lunt (1993) found that people who had suffered decreases in income, most often through the loss of a job, revert to their previous standards of living and concentrate on spending money on food and occasional rewards. Yet these only shed light on the meanings of economic activities such as saving in the context of peoples' everyday lives, not strictly within the context of recession or post-recession periods (Hampson and McGoldrick 2011).

#### What Consumers Value in Recession

A significant body of literature focuses on consumer spending alterations during changing times (Perriman et al 2010). For example, McGregor's study (2000) on the changing behaviours of consumers during times of economic hardship provides insights into what shoppers value, namely a streamlined experience to what they expected in times of plenty. The consumer sets priorities and lets go of non-essentials, now demanding more from the shopping experience and basing their perceptions of quality on their prior knowledge (McGregor 2000). Shipchandler (1982) based his findings of

consumer behaviour changes on four tendencies that appeared most prominently in recessionary times; an ethic of conservation and carefulness with existing possessions, a desire for a simpler way of life, increased planning in shopping and reduced impulse purchases, and a desire for greater value in products and services. Consumers are also portrayed as more 'promiscuous' during economic crisis, taking advantage of deals from various stores and rapidly decreasing their loyalty to certain brands (Hampson and McGoldrick 2011). Clearly "loyal customers are more profitable to retailers and brands than frequent switching consumers" (Knox and Denison 2000), however the consumer shops less frequently (Shipchandler 1982) and engages in greater comparative shopping during recession (Shama 1978). The existing literature is vastly from the perspective of retail and business management practitioners, highlighting the need for the consumer viewpoint of their attitudes towards remaining in the home. Shipchandler (1982) presents evidence of the 'back to basics' attitude many consumers revert to in periods of stagflation. He found that consumers enjoy the simpler version of life, and can learn to appreciate living without the unnecessary frills attached to many consumer products; as well as enjoying simpler activities such as inviting friends over, camping and being outdoors (Shipchandler 1982). His study also revealed that the 'do-it-yourself' tendency flourished in times of economic hardship, and he indicates the need for future research to monitor these trends closely to limit the ramifications for the market and practitioners (Shipchandler 1982). As Flatters and Willmott (2009) discovered, the consumer builds a mounting dissatisfaction with excessive consumption and grows a desire for a less wasteful life. This might align with the growing interest in 'green consumerism', increases in recycling and a yearning for traditional values (Flatters and Willmott 2009).

#### 'Staying In' vs. 'Going Out'

This section presents consumer motivation to remain in the home as recession ease and the habits that indicate a distancing from the market. Whether or not consumers prefer to shop online or in stores is debated (Ganesh et al 2010). For example, Kacen et al (2013) discovered that consumers perceive online stores to have higher costs and fewer benefits for the purchaser, despite the consistently rising numbers of online shoppers. An earlier study discovered that consumers displayed a greater satisfaction with online shopping when the shopping experience positively correlated with values such as convenience (Szymanski and Hise 2000). A visit to a physical space owned by the market, such as a store or restaurant, will influence consumers' emotional responses and attitudes towards purchasing and to a brand or company (Yoo et al 1998). Pleasurable store atmospherics have been shown to influence the amount of time and money spent in the store and the willingness to visit again (Donovan and Rossiter 1982).

The effects of environmental characteristics of stores on shoppers' emotions and attitudes have also been explored (Donovan and Rossiter 1982, Ridgeway et al 1994, Frow and Payne 2007). In an early study of online shopping, Burke (2002) found that consumers greatly preferred the convenience of the physical store to make the final transaction in the purchase cycle. However, Kuan and Bock (2007) found that many consumers increasingly prefer to shop with 'faceless' online stores, despite their lack of established trust from holding a physical presence. A critically limited number of studies could be found on the consumer attitudes towards the increase in general 'staying in' behaviours during or after periods of recession. Therefore this study will address a gap by exploring the consumer's experiences of spending their leisure time inside the home,

and also in a variety of spaces owned by the market, rather than purely stores and retail spaces.

## METHODOLOGY

Drawing upon nine phenomenological interviews, this study understands cocooning consumers, and their experiences of 'staying in'. This research is guided by the 'life world', or the interactions between individuals and their perceptual environments (Thompson 1997, Creswell 1998, Garza 2007), and seeks to understand the consumer experience from the specific context of the way in which it was lived. Data was analysed using an hermeneutical approach, where the researcher related aspects of the interviews to the overall life-world of the informants, and sought for key themes from interview to interview and interview to whole (Thompson 1997). After several readings of the transcripts, insights and understandings were gained about the biographical significance of the participants' life-stages and specific personal situations to their behaviours.

A total of eleven hours of data was collected from nine interviewees. A sample size for the study was not pre-determined. Thompson et al (1990) note the suitability of this method for phenomenological research to ensure that the focus of the study is on exhausting the range of discourses rather than meeting set sampling numbers. The ages of the participants ranged from 21 years to 64 years, and therefore included a varied collection of past experiences, personal biographies and backgrounds.

An information sheet outlining the study's purpose was used to invite those interested in taking part. Participants were interviewed because their lives had recently changed with effect to their free time and spending power. Some had recently moved to new homes, some had recently had their children move out, and some had changed their lifestyles due to personal shifts. All participants were suitable for providing discursive material to the study because all had felt an increase in price consciousness due to recession, which is in-line with previous literature (Hampson and McGoldrick 2011, Shipchandler 1982). Holt (2002) used a similar technique to successful effect, locating participants in an intentionally conservative method in order to find individuals who demonstrated they were a robust example for his study.

Participants were interviewed in their own homes. Three areas of questions were designed to be covered; questions to gather information about the participant and their day-to-day lifestyles, the impact of recession and price consciousness on their lifestyles, and finally the participants were asked about their experiences inside and outside the home. The participants were asked to recall past experiences of shopping online and in stores, cooking and visiting restaurants, and also watching films and entertainment. These three types of experiences can easily be contrasted to happen both inside and outside the home.

In order to ensure concreteness rather than abstract views of the lived experience (Wertz 2005), participants were specifically asked to 'describe the last time you visited the cinema', or to tell the researcher about 'the last time you did something special on a night in'. This research followed the ethical procedures of the university. Pseudonyms were used in order to maintain participants' confidentiality to the study. As is the case with phenomenological interviews, different researchers may always produce different stories from the same data, and it can be argued that the researcher's interpretation

would not match others’ (Schwandt 1998). In order to limit the interviewer bias, and therefore improve trustworthiness, the researcher endeavoured to maintain a stance of neutrality throughout the research process by not presenting own perceptions or views on the topic, unless copious probing was required (Appleton 1995).

**Table 1- Sample Description**

Name	Age	Location of Interview	Occupation	Impact of Recession on Participant	Cocooning Behaviours and Rituals
Alexander	21	Bournemouth	Student	Sheltered from effects of recession by being a student and comfortable parents	Economical with food, dislikes spending money on food in restaurants, avoids social events if he doesn't want to spend the money
Maria	22	Bournemouth	Student	Sheltered from effects of recession by being a student, yet price consciousness is greatly felt when shopping	Watches films and cooks with friends at home to strengthen relationships rather than spending money
Melody	25	Skype	Food concept developer	She was a student at worst point of recession, but has moved to London which has had a big financial impact	Cooks for friends to keep costs of socialising down, can't enjoy evenings out because always thinking of money
Ben	64	Reading	Warehouse manager	Recently semi-retired, spent much of his adult life saving and is on a comfortable salary so has had no real impact from recession	Special meals and occasions are more likely to happen in the home
Jessica	23	Maidenhead	Physiotherapist	Recently bought own property which has bought biggest financial impact	Avoids expensive activities, makes rather than buys furniture, holds film nights with neighbours to bond and keep costs down
Alison	48	Reading	Chemist	Spending power has changed because her children have started to move out, so has more spare cash, but has always felt increased living costs since recession hit	Evenings in are made to be special with food and sweets, so she can catch up with her partner and avoid spending money. Family meals are important to her
Alastair	27	Skype	Carpenter	Recently bought own property, a massive change from when he rented larger properties, and is worried about his job security	Cost of living causes him to stay in a lot, has built relationships with neighbours and socialises with them to save cost of travelling
George	25	Skype	Food concept developer	Has moved to London so feels financial pressure increasing all the time	Large amount of effort is put into maintaining his relationships with friends, spends a lot of time cooking, is resourceful with shopping to save waste
Sophia	37	Reading	Nurse	Has felt impact of recession in her job with NHS, has not received bonus she was expecting	Puts large amount of effort into cooking at home, entertains friends

FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

Here we discuss in more details the key themes identified in discussion with the nine interviewees that participated in the study.

### Value Placed on Experiences

A prominent theme among interviewees was price consciousness as a result of the general economic downturn and also their current circumstances (similar with Hampson and McGoldrick 2011, Flatters and Willmott 2009). Participants who were in a younger life-stage, or who had only recently become fully independent from their parents by having moved into their first homes or first few jobs, were more impacted by price consciousness. Therefore the behaviours they exhibited in their free time and the value that was placed on their experiences were generally dissimilar to those of the participants who had accrued more of their lifetime's financial earnings. The researcher was able to understand the many ways recession had affected the younger participants. Many had noticed the rise in the cost of living, and some had increased cost burdens by moving to expensive cities or to new homes. This affected every decision when shopping, socialising and choosing free-time activities.

For example, Alastair is 27-years-old and has just bought a new flat with his girlfriend. His responses make him an informant who greatly resembles a 'cocooning' consumer:

"Before I had this place, I was renting my parents' 4-bed house. And I was better off then than I am now. And I don't get why! And it was a bigger house, so it cost more to heat and things. Yeah, I was renting and that's a bit cheaper, but not by much. And for some reason I haven't lost money, I just haven't got as much spare cash [...] A lot has changed trying to make a life for myself, with the house and everything. You lose your social side. Not your 'fun-ness', because you'll always have your personality but you lose your 'up and go-ness'. It's a bit depressing. But that's the thing; you learn to have fun in other ways. That's what we've discovered. You know, sometimes we can have fun sat at home playing Monopoly."

Another story is provided by Melody a 25-years-old concept developer for a food manufacturer. Her recent move to London highlights the pressure she feels at all times when socialising or spending money, and the impact of increased cost of living and price consciousness has brought to her:

"I think if you go to a restaurant you're always thinking about money. Even though you want to enjoy the evening there's probably a part of you that's always thinking, how much is this going to cost? I wouldn't necessarily order exactly what I want because of the price."

Alison, a 48-years-old chemist who had recently become an empty nester, further highlighted the pressure that was felt by many of the participants in regards to the increase in living costs. Although her children had now left the family home she continues to feel the strain on her finances caused by recession:

"I do see how expensive things are and how much things have gone up when I go shopping. I've got to eat the cheap things and mix and match it, so that I can afford to have nicer food as a treat on a Friday night!"

The choices that price conscious consumers need to make when they decide to 'go out' and visit a place of leisure or shopping environment often causes a lot less value to be placed upon the experiences that happen outside the home. Participants noted that this results in them being more inclined to stay at home, or to undergo an activity that will have little or no financial impact. The low value attachment created by the consumer in this situation is based upon the sacrifices and costs they must encounter when partaking in the experience (Woodruff 1997). Consumers desire certain consequences to come out of partaking in an activity with a brand, or buying a product or service because these consequences help them fulfil or satisfy their desired end states (Overby et al



2004). However in our case participants had attached little or no evaluation of the value or worth of the experience, because of the cost consequences associated with the experience.

Alastair and Jessica were both participants who had moved to new homes in rural areas, becoming distant from their old lives because of the cumulative cost of travelling and socialising; the effect that their price consciousness had on them was significantly more severe than other participants. Furnham's (1984) work describes the differences of attachment consumers feel towards their money in several situations, and also ascertains that habits of money usage are complex and multi-faceted. Jessica explained this situation fittingly when she spoke about the amount of money she had left over to socialise with after she had paid her bills:

"Now I've got quite a lot more responsibilities and probably less money, definitely less disposable income because I've got money going on important things like a mortgage, I'm in a good position because I'm only 23 and I've got a place of my own. I'd rather be spending money on a mortgage than paying rent for someone else's mortgage; that's the main reason we bought."

The result of participants holding heightened price conscious effects is in line with Furnham's (1984) findings that alienation causes a more complex obsession with money. Consumers become more retentive and security-minded.

Cost Conscious 'Cocooners' Need to Buy In-Store, not at Home.

Interviewees routinely expressed their need to visit a physical store to purchase items such as clothes, due to their distrust in the nature of online shopping. Although the majority of participants explained that generally their visits to spaces owned by the market, such as cinemas, stores and restaurants had decreased, the preferred channel to purchase products was nearly always through a visit to a physical store rather than online.

For example, Maria a 22-years-old told the researcher about how infrequently she bought clothing online and the bad results that often come from it:

"One day I was in a really bad mood, and I went online and saw this bag, and it was on offer, and the offer was only online too. I didn't even think about it twice, I just pressed buy. I didn't even remember what I'd bought afterwards, the email that came through to me, the picture wasn't working either, and then I had to wait the week for it to arrive. It was a nice bag in the end, it did break soon after though. I really liked it until it broke, but that was probably why I should have just gone to the shop and seen that it was made out of bad material."

Maria's statement emphasises the continuous effects of price consciousness on the cocooning consumer, and the need to thoroughly check all items that fall outside of 'routine' purchases for indications of quality and resilience. If they do not complete these checks the purchase will not be made, or regretted if it was hastily made. This finding is in-line with Shipchandler's (1982) description of the consumer in periods of stagflation, where a conservation ethic becomes an important factor in product selection. While many researchers such as Burke (2002) have discussed the consumers' need to assess quality of items in the physical setting before purchase, the present study has identified this as a result of the cocooner's price consciousness, conservation ethic, and significance of all purchases to their spending power for other activities. These details became clear during the data analysis stage, where participants placed positive value on the activity of purchasing in the physical space owned by the market. This contrasted significantly with

most other activities, which took place outside the home and in spaces owned by the market, such as those listed above.

This can be further supported by George a 25-years-old who related shopping in a physical store to his price consciousness through his need for a very personalised experience. For example, when asked about online food shopping, he replied with strong negative value perceptions, and spoke about the tactics he would employ while in the physical store to ensure that his specific needs would be met:

“If I were in the shop myself I would be looking for the pack of chicken with the longest sell-by date, but you know the packer in the warehouse would be wanting to get rid of their short-dated stock, [...] if I was trying to avoid wasting fruit then I would probably want two yellow bananas and two green bananas. But when you’re telling someone what you want over an order form, you miss out on that personal involvement”

Findings are similar with studies that measure the valuations and trust transference of consumers on different methods of shopping (Kuan and Bock 2007). Here we establish the cocooning consumer’s need for trust in a purchase, contrasting with their other cocooning behaviours, and therefore the higher valuation of the visit to the physical store. If the consumer shops using a method where little trust can be transferred to the purchase, the financial pressure felt from price consciousness is fuelled, furthering subsequent cocooning behaviours.

Special Experiences Almost Exclusively Happen in the Home.

Strengthening the finding that cocooners often place negative value on experiences outside the home, participants spoke at length about the experiences they had in their own homes. These were vivid and rich descriptions of the positive value placed upon moments in their own homes with their families and friends, and were often accompanied by negative comparisons of similar moments that occurred in spaces owned by the market.

For example, Melody spoke at length about preparing a special meal in the home for her boyfriend on Valentine’s Day. This meal would have been very different if they had visited a restaurant instead:

“I just enjoy it more when you’re in your own surroundings, and you have really nice food, and I think it makes it more special on a day like Valentine’s Day, it makes it more special to be in your own home, the last thing I want to do is go sit in a restaurant with loads of other people around you. It just made it more special. It’s more thoughtful if you’ve gone to the effort to make something and put the effort in to think about what you’re going to do rather than just go out and spend the money.”

Jessica told the researcher about how she had started weekly film nights with her neighbours and friends. She enjoys being a hostess and this creates a special evening for her. When asked if she can remember the films that are watched on these evenings, she explains: “No, I don’t really remember the film, but I remember the night and the conversations and things like that”.

We can relate our findings to Stedman’s study (2006) who investigated consumer’s place attachment to their homes using a sense-of-place framework, discovering the factors that produced place attachment were heavily fostered by social interaction and creating a ‘community meaning’. Tuan (1977) also suggested that consumers create attachment to their homes because of the accumulation of everyday experiences and relationships with

other people. The 'back to basics' attitude that many consumers adopt in times of economic hardship (Shipchandler 1982) can be seen here. Our findings offer understandings as to the cocooning consumer's motivations to limit their visits to spaces owned by the market.

#### Returning to Core Values and Rituals

An underlying subtext within the interviews was the recurring theme of rituals and finding entertainment in strengthening relationships with friends and family. The experiences described as personally important to the participants were closely associated with events centred on their relationships with their social networks, and bonding experiences with these social networks. In many cases these experiences inside the home occurred as substitutions for activities within spaces owned by the market. For our participants this meant a reaffirmation of core values and the desire for a simpler life, achieved by an increase in making or fixing things themselves and the strengthening of relationships. For example, Melody spoke about her passion for home cooking in preference to eating out:

"No I love cooking at home. Even though my work is completely about food all day, I never get that 'I can't be bothered to cook' feeling. I'd rather get home and have something actually tasty than go out spend money and it not be as good as home-cooked food. Even if it's just something quick, I enjoy making it and I enjoy eating it more if I've done it I suppose."

Jessica had made the financial leap to buy her own property, and therefore now fills her time with making her own furniture with her family and boyfriend:

"The cost of buying a house, paying mortgage, bills, are everything that costs money, food shopping, everything like that, takes a massive chunk of your paycheque away, and when you add in things like petrol then its even more, so I'd probably not do things like go to Reading and go to the shops anymore, because I just cant afford to buy clothes and I'd rather not look at them! We tend to do things, like we have done a lot of furniture renovation recently. So we go to the reclamation yards and stuff, and get scrap things from there, different bits of furniture and paint and things, and make bits and bobs out of those. We will go round to my boyfriend's dad's house and use his garden to do that, to renovate furniture and put in our new flat."

Because Alastair has now moved away from many of his friends, the financial impact of socialising and the consciousness he feels when making decisions means his social life has been impacted. When asked about what he does with his free time, many of the experiences he recalls are centred on the time he spends at home with his girlfriend, and the newly formed relationships with his neighbours:

*"We are closer friends with all our neighbours here now, we haven't lost touch with our main friend group it's just now; because we are so close in this place our new friends are our neighbours now. You know, we spend a lot of time in each other's flats now so everyone has little evenings where we all go to. And yeah we love it; we'd prefer to do that than go out to a pub."*

The comments above illustrate the determination of cocooners to limit their spending due to their financial limitations, consequentially replacing activities outside of the home for alternative methods of entertainment and feelings of achievement. It can be considered that the motivation to continue to demonstrate such behaviours even as the worst of recessionary times has passed is more than financial. Cocooning consumer seeks a simpler way of life. This is due to their limitation of, and attachment to, their funds caused by the pressures of the rise in the cost of modern living. In many cases,

consumers found enjoyment in this way of life and different experiences. Aligning with Flatters and Willmott's (2009) work, the cocooning consumer is losing trust in the market, and gaining confidence in finding what they need within their social networks. The desire for simplicity is evident in these consumers.

#### Traditions, Rituals and Distancing from the Market

With decreased or limited funds to spend, cocooners limit interactions with the market and increase the time spent developing their relationships with family and friends, and producing their own goods and meals. Many of the interviewees described ritual-like activities they performed in place of experiences with the market in stores, restaurants or cinemas. Watching films and TV box sets on streaming services was a common example activity that replaced experiences in spaces owned by the market. Alastair described how his limited finances had a rolling effect upon all other decisions, including how to socialise and spend free time. On many occasions the answer for him was to stay at home with his girlfriend and watch films or TV series, creating special bonding experiences. Pleck (2000) remarks on the positive aspects of rituals for consumers, such as how ritualistic activities engender social and emotional bonds. Participants used these activities to strengthen their relationships and as alternate activities to spending time and money within the market. Pleck (2000) also notes that rituals have the ability to make people less fearful of the future, and promote a sense of solidarity and group cohesion. Alastair particularly exemplified this, who used weekly, traditional activities like Sunday roasts to solidify the emotional connections between his family and their partner's families:

"A special meal that we have in the home is Sunday roasts. So every Sunday we always make an effort to be in and make this roast dinner. It makes us feel a bit more complete really. [...] And I'm Scottish so I have a lot of recipes from Scotland that I know, there's this thing called mealy pudding that my mum does [...] So my mum taught my girlfriend how to cook it and we put that into it now as well. And it's nice, we always try and do it and we always have friends up for it as well, which is cool."

Traditional gender roles begin to grow in importance to cocooners within their rituals, where Pleck (2000) shows that participants play homage to the cultural ideals of proper relations between men and women. Ben a 64-years-old spoke about an 'invented tradition', or ritual that creates continuity with the past (Hobsbawm 1983), that he greatly enjoyed and spoke about with fondness and emotion. Ben held an annual rugby celebration with his family, where the underlying main reason for the gathering was so that Ben's wife could cook for and fuss over their two grown up sons. The ritual would not be the same if it occurred outside the home.

These findings show the similarities between the work of Flatters and Willmott (2009) and Shipchandler (1982), where the simple way of life is sought for, away from the unnecessary frills of the market. Markets have been shown to have adverse effects to the individual consumer; for instance, Firat and Venkatesh (1995) state that markets cause the fragmentation of consumers into isolated groups and undermine important social institutions, such as family. Pleck (2000) notes criticisms of consumer culture and its adverse or 'cheapening' effect of traditional and family rituals. Our participants displayed behaviours and rituals that enabled them to avoid expenditure and a visit to a space owned by brands or companies, opting instead to remain at home with their families and friends. They sought and received enjoyment from their own homes, and by not spending money or visiting a space owned by the market.

## CONCLUSIONS

The sample used in the study provided personal biographies and experiences, which caused the heightened price consciousness of the participants. While some participants were older and did not consider themselves to be in a difficult financial position or to have suffered greatly from recession, others were in the stage of their lives when they naturally found living costs to be more expensive after having removed themselves from the financial protection of their families. Yet all participants displayed the perception that recession had been hard for the entire country, and the national culture of thrift and price consciousness emerged from all interviews (Hampson and McGoldrick 2011). Parallels can be drawn with Manning (2005), where authors have shown that younger life stages and transitional periods have an effect on the consumer's potential to exhibit cocooning behaviours.

Ritual-like activities frequently take the place of those that would happen outside the home, and new traditions are born for cocooners as they establish the emotional connections with those within their social networks. The cocooning consumer seeks simpler pleasures and enjoyment from strengthening relationships and making their own possessions or meals, because the impact of recession has led to a collective distancing from the market. Some may not actively search for this, yet the financial pressure felt and the security minded consumer who is forced to spend less time and money within the market is content with the entertainment and achievements they derive from experiences inside the home.

Their social lives and lifestyles are different to their pre-recession lifestyles, and while they may express a frustration with this, they also note that they receive enjoyment from these new activities that fill their time. Their distrust in the market is displayed by their need to visit physical stores to buy items, in order to satisfy their conservation ethic brought on by recession (Shipchandler 1982). In most other consumption situations the cocooning consumers place greater value on distancing themselves from the market, remaining in the home to avoid expenditure and to derive greater satisfaction from the experiences that occur within their own walls.

The present study explored the experiences of staying in and the cocooning consumer's lifestyle, and has consolidated various areas of literature to bring a rounded picture and explanation of the cocooning consumer's habits as recession eases. Past research has made many attempts to classify consumers through changes to purely their purchasing habits (Swait and Sweeney 2000, Ang 2001), what motivates them to purchase without a visit to a company's physical space (Kacen et al 2013), and the degree to which their values and way of life changes (Shipchandler 1982, McGregor 2000). The present study provides a new focus by allowing the consumer's voice to be at the heart of the study, to explore the meanings of their experiences while in the home and away from the market, rather than the creation of consumer typologies determined by the levels of change the consumer exhibits.

As consumer distancing from the market is always of importance to marketers and academics (Holt 2002), and past research has shown that consumers have exhibited

these behaviours following previous recessions (Shipchandler 1982), this study provides a timely contribution to the ever-developing field of consumer behaviour.

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