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Formal plethories

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ABSTRACT

Unstable operations in a generalized cohomology theory E give rise to a functor from the category of algebras over E_* to itself which is a colimit of representable functors and a comonoid with respect to composition of such functors. In this paper I set up a framework for studying the algebra of such functors, which I call formal plethories, in the case where E_* is a Prüfer ring. I show that the "logarithmic" functors of primitives and indecomposables give linear approximations of formal plethories by bimonoids in the 2-monoidal category of bimodules over a ring.

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1. Introduction

Let k be a commutative ring. From an algebro-geometric point of view, the category of representable endofunctors of commutative k-algebras can be considered as affine schemes over k with a structure of a k-algebra on them. Composition of such representable endofunctors constitutes a non-symmetric monoidal structure \circ . A plethory is such a representable endofunctor F of k-algebras which is a comonoid with respect to \circ , i.e. which is equipped with natural transformations $F \to \operatorname{id}$ and $F \to F \circ F$ such that coassociativity and counitality conditions are satisfied. The algebra of plethories was first studied by Tall and Wraith [36] and then extended by Borger and Wieland [10]. The aim of this paper is to extend the theory of plethories to the setting of graded formal schemes and to study linearizations of them. The motivation for doing this comes from topology.

Let E be a homotopy commutative ring spectrum representing a cohomology theory E^* . For any space X, $E^*(X)$ is naturally an algebra over the ring of coefficients E_* of E; furthermore, there is an action

$$E^n(\underline{E}_m) \times E^m(X) \to E^n(X)$$

by unstable operations. Here \underline{E}_m denotes the mth space in the Ω -spectrum associated to E. The bigraded E_* -algebra $E^*(\underline{E}_*)$ almost qualifies as the representing object of a plethory, but not quite. In order for $E^*(\underline{E}_*)$ to have the required structure maps (the ring structure on the spectrum of this ring must come from a coaddition and a

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