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Research Paper

Digital Rhythms: Investigating The Link Between Internet Habits and Media Multitasking Among Young Adults

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the relationship between Internet Habit Strength and Media Multitasking Efficacy among young adults aged 18-25. Utilizing a correlational research design, we employed convenience sampling to recruit 200 participants in India. Data were collected through validated instruments: the Internet Usage Scale and the Media Multitasking Revised Scale. Statistical analysis revealed a moderate positive correlation (Spearman's rho = 0.520, $p < 0.01$) between Internet Habit Strength and multitasking efficacy. The findings suggest that individuals with more vigorous internet habits are likelier to engage in multitasking behaviours, particularly in entertainment contexts, while potentially facing cognitive overload during task-oriented activities. This research highlights the implications of internet usage on cognitive performance and behavioural patterns, suggesting the need for strategies to manage multitasking effectively in a digital environment. Future research should explore causal relationships and the long-term effects of these behaviours on academic and mental health outcomes. Key words: Internet habit strength, Media multitasking efficacy.

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Internet habit strength refers to the automatic and repetitive behavior of connecting to the internet over time. As individuals frequently engage in online activities, these behaviors become ingrained, often performed with little conscious thought. Strong internet habits are influenced by external factors such as accessibility at home, work, or school, while activities like online gaming and social media further reinforce these habits (LaRose et al., 2003). Over time, individuals connect instinctively, often triggered by environmental cues such as notifications or idle moments (Verplanken & Aarts, 1999). Initially, internet usage is intentional, but with frequent engagement, it becomes habitual. Users respond automatically to environmental triggers, leading to ingrained behaviors that persist despite awareness of potential negative effects (Ajzen, 1991).

Strong internet habits can have significant psychological and behavioral consequences. Research suggests that excessive internet use is associated with reduced productivity, mental health concerns, and addictive behaviors (Kuss & Griffiths, 2015). Users often engage in online activities despite being aware of their negative effects, such as procrastination and

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sleep disruption (Simanjuntak et al., 2018). Furthermore, excessive internet use can interfere with personal responsibilities and relationships, particularly in workplace and educational settings. The persistence of internet habits, despite their negative consequences, is attributed to their strong association with environmental cues, making it difficult to moderate online engagement (LaRose et al., 2003).

A proposed internet usage model based on Bandura's (1991) Social Learning Theory identifies four key determinants: internet self-efficacy, outcome expectations, media self-regulation mechanisms, and depression. Internet self-efficacy refers to an individual's belief in their ability to navigate internet-related tasks, influencing both confidence and engagement (Bandura, 1991; LaRose et al., 2001). Outcome expectations, or anticipated gratifications such as social, monetary, and entertainment benefits, reinforce habitual internet use (LaRose et al., 2001). Media self-regulation mechanisms include habit, judgment, and deficient self-regulation, with habit referring to unconscious use, judgment to recognizing excessive use, and deficient self-regulation to poor self-monitoring (LaRose et al., 2003). Depression can impair self-regulation, increasing reliance on habitual internet use as a short-term coping mechanism, ultimately exacerbating self-regulation deficits (Bandura, 1991).

Several theoretical frameworks explain the development of internet habit strength. Habit theory posits that habits are automatic behaviors triggered by environmental cues and reinforced through repetition and reward (Verplanken & Aarts, 1999). In internet use, behaviors such as scrolling through social media or browsing the web become automatic responses to boredom or notifications. Similarly, the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991) suggests that internet use is initially driven by attitudes, social norms, and perceived control. Over time, repeated engagement transforms intentional behavior into habitual patterns. Media Habit Theory (LaRose, 2010) extends this concept to media use, emphasizing cue-driven behavior, where users automatically respond to triggers such as stress or notifications, leading to passive internet engagement.

The consequences of strong internet habits include reduced self-regulation, increased media multitasking, and a higher risk of internet addiction. As internet habits strengthen, users struggle to control their online behavior, making it difficult to regulate screen time and focus on responsibilities (LaRose et al., 2003). Media multitasking—engaging in multiple digital and offline tasks simultaneously—has been linked to impaired attention and increased cognitive stress (Wilmer et al., 2017). Moreover, habitual internet use may escalate into problematic or addictive behaviors, where users find it difficult to disconnect despite negative consequences in daily life (Kuss & Griffiths, 2015).

Media multitasking efficacy (MME) stems from self-efficacy theory and reflects an individual's confidence in managing multiple media tasks at once (Bandura, 1991). Students with high MME often believe they can balance academic and non-academic digital tasks, such as attending online lectures while using social media. However, research suggests that this confidence often exceeds actual multitasking ability, leading to reduced academic performance (Junco, 2012). Despite perceived competence, frequent media multitasking has been associated with lower attention spans, decreased comprehension, and impaired cognitive control (Ophir, Nass, & Wagner, 2009). Additionally, high levels of media multitasking have been linked to impulsivity, mind-wandering, sensation seeking, and

emotional issues such as depression and social anxiety (Becker et al., 2012; Ralph et al., 2014).

Several factors influence media multitasking behavior, including cognitive, environmental, psychological, and social elements. Cognitive factors such as memory and focus play a role, with individuals who believe they are proficient multitaskers engaging in such behaviors more frequently (Van der Schuur et al., 2015). Environmental factors, such as device accessibility and media choices, encourage multitasking, particularly in locations with Wi-Fi availability (Carrier et al., 2009). Psychological factors, including boredom, impulsiveness, and excitement, drive individuals to engage in multiple media activities (Sanbonmatsu et al., 2013). Social influences, such as peer behavior and fear of missing out (FOMO), further contribute to media multitasking (Foehr, 2006).

The effectiveness of multitasking is also influenced by the type of media being used. Passive media, such as television, are easier to combine with other tasks, whereas active media, such as books, require greater cognitive effort, making multitasking more difficult (Holmes et al., 2005). Interactive media, such as computers, encourage multitasking through notifications and multiple open tabs (Yeykelis et al., 2014). Theories of attention, such as the Bottleneck Theory, suggest that individuals can focus on only one task at a time, with the brain rapidly switching between tasks rather than truly multitasking (Broadbent, 1958; Maslovat et al., 2013). Cognitive Load Theory (Sweller, 1988) further explains that excessive information processing can overload cognitive capacity, reducing learning and performance (Meyer & Kieras, 1997).

Empirical research supports these theoretical perspectives. Simanjuntak et al. (2018) found that students with strong internet habits and high confidence in media multitasking were more likely to engage in cyber slacking during lectures. Islam et al. (2018) reported that information and communication overload contribute to social media fatigue, with multitasking self-efficacy mitigating the impact of information overload but exacerbating communication overload. Studies indicate that media multitasking behaviors often involve common activity combinations, such as texting, listening to music, and browsing social media, which are consistent across different groups (Wiradhany & Baumgartner, 2019). Tugtekin and Odabasi (2023) highlighted that multitasking in virtual learning environments increases cognitive load, affecting academic performance. Additionally, excessive internet use impacts cognitive functions, influencing memory, attention, and even brain structure development (Firth et al., 2020).

Research suggests that media habits, more than time spent online, predict functional difficulties in daily life, challenging the displacement theory (Tokunaga, 2016). Gender differences also play a role, as stronger internet habits lead to increased online communication, particularly among females (Ang, 2017). Adolescent studies reveal that heavy media multitasking correlates with lower test scores, poorer working memory, and higher impulsivity, though traits like grit or general processing speed remain unaffected (Cain et al., 2016). Furthermore, media multitasking serves as an emotional coping strategy, with individuals using it to alleviate distress, albeit with potentially harmful long-term consequences for anxiety and depression (Shin & Kemps, 2020).

METHODOLOGY

Aim

It is to study the relationship between Internet Habit Strength and Media Multitasking Efficacy among young adults.

Objectives

- To study Internet Habit Strength among young adults
- To study Media Multitasking Efficacy among young adults
- To study the relationship between Internet Habit Strength and Media Multitasking Efficacy among young adults

Hypothesis

H0 - There is no significant relationship between Internet habit strength and Media multitasking efficacy.

Research Design

This study utilizes a quantitative approach with a correlational research design to explore how Media multitasking relates to Internet Habit Strength in adults. The goal is to identify the associations between Media multitasking and Internet Habit Strength, without intervening in the variables.

Sampling

The study employed a convenience sampling method, targeting young adults aged 18–25, with a total sample size of 200 participants.

Tools

- The Internet Usage Scale developed by Saini and Kaur (2017) has a split-half reliability coefficient of 0.91, indicating high internal consistency. Its construct validity index is reported as 0.74, demonstrating its effectiveness in measuring internet usage.
- The Media Multitasking Revised (MMT-R) Scale by Lopez et al. (2018) has a Cronbach's alpha reliability of 0.86, indicating good internal consistency, and content validity of 0.70, showing that it adequately measures media multitasking behaviors.

Procedure

Participants were recruited using snowball sampling, with data collected via Google Forms and paper-based questionnaires to ensure anonymity and convenience. The survey link was shared through messaging apps and social media. Before participation, individuals reviewed an informed consent form outlining the study's objectives, procedures, and ethical considerations. Those who consented provided demographic details and completed the Revised Paranormal Belief Scale (R-PBS), a 26-item measure assessing Traditional Religious Belief, Psi, Witchcraft, Superstition, Spiritualism, Extraordinary Life Forms, and Precognition, with high reliability ($\alpha = 0.92$) and content validity. Ethical guidelines were strictly followed, ensuring voluntary participation, the right to withdraw, and confidentiality of all data.

Statistical Analysis

To study the relationship between media multitasking and internet habit strength, a correlational approach was employed. Descriptive statistics, including the mean, median, and standard deviation, were calculated. If the data followed a normal distribution, Pearson's correlation test was applied; otherwise, Spearman's test was used. These tests determined whether the relationship was strong, weak, or non-existent, and whether it was statistically significant.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table No. 1 Correlation between Media Multi-Tasking and Internet Habit Strength.

Correlations			**Multitasking**	**Internet habit strength**
Spearman's rho	Multitasking	Correlation Co-efficient	1.000	.520**
		Sig (2tailed)	-	.000
		N	193	193
	Internet habit strength	Correlation Co-efficient	.520**	1.000
		Sig (2tailed)	.000	-
		N	193	193

**.Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

The table shows a moderate positive correlation ($\rho = 0.520$, $p = 0.000$) between media multitasking and internet habit strength. This indicates that individuals with stronger internet habits tend to engage in multitasking more frequently. The significant p-value ($p < 0.01$) confirms that this relationship is statistically meaningful and not due to chance. These findings suggest that increased internet use may influence multitasking behavior.

DISCUSSION

The Spearman's rho correlation analysis, based on data from 193 participants, revealed a moderate positive relationship between media multitasking and internet habits, with a correlation value (ρ) of 0.520. This indicates that as individuals' internet usage increases, their tendency to multitask also rises. The study defined multitasking as engaging in multiple online activities simultaneously, such as browsing the web, using social media, and switching between tasks. The findings suggest that people who use the internet more frequently tend to multitask more often. Additionally, the p-value of 0.000 indicates the statistical significance of the relationship, making it highly unlikely that the results occurred by chance. The relationship between internet habits and multitasking can also be explained by the fact that increased exposure to digital environments may train individuals to handle several tasks at once. The study also reflects the growing demand for digital media consumption in modern society, where the blending of work, social interaction, and entertainment is commonplace. However, it is important to note that while multitasking may appear beneficial in terms of managing multiple tasks, there could be cognitive costs associated with frequent switching between tasks, such as reduced focus and efficiency. These results suggest that while multitasking is linked with more frequent internet use, it remains a complex behavior that may have both positive and negative implications for cognitive functioning and task performance.

CONCLUSION

This study found a positive correlation between internet habit strength and media multitasking efficacy, suggesting that individuals with stronger internet habits tend to be better at multitasking across various media platforms. Most participants exhibited moderate levels of both internet usage and multitasking skills, reflecting the high engagement of young adults with digital media. These results highlight the role of frequent internet use in enhancing multitasking abilities. Future research could explore the long-term effects and the impact of different types of media on multitasking and cognitive processes.

Limitations

- The study focused only on individuals aged 18–25, limiting the applicability of the findings to other age groups.
- The reliance on self-reported data may introduce inaccuracies.
- The study established a correlation but did not investigate causal relationships.
- It did not consider other factors, such as memory or focus, that could influence multitasking.
- The sample was restricted to participants from India, limiting generalizability to other regions.

Implications

- Educators can guide students to improve their multitasking skills while managing internet usage.
- Mental health professionals can assist those who feel stressed due to excessive multitasking.
- Future research could examine the long-term effects of internet use and multitasking across diverse populations.

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Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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