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Research Paper

The Relationship Between Internet Habit Strength and Media Multi-Tasking Efficacy 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 stronger internet habits are more likely to engage in multitaskin 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.

Keywords: *Internet habit strength, Media multi-tasking efficacy*

Internet Habit Strength

Internet habit strength refers to the automatic and repetitive behavior of connecting to the Internet over time. As individuals repeatedly use the Internet, it becomes an ingrained part of their routine, performed with little conscious thought. Strong internet habits are influenced by external factors, such as easy access at home, work, or school, and activities like online gaming or social media reinforce these habits. Over time, people connect instinctively, often triggered by environmental cues.

Formation of Internet Behavior

The use of the internet, initially intentional, becomes habitual as users frequently engage with it. As people interact more with devices, especially smartphones for social media or notifications, these actions become automatic responses to environmental triggers, like a push notification. This repetitive engagement solidifies the habit over time.

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Psychological and Behavioral Impacts
Strong internet habits can have psychological consequences, such as reduced productivity, mental health issues, and addictive behaviors. When the line between purposeful and habitual use blurs, users may engage in online activities even when aware of their negative effects, such as procrastination or sleep disruption. Excessive internet use can interfere with personal responsibilities and relationships, especially in workplaces and educational settings.

Resistance to Change
Internet habits are difficult to break due to their strong association with environmental cues. Even when individuals are aware of the negative effects of their internet use, the habit persists. Factors like notifications or idle time continue to prompt habitual online behavior, making it challenging to moderate internet engagement and return to controlled usage.

A Proposed Internet Usage Model (Based on Bandura's Social Learning Theory)
This model explains Internet usage through four key determinants: Internet self-efficacy, outcome expectations, media self-regulation mechanisms, and depression, grounded in Bandura's (1991) Social Learning Theory and supported by LaRose et al. (2001, 2003).

Internet self-efficacy refers to one's belief in their capability to perform Internet-related tasks, influencing confidence and engagement online (Bandura, 1991; LaRose et al., 2001). It positively correlates with outcome expectations, motivating use.

Outcome expectations, or anticipated gratifications, include sensory, status, social, self-reactive, monetary, and enjoyment incentives (LaRose et al., 2001). As self-efficacy increases, so does users' ability to attain these outcomes, reinforcing Internet behaviour.

Media self-regulation mechanisms—habit, judgment, and deficient self-regulation—explain behavioural control. Habit involves unconscious use; judgment involves recognizing excessive use; deficient self-regulation refers to poor self-monitoring. These mechanisms are positively associated with Internet use (LaRose et al., 2003).

Depression impairs self-regulation, increasing reliance on habitual media use for short-term emotional relief, which may worsen long-term regulation (Bandura, 1991; LaRose et al., 2003).

Theoretical Background of Internet Habit Strength
1. Habit Theory
Habit theory defines habits as automatic behaviors triggered by environmental cues, reinforced through repetition and reward (Verplanken & Aarts, 1999). In Internet use, repeated behaviors like scrolling social media or browsing the web become automatic, often performed unconsciously in response to cues like boredom or notifications. The ease of access and constant reinforcement (e.g., entertainment or social validation) contribute to the growing strength of these habits.

2. Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB)
Ajzen's (1991) TPB explains how intentional behavior can evolve into habitual behavior. Internet use is initially driven by attitudes, social norms, and perceived control. When individuals view online engagement as beneficial and socially supported, repeated use leads

to habitual patterns. Thus, what begins as purposeful Internet use becomes automatic over time.

3. Media Habit Theory

LaRose (2010) extends general habit theory to media use. Media habit theory emphasizes cue- driven behavior, where users respond automatically to triggers like boredom, stress, or notifications. Over time, intentional behaviors shift, and users increasingly engage in passive Internet use, often at the cost of meaningful offline activities.

Consequences of Strong Internet Habits

1. Reduced Self-Regulation

As Internet habits strengthen, users often lose control over their online behavior. The automaticity of use makes it difficult to manage screen time or focus on other responsibilities (LaRose et al., 2003).

2. Increased Media Multitasking

Strong habits promote media multitasking—simultaneously engaging in multiple digital and offline tasks. Wilmer et al. (2017) note that this can impair attention and increase cognitive stress.

3. Risk of Internet Addiction

When habitual use escalates, it may lead to problematic or addictive behavior. Users may struggle to disconnect despite harmful consequences to daily life (Kuss & Griffiths, 2015).

Media Multitasking Efficacy (MME)

MME stems from self-efficacy theory and reflects one's confidence in managing multiple media tasks simultaneously (Bandura, 1991). Students with high MME often believe they can balance academic and non-academic digital tasks, like attending online lectures while using social media. However, research indicates that this confidence often exceeds actual multitasking ability, leading to reduced academic performance (Junco, 2012).

Cognitive and Academic Impacts

Despite perceived competence, frequent media multitasking has been linked to lower attention spans, decreased comprehension, and reduced cognitive control (Ophir, Nass, & Wagner, 2009; Lin, Lee, & Robertson, 2011). It can also increase susceptibility to distractions and advertising (Cain & Mitroff, 2011; Duff et al., 2014).

Emotional and Behavioral Consequences

High levels of media multitasking have been associated with impulsivity, mind-wandering, sensation seeking, and emotional issues such as depression and social anxiety (Becker et al., 2012; Ralph et al., 2014; Minear et al., 2013).

Adolescent Findings

Among adolescents, multitasking habits vary widely, with studies showing both negative and nuanced outcomes. Baumgartner et al. (2014) found self-reported executive function deficits, yet some improvement in inhibitory control.

Factors Influencing Media Multitasking

1. Cognitive Factors

- Memory and Focus: Good memory helps, but doesn't mean multitasking is better.
- Confidence: People who think they're good at multitasking tend to do it more (Van der Schuur et al., 2015).

2. Environmental Factors

- Device Access: Phones and laptops nearby make it easier.
- Media Choices: More options (like Netflix or Instagram) encourage switching.
- Location: Places with Wi-Fi or fewer rules lead to more multitasking (Carrier et al., 2009).

3. Psychological Factors

- Boredom: People switch tasks when bored. Excitement: Some multitask to feel entertained.
- Impulsiveness: Harder to resist distractions means more multitasking (Sanbonmatsu et al., 2013).

4. Social Factors

- Friends' Habits: If friends multitask, others follow Social Media: Notifications push users to switch.
- FOMO: Fear of missing out makes people stay online (Foehr, 2006).

5. How Multitasking Affects Thinking

- Multitasking uses up attention quickly.
- Makes it harder to learn deeply or focus well (Maslovat et al., 2013).

6. Media Types Matter

- Passive Media (TV): Easy to combine with other tasks. Active Media (Books): Harder to multitask with.
- Interactive Media (Computers): Encourage multitasking with pop-ups and switching tabs (Holmes et al., 2005; Yeykelis et al., 2014).

Theoretical Background of Media Multitasking Efficacy

1. Theories of Attention

Bottleneck Theory says we can only focus on one task at a time. Our brain switches between tasks, not truly multitasks. When multiple tasks compete for attention, only one gets processed at a time (Broadbent, 1958; Maslovat et al., 2013).

2. Cognitive Load Theory (CLT)

We have limited mental capacity to handle information. Too much information at once can hurt learning and performance (Sweller, 1988). Using multiple media (e.g., texting while watching a lecture) increases mental load, making it harder to focus (Meyer & Kieras, 1997).

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Internet Habit Strength and Cyber Slacking

Students with strong internet habits and confidence in media multitasking are more likely to engage in non-academic internet use during lectures (cyber slacking). However, self-regulated learning did not show a link to this behavior. (Simanjuntak et al., 2018)

Social Media Fatigue and Multitasking Self-Efficacy

Information and communication overload contribute to social media fatigue. While multitasking self-efficacy reduces the impact of information overload, it actually increases the effect of communication overload. (Islam et al., 2018)

Media Multitasking Behavior Patterns

Media multitasking behaviors often involve a few common combinations—like texting, listening to music, browsing, and using social media. These patterns are similar across different groups. (Wiradhany & Baumgartner, 2019)

Multitasking in Virtual Reality Learning In virtual learning environments, multitasking and task complexity can increase cognitive load, which may affect academic performance. More research is needed to understand these impacts. (Tugtekin & Odabasi, 2023)

Internet Use and Cognitive Functions

Excessive internet use affects memory and attention. It also influences brain structure and development, especially in young users. More research is needed to understand long-term effects. (Firth et al., 2020)

Internet Habits vs. Time Spent Online

Media habits, more than time spent online, predict functional difficulties in daily life. These habits are better indicators of negative outcomes than the displacement theory suggests. (Tokunaga, 2016)

Gender Differences in Internet Habits

Stronger internet habits lead to more online communication, especially in females. This suggests that gender influences how internet habits affect online behavior. (Ang, 2017)

Media Multitasking in Adolescents

Heavy media multitasking among teens is linked to lower test scores, poor working memory, and higher impulsivity. However, it is not related to traits like grit or general processing speed. (Cain et al., 2016)

Media Multitasking as an Emotional Coping Strategy

People may use media multitasking to avoid negative emotions. While it may help reduce distress in the short term, it could be a harmful coping strategy for anxiety and depression. (Shin & Kemps, 2020)

METHODOLOGY

Aim

The aim of this study is to investigate the relationship between Internet Habit Strength and Media Multitasking Efficacy among Young adults.

Objectives

- To study the Internet Habit Strength and Media Multitasking Efficacy among young adults.
- To investigate the impact of internet habit strength on cognitive performance during media multi tasking situations.

Hypotheses

- H0-There is no significant relationship between the strength of Internet habits and media multitasking efficacy.
- H1- There is a significant relationship between Internet habit strength and Media multi tasking efficacy among young adults.
- H2-There is a significant positive relationship between Internet habit strength and the efficiency of multitasking involving similar types of media (e.g., social media platforms).
- H3-Stronger Internet habits are associated with a decrease in accuracy when multitasking between dissimilar media types (e.g., switching between watching videos and reading articles).
- H4-The relationship between Internet habit strength and media multitasking efficacy is moderated by the type of media tasks, with more habitual users performing better on entertainment-related multitasking but worse on task-oriented multitasking.

Research Design

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

Sampling

- **Sampling Method:** Convenience sampling method was used for the study.
- **Target Population:** Young Adults (18-25)
- **Sample Size:** Sample of 200 participants

Data Collection

Data will be collected online via Google Forms and offline through paper-based Questionnaires.

Tools

- Internet usage scale by Shaloo Saini and Dr.Parminder kaur in 2017 Reliability 0.91 Validity 1.75
- Media Multi tasking revised scale by Lopez in 2018 Reliability 0.86 Validity 0.70

Procedure

Participants were selected using snowball sampling techniques. Data was collected through Google Forms and paper-based questionnaires. This approach allowed participants to take the survey at their convenience while maintaining anonymity and confidentiality.The survey link was shared through messaging apps and social media. Interested participants received a brief introduction about the study's goals and academic relevance. Before participating, they were shown an informed consent form explaining the research process, their rights, and the confidentiality of their data. Participation was voluntary, and individuals could withdraw at any time without penalty. Once consent was given, responses were collected and prepared for statistical analysis.

Ethical Considerations

Participants were fully informed about the study's purpose, process, and potential risks. Verbal consent was obtained, ensuring they knew they could decline or withdraw at any point without any consequences. Data privacy was a priority. Personal and sensitive information remained confidential and was not shared with unauthorized parties. This upheld the integrity and trust of the research process.

Statistical Analysis

To study the relationship between media multitasking and internet habit strength, a correlational approach was used. First, two hypotheses were made: one said there is no connection between the two variables (null), and the other said there is a connection (alternative). After collecting the data using standard questionnaires, basic checks were done to see if the data was suitable for analysis. Descriptive statistics like average (mean), middle value (median), and spread (standard deviation) were calculated. If the data followed a normal pattern, Pearson's correlation test was used; if not, Spearman's test was applied. These tests showed whether the relationship was strong, weak, or non-existent, and whether it was meaningful (significant). A regression analysis was also done to see if media multitasking could predict internet habit strength. A scatter plot was created to show the relationship visually, along with a line that best fits the data. Finally, results were explained clearly, showing what they mean and pointing out any limits of the study.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1 This table shows the correlation between Media Multi-Tasking and Internet Habit Strength.

Correlations

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)

DISCUSSION

The Spearman's rho correlation analysis, based on data from 193 participants, shows a moderate positive relationship between media multitasking and internet habits, with a correlation value (ρ) of 0.520. This means that as people's internet usage increases, their tendency to multitask also increases. In this study, multitasking refers to doing several tasks at once, like browsing the web, using social media, and switching between online activities. The results suggest that people who use the internet more often are more likely to multitask. The p-value of 0.000 shows this relationship is statistically significant, meaning the results are very unlikely to be due to chance. Overall, the findings confirm that stronger internet habits are linked to more frequent multitasking, which may affect how people think and behave in digital environments.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the link between Internet Habit Strength and Media Multitasking Efficacy among young adults. The results showed a moderate positive correlation ($\rho = 0.520$, $p < 0.01$), meaning that individuals who use the internet more regularly tend to be better at multitasking across different media platforms. This suggests that frequent internet use may help improve the ability to manage multiple tasks at once. The findings also showed that most participants had moderate levels of both internet habit and multitasking skills, which reflects how involved young adults are with digital media. A scatter plot supported this relationship by visually showing that more habitual internet use is linked to better multitasking ability. These results are important in today's tech-driven world. Understanding how internet habits affect multitasking can help guide education strategies and promote healthier digital behaviors. Future research could look at different age groups, types of media, or long-term effects to better understand this connection. Overall, the study highlights how internet use may shape the way we think and manage tasks in everyday life.

LIMITATIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Limitations

1. The study only looked at people aged 18–25, so results might not apply to other age groups.
2. People answered questions about themselves, which might not always be accurate.
3. The study only shows a link, not cause and effect.
4. It didn't look at other things like memory or focus that could affect multitasking.
5. It didn't consider the kind of media people used or their personal differences.
6. All participants were from India, so results might not be the same in other countries.
7. Since technology changes fast, the results might not stay relevant for long.

Implications

1. Teachers can help students learn how to use the internet and multitask better.
2. The government can make rules for healthier internet use.
3. More research can look at different people or study changes over time.
4. Young people can learn how to manage online tasks without getting too distracted.
5. Companies can train workers to use the internet in ways that boost productivity.
6. Mental health experts can support people who are stressed by too much multitasking.

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Conflict of Interest

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