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Adoption of Multi-screen Multitasking in Young Generation of China:
A Perspective of Self-Regulation

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ABSTRACT

Presently, people are increasingly becoming screen jugglers and frequently involving multitasking through multiple screens. The current study is focused on explaining multi-screen multitasking behavior of the younger generation in China. People like to self-regulate their routine behaviors to be productive and organized. Recent research in social psychology suggests that self-regulation occurs both deliberately and intuitively. This dual system approach of self-regulation promotes the idea that both reflective and impulsive forces are involved in determining human behavior. Owing to this conception, the present research opted for a dual system approach of self-regulation as the theoretical basis. Empirical data has been collected from university students in China and a total of 345 responses have been used for the analysis which has been performed through structural equation modeling in SmartPLS 3.0. The results indicate that the factors of both deliberative and automatic self-regulation are effective in determining multi-screen multitasking behavior.

KEYWORDS

Automatic Self-Regulation, Chinese Young Generation, Dual System Model, Media Multitasking, Multi-Screening, Self-Regulation

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Media has become diversified with technology innovations over time. Different kinds of devices and contents are available for users to satisfy their various needs. The combinations of multiple devices have resulted in smarter and elevated user experience. Device mobility and power of Internet have made multi-screen devices strongly integrate with each other and users are no longer restricted to the single device. They are rather able to choose the right type and appropriate combination of devices which suits their current needs (Dias, 2014). Devices such as laptops, smartphones, tablet computers and PDAs are very much integrated these days along with their various software applications and operating systems (Microsoft, 2013). Most of our screen time is spent in multitasking with these devices (i.e., simultaneous use). Multitasking in computer-mediated environments has been fueled by the increasingly rich media environment, the development of ICT, and the rise of the multitasking generation. Media use has increased vividly more recently as the technology has become easily accessible and portable. Presently, screen users are located in such environment where they can do non-stop multitasking while traveling, watching television or working on the computer at home or office. Media firms, advertisement agencies, product developers and marketing professionals among others can cultivate larger benefits by better understanding consumers' multi-screen multitasking behavior

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(Brasel & Gips, 2011). Another related concept to the current context of the study is 'transmedia' which means 'across media' and explains any combination of relationship which resided between various digital media outlets such as smartphones, computers among others. Furthermore, 'transmedia storytelling' is a newly evolved concept that is defined as the process in which the integral factors of a communication campaign or marketing story are systematically dispersed across multiple media platforms or in other words multi-screens. Although the concept transmedia storytelling is new and still evolving, it has already fascinated the attention of many researchers in various domains, especially where it has been applied including marketing and media industries (Young-Sung & Daniel, 2016). Understanding the motivations behind combined use of multiple screens to performs various connected and disconnected tasks will also provide some valuable input to transmedia research.

Multitasking is usually termed as performing multiple tasks simultaneously (Meyer & Evans, 2001). It involves switching among independent tasks and interleaving them in the same time period. Multitasking is widespread in daily life which can occur with or without multi-screens and researchers in a number of domains have initiated investigations on this phenomenon. The deeper understanding of its antecedents and impact has been the keen interest of researchers (Adler & Benbunan-Fich, 2013). In the context of current study, multi-screen multitasking refers to engaging in more than one tasks simultaneously involving more than one distinct screens such as the smartphone, tablet, laptop, and television. In previous literature, this kind of multitasking has also been called media multitasking and it has been defined as the simultaneous use of one or more screen-based digital devices (e.g., Yang et al., 2015). The simultaneous media usage has also emerged as a universal phenomenon, involving people of all ages and professions. It has equally infused in both classroom and workplace and it has transformed the way in which we communicate and interact. A better understanding of how people use and interact with media devices can contribute to the consumer psychology, advertising, and media industry. It should be here noted that the current study focuses only on the adoption of multi-screen multitasking and not multitasking or multi-screens in general. Understanding multi-screen multitasking will help to develop positive multitasking interactions in a computer-mediated environment, which will produce a positive experience and improve efficiency.

Multi-Screen Multitasking Among New Generation of Students

Several expressions have been used to refer to a new generation of tech-savvy students. The most popular amongst these are the 'T.V. generation', 'Net generation,' and 'Millennials' (Breed & Taylor, 2015). Prensky (2001) dubbed the new generations of students as 'digital natives.' He further explained that these 'digital natives' have been engulfed in technology since their childhood and they speak technology language fluently (i.e., the digital language of screen-based devices such as smartphones, laptops, tablets and, the Internet. Jeong and Fishbein (2007) reported that multitasking through digital media has become ubiquitous in the young generation. Moreno et al. (2012) exposed that more than half of the university students' Internet was consumed when they were multitasking. A study termed the general-purpose computer (e.g., a laptop in the home) as the multitasking center of a youth's life, after scrutinizing the self-reported devices with which American youth multitasked (Foehr, 2006). Baron (2008) noted that in order to control the level of interaction with another person, a student might use instant messaging synchronously or asynchronously. Moreover, multitasking is convenient on a digital screen as it facilitates to avoid awkwardness which might happen if a person tries to multitask during a face to face communication (Carrier at al., 2015). Wallis (2006) has created the term "multitasking generation," which refers to the use of portable devices so as continuously engage in multiple tasks. Carrier at al. (2015) found that this so-called multitasking generation considers multitasking easier and they engage more in this behavior as compared to other generations. Hence, it is critical to understand this behavior, particularly in the young generation.

Brief Review of the Related Literature

Although many studies have examined the impact of multitasking, relatively few studies have focused on the prerequisites or motivations that guide multitasking behavior (Hwang et al., 2014).