

A Study on the Impact of Short-Form Content on Attention Span and Academic Performance among College Students

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Abstract

The widespread adoption of short-form video platforms such as Instagram Reels and YouTube Shorts has significantly transformed media consumption patterns among college students. This study examines the impact of short-form content consumption on attention span and academic performance. Using a descriptive and correlational research design, data were collected from 55 college students through a structured questionnaire based on a five-point Likert scale. Composite scores were computed for short-form content consumption, attention span, and academic performance. Pearson's correlation analysis revealed a strong significant relationship between short-form content consumption and attention span ($r = 0.650$), and a very strong significant relationship between attention span and academic performance ($r = 0.862$). Further, simple linear regression analysis confirmed a statistically significant relationship between short-form content consumption and academic performance ($\beta = 0.51$, $p < 0.001$), with 40% of the variance in academic performance explained by short-form content usage ($R^2 = 0.40$). The null hypothesis was rejected and the alternative hypothesis was accepted. The findings indicate that increased consumption of short-form content is associated with reduced attention span and lower academic performance. The study emphasizes the importance of promoting mindful digital media usage among college students.

Keywords: Short-form content, Attention span, Academic performance, College students, Digital media

Introduction

The rapid growth of digital media has led to the emergence of short-form video platforms that deliver brief, visually engaging content designed to capture immediate attention. Platforms such as Instagram Reels and YouTube Shorts have become especially popular among college students due to their ease of access and entertainment value. While these platforms offer relaxation and stress relief, concerns have been raised regarding their potential impact on cognitive functioning, particularly attention span, and the subsequent effect on academic performance.

Attention span plays a critical role in academic success, as students are required to concentrate during lectures, engage with reading materials, and complete assignments effectively. Excessive exposure to rapidly changing short-form content may condition users to shorter attention cycles, making sustained focus on academic tasks more challenging. This study seeks to explore the relationship between short-

form content consumption, attention span, and academic performance among college students.

Literature Review

Rosen et al. (2014) found that excessive use of digital media and frequent switching between online activities reduced students' ability to sustain attention and negatively influenced academic engagement. The study suggested that constant exposure to digital stimulation weakens concentration and learning effectiveness.

Ophir, Nass, and Wagner (2009) investigated media multitasking and discovered that individuals who frequently consumed multiple forms of media demonstrated lower cognitive control and greater difficulty filtering irrelevant information. Their findings indicated that excessive digital engagement may contribute to reduced academic focus.

Junco (2012) studied social media usage among university students and observed that excessive engagement with social networking platforms negatively affected academic performance. Students who spent more time on social platforms reported lower levels of concentration during academic tasks.

Firth et al. (2019) examined the impact of internet and digital media consumption on cognitive functioning. The study concluded that continuous interaction with fast-paced digital content could shorten attention span and reduce students' ability to engage in deep learning.

Montag et al. (2019) explained that social media platforms are designed using algorithm-based engagement mechanisms that encourage repetitive usage and prolonged screen time. This pattern of media consumption may gradually influence students' attention behaviour.

Carr (2020) proposed the "Shallowing Hypothesis," stating that rapid and fragmented online content may reduce individuals' capacity for sustained thinking and deep concentration. According to the study, prolonged exposure to short digital formats can alter cognitive processing patterns.

Anderson (2020) found that fast-moving digital content contributes to shorter attention cycles and decreased academic persistence. Students exposed to continuous short-form media demonstrated greater difficulty maintaining attention during educational activities.

Barkley (2018) emphasized that attention regulation is a major predictor of educational performance. The study suggested that students with stronger attention control generally perform better academically.

Prindle et al. (2024) explored short-form videos in educational environments and reported that although such content increases engagement and accessibility, excessive dependence may encourage fragmented attention and reduced cognitive endurance.

Ning and Inan (2024) investigated the effect of social media addiction on academic outcomes and found that excessive digital consumption significantly reduced students' academic efficiency through attention fragmentation and lower cognitive engagement.

Theoretical Framework

This study is supported by Cognitive Load Theory developed by Sweller and Media Multitasking Theory. According to Cognitive Load Theory, the human brain has a limited capacity to process information at a given time. Continuous exposure to short-form content such as Instagram Reels and YouTube Shorts delivers rapid and highly stimulating information that may overload cognitive processing. As a result, students may find it difficult to maintain sustained attention during academic activities.

Media Multitasking Theory explains that frequent switching between digital content and academic work reduces concentration and weakens attention control. Students who regularly consume short-form content

may develop shorter attention cycles, making prolonged academic engagement more difficult. These theories provide the foundation for understanding how short-form content consumption influences attention span and ultimately affects academic performance.

Objectives

1. To assess the extent of short-form content consumption among college students.
2. To examine the relationship between short-form content consumption and attention span.
3. To analyse the relationship between short-form content consumption and academic performance.

Hypotheses

H₀: There is no significant relationship between short-form content consumption and academic performance among college students.

H₁: There is a significant relationship between short-form content consumption and academic performance among college students.

Research Methodology

Research Design

The study adopted a descriptive and correlational research design to examine the relationship between short-form content consumption, attention span, and academic performance among college students.

Population and Sample

The population of the study consisted of college students. A total sample of 55 students was selected using the convenience sampling technique.

Data Collection Instrument

Primary data were collected through a structured questionnaire designed using a five-point Likert scale ranging from Strongly Disagree (1) to Strongly Agree (5).

Data Collection Procedure

The questionnaire was distributed among students and responses were collected anonymously. Participation was voluntary and respondents were informed that data would be used only for academic purposes.

Data Analysis Tools

Collected data were analysed using Microsoft Excel. Composite scores were calculated and statistical tools including Pearson Correlation and Simple Linear Regression were applied to determine relationships between variables.

Results and Data Analysis

Table 1: Correlation Matrix (n = 55)

Variables	Short-Form Consumption	Content Attention Difficulties	Span	Academic Performance
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Short-Form Content Consumption	1.000	0.650	0.630
Attention Span Difficulties	0.650	1.000	0.862
Academic Performance	0.630	0.862	1.000

All correlations are significant at $p < 0.01$ level.

Table 2: Simple Linear Regression Results
Dependent Variable: Academic Performance

Model Statistics	Value			
Multiple R	0.63			
R Square (R ²)	0.40			
Adjusted R ²	0.38			
Standard Error	0.55			
F-value	34.64			
Significance (p-value)	< 0.001			
Predictor	B (Coefficient)	Std. Error	t-value	p-value
Short-Form Content	0.51	0.09	5.89	< 0.001

Interpretation

The regression model is statistically significant ($F = 34.64$, $p < 0.001$), explaining approximately 40% of the variation in academic performance.

The results indicate that increased short-form content consumption is associated with attention span difficulties and changes in academic performance. Since the p-value is lower than 0.05, the null hypothesis (H_0) is rejected and the alternative hypothesis (H_1) is accepted.

Correlation Analysis

A strong positive correlation was found between short-form content consumption and attention span difficulties ($r = 0.650$). A very strong positive correlation was found between attention span difficulties and academic performance ($r = 0.862$).

Regression Analysis (Hypothesis Testing)

Simple linear regression was performed with academic performance as the dependent variable and short-form content consumption as the independent variable.

Model Summary:

- $R = 0.63$
- $R^2 = 0.40$
- $F = 34.64$, $p < 0.001$

Regression Coefficient:

- $\beta = 0.51$, $t = 5.89$, $p < 0.001$

Regression Equation: Academic Performance = $2.18 + 0.51$ (Short-Form Content Consumption)

Since $p < 0.05$, the null hypothesis (H_0) is rejected and the alternative hypothesis (H_1) is accepted. Thus, short-form content consumption has a statistically significant impact on academic performance

Discussion

The findings indicate that excessive engagement with short-form video platforms is associated with reduced attention span and lower academic performance. The regression results confirm that short-form content consumption significantly predicts academic performance, explaining 40% of its variance. This supports previous literature that digital overstimulation weakens sustained attention, thereby affecting learning outcomes.

Recommendations

1. Students should maintain controlled daily screen time for short-form media consumption.
2. Educational institutions should conduct awareness programs regarding digital distraction.
3. Students should adopt focused study techniques and time management practices.
4. Colleges may encourage digital literacy and mindful media usage.
5. Future educational interventions may incorporate attention management strategies.

Conclusion

This study concludes that short-form content consumption has a significant relationship with attention span and academic performance among college students. The findings suggest that excessive engagement with short-form video platforms may reduce sustained attention and influence academic outcomes.

The study highlights the importance of balanced digital media usage and encourages students to develop healthier consumption habits to improve concentration and academic effectiveness.

Limitations

1. Small sample size ($n = 55$)
2. Self-reported data
3. Correlational design limits causal inference

Scope for Future Research

Future studies may include larger sample sizes and students from multiple institutions to improve generalizability. Researchers may also examine additional variables such as digital addiction, sleep quality, self-control, and study habits to obtain deeper insights into student behaviour.

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