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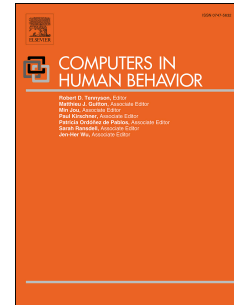
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In-lecture Media Use and Academic Performance: Does Subject Area Matter?

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Abstract

The current generation of university students display an increasing propensity for media multitasking behaviour with digital devices such as laptops, tablets and smartphones. A growing body of empirical evidence has shown that this behaviour is associated with reduced academic performance. In this study it is proposed that the subject area within which an individual is situated may influence the relationship between media multitasking and academic performance. This proposition is evaluated, firstly, by means of a meta-review of prior studies in this area and, secondly, through a survey-based study of 1 678 students at a large university in South Africa. Our findings suggest that little or no attention has been paid to variations between students from different subject areas in previous work and, based on our data, that subject area does influence the relationship between media use and academic performance. The study found that while a significant negative correlation exists between in-lecture media use and academic performance for students in the Arts and Social Sciences, the same pattern is not observable for students in the faculties of Engineering, Economic and Management Sciences, and Medical and Health Sciences.

Keywords: Media Multitasking, Academic Performance, Cognitive Control, Subject Area

1. Introduction

The current generation of university students are considered to be part of the net generation (Tapscott, 1998), a cohort displaying an unprecedented propensity for engaging and interacting with mobile digital devices such as laptops, smartphones and tablets (Cotten et al., 2011). They generally display a positive relationship with digital media, exhibiting significantly higher adoption and engagement rates than other generations (Dahlstrom and Bichsel, 2014). Extending from their significant engagement with digital media in the course of their general life (Junco and Cotten, 2011; Thompson, 2013; Moreno et al., 2012), studies indicate that students are spending an increasingly larger proportion of their time engaging with media while performing academic activities (Leysens et al., 2016; Jacobsen and Forste, 2011; Fried, 2008; Junco, 2012a; Burak, 2012).

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