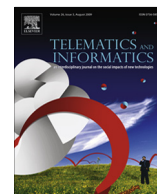




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Predicting tablet use: A study of gratifications-sought, leisure boredom, and multitasking



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ABSTRACT

Using a probability sample of 348 tablet users, this study found that relaxation, information seeking, fashion/status, and work management were instrumental reasons for tablet use, while social connection anytime/anywhere, large screen, and ease-of-use were intrinsic motives. Contrary to what was hypothesized, leisure boredom was not significantly linked to tablet use. Relaxation was the strongest motivation to predict multitasking with the tablet; however, people tend not to engage in cognitively unproductive multitasking. Limitations and suggestions for future research are discussed.

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1. Introduction

The introduction of tablet computers (tablets), such as Apple's iPad, has been a huge hit all over the world. With a more advanced Web browsing experience and limitless innovative applications (apps) at users' fingertips, tablets have experienced unprecedented adoption over the years. Pew Internet has been conducting tablet ownership surveys since May 2010, when U.S. ownership was recorded at 3% (Pew Research Center, 2010). By June 2013, the survey showed that over a third (34%) of American adults over age 18 owned a tablet computer, including almost half (49%) of those in their late thirties and early forties (Pew Research Center, 2013). In 2014, the rate of tablet ownership rose to 42% of American adults (Pew Research Center, 2014).

With the presence of tablets seeping into people's daily lives, the unique attributes and features of these devices have caught the attention of researchers. Tablets are regarded as a new type of mobile platform that offers all the functionality and connectivity of a laptop, and the mobility and portability of a smartphone (Melhuish and Falloon, 2010). Yet a tablet is not a mere stop along the spectrum between a smartphone and laptop. Rather, its particular combination of features—large screen, portability, instant-on capability, and long battery life—fuels the astonishing rise in adoption of tablets beyond any previous electronic product (Warschauer, 2011). Given the prevalence of tablet devices, a large body of studies has accrued regarding the practical application of tablets in the fields of education and business, such as literacy learning, academic teaching, and collaborative work (Falloon and Khoo, 2014; Hess and Jung, 2012; Melhuish and Falloon, 2010; Young, 2014). For instance, Falloon and Khoo (2014) explored the advantages of the iPad being used in public work spaces and highlighted its affordances such as orientational flexibility, wide viewing range, and multi-user accessible interface, which enabled students to interact more collaboratively when creating learning outputs. In a case study of the introduction of iPads at an applied research company, Hess and Jung (2012) found that tablets added value to business environments in that the productivity and joy of use had been increased.

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Despite the mounting evidence concerning the attributes and practical uses of tablets, few empirical studies have explored what motivates people to engage in tablet use. Employing the small-scale interview method, Müller et al. (2012) provided an in-depth analysis of frequent tablet activities, locations of use, and contextual factors. They found that people mainly used tablets to check e-mails, play games, and socialize with friends. Tablet use mostly occurred in the home while doing other activities, such as watching TV, eating, and cooking. However, due to the small sample size—only 33 participants—and nonrandom nature of the sample, the results are not generalizable.

Therefore, this study seeks to expand the scope of tablet research and contribute to the audience studies of tablets with the framework of uses and gratification approach. In particular, we explore (a) what prompts people to engage in tablet use, (b) how psychological states (e.g., leisure boredom) predict different usage patterns, and (c) under what circumstances (e.g., multitasking with media and non-media activities) people are prone to using the tablet.

2. Literature review

2.1. Uses and gratifications

As a sub-tradition of media effects research (McQuail, 1994), the uses and gratifications (U&G) approach seeks to explore the underlying motivations of individuals' use of media. Coming most prominently to the fore in the 1950s and early 1960s, the U&G approach is employed by researchers to understand audiences' active involvement in mass media, and assumes that the audience chooses mass media to fulfill their own needs and expectations; this leads to different patterns of media exposure and gratifications, which, in turn, motivate the use of a particular medium (Katz et al., 1973). The behavior of media gratification-seeking is often regarded as goal-directed and utility-driven (Palmgreen and Rayburn, 1982). The audience draws on media to satisfy their social and psychological needs, such as information seeking, entertainment, personal identity, and companionship (Dimmick et al., 1994). Over the years, a large and growing number of studies have consistently documented U&G as robust (Rubin, 1983; Wimmer and Dominick, 1994).

As new technologies arm people with an increasing number of media choices, gratifications become more crucial components of media studies. Scholars pointed out that the interactive nature of the Internet has significantly strengthened the core U&G notion of the active user (Ruggiero, 2000), and the line between sender and receiver of mediated messages has been blurred (Singer, 1998). Furthermore, the convergence of mass media and digital technology has altered the exposure patterns of many media consumers (Finn, 1997). The transformation of media exposure and media consumption contributes to newly identified gratifications, such as personal involvement, relationship building and maintenance, and status seeking (Eighmey and McCord, 1998).

Previous studies have explored gratifications sought from the Internet in general (Papacharissi and Rubin, 2000) and from specific new media, including e-mail and telephone (Dimmick et al., 2000), ICQ (Leung, 2001), social networking sites (Dunne et al., 2010), and user-generated content (Leung, 2009). Despite the mounting evidence in terms of the U&G of new media, few empirical studies have explored people's underlying motivations to engage in tablet use. Warschauer (2011) identified the lighter weight, instant-on capability, mobility, user interactivity, and long battery life as the main advantages of iPads, which have been regarded as an efficient tool for education and learning. The enhanced Web browsing experience on tablets, mainly contributed to by a large, high-definition touch screen without the burden of a keyboard and mouse, leads to more user gratifications and dependency (Bolt et al., 2010). Those unique attributes of the tablet might significantly affect individuals' motivations and usage patterns.

Grounded in U&G framework, this study seeks to discover the motives of tablet use and expand previous research by proposing the following research question and hypothesis:

RQ1. What gratifications do users seek from using the tablet?

H1. The more that users find the tablet gratifying, the more they will use it.

2.2. Leisure boredom

Boredom is defined as an “unpleasant, transient affective state” in which an individual is left with nothing in particular to do and lacks interest in their surroundings (Fisher, 1993). This state is the result of under-stimulation, under-arousal, lack of momentum, or lack of psychological involvement (Brissett and Snow, 1993; Mikulas and Vodanovich, 1993), which may occur more frequently in an individual's leisure time. People who fail to handle the free time at their disposal appropriately are prone to experiencing leisure boredom. Iso-Ahola and Weissinger (1990) conceptualized leisure boredom as “the subjective perception that available leisure experiences are not sufficient to instrumentally satisfy needs for optimal arousal. . .leisure experiences are not sufficiently frequent, involving, exciting, varied or novel.”

As noted by Iso-Ahola and Weissinger (1987), “optimal arousal” has a stake in leisure boredom. Through the lens of optimal arousal, “boredom” is defined as an information overload and underload: the latter is the situation where individuals are apt to experience boredom in the context of leisure. This claim was backed by Geiwitz (1966), who reported that feelings of boredom were associated with feelings of “unpleasantness, constraint, repetitiveness, and low ‘societal’ arousal.” Unless

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