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The influence of media multitasking on the impulse to buy: A moderated mediation model



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ABSTRACT

This study explores whether and why media multitasking is related to the impulse to buy among young people. The results of an online survey of 993 college students supported the proposed moderated mediation model. For individuals with a higher impulse-buying tendency, media multitasking enhanced the buying impulse through the mediation of high perceived information utility. For individuals with a lower or moderate impulse-buying tendency, media multitasking enhanced the buying impulse through the mediation of high perceived information utility and social presence. The moderated mediation model extended the stimulus-organism-response (S-O-R) framework and demonstrated the moderating influence of an impulse-buying tendency.

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1. Introduction

Previous studies have consistently found that young people are often engaged in media multitasking, particularly the combined use of television and the Internet. Chang (2015) found that 57.1% of members of the Web Generation use mobile Internet devices while watching television. Kononova, Zasorina, Diveeva, Kokoeva, and Chelokyan (2014) found that 77.6% of college students in Kuwait, Russia, and the USA sometimes or frequently use television and the Internet concurrently.

Young people also tend to shop impulsively. Researchers at Yahoo found that 43.5% of people under age 20 use mobile Internet for shopping and that 33.4% of mobile shoppers are likely to shop impulsively (Yahoo, 2013). Chase Bank also found that 83% of US millennials have made impulse online purchases and are significantly more likely to do so than their older peers (eMarketer, 2015). Is it possible that as young people engage in media multitasking more frequently, their impulse to buy things becomes stronger? This study aims to answer this question and to identify the psychological mechanisms underlying this phenomenon.

Lewis and Reiley (2013) found that television advertisements

during the Super Bowl tend to immediately trigger online searches for the brands advertised. Liaukonyte, Teixeira, and Wilbur (2015) found that television advertising has an immediate impact on online buying behavior. Liu, Li, and Hu (2013) suggested that the Internet facilitates impulsive buying. Therefore, it is likely that television-Internet multitasking will lead to a stronger impulse to buy among young people. Impulse-buying behavior is unplanned purchase behavior without conducting prior research, evaluating alternatives, or considering consequences (Jeffrey & Hodge, 2007). The impulse to buy is the desire to make a purchase upon encountering an object in one's environment (Beatty & Ferrell, 1998). Impulse-buying behavior has attracted considerable research attention because it can significantly contribute to overall product sales (Jeffrey & Hodge, 2007; Madhavaram & Laverie, 2004).

Several studies have applied the stimulus-organism-response (S-O-R) framework to online impulse buying among members of the younger generation (Liao, To, Wong, Palvia, & Kakhki, 2016; Liu et al., 2013). However, not one of the studies has considered media multitasking as a situational cue. This study extends the S-O-R framework by considering media multitasking as the situational cue (S), perceived information utility and social presence as the internal reactions (O), and the impulse to buy as the behavioral response (R). Additionally, this study postulates that impulse-

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buying tendency (IBT) moderates the mediation effect. Individuals with different IBT levels are expected to have different mediation patterns.

The theoretical value of this study is as follows: (1) it demonstrates the applicability of the S-O-R framework to media multitasking situation; (2) it elucidates the S-O-R framework by incorporating source magnification theory and social impact theory; (3) it identifies perceived information utility and social presence as the two psychological mechanisms linking media multitasking and the impulse to buy; and (4) it validates the moderating role of IBT for the mediation model, which is considered to have a positive and direct effect on the impulse to buy (Flight, Rountree, & Beatty, 2012; Liu et al., 2013). The S-O-R framework and the influences of the two mediators and the moderator will be discussed in the following section, from which the moderated mediation model will be established.

2. Theoretical background

2.1. The S-O-R framework and the impulse to buy

Introduced by Woodworth (1929), the S-O-R framework is an improvement on the classical stimulus-response (S-R) theory in behaviorism. Classical S-R theory considers human behavior to be a learned response to stimuli. The S-O-R framework extends the classical S-R theory by integrating an organism to account for individuals' internal reactions in response to situational stimuli. The framework posits that situational cues (S) trigger an individual's internal reactions (O), which subsequently affect his or her behavior (R). This framework has recently been introduced to online buying research on, for example, online purchase intention (Jiang, Chan, Tan, & Chua, 2010) and online repurchase intention (Hsu & Tsou, 2011).

Several studies have applied the S-O-R framework to online impulse buying among young people (see Table 1). Parboteeah, Valacich, and Wells (2009) surveyed a convenience sample of 264 undergraduate students in the United States. The results of their study supported the S-O-R framework, and they found that task-relevant and mood-relevant situational cues (S) significantly influenced perceived usefulness and enjoyment (O) and subsequently influenced the urge to buy impulsively online (R).

Ning Shen and Khalifa (2012) combined the S-O-R framework and the Mehrabian-Russell (M-R) model to examine the mediated relationship. The M-R model considers three basic emotional states that mediate responses to stimuli in a retailing environment. These authors examined the mediation effects through a laboratory experiment with 151 undergraduate students in Dubai. Their findings supported a serial mediation relationship in which interactivity and vividness influenced social presence and telepresence

(S), which in turn influenced pleasure and arousal (O) and buying impulse (R).

Liu et al. (2013) aimed to identify the relationships among website cues, personality traits, and the urge to impulse purchase online on the basis of the S-O-R framework. These authors surveyed a convenience sample of 318 college students in China. They found that the visual appeal of a website (S) significantly triggered three personality traits: impulsiveness, normative evaluation, and instant gratification (O). The three traits, in turn, significantly influenced the urge to buy impulsively online (R).

Finally, Liao et al. (2016) conducted a lab experiment with 120 undergraduate students in Taiwan. Their data showed that online product presentation, product type, and the interaction of the two (S) significantly influenced an individual's pleasure or arousal (O), which subsequently influenced the urge to buy impulsively.

Overall, previous studies relating to the impulse to buy among young people have examined different situational stimuli and internal reactions. No study has considered media multitasking as a situational cue. The following sections will elaborate on why media multitasking leads to a stronger impulse to buy through the mediation of perceived information utility and social presence.

2.2. Perceived information utility as the mediator

Previous studies have suggested two reasons why engaging in media multitasking more frequently can result in higher perceived information utility. First, habitual media multitaskers have an information-process bias in favor of attending and processing greater amounts of information, even information that is not directly relevant (Lin, 2009; Ophir, Nass, & Wagner, 2009). Duff, Yoon, Wang, and Anghelcev (2014) revealed a positive relationship between media multitasking and advertising utility. They found that high media multitaskers are more likely to perceive advertising information as having utility because they have broader attentional filters and a reduced ability to filter out irrelevant information. In the same vein, young people who often engage in media multitasking should have the cognitive propensity to attend and process greater amounts of information from multiple media, which results in higher perceived information utility.

Second, source magnification theory holds that an individual will perceive high information utility when two consecutive sources are independent (Harkins & Petty, 1981a, 1981b, 1987; Moore & Reardon, 1987; Moore, Reardon, & Mowen, 1989). In media multitasking, individuals oscillate from television to the Internet to obtain product information (Brasel & Gips, 2011). Because these sources are mostly independent of one another, individuals are more likely to consider overall information utility to be high.

Source magnification theory also suggests that higher perceived information utility will result in higher motivation to process

Table 1
The S-O-R framework and the impulse to buy among college students.

Source	Stimulus (S)	Organism (O)	Response (R)
Parboteeah et al. (2009)	Task-relevant cues	Perceived usefulness	Urge to buy impulsively
Ning Shen and Khalifa (2012)	Mood-relevant cues	Perceived enjoyment	Buying Impulse
	Interactivity	Pleasure	
	Vividness	Arousal	
	Social Presence		
	Telepresence		
Liu et al. (2013)	Product availability	Impulsiveness	Urge to buy impulsively
	Visual appeal	Normative evaluation	
	Website ease of use	Instant gratification	
Liao et al. (2016)	Product presentation	Pleasure	Urge to buy impulsively
	Product type	Arousal	
	Product presentation × Product type		

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