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A Study on How Short-Form Video Consumption Relates to Emotional Regulation, Impulsivity, and the Ability to Delay Gratification in Young Adults

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ABSTRACT: In this era of endless scrolling, attention has become one of our most valuable yet fragile human resources. Short-form video platforms deliver fast-paced, and emotionally charged content that can subtly reshape how individuals process emotions, control impulses, and pursue long-term goals. This study examines how short-form video consumption relates to emotion regulation, impulsivity and the ability to delay gratification among young adults. A sample of 32 participants between the ages of 18-26 were surveyed using standardized self-report questionnaires. The questionnaires measured levels of emotion regulation, impulsivity and the ability to delay gratification in relation with the number of hours such content was consumed for in a day. Correlational analysis revealed a significant positive relationship between increased content consumption and impulsivity, which suggests that higher exposure to short-form videos may correspond to increased impulsive tendencies. While emotion regulation and delay of gratification showed no statistically significant correlation within the sample used, the results do suggest an inverse relationship between the variables, which warrants further exploration. These findings highlight the ever-growing psychological implications of digital media habits, and emphasize the importance of understanding how high-stimulation, and instant gratification media environments may influence self-regulatory capacities which are essential for adaptive functioning in adults.

KEYWORDS: Short-Form Videos, Emotion Regulation, Impulsivity, Delaying Gratification, Young Adults

I. INTRODUCTION

One scroll, one swipe, one more video and suddenly hours have gone by in a flash. In a world where entertainment is delivered in seconds and attention spans are fleeting, Instagram Reels, Tik Tok and YouTube Shorts now shape how people engage with digital media. These platforms offer rapid, endless streams of emotionally charged content, designed to capture attention and reward users with constant novel and stimulating content. While this shift in media has definitely impacted and transformed the way people learn, interact and unwind, it raises the question: what happens when the brain gets conditioned to such rapid feedback? Researchers are now increasingly investigating the psychological effects of such content and media exposure particularly its impact on functions like heightened impulsivity, altered patterns of emotional regulation and reduced capacity to delay gratification. Processes that are essential to self-control, mental health, adaptive functioning and everyday decision making. Examining these functions is crucial to understanding how short form video consumption is shaping the psychological landscape of young adults.

For the purpose of this paper, the variable Emotion Regulation will be referred to as its components; Cognitive Reappraisal and Expressive Suppression. Cognitive reappraisal involves reframing one's thoughts about a stimulus to change its emotional impact (Gross, 1998). In contrast expressive suppression refers to the conscious inhibition of emotional expressions while emotionally aroused (Butler et al., 2003).

Recent research by Maier et al., (2021) using a sample of 57 participants; 25 with low impulsivity (higher cognitive control) and 32 with high impulsivity (lower cognitive control), found that highly impulsive individuals displayed stronger emotional reactions unless explicitly instructed to suppress them. This suggests that they rely on external guidance for emotion regulation. On the other hand, less impulsive individuals naturally managed their emotions with greater internal control. Another study by Bembenutty et al., (2000), conducted among a sample of 364 students, concluded that academic delay of gratification was associated with lower test anxiety once motivational, cognitive, and self-regulated factors were controlled. Their findings suggest that delay of gratification functions as a learning strategy, helps students protect their long-term academic goals and mitigate the adverse effects of test anxiety on performance.

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EMOTION REGULATION

One of the key constructs examined in this study is emotion regulation, which is generally used to describe an individual's ability to effectively manage and respond to emotional experiences (Rolton and Lloyd-Richardson, 2017). It has widely been recognised as a component of affect regulation along with mood regulation and coping. According to Gross (1998b), as cited in Gross (2015), emotion regulation refers to when an individual aims to influence which emotion an individual experiences, how they express it and when they are able to experience it. This may result in an emotional response that is either augmented or diminished in duration or intensity, which is considered to be vital for individual well-being (Gross, Richards and John, 2006). Past research has indicated a strong link between emotion regulation and impulsivity, particularly in helping predict vulnerability in addiction and risk-prone behaviour. Schreiber, Grant and Odlaug (2012) studies this relationship amongst a sample of 194 young adults, categorizing them on the basis of emotion dysregulation. Their findings revealed that individuals with higher emotional dysregulation scored higher self-reported impulsivity. The study concluded that emotional regulation is a key factor influencing impulsive tendencies and may play a crucial role in the development of maladaptive or addictive behaviour among individuals. More recently, Wartberg, Thomasius and Paschke (2021) explored the role of emotion regulation in problematic social media use amongst a sample of 1221 children and adolescents in Germany. The study examined various components of emotion regulation, including procrastination and perceived stress and related it with maladaptive or excessive social media behaviour. The findings revealed significant association between problematic social media use, greater impulsivity and pronounced difficulties in regulating emotions. Gosh and Halder (2020) also studied the relationship between cognitive flexibility and emotion regulation amongst 30 young adults. Cognitive flexibility is the ability to change cognitive processing strategies according to the situation, playing an important role in emotion regulation. Their findings suggested a strong association between emotion regulation and cognitive processing.

IMPULSIVITY

Another key component being examined in this study is impulsivity, described as a predisposition toward rapid, unplanned reactions to internal or external stimuli with diminished regard to the negative consequences of these reactions to the impulsive individual or to others (Evenden, 1999; Moeller et al., 2001; Potenza and de Wit, 2010).

Impulsivity has been given a number of definitions over the years. These include: human behaviour without adequate thought (Smith, 1952), behaviour with no thought whatsoever (English, 1928), action of instinct without recourse to ego restraint (Demont, 1933) and swift action of mind without forethought of conscious judgement (Hinslie & Shatzky, 1940).

Recent research has shown a strong relationship between impulsivity, psychological symptoms and social media addiction. This was studied by Tutal et al. (2021) within a sample of 178 adults. Their study revealed that higher levels of social media intake are significantly linked with greater impulsivity and increased psychological symptoms. Their findings highlighted the psychological risks linked with excessive reel consumption and linked impulsivity as a mediating factor between social media addiction and emotional states. Savci and Aysan (2016), examined a sample of 307 university students and their findings revealed a significant relationship among impulsivity, social media usage and loneliness. Their findings revealed that impulsivity directly and significantly predicts social media usage, and impulsivity indirectly but significantly predicts loneliness. Recently, Lewin et al. (2023) analysed 17 publications and investigated the relationship between problematic social media use and some aspect of impulsivity across 21 studies. They found out that problematic social media use is related to greater general impulsivity and certain facets of impulsivity.

DELAYING GRATIFICATION

Another essential construct being analysed in this paper is the delay of gratification, which can be seen as the inverse of impulsivity. In most literatures, delay of gratification is considered as the ability to sacrifice immediate rewards and preserve goal-oriented behaviour for the sake of long-term better reward (Mischel W, Shoda Y & Rodriguez ML, 1989). From the choice perspective, delay of gratification is seen as a cognitive process associated with the preference of a more distant reward at the expense of an immediate reward. Some experts also tried to equate delay of gratification with ego control (Funder DC, Block JH & Block J,1983), self-regulation and self-control (Mischel W, Shoda Y & Rodriguez ML, 1989).

Meade (2012) conducted a fascinating study amongst a sample of 271 participants in different grades, who were then divided into two groups: one with high access to instant gratification media and one with low access, and their findings revealed that the participants in the high access group were more likely to put their endanger their grade in exchange for a good time, whereas the low access group would not. Kumar and Pareek (2018) worked with a sample of 120 adolescents and investigated the role of 'ability to delay gratification' and 'cognitive emotion regulation strategies' in the psychological well-being of adolescents. The results showed that Refocus on Planning, Positive Refocusing, etc., significantly predict psychological well-being, whereas the ability to delay gratification failed to do so. Wulfert et al., (2002) also studied delay of gratification with an engaging experiment with high school students, who were offered a monetary incentive for participating in the research. The students were given a choice between a smaller fee immediately or a larger fee one week later. The results showed that students who chose the immediate fee showed

more self-regulatory deficits, had greater involvement with cigarettes, alcohol, and marijuana. They also had poorer self-concept and underperformed academically compared to the other group. The results were replicated when the study was repeated using middle-school students and different rewards.

II. PURPOSE

The purpose of this study was to understand the impact of short form video consumption on the ability of an individual to regulate their emotions, control impulses and delay gratification.

III. HYPOTHESIS

H1- Higher frequency of short form content consumed will be inversely linked to the ability of an individual to regulate their emotions.

H2- Individuals who consume short form videos for a longer amount of time will exhibit higher impulsivity than others

H3- Frequency of short form content consumed is negatively correlated with an individual's ability to delay gratification

IV. METHOD

Sample

A total sample of 32 young adults aged 18-26 was collected from the city of Mohali, Punjab.

Measure

Emotion Regulation Questionnaire (ERQ)- The Emotion Regulation Questionnaire was developed by Gross and John (2003) to assess the habitual differences of using emotional regulation strategies like expressive suppression and cognitive reappraisal amongst individuals. The ERQ was a 10-item, self-report scale and it was scored on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from Strongly Disagree (1), Disagree (2), Somewhat Disagree (3), Neutral (4), Somewhat Agree (5), Agree (6) and Strongly Agree (7).

Impulsive Behaviour Short Scale (I-8)- The impulsive behaviour short scale is used to measure impulsive behaviour when assessment time is limited. It comprises 4 subscales which are urgency, lack of premeditation, lack of perseverance and sensation seeking. The I-8 was developed by Groskurth et al., (2022) and it is a self-report scale measured on a range from Does not apply at all (1) to Applies completely (5).

Delaying Gratification Inventory (DGI)- The Delaying Gratification Inventory was developed by Hoerger, Quirk and Weed (2011) and the original version has 35 items (DGI-35), in this study the 10-item short form was used (DGI-10). The inventory covered 5 dimensions of delay behaviour which involved food, social interaction, physical pleasures, money and achievement. The DGI is a self-report scale and it is scored on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from Strongly Disagree (1), Somewhat Disagree (2), Neutral (3), Somewhat Agree (4), and Strongly Agree (5).

V. PROCEDURE

All participants were initially given a brief description regarding the objective and purpose of the study. They were informed about their rights as a participant which includes voluntary participation, option to withdraw at any moment as well as confidentiality and privacy regarding their data. Informed consent was taken electronically before the test began and any queries or doubts the participant had, were cleared via the contact email provided in the form.

Data was collected through google forms, using structured and standardized questionnaires. This ensured accessibility and convenience for all involved. The form consisted of three sections, first was regarding demographics which included age, gender along with an option to consent for the test. This was followed by a section to measure the duration that the individual consumed short form content for. The final section involved the 3 scales used to measure emotional regulation, impulsivity and delayed gratification. Participants were instructed to read all the questions thoroughly, not to skip any question and to respond to the questions as honestly as possible. Upon submission, the participant was thanked for their contribution, time and cooperation.

VI. ANALYSIS OF DATA

Results

Table I: N, Mean and Standard Deviation

	Content Consumption in Hours	Cognitive Reappraisal	Expressive Suppression	Impulsivity	Delaying Gratification
N	32	32	32	32	32
Mean	2.91	30.3	17.1	22.3	36.3

	Content Consumption in Hours	Cognitive Reappraisal	Expressive Suppression	Impulsivity	Delaying Gratification
Standard Deviation	1.63	5.28	5.64	4.44	3.64

Table II: Correlation between Number of hours content consumed, Emotion Regulation (Cognitive Reappraisal, Expressive Suppression), Impulsivity and Delaying Gratification.

	Content Consumption in Hours	Cognitive Reappraisal	Expressive Suppression	Impulsivity	Delaying Gratification
Content Consumption in Hours	—				
Cognitive Reappraisal	-0.008	—			
Expressive Suppression	0.180	0.022	—		
Impulsivity	0.383*	-0.007	0.032	—	
Delaying Gratification	-0.190	-0.053	-0.066	-0.224	—
Note. * p < .05, ** p < .01, *** p < .001					

VII. DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

The central objective of this study was to examine the impact of short-form content consumption on emotion regulation, impulsivity and the ability to delay gratification among young adults. The findings indicate that content consumption in hours is significantly positively correlated with impulsivity ($r= 0.383$, $p<.05$), suggesting that individuals who consume such content for longer durations are more likely to display impulsive behaviour compared to those who watch for shorter periods. In contrast, content consumption showed an inverse relationship with the ability to delay gratification, although this relationship was not statistically significantly in the sample measured. This implies that as the amount of short-form content consumed increases, an individual's ability to delay gratification tends to decrease. Regarding Emotion Regulation, cognitive reappraisal showed virtually no relationship, which means that in the current sample the number of hours a person spends consuming content doesn't relate in any meaningful way to an individual's tendency to reappraise a situation. Expressive Suppression, on the other hand, showed a small positive correlation, suggesting that as content consumption increases, individuals may be slightly more inclined to regulate their emotions by suppressing or concealing their emotional expressions rather than reinterpreting the situation.

Based on the findings, Hypothesis 1, which was proposed that higher frequency of short form content consumption would be inversely linked to emotion regulation ability, was partially rejected. While no relationship was observed between content consumption and cognitive reappraisal, a small positive correlation emerged with expressive suppression. This indicates that increased content exposure may slightly encourage individuals to manage their emotions by concealing rather than reframing them. A possible explanation is that short-form content, which often promotes immediate emotional stimulation and rapid shifts in attention, might limit opportunities for reflective processing. This will lead to individuals regulating their emotions in more surface level ways rather than through cognitive reinterpretation. Hypothesis 2, which predicted that longer durations of short form video consumption would be associated with higher impulsivity was accepted. The significant positive correlation suggests that individuals who spend more time on such content display stronger impulsive tendencies. This may be due to the fast-paced, reward driven design of short-form platforms, where constant novelty and instant gratification can condition users to see quick rewards and reduce their capacity for sustained attention or self-control. Finally, Hypothesis 3, which proposed that higher frequency of content consumption would negatively correlate with the ability to delay gratification was rejected. The relationship was not statistically significant despite being negative in direction, suggesting that while increased exposure to rapid reward media may conceptually

undermine self-control, the present data does not provide sufficient evidence to confirm this effect. It is possible that factors such as individual differences in self-regulation or the type of content consumed may have moderated this relationship.

Findings align with research conducted by Zsido et al., (2021) who examined a sample of 499 participants to explore how emotion regulation strategies and social anxiety relates to problematic smartphone and social media use. Their results indicated that individuals often use smartphones and social networking platforms as external tools for emotion regulation. This reliance on digital media for emotional comfort may, in turn, reinforce maladaptive regulatory patterns like expressive suppression. Similarly, in the present study, participants who reported higher short-form content consumption demonstrated patterns consistent with diminished emotion regulation capacity. This suggests that frequent engagement with such media may condition individuals to rely on external digital stimuli rather than internal coping strategies. Consistent with this, findings from Sindermann, Elhai and Montag (2020), provide further evidence of impulsivity as a result of disordered use of social media platforms. In their study of 494 participants, impulsivity and extraversion were found to be positively associated with tendencies towards Facebook, WhatsApp, and Instagram Use disorder. In the present study, participants who reported longer durations of short-form video consumption also demonstrated higher impulsivity scores. This suggests that the rapid reward design of short-form platforms may both attract and reinforce impulsive behavioural patterns, creating a cycle of immediate gratification and reduced self-regulatory behaviour. Furthermore, recent research by Singh and Prusty (2025) further links problematic short-form media use with difficulties in delaying gratification. Their study involved 174 young adults, and their findings revealed that excessive engagement with short-form video content was significantly negatively correlated with both attentional control and delay of gratification. Indicating that frequent exposure to such content may weaken one's ability to sustain attention and resist immediate impulses. These findings parallel the results of the present study, suggesting that habitual use of short-form video platforms can condition users towards preference for instant reinforcement, thereby reducing their capacity for delayed reward and sustained cognitive control

Considering all these results, the evidence reflects that short-form media may be subtly training the mind to expect rapid stimulation and instant reward. As individuals grow accustomed to such feedback, capacity for patience, emotion regulation, and impulse control may gradually decrease. While digital media remains an integral part of modern life, the findings highlight the importance of awareness and self-regulation in how individuals engage with it. Future research can build on this by exploring the interventions that help restore balance between digital consumption and psychological well-being.

V111. CONCLUSION

The present study found that increased consumption of short-form video content is linked to higher impulsivity, greater use of expressive suppression, and lower ability to delay gratification. These results suggest that frequent exposure to fast-paced, emotionally stimulating media may shape self-regulatory behaviour, making individuals more responsive to immediate rewards rather than engaging in reflective control. Data was analysed from the responses of 32 young adults in Mohali, Punjab, and it supported the idea that short-form content use can meaningfully affect emotion regulation and impulse-controlled processes.

With the rise in availability and personalization of short-form video content, people's dependence on them for quick entertainment and information has increased tenfold. This has led to adverse effects like shorter attention spans and difficulties in managing emotions and impulses. There needs to be certain limits on how people consume this content to avoid the detrimental effects. Encouraging more mindful digital habits, such as setting app limits, reducing screen time, or engaging with more meaningful and balanced content, could help counter these detrimental effects. Practices like journaling or creative expression may also support emotional awareness, reduce reliance on suppression as a coping strategy, and help reduce the phenomenon of 'doom scrolling'.

While the findings offer useful insights, the study was limited by its small and localized sample, as well as its reliance on self-report measures, which can affect accuracy and generalizability. Future research using larger, more diverse samples and experimental or longitudinal designs would help clarify the long-term effects of short-form content consumption on self-control and emotional functioning.

In conclusion, developing awareness and intentionality in how an individual engages with short-form content can help ensure that these digital spaces enhance, rather than hinder, emotional regulation, impulse control, and the capacity to delay gratification.

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