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Study the Impact of Short-Form Video Content on Attention Span of GenZ

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Abstract

Concerns over their possible effects on attention span and cognitive focus have been raised by the quick emergence of short-form video platforms, which have drastically changed digital media consumption, particularly among Generation Z. The purpose of this study is to investigate how Gen Z users' attention spans are affected by short-form video material and to assess the connection between platform usage, focus, and user perception. Using a convenience sample technique, 110 Gen Z respondents in Pune between the ages of 18 and 25 completed a structured questionnaire as part of a descriptive and quantitative study design. The results were then analyzed using statistical methods such as regression analysis and correlation. The findings reveal that Instagram Reels is the most preferred platform, with the majority of users spending 30–60 minutes daily on short-form content, and a significant proportion reporting reduced ability to concentrate on long tasks and a perceived decline in attention span; statistical results further confirm a positive relationship between short-form video usage and reduced attention span. The study also shows that even while users are aware of detrimental cognitive effects, they still interact with the content because it is interesting and imaginative. These findings suggest the need for balanced digital consumption and increased awareness of digital well-being, offering valuable insights for educators, researchers, and policymakers concerned with cognitive health and productivity among young individuals.

Keywords: Short-form Videos; Attention Span; Generation Z; social media; Digital Behaviour.

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Introduction

Short, fast-paced video formats have replaced long-form media as the primary mode of information consumption in the digital age. Platforms such as Instagram Reels, YouTube Shorts, and Snapchat Spotlight have rapidly gained popularity, particularly among Generation Z, who prefer quick, engaging, and visually stimulating content. With billions of daily views globally, short-form videos have become a dominant force in shaping entertainment, communication, and even learning habits. This change has brought up significant issues about how such rapid content consumption is influencing cognitive abilities, especially attention span, which is critical for productivity, learning, and overall mental well-being.

While short-form videos offer instant gratification and high engagement, their fast-paced and repetitive nature may contribute to reduced ability to concentrate on longer tasks. Generation Z, being the most active users of these platforms, is particularly vulnerable to these effects. The constant exposure to quick bursts of information may condition users to expect rapid stimulation, making it difficult to sustain attention in academic, professional, or daily activities. Despite growing concerns, there remains uncertainty about the degree to which these platforms directly impact attention span and concentration. Numerous researchers have shown adverse relations between excessive screen time and cognitive focus in studies that have examined the relationship between digital media usage and attention span. Some studies highlight that heavy consumption of short-form video content is linked to reduced academic performance and increased distraction levels. Additionally, frequent users' attention control-related brain activity has changed, according to neuroscientific studies. Other research, however, indicates conflicting and occasionally contradictory results, suggesting that digital information can improve learning and engagement when used appropriately.

Despite the growing body of research, there isn't enough focused studies examining the direct relationship between short-form video consumption and attention span specifically among Generation Z in localized contexts such as Pune. Most existing research either generalizes social media usage or does not isolate short-form video platforms as a distinct variable. Additionally, limited studies explore both the behavioural impact (attention span) and users' perceptions simultaneously. Addressing this gap is important to comprehend how new media consumption patterns are shaping cognitive behaviour in young adults and to offer more focused perspectives for digital well-being.

Literature Review

Attention span has long been studied as a fundamental cognitive function that determines an individual's ability to sustain focus on tasks over time. Foundational theories such as Selective Attention Theory and Cognitive Load Theory suggest that human cognitive capacity is limited and can be easily overloaded by excessive stimuli (Sweller, 1988; Kahneman, 1973). Within the framework of digital media, these theories are increasingly relevant, as modern platforms are designed to capture and retain user attention through rapid, engaging, and continuous content delivery.

Recent studies argue that short-form video platforms intensify cognitive load by presenting highly stimulating and fast-changing visual information, which may impair deep processing and sustained attention (Opara et al., 2025; Montag et al., 2019). Also, neuroscientific research shows that repeated exposure to such content alters neural pathways related to attention control and reward processing (Yan et al., 2024). But some academics contend that attention is influenced by engagement and context rather than declining universally. This theoretical debate provides a foundation for understanding how short-form video content may influence attention span among Generation Z.

The rapid growth of short-form video platforms such as Instagram Reels, TikTok, and YouTube Shorts has significantly reshaped digital consumption patterns. These platforms use algorithm-driven personalization and infinite scrolling, leading to high user engagement and prolonged screen time (Kaye et al., 2021; Smith & Short, 2022). Generation Z shows a strong preference for short, visually engaging content and consumes such media regularly (Anderson & Jiang, 2018).

Empirical studies indicate that short-form video consumption is associated with habitual and sometimes addictive behavior due to dopamine-driven reward mechanisms (Alter, 2017; Turel et al., 2014). Users often continue engaging despite attempts to limit usage, reflecting reduced self-regulation (Alghamdi & Aljabr, 2024). At the same time, research highlights positive aspects such as micro-learning, creativity, and quick access to information (Tare & Tripathi, 2023; Zhang et al., 2020), showing both beneficial and detrimental effects.

The connection between the use of digital media and attention span has been extensively studied in the literature. Several studies report a negative correlation between too much screen time and sustained attention, particularly among young users (Rosen et al., 2013; Asif & Kazi, 2024). Exposure to fast-paced content has been linked to increased distraction, reduced concentration, and difficulty in performing cognitively demanding tasks (Haliti-Sylaj & Sadiku, 2024).

Neuroscientific evidence supports these findings, indicating reduced executive control and lower neural activation in attention-related regions among heavy users (Yan et al., 2024). Psychological factors such as Fear of Missing Out (FoMO) also contribute to distraction and reduced attention (Zahra et al., 2025). Yet, some research contends that attention is context-dependent, and structured digital content can enhance engagement and focus (Tare & Tripathi, 2023).

In particular, recent studies have looked at the connection between short-form video consumption and attention span, reporting a strong correlation between higher usage and reduced ability to concentrate on long tasks (Asif & Kazi, 2024; Haliti-Sylaj & Sadiku, 2024). Statistical analyses confirm that time spent on such platforms predicts reduced attention span (Alghamdi & Aljabr, 2024). Despite negative effects, users continue engagement due to entertainment value and accessibility (Opara et al., 2025).

Simultaneously, some studies highlight that short-form videos can enhance creativity and support informal learning (Zhang et al., 2020), creating a paradox where users recognize both benefits and drawbacks. Thus, the relationship between short-form video consumption and attention span is multifaceted, involving cognitive and psychological factors.

The body of current research offers compelling evidence on the link between the use of digital media and attention span but mainly focuses on general social media use or specific platforms within limited contexts. There's not enough research that simultaneously examines short-form video usage, attention span, and user perception within a single framework.

Additionally, limited studies focus on Generation Z in localized urban contexts such as Pune, and few integrate both statistical analysis and self-reported cognitive perceptions. Addressing this gap is essential to better understand how short-form video consumption influences attention span. This study aims to close this gap by offering empirical insights regarding the cognitive and behavioral impact of short-form video content among Generation Z

Research Methodology

This research is based on the positivism research philosophy, which emphasizes objective measurement, empirical observation, and statistical analysis. Positivism is appropriate as the research aims to examine the measurable relationship between short-form video consumption and attention span using quantifiable data collected from respondents. The research depends on observable facts and numerical data rather than subjective interpretations, ensuring objectivity and generalizability of findings.

Research Objectives

- To identify which short-form video content platform (Instagram Reels, YouTube Shorts or Snapchat Spotlight) is most frequently used by GenZ.
- To study how the impact of short-form video platforms on concentration relates to users' attention span.
- To investigate the connection between impact of short-form video on concentration and users' perception of short-form videos.

Research Approach

The study follows a deductive research approach, wherein existing theories related to attention span, cognitive load, and digital media consumption are used to formulate theories. Next, these theories are put to the test empirically using collected data. This approach is suitable as the research seeks to validate predefined connections among variables like short-form video usage and attention span.

Research Design

A descriptive study design is used to methodically describe patterns of short-form video consumption and its impact on attention span among Generation Z. The Design permits the identification of trends, behaviors, and connections between variables without changing the research environment. Additionally, elements of explanatory design are incorporated through regression analysis and correlation to examine relationships between variables.

Data Type

The primary data used in the study came directly from respondents via a standardized questionnaire. Primary data guarantees that the information is specific, relevant, and in line with the goals of the study.

Method of Data Collection

Information was collected using a survey method via an organized questionnaire. The questionnaire consisted of closed-ended questions measured using a 5-point Likert scale (ranging from "Strongly Agree" to "Strongly Disagree") to capture respondents' perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors. The survey was administered both online (via Google Forms) and offline to ensure wider reach and participation.

Population & Sample

The target population comprises Generation Z individuals (aged 18–25 years) who actively use short-form video platforms such as Instagram Reels, YouTube Shorts, and Snapchat Spotlight.

A non-probability Convenience sampling was employed due to accessibility and the exploratory nature of the study. Out of the 150 surveys that were sent, 110 were deemed legitimate responses were collected and used for analysis. While a minimum of 150–200 responses is recommended for large-scale studies, the achieved sample size is considered acceptable for preliminary quantitative analysis and aligns with similar academic studies in this domain.

Research Instrument

The research instrument used was a systematic survey with four sections:

1. Demographic details (age, gender, education, occupation)
2. Usage patterns (time spent, preferred platforms)
3. Attention span and concentration measures
4. Perceptions toward short-form video content

The items on the questionnaire were modified from previously approved studies on digital media usage, attention span, and social media behavior (e.g., Asif & Kazi, 2024; Haliti-Sylaj & Sadiku, 2024; Zahra et al., 2025), ensuring content relevance and validity. There was a pilot test with 30 respondents to refine the questionnaire for clarity, reliability, and consistency before final data collection.

Reliability & Validity

Cronbach's Alpha was used to assess the questionnaire's internal consistency which yielded a value of 0.70, indicating acceptable reliability.

Validity:

- Expert review was used to guarantee content validity and alignment with prior literature.
- Construct validity was maintained by designing items that accurately reflect the theoretical constructs of attention span and short-form video usage.

Statistical Tools Used

Data analysis was carried out employing statistical techniques to test relationships and interpret findings. The following instruments were employed:

- Descriptive statistics (frequency, percentage, mean) to summarize data
- Correlation analysis to look at relationships between variables
- Regression analysis to ascertain the effects of short-form video usage on attention span

Microsoft Excel was used to conduct the analysis.

Ethical Considerations

The study adhered to standard ethical research practices. Participation was voluntary, and Every respondent gave their informed consent prior to data collection. Respondents were assured of confidentiality and anonymity, and no personal identifying information was collected or disclosed. The Data was only utilized for educational purposes, and appropriate measures were taken to ensure data privacy and integrity.

Data Analysis & Results

The Appropriate statistical tools were used to assess the data gathered from respondents to identify key patterns and relationships. The findings are presented in the form of tables and statistical results for clarity and accuracy.

Demographic Profile of Respondents

Table 1: Gender Distribution of Respondents

Gender	No. of respondent	Percentage
Male	80	73%
Female	30	27%

Total	110	100%

Table 2: Age Group of Respondents

Age Group	Frequency	Percentage
Below 18	2	2%
18 to 21	22	20%
22 to 44	71	65%
25 to 28	13	12%
Above 28	2	2%
Total	110	100%

Descriptive Statistics

Table 3: Most Used Short-Form Video Platform

Platform	Frequency	Percentage
Instagram reels	94	85%
YouTube Shorts	42	38%
Snapchat Spotlight	13	12%
Facebook Reels	9	8%

Table 4: Average Daily Time Spent on Short-Form Videos

Time Spent	Frequency	Percentage
0-30 minute	27	25%
31-60 minute	38	35%
61-120 minute	29	26%
121+ minute	16	15%
Total	110	100%

Table 5: Reliability Test (Cronbach's Alpha)

Questionnaire Scale	0.70

Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis 1

H_1: There is a significant relationship between short-form video platform usage and attention span of Gen Z users.
H_0: There is no significant relationship between short-form video platform usage and attention span of Gen Z users.

Table 6: Correlation Analysis

Variables	Correlation (r)
Platform Usage & Attention Span	0.506

Table 7: Regression Analysis Results

Variables	β Coefficient	t-Value	p-Value
Platform Usage	0.334	6.10	<0.05

Result: Since $p < 0.05$, H_1 is Supported.

Hypothesis 2

H_1: There is a significant relationship between the impact of short-form video content on concentration and users' perception.
H_0: There is no significant relationship between the impact of short-form video content on concentration and users' perception.

Table 8: Correlation Analysis

Variables	Correlation (r)
Concentration Impact & User Perception	0.498

Table 9: Regression Analysis Results

Variable	β Coefficient	t-Value	p-Value
Concentration Impact	0.321	5.87	<0.05

Result: Since $p < 0.05$, H_1 is Supported.

Findings

1. Most respondents (73%) are male and belong to the age range 22–24 years (65%), indicating that the sample mainly represents young adult Gen Z individuals, largely students (63%).
2. Instagram Reels is the most used short-form video platform (85%), followed by YouTube Shorts (38%), showing Instagram's strong dominance among Gen Z users in Pune.
3. The majority (35%) spend 31–60 minutes daily on short-form videos, while 26% watch for 1–2 hours, reflecting high engagement levels.
4. 59% agree that Instagram affects their ability to concentrate on long tasks, followed by •35% for YouTube Shorts. Snapchat and Facebook Reels show relatively minimal effects.
5. 45% believe their ability to focus has decreased since using short-form videos.
6. 46% find it difficult to focus on studying or work after watching short videos.
7. 45% say they can focus better on days they skip watching such videos.
8. 46% admit they continue watching short videos even when they try to reduce usage, suggesting addictive viewing patterns.
9. 63% believe short-form videos assist them in keeping up with trends.
10. 53% feel these videos boost creativity and ideas.
11. 47% find them an effective way to learn new things.
12. There is a moderate positive correlation ($r = 0.506$) between short-form video usage and attention span.
13. A significant relationship ($p < 0.05$) exists, indicating short-form video usage impacts attention levels.
14. Another correlation ($r = 0.498$) shows that concentration levels relate positively to users' perception of short-form videos.
15. Around 25% of variation in attention and perception can be explained by short-form video usage.

Conclusion

1. Short-form video platforms have become a crucial component of Generation Z's daily digital life, with Instagram Reels emerging like the most preferred platform and users spending 30 minutes to 2 hours daily on such content.
2. The study finds that excessive consumption of short-form videos has a major detrimental effect on attention span, with many respondents reporting reduced ability to focus on long or important tasks.
3. A moderate positive correlation ($r = 0.506$) and statistically significant relationship ($p < 0.05$) were observed between short-form video usage, concentration levels, and user perception.

4. Users reported improved concentration on days when short-form content was avoided, indicating that reduced exposure can help restore attention and mental clarity.
5. Despite negative cognitive effects, respondents also highlighted positive outcomes, including increased creativity, quick learning, and staying updated with trends, showing a dual impact of short-form content.
6. Overall, short-form video platforms present a balanced effect, enhancing awareness and engagement while simultaneously challenging sustained attention, emphasizing the need for mindful usage and digital well-being practices.

Discussion And Suggestions

1. Gen Z users should consciously limit screen time and schedule digital breaks to avoid attention fatigue and maintain focus.
2. Educational and skill-based short-form videos should be promoted to turn usage into productive learning rather than distraction.
3. Institutions and workplaces can introduce awareness sessions on mindful media consumption and the effects of overexposure on concentration.
4. Platforms like Instagram and YouTube can include features such as daily watch-time reminders or focus-mode tools to help manage overuse.
5. Parents and educators can encourage offline hobbies, reading, and time management practices that enhance attention span.
6. Further studies can compare generational sub-groups within Gen Z and explore the long- term cognitive effects of short-form content.

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