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Media as Multitasking: Rise of Media Simultaneity

Author(s):   Fatih Tokan, Pekka Mattila, Antti Sihvonen

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Participants	Name	Organisation
Research	Fatih Tokan	**Aalto University School of Economics**
	Pekka Mattila	**Aalto University School of Economics**
Editing	Antti Sihvonen	**Aalto University School of Economics**

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Executive summary

This report investigates media multitasking and multiple media use practices among audiences with all included aspects and respective attention. Moreover, this report highlights several factors such as 1) rationale for conducting media multitasking and using multiple media, 2) influencing factors and 3) consequences of undertaking these practices. In order to achieve these objectives, media consumers' routine daily life activities were observed and analysed according to the thematic context that these practices occur. To say, the objectives have mostly emerged from the lack of studies qualitatively studying media multitasking and multiple media use practices as a holistic process as well as these studies' deficiency in delivering insights, feelings and emotions of the audiences while conducting these practices.

This report illustrates results of an exploratory qualitative research focusing on capturing media multitasking and multiple media use experiences of audiences as a part of their everyday life routine. In order to identify these practices within audiences' daily life routine, grounded theory approach is utilized. During audiences' general media consumption is observed, media multitasking and multiple media use practices have been established and concepts and categories within these media practices have been generated. Field observations and in-depth interviews have been conducted as data collection methods using theoretical sampling to reach participants according to grounded theory methodology.

Findings indicate that thematic context directly influences media multitasking and multiple media use experience, affecting reasons for and results of conducting these media practices. A number of factors have been identified fostering or inhibiting occurrence of these practices depending on the circumstances, while these factors reciprocally interact with thematic context effects. It has been found that some reasons for conducting media multitasking or using multiple media originates internally according to requirements or desires of audiences. On the other hand, it is also possible that rationale for conducting these activities are initiated externally, mainly forced by media environment or work context. Furthermore, conducting these activities delivers some benefits to audience; improve their media usage experience in multiple media consumption as well as support non-media activities during media multitasking. However, it is also observed that media multitasking and multiple media use experiences might result in deprecating consequences, personal complications or deliver a drearier media consumption experience. In order to cope with drawbacks, audiences deploy some strategies aiming at reducing or completely eliminating the damaging result such as restricting media channel and content availability and creating media hierarchies.

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1. Introduction

Recently increasing importance of media for consumers to conduct their daily life routines and synchronize with their surrounding environment has resulted in escalating attention from researchers, advertisers and managers. Commonness of media use and its importance for the audiences generated new, innovative means of consumption shaped according to the needs and requirements of media consumers. Among these emergent ways of consuming media, conducting non-media related activities while using a medium - *media multitasking* - and using more than one medium at the same time - *multiple media use* - have been highly valued and investigated. To say, the rationale for intense interest in these activities mainly originates from their importance for consumer behaviour and prevalence among audiences.

In this report, audiences' rationale for conducting media multitasking and multiple media use as well as results of conducting these media practices on audiences will be illustrated. Acting as a core of reason-practice-result pattern, media multitasking and multiple media use experience will be observed with all its dimensions, while factors facilitating or inhibiting this conduction will be also explored.

1.1. Importance of media multitasking and multiple media use

Media multitasking and multiple media use have penetrated to audiences' daily life practices, and they currently occupy a central role in overall media consumption, to say, they have become almost irreplaceable. To highlight this, Pilotta & Schultz (2005) found out that most of the media consumption today is either conducted as media multitasking or simultaneous use of two or more media. Moreover, Pilotta et al. (2004) observed in their study that *only around 16 % of the respondents do not engage in simultaneous media usage*. Inarguably, media multitasking and multiple media use are how media are consumed these days. Several other studies have also highlighted the prevalence of media multitasking and multiple media use among media consumers. *From 70 to 80 % of total media time is predicted to be consumed as media multitasking or multiple media use*, as some studies reveal (BIGresearch 2003; Pendleton 2004; Jeong et al. 2005). Similar to previous research, Papper et al. (2004) found that *around a quarter of the media day, media audiences consume at least two media simultaneously*.

1.2. Objectives

Previously mentioned, there is abundance of quantitative studies inspected prevalence of media multitasking and multiple media use, investigated most common combinations of different media channels in multiple media use and co-occurrences of media and non-media related activities in media multitasking. However, these studies fall short about *delivering in situ knowledge of individuals while these activities are undertaken as a part of daily life routines, and fail in reflecting the 'real' experience due to the lack of a contextual framework.*

Throughout this report, constructing upon these media practices, rationale behind conducting these activities, factors affecting them and results delivered are evaluated as occurred as a part of daily life routine including several common 'themes' for most of

the audiences. Prevalence of these activities among media audiences and most common affiliations are included to serve as a background supporting comprehension of these activities and utilized to provide basis for analysis, instead of being an aim or focus of the study.

1.3. Approach

This report illustrates the results of an exploratory qualitative study utilizing grounded theory approach to comprehend audiences' media multitasking and multiple media use practices as a part of their daily life routines. To achieve the objectives, first research problem has been identified and objectives have been set. Then, literature on media multitasking and multiple media use has been conducted simultaneously with initial exploratory observations and interviews aiming at understanding audiences' media consumption as a part of their daily life routine. After the literature review and initial media consumption observations and literature have been completed, an initial framework was generated in order to serve as a guide for the later stages of the research.

2. Research Findings

In this chapter, findings from the research will be illustrated. These findings are mainly related to media multitasking and multiple media use experience, reasons for conducting media multitasking and multiple media use, factors affecting these activities, results of conducting these activities and strategies to cope with negative results of media multitasking and multiple media use.

2.1. Media multitasking and multiple media use experience

Considering the daily life context and media environment, consumers reveal that their multiple media use first shaped by theme they are situated. Then, according to theme, they realize the options for selection, meaning that they evaluate the available media in the theme. Finally, they generate a media portfolio and select the combination according to their personal preference and timing. Although there are other methodologies to generate multiple media consumption practice, this is the most frequent method that is utilized by the participants.

According to the results, *participants mention multiple media use occurring mostly in home theme.* Although some multiple media behaviour is mentioned in other themes (school, work, social life, commuting), they are not common enough to make generalizations. *Main reasons for consuming multiple media simultaneously at home more than the other themes appear to be higher availability of different media channels*, appropriateness and time related aspects. As in multiple media use, during media multitasking, individuals evaluate the available media according to the theme, generate a portfolio of possible media and select the most appropriate medium that might serve their preference and satisfy the need which to be combined with the preferred non-media activity. *Findings also reveal that listening to music, talking on the phone, browsing Internet and conducting online tasks are most prevalent media practices that are included during conducting chores, commuting, doing homework and other similar non-media related activities.*

To summarize, in media multitasking activities audiences employ media consumption mainly to support their non-media related activities, make them more tolerable and improve non-media related activities' experience. Therefore, selection of media activities to be combined with non-media related activities is usually made such that these activities somehow complement each other and they are thematically convenient to be combined.

2.2. Reasons for conducting media multitasking and using multiple media simultaneously

Comprehending the reasons for conducting media multitasking and multiple media use behaviours is an important aspect of these behaviours while delivering the rationale for achieving mentioned practices. Analysing the observations and interviews deliver that theme (context) directly influences the reasons individuals carry out the mentioned media practices.

At home, media multitasking and multiple media use are generally undertaken in order to improve the media consumption in general or to make several non-media related activities such as washing the dishes and cleaning more bearable or entertaining. At school and work themes, the mentioned reasons are mostly related to the performance of the thematic activities (conducting work related or school related activities) while media consumption evidently improves task performance. Similar to home context, media multitasking and multiple media use in social life and commuting themes are accomplished to support non-media activities' delivery in terms of joy and contributing to the media consumption's assistance. Figure 1 below summarizes internal and external reasons of conducting media multitasking and using multiple media simultaneously.
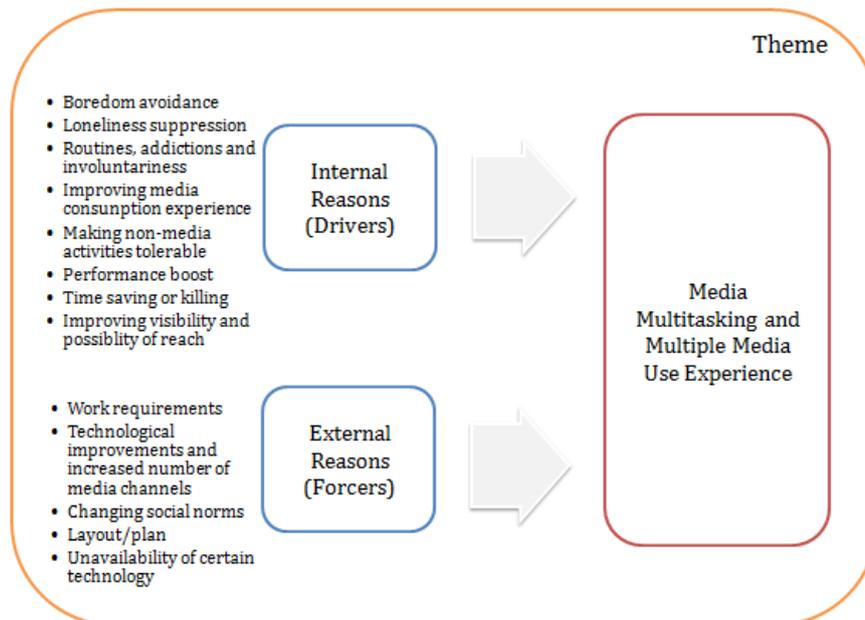

Figure 1. Internal and external reasons for media multitasking and using multiple media simultaneously

2.3. Fostering and inhibiting factors of media multitasking and multiple media use practices

Media multitasking and multiple media use practices are enabled or disabled, limited or supported due to the factors existing in the environment of conduction. According to the role of these factors, they might help or create obstacles to the individual who intentionally or unintentionally conducting/contemplating to conduct media multitasking or consume multiple media simultaneously.

The fostering and inhibiting factors can be categorized according their source or origin, audience, media or situational related. It is also possible that there are some factors affecting media multitasking or multiple media use practice or intention, which are derived as a combination of above mentioned combinations, generating a different effect from their individual consequence. Consistent with the theme, some factors vary according to applicability, suitability and projected benefits; that are some factors might not be applied each theme, or it might not bring same effect on the each theme. Figure 2 illustrates a summary of factors fostering and inhibiting media multitasking and multiple media use practices, which are surrounded by 'theme' affecting their applicability and effectiveness.
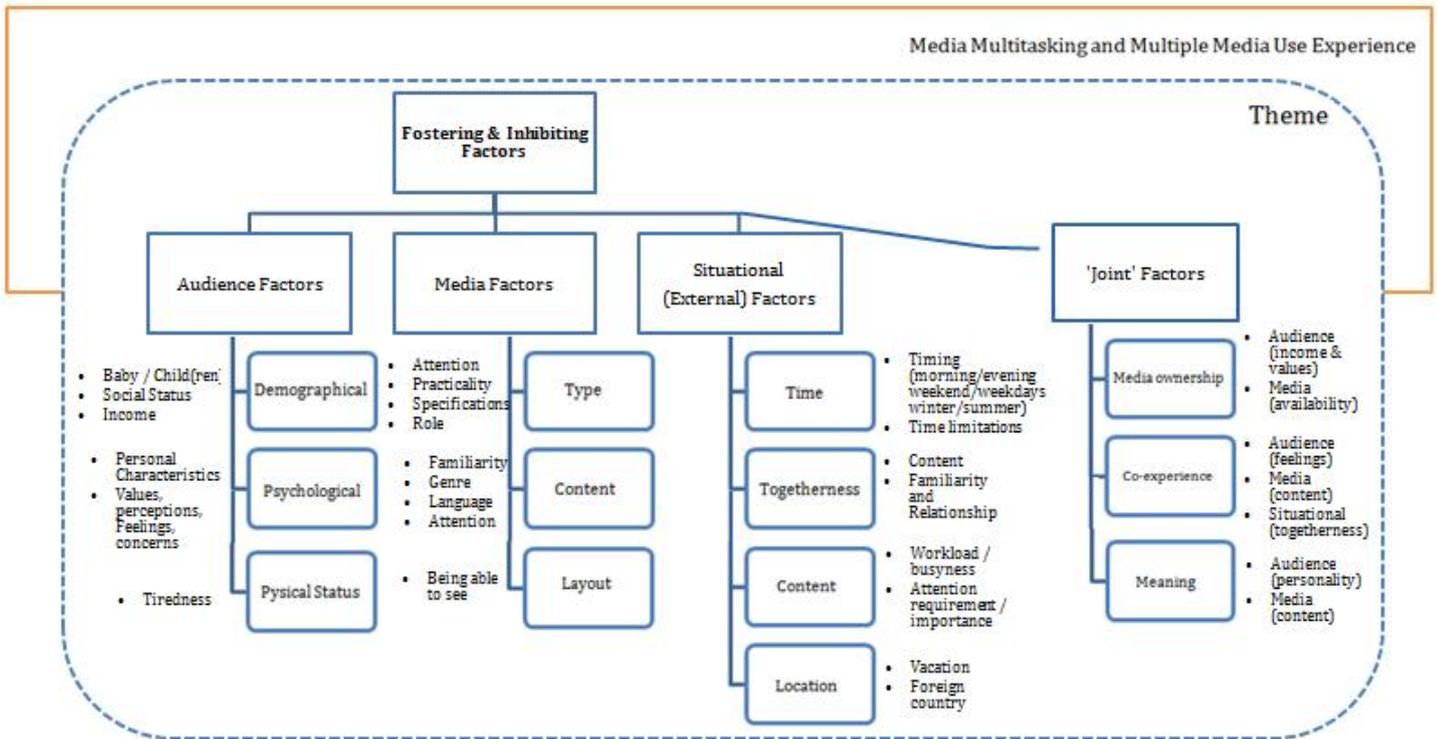

Figure 2. Fostering and inhibiting factors of media multitasking and multiple media use practices

2.4. Results of media multitasking and multiple media use

Research findings reveal that even if media multitasking and multiple media use are conducted as a result of habit or routine, inevitably, occurrence of these events brings some benefits or drawbacks depending on the content and even theme. *Despite the fact that content of the media or non-media activity and rationale behind the practice are the main forces in deciding on the type and magnitude of the result, situated theme (context) also has a certain effect on the outcome of conducting media multitasking or multiple media use practices.*

As can be seen from Figure 3, conducting media multitasking or using multiple media simultaneously might deliver positive or negative results depending on thematic context and influencing factors. *Most common positive results are mentioned as delivering a better media consumption practice, avoiding boredom and loneliness and increased visibility.*

On the other hand, some negative results have also mentioned. Those include, *loss of time, reduced performance, loss of joy and enslavement* are among the most prevalent negative results that informants mentioned.
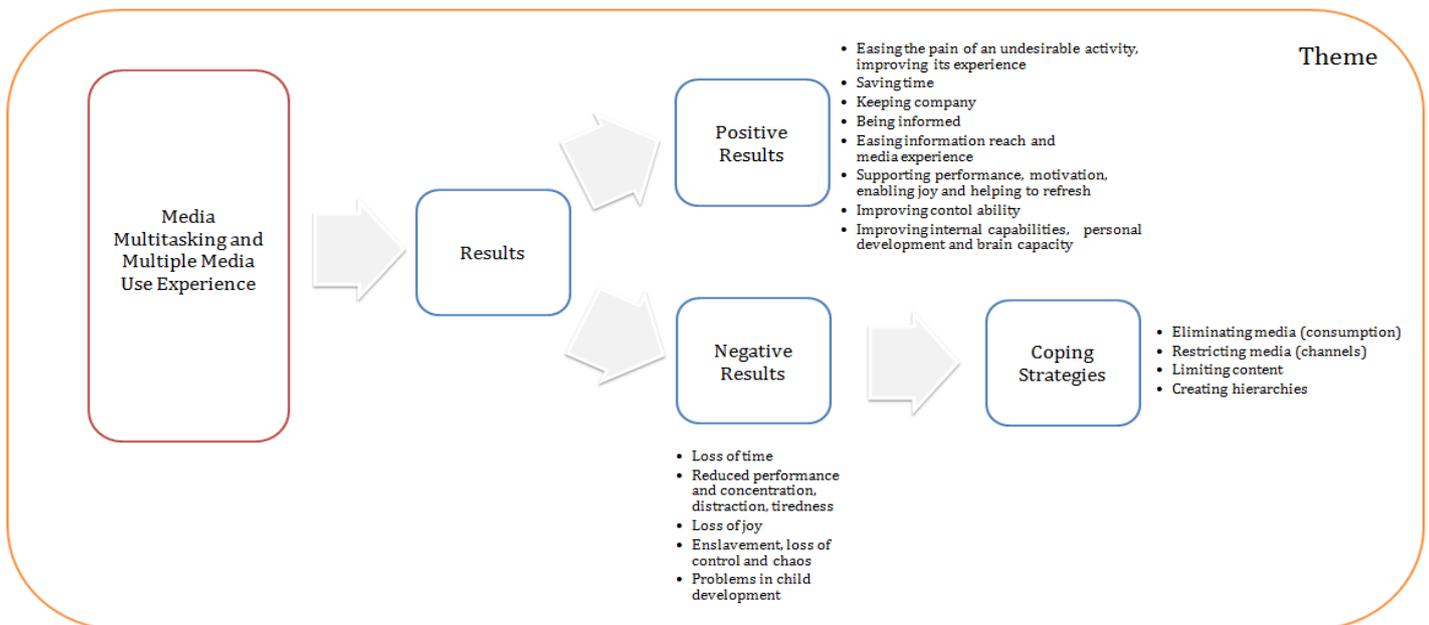

Figure 3. Results of media multitasking and multiple media use and coping strategies generated to eliminate negative effects

2.5. Strategies to cope with negative results

In order to alleviate or escape from the negative consequences of conducting media multitasking and multiple media use practices, audiences typically generate strategies that aim at successfully easing the pain. Coping strategies principally depend on the theme, type of activity (media multitasking or multiple media use), content/importance of media or non-media activity, individual's personality and finally, urgency or importance of applying the strategy.

As it was revealed during the interviews and field observations, most common coping strategies employed by participants are 1) restricting the number of media used/available, 2) limiting or selecting media or non-media content, and 3) prioritizing media and non-media related activities. In Figure 3, most common coping strategies are illustrated as reactions to negative results of media multitasking and multiple media use.

3. Discussion and Conclusion

3.1. Restatement of findings: What did we learn?

The main learning points from this research can be summarized as following:

Media multitasking and multiple media use are holistic processes and separate or individual evaluation of different categories related to these processes might diminish the understanding of the whole phenomenon.
Throughout this report, different aspects related to media multitasking and multiple media use practices have been identified which are rationale for and results of conducting these activities, strategies to cope with negative results of these activities and finally, thematic context and fostering/inhibiting factors. These aspects define a holistic process while indicating the reason-practice-result pattern as well as reflecting contextual and situational factors where thematic contexts have direct effect on the pattern and encompass its occurrence whereas fostering/inhibiting factors also directly affects the pattern yet its' several dimensions are independent from the theme.

Media consumers are mostly unaware of their media multitasking and multiple media use behaviour due to the fact that they have integrated to other daily life routines and constitute a large part of total media consumption.
Due to the fact that media consumption, especially media multitasking practices, has integrated with daily life activities thus, it is hard to identify the media use activities. For example, driving to work and listening to music is extremely integrated which makes identifying the media consumption practice (listening to recorded music or radio) hard to identify for the informants. Moreover, most of the media consumption today is based on routines, rituals or emergent decisions; thus, identifying the activity is problematic.

Media ownership and media usage are two different concepts.

Media ownership and media availability are two different concepts where media ownership is a function of media availability affected by personal influences. Moreover, media ownership and media usage are also different concepts where media usage diverges from media ownership in terms of frequency and also actual owning. To explain, some participants own game consoles, music sets or DVD players that they haven't used for a while. Therefore, media ownership does not necessitate media usage. Moreover, it is also possible to use among available media channels that are not owned, but borrowed or used as a guest.

Today a majority of media channels are used to serve other purposes with a different role.

During observations and interviews, it has been realized that most of the media channels are used to serve a different purpose than its' original role. For instance, television is just used for its screen, instead of its designated purpose: to view television broadcasts. Additionally, computer's role has expanded these days linear to their capabilities, while it enables individuals to conduct activities that are originally some other media channels purpose. Moreover, some media channels are bound to extinction due to their limited content, flexibility or cross-functioning ability of technologically improved media channels. For example, listening to radio is observed in a very limited context that is mostly replaced by other technologies or options.

Single platform multiple media use is exceptionally common among audiences.

Today, computer usage itself become a multiple media use experience, while offering audiences live stream television viewing experience, browsing on the web, reading recent newspapers and magazines, talking over VOIP applications or Skype and instant messaging possibility, even simultaneously. Therefore, computer may not be consider as a medium anymore, since it is a hub combining different media channels while delivering a crucial content that other media fails to deliver: control over content. Additionally, it seems to be a reciprocal relationship with computers and other digital media, where computers are equipped with other mediums features whereas all other media channels are being 'computerized', meaning that several features of computers such as web browsing, DVD watching, etc. are added to televisions and game consoles.

Consumers demand privacy in their media consumption.

During interviews, most of the participants have raised some issues regarding to privacy of their media consumption, especially with Facebook or other social media tools. However, in the direction we are heading about media consumption, privacy issues will appear to continue growing where location tagging seems to be the social norm today. Therefore, extensiveness of tagging and sharing among the society appear to build new social norms among consumers, which might lead changes in privacy settings and rules of sceptics.

Sometimes, lack of control over content is good, even fun.

Source of media content is another interesting issue these days. Even watching movies from DVD or Blu-ray is old fashioned, while introduction of online technologies to home entertainment bring boundless options to the audiences. However, it might not be the case all the time. Sometimes lack of control or randomness can offer great value and a superior experience to audiences, which might be ignored or omitted among a large number of options. To say, although watching a movie of personal choice is bringing great value, watching a movie on a TV channel, especially if content of the movie is unknown and the movie is liked at the end, might be more entertaining when compared with VOD, IPTV or Blu-ray.

Loneliness is a powerful instinct for media multitasking and multiple media use activities.

The findings also revealed that there might be an inverse proportion between the average number of media channels used and number of household due to the fact that boredom and loneliness suppression appear to be one of the most important reasons for consuming multiple media simultaneously, as well as lower value of household results in an increase in the number of media channels during conducting some non-media related activity. Additionally, togetherness factor appear to be a significant factor on go-or-kill decision for conducting media multitasking and multiple media use behaviours as well as combination selection and attention allocation, while it is also strongly correlated with theme, content of media and relationship/familiarity with the other individual.

3.2. Managerial Implications

In this part, managerial implications will be presented based on the emerged topics from research findings, literature review, observations and interviews.

Don't fear simultaneity.

It should be mentioned that companies and managers most of the time fear simultaneity because of the fact that it makes things complicated, hard to analyse and tricky to develop solutions. However, this time they should not, since they have the ability to control the simultaneously occurred media consumption process by developing media synergies that address multiple consumptions. This can be achieved by organizing media content such that they create synergy instead of competing for attention (Rohm et al. 2009; Pilotta & Schultz 2005). As research findings reveal, participants do not perceive multiple media consumption or media multitasking as undesirable activities, they are ready to conduct welcoming new practices.

Produce creative and relevant content to reach target customers.

As Gordon (2005) suggests, generating creative content in order to deliver a certain message would definitely contribute to reach target customers by receiving sufficient attention from the audience. Thus, messages should be creative and relevant to beat other messages in this competition. In order to generate relevant content, target customers should be carefully identified; their interests, values and feelings should be exhaustively analysed. Creative and relevant content is one of the most frequently emerged subjects in the analysis, while participants select, consume and react according to their interest, which can be easily satisfied by offering them creative and relevant to their interests solutions.

Understand audiences' advertising processing.

Having an insight about how consumers receive, process and react to media and advertising is the key. This can be used to open all the doors to potential customers. Therefore, firms should generate segments according to target audience's media usage and about their interests in order to receive their attention — or survive the battle for attention. However, winning the battle is not everything, without receiving desired response from the customers, transmitting impacts would be to no avail. Also, not everyone processes advertising messages similarly, Rohm et al. (2009) argue that

especially Gen Y processes messages nonlinearly, making their response hard to predict.

Follow new technologies and trends, closely.

As mentioned, message receiving, processing and reaction differs among customers. Therefore, learn more about the least known. It is critical for a company to follow new technologies, especially trends, which shape their target audiences thoughts and actions. During interviews, several participants mentioned about their media multitasking and multiple media consumption is solely for being trendy or the norm for the day, not exactly from their intention or attention. Also, especially recent social media technologies or tools appear to have a great impact over media consumption of Gen Y consumers, giving a perfect idea about where to start.

Enable consumers; don't imprison them.

Letting individuals control their media consumption, select and combine according to their interests might have a positive impact on advertising perception due to the fact that they haven't been forced to see but it was their own decision to receive the message. During interviews, one of the participants mentioned about how being able to see multiple screens support an advertising message and his perceptions about the product while he is able to build upon what is seen. On the other hand, if an ad is the only option to see such as an ad screened before and during watching a movie in a theatre, it might even reduce the perceptions about the product and affect the purchase decision negatively. Thus, let audiences have multiple screens; it will not harm but support the perception of the brand and the advertisement.

Think local; act local.

The research findings revealed that timing, location and language have a certain effect on media multitasking and multiple media use behaviours. Therefore, universal rules may not apply in terms of reaching media multitasking or multiple media using audience. Time is a critical factor that affects audiences' media consumption, for instance, it would be more suitable to deliver visual messages to receive interest or attention from the audiences during day time, instead of audio messages due to the fact that most of the working audience cannot process audio messages while they are working. Also, location and language are important considerations of attention and interest while location affects routines that eventually affect media practices. Likewise, language is important to receive and process a message; therefore locality should be carefully considered while targeting media multitasking and multiple media using audiences. (Cuneo 2002)

More is better.

In terms of effective reach to the target audience, especially multiple media users and media multitaskers, utilizing multiple channels might have a positive impact over their processing or attention due to repetition and synergy effects. Focusing solely on one medium and utilizing it as a source of reaching audience is old fashioned. Research findings have indicated that most of the participants are able to receive and process multiple messages simultaneously; therefore in order to create a combined impact, messages should be delivered via multiple media channels. For example, an individual

might see an advertisement while watching television but this might not start purchase decision process, although seeing an ad while listening its ad through radio might generate a combined effect, which is more powerful in reaction, and also might be a lot less expensive.

Tell your story through different media channels.

As Jenkins (2006) mentions, transmedia story telling can be conceptualized as using multiple media types to craft a single story where each new text makes a distinctive and valuable contribution to the whole. As a part of technological advancements, especially widespread availability of the Internet and advanced personal computers, cross-media production has emerged and rapidly spread, which has eventually increased the complexity that audiences expect from their entertainment (Dena 2009).

Considering the alteration in audience expectations, generating and delivering product/service offerings as a part of larger scale 'narrative' can help companies to build more informed and loyal customer base. Eventually, increasing importance of being visible in multiple media screens can provide a lucrative opportunity for different media channels. Therefore, media agencies and advertisers should solemnly ponder possibilities to create a narrative approach, compelling consumers to practice a more satisfying product/service experience through being part of a larger narrative involvement. Furthermore, due to simultaneous scanning of various screens, transmediation can improve visibility of the offering to audiences and also increase possibility of gaining potential customers for the companies through perpetual repetition of the narratives' fragments.

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