Comparing Frequency of TV and Internet Use among African-American Students and Their Effects on Material Values and Sociability

David J. Park, Florida International University, USA

Maria Elena Villar, Florida International University, USA

Abstract

This study compares sociability, material values and self-reported happiness among African-American university Internet and television consumers.Reminiscent of Marshal McLuhan's (1979) medium theory, our results highlight the role of technological change in affecting value structures and social behaviors. The results showed that heavy Internet users did not differ from light Internet users in their level of sociability, however, heavy Internet users avoided "large social gatherings." For materialism and self-reported happiness, there were no differences between heavy and light Internet users. The results for television viewers differed from Internet users. While there were no differences between light and heavy viewers concerning sociability, heavy TV viewers scored higher than light viewers on materialism, and lower in happiness. Findings suggest that the effects of heavy television viewing do not necessarily translate to heavy Internet use.

Keywords: Media Use, Sociability, Materialism, Happiness, African-Americans

Introduction

Media consumers spend roughly three and five hours per day watching television (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2010; Nielsen, 2011), and three to four hours per day on the Internet (Nie, Simpser, Stepanikova, & Zheng, 2005; O'Brien, 2012), with those under 40 likely to average a few more hours per week with new media (Holmes, 2008). The effects of television on values and behaviors are well documented (Jeffres & Perloff, 1997; Perse, 2001; Schramm & Roberts, 1971), albeit withmostly White subjects. As most people in the United States are now online, researchers interested in the effects of media have turned their attention from traditional media like newspapers and television, to the effects of the Internet (Fodeman & Monroe, 2009; Ellison, Steinfield, & Lampe, 2007). A growing body of evidence connects the use of various media technologies tovalues and behaviors, particularly among college students (Sirgy et al. 1998; Kraut, Patterson, Lundmark, Kiesler, Mukopadhyay, & Scherlis, 1998; Beaudoin, 2009; Fodeman & Monroe, 2009; Park & Villar, 2011;Ellison et al., 2007; O'Brien, 2012; Wellman, Haase, Witte, & Hampton, 2001; Whitty, 2008). Some of the dominantvalues cultivated by media relationships amongtelevision viewers and Internet users include: sociability (Sule, Shell & Kleen, 2003; Ellison, Lampe &Steinfield, 2009; Valkenburg & Soeters, 2001; Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, &Signorielli, 1980; Arnett, 1995; Meyrowitz, 1985), materialism (Robinson, et. al., 2010; Sirgy et. al., 1998), and perceptions of happiness (Richins, 1987; Sirgy et al., 1998).

Contemporary media studies, following the path of older studies in the communications field, have largely excluded African-Americans in their focus on media effects compared with other groups (Watkins, 2000). Black scholars have highlighted the need for further study on the different effects of increased television viewing on Black audiences (Watkins, 2000), as well as the need to further research African-American Internet users. Omi and Winant (1994) note race and concepts of race are influenced by social structures and cultural representations. Television and the Internet are social media structures that disseminate predominantly commercial content that encourages consumption and cultivates values. Carey (2008) expands on this important influence by noting communication technologies also transmit beliefs encoded within information.According to Brock (2012), culture also shapes various online social interactions.

Reminiscent of Marshal McLuhan's (1979) medium theory, which argues the format of different media creates unique effects on consumers,the goal of thisstudy is to comparesociability (the extent to which individuals socialize with others), materialism (importance of material goods) and happiness (through a self-anchored scale) between light and heavy African-American college student television and online media consumers.With scarce research focusing on values, social behaviors and perceptions of Black students, a group at the forefront of adopting emerging technologies, this study attempts to address thismajor gap by exploringthese important and understudied value areas of media effects research.Within a constantly evolving media landscape, our results highlight the role of technological change in affecting value structures and social behaviors and contribute tomedia effects research on African-Americans.

African-Americans, TV and Internet

African-Americans constitute an understudied, marginalized, largely deemphasized and devalued group in the United States(Gilchrist & Jackson, 2012).They have been excluded from many types of research, one of them being early media research (Sampselle, 2007), due to both institutional racism that excluded racial minorities from academic research, and to racial exclusionary practices in the media industry. This is an unfortunate trend given that African-Americans have a unique relationship with mass media when compared with other ethnicities (Ward, 2004; Watkins, 2000). Studies on media use have established that African-Americans watch more television than other groups. They spend up to 37 percent moretime watching television, which translates to seven hours and seventeen minutes per day (Ward, 2004, Nielsen, 2013). The effects of television often differ between Blacks and Whites depending on the topic (Eschholz, Blackwell, Gertz, & Chiricos, 2002).This may be relatedtothe fact that media content has historically portrayedAfrican-Americans in unfavorable lights (Allen & Hatchett, 1986). While many of these studies focus on the associations between media use and body image/ or healthy lifestyles (Kean, Prividera, Boyce & Curry, 2012; Gordon, 2008; Dawson-Andoh, Gray, Soto, & Parker, 2011; Robinson et al. 2010), Park and Villar (2011) note studies examining African-Americans can be grouped in at least five categories: stereotypes, news media images, self-esteem, gender representation and consumption of news media. In essence, media have been described as priming negative perceptions of Blacks (Holt, 2013).

In terms of Internet usage and African-Americans, "Black Internet usage has become increasingly visible. Thanks to the integration of social media into our everyday communication habits" (Brock, 2012 p. 529). In fact, African-Americans spend about twice as much time on webhosting sites than other groups, which suggests they own more likely to own personal websites (Nielsen, 2013). Roughly 87% of Blacks own a cell phone with 64% being wireless Internet users (Smith, 2010). Studies find that Black Internet users are younger, have a higher income and are more likely to have some college education than non-Internet users (CH II Publishers, 2001), but these class differences are also diminishing over time (Roberts & Foehr, 2008). Along with Hispanic and Asian students, Black students spend more creating online content than White students (Correa & Jeong, 2011) and Black Americans constitute over a quarter of all U.S. Twitter users (Brock, 2012).African-Americans are also 44 percent more likely to own a social media profile than other groups (Nielsen, 2013).

Effects of Television on Sociability, Material Values and Happiness

Studies from the 1970s-1990s examining frequency of TV exposure highlight negative effects in particular from heavy TV exposure. Much of this research focuses on the socializing (Arnett, 1995; Meyrowitz, 1985) role of television through the transmission of cultural perceptions, norms and values (Gerbner et al., 1980) or through social learning (Bandura, 1977). Ball-Rokeach, Rokeach, & Grube, (1984) argue exposure to TV programs influence viewers' values, while Arnett (1995) and Meyrowitz (1985) note the frequency of TV exposure also cultivates and influences viewer sociability.Although often presumed negative, research is surprisingly lacking on the relationship between television and sociability (Oehlberg, Ducheneaut, Thornton, Moore, Nickell, 2006). Sociability refers to the degree of socializing with others, while socialization refers to the process of learning and disseminating social norms, customs, and attitudes that allow individuals to participate successfully in their social environment. We focus on sociability in this study.

The frequency of TV use not only affects sociability, but also impacts the cultivation of material values and personal happiness. Here,time spent watching television is associated with the development of materialistic desires (Morgan, 1984; Robinson, Kestnbaum, Neustadtl, & Alvarez, 2000; Sirgy et al., 1998), which may in turn reduce personal happiness

(Richins, 1987; Sirgy et al., 1998). Materialism is the general tendency to view worldly possessions as important sources of satisfaction in life (Belk, 1984). Richins and Dawson (1992) define materialism as the importance ascribed to the ownership and acquisition of material goods. In his study, Inglehart (1977) notes that materialistic people focus on affluence, control and security. In some cases, possession of goods is not an end in itself but a means for achieving another objective (Zinkham, 1994). Materialistic people in this case are also more likely to be dissatisfied and self-report lower levels of happiness (Pollay, 1986; Schor, 1998; Schudson, 1984). Based on these studies, we created the following hypotheses:

H1: Heavy television viewers will score lower on sociability measures than light television viewers.

H2: Heavy television viewers will be more materialistic than light television viewers.

H3: Heavy television viewers will report lower levels of happiness than light television viewers.

Effects of Internet on Sociability, Material Values and Happiness

The results of studies examining sociability and Internet use are in most cases contradictory and far from uniform. Some studies suggest that exposure to the Internet hampers sociability (Fodeman & Monroe, 2009; Karim, Zamzuri, &Nor, 2009; Nie & Erbring, 2002; Soule, Shell, &Kleen, 2003; Whitty, 2008), while others indicate the Internet through social networking use improves socialization processes (Ellison et al., 2007). This is likely due to the diverse functions that the Internet serves ranging form information seeking, to entertainment, and interpersonal communication. Studies examining the perspective of younger Internet users indicate the users feel the technology improves their sociability (Bargh, McKenna, & Fitzsimons, 2002; Lenhart, Rainie, & Lewis; 2001; Valkenburg & Soeters, 2001). However, personality traits also appear to influence the type and amount of Internet use and the potential effects (Finn, 1997; McMillan & Morrison, 2006; Ross et al., 2009; Swickert, Hittner, Harris, & Herring, 2002). Kraut et al. (1998) argue that physical inactivity and limited face-to-face interaction negatively affect Internet users, and Chen, Chen, & Yang (2008) explain that the detrimental effect of Internet disorders can be quite serious even leading to antisocial behaviors and symptoms of addiction "withdrawal" (Song, Larose, Eastin, & Lin, 2004).

Although relationships between frequency of TV use and the cultivation of material values

and personal happiness are well documented (Morgan, 1984; Robinson et al., 2000; Sirgy et al., 1998; Richins, 1987; Sirgy et al., 1998; Pollay, 1986; Schor, 1998; Schudson, 1984), their application to Internet usage is less clear. To-date one study with African-American and Hispanic teenagers found a significant relationship between Facebook use and anxiety (Lee, 2014). However, by the end of the first decade into the 21st century, there were no studies that focused on general Internet use, materialism and happiness.

It is important to note that studies focusing on television use, sociability, materialism and happiness have typically neglected African-Americans. This study included only African-Americans and tested relationships found in previous studies for this audience group. The hypotheses were based on studies that found a propensity for viewers who spend more time watching television to be less sociable (Arnett, 1995; Meyrowitz, 1985),more materialistic (Morgan, 1984; Robinson et al., 2000; Sirgy et al., 1998), and less happy compared to those that watch television more frequently (Richins, 1987; Sirgy et al., 1998). In addition, we test whether the hypotheses hold for online media use as well. The hypotheses also draw on research examining relationships between sociability and frequency of new media use (Ellison et al., 2007; Fodeman & Monroe, 2009; Karim, Zamzuri, & Nor, 2009) combined with studies investigating materialism and happiness via television viewership (Morgan, 1984; Robinson et al., 2000). Specifically, the following hypotheses were proposed:

H4: Heavy Internet users will score lower on sociability measures than light Internet users.

H5: Heavy Internet users will be more materialistic than light Internet users.

H6: Heavy Internet users will report lower levels of happiness than light Internet users.

Methodology

Sample

The data for this study were collected from a convenience sample of adult undergraduates (N=211) from a historically Black[1] university in the southern United States during visits throughout the 2009-2011 academic years. The majority (81%) of respondents was female and the average age was 19.5 years, with 70% of respondents between the ages of 18 and 20. The sample was well distributed across class standing with 37% freshmen, 20% sophomores, 26% juniors, and 14% seniors. All respondents voluntarily completed the survey in various

locations on campus. This population is ideal to examinetelevision and Internet usage because college students tend to be heavy users of communication technologies and online media (Jones, 2002; Miller, 2001; Timm & Duven, 2008).

Measures

In addition to standard demographic variables, this survey measured four main variables: 1) frequency of media use, 2) sociability, 3) materialism and 4) self-reported happiness.

Frequency of Media Use: Participants were classified as heavy, medium, and light TV viewers, as well as heavy, medium, and light Internet users based on the number of hours they spent on each medium per day. Respondents were classified as "heavy TV viewers" if they spent more than five hours per day watching television (20.7% of the sample), "medium TV Viewers" if they spent three to five hours per day (38.9% of the sample), and as "light TV viewers" if they spent fewer than three hours per day watching TV (39.4% of the sample). These figures were based on reported averages of roughly three to five hours per day for television viewing and Internet usage (Nie et al., 2005; Nielsen, 2011;U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2010; Holmes, 2008), and were consistent with Lee, Bichard, Irey, Walt, & Carlson's (2009) measurement methods. Internet use groups in this study consisted of 33.2% as heavy users, 36.9% as medium users, and 28.9 as light users.

Sociability: Our sociability measurement was based on Gilliland & Burke's (1926) classic sociability measurement study, which used a questionnaire to specifically target college students. Weused a 5-point Likert-type scale consisting of four items where participants rated their level of agreement with statements about their preference for spending free time with others, spending time alone (reverse coded), avoiding large social gatherings (reverse coded) and by indicating their own perceived extroversion (Chronbach's alpha = .634). The Likert-type scales included the following options: strongly disagree, disagree, neutral, agree and strongly agree.

Materialism: Materialism was measured on a 5-point Likert-type scale consisting of three items where respondents indicated their level of agreement with statements about the importance of material things (large house, nice car, money; Chronbach's alpha = .812).

These measures were based on Richins and Dawson's (1992) "possession-defined success" dimension of materialism.

Happiness: Similar to Dynan and Ravina (2007), our happiness measures were drawn from the General Social Survey (GSS), which was conducted by the National Opinion Research Center. Single item, self-anchoring measures of happiness ranging from some equivalent of "extremely happy" to "not at all happy" have been widely used (Lyubomirsky & Lepper, 1999) because they allow the respondent to self-define what happiness means to them (e.g. Cantril's (1965) Self-Anchoring Scale, Bradburn's (1969) Global Happiness Item, and the Gurin Scale by Gurin, Veroff, & Feld, 1960). We measured self-reported happiness by another Likert-type scale where respondents selected their level on a 5-point scale with I being 5 being the happiest.

Results

A one-way ANOVA was used to test for mean differences in materialism, sociability and happiness among three TV frequency groups, with significant differences found between heavy and light TV viewers with respect to materialism, sociability and happiness (see Table 1), supporting H1, H2 and H3. Materialism scores differed significantly across the three frequency groups, $F_{(2,202)}=4.16$, p=0 .017 η^2=0.039. Tukey post-hoc comparisons of the three groups indicate that light TV viewers (M=3.18, 95% CI [2.97, 3.39]) had significantly lower materialism scores than heavy TV viewers (M=3.65, 95% CI [3.32, 3.99]), p=0.027. Comparisons between medium TV viewers (M=3.52, 95% CI [3.31, 3.73]) and the other two groups were not statistically significant at p<0.05.Sociability scores also differed significantly across the three frequency groups, $F_{(2,202)}=4.65$, p=0.011, η^2=0.045. Tukey post-hoc comparisons of the three groups indicate that light TV viewers (M=3.75, 95% CI [3.57, 3.93]) had significantly higher sociability scores than heavy TV viewers (M=3.31, 95% CI [3.12, 3.50]), p=0.007. Comparisons between the medium TV viewers (M=3.62, 95% CI [3.43, 3.81]) and the other two groups were not statistically significant at p<0.05.

Finally, happiness scores differed significantly across the three frequency groups, $F_{(2,208)}=3.72$, p=0.02, η^2=0.034. Tukey post-hoc comparisons of the three groups indicate that light TV viewers (M=3.90, 95% CI [3.71, 4.10]) had significantly higher self-reported

happiness scores than heavy TV viewers (M=3.41, 95% CI [3.05, 3.77]), p=0.02. Comparisons between medium TV viewers (M=3.75, 95% CI [3.55, 3.96]) and the other two groups were not statistically significant at p<0.05.

	Light (0-2 hrs)	Med. (3-5 hrs)	Heavy (> 5 hrs)	F	Sig.	η²
Materialism	3.185	3.525	3.659	4.16	<0.05	0.039
Sociability	3.75	3.621	3.311	4.66	<0.01	0.045
Happiness	3.905	3.759	3.409	3.72	<0.05	0.034

Table 1: Means by Daily Television Use

Support for H4, which posited that heavy Internet users would score lower on sociability than light Internet users, was mixed. Contrary to our hypothesis, was no difference in sociability scores across the three Internet frequency groups (high, medium, low).However, heavy Internet users differed from light Internet users in their "avoidance of large social gatherings" (2.70 vs. 2.17, t=2.58, p=.01), which was one of the items in the sociability scale. The data did not support H5, and H6, which posited that heavy Internet users would score higher on materialism and lower on happiness than light Internet users. Indeed, heavy, medium and light Internet users displayed no difference in their perceived importance of materialistic possessions and self-reported happiness (see Table 2).

	Light (0-2 hrs)	Med. (3-5 hrs)	Heavy (> 5 hrs)	F	P
Materialism	3.553	3.381	3.353	0.75	(NS)
Sociability	3.706	3.701	3.422	1.03	(NS)
Happiness	3.786	3.782	3.671	0.29	(NS)

Table 2: Means by Daily Internet Use

Discussion

Sociability scores were significantly lower for heavy television viewers than light viewers, supporting the study's first hypothesis. Since television cultivates social roles (Arnett, 1995; Meyrowitz, 1985), more exposure to television programs may cultivate roles and identities that are more individual than communal, and this may negatively affect sociability among the African-American college student sample. This also has implications considering Bandura's (1977) social learning theory, which suggests people learn how to behave though observation of social situations on television and behavioral modeling. Variables such as family socialization patterns, college lifestyles, dormitory viewing patterns and the role of cultural

identity should also be examined in future studies to assess the extent to which television viewing is an effect of lower sociability and preference for individual activities, or perhaps a determining factor. The type of television content should also be considered, since the relationship between African-Americans and television is different than for Whites. Beaudoin (2009) notes that African-Americans show a more positive relationship between television news use and social capital. African-American oral traditions have contributed to different socialization processes through religious participation and storytelling (Banks-Wallace, 2002). Indeed, these two factors may interact with the influence television in terms of influencing sociability. In other words, although the direction of the association between television viewing and sociability among African-Americans was as expected, the results of this study do not shed light on the reasons for that association.

This study also found that for African-American college students, spending time online does not decrease socializing with friendsand family. Instead of simply supplementing face-to-face relationships, as suggested by Wellman et al. (2001), online communication may complement socialization processes among African-American college students. It is likely that the Internet may help college students communicate with family and friends more, which supports the idea that email, social media, and other vehicles on the Weboffer cheaper substitutes to phone calls and easier alternatives to writing letters (McMillan & Morrison, 2006). Our results do not support Nie & Erbing (2002) or Soule et al. (2003), who suggest that new media users are more likely to become less social by losing contact with family and friends than those who do not use new media.

While there was not a significant difference between heavy, medium and light Internet users in the overall sociability scale, the study did find that heavy Internet users differed in their responses to one of the scale items: "avoidance of large social gatherings." The trend applied mostly to women, who comprised the majority of our respondents. They are more likelyto turn to blogs, social networks, and online status updating as primary sources of community interaction, entertainment and information (Women's Health Weekly Staff, 2009). This may replace or diminish the desire to attend large social gatherings or serve as an adequate alternative for some African-American college students who consider themselves quite sociable.

In terms of material values, the more television African-American college student's watch, the more likely they were to hold material values. This finding directly supports Robinson et al. (2000) and Sirgy et al. (1998), who found that television viewership, could be a predictor of materialistic values. McLeod et al. (1998) would add that the African-American sample might seek out television content that is synonymous with their value structure. It is likely that those respondents were attracted to television shows with higher socio-economic lifestyles characters. Richins (1987) would suggest that they may seethese television characters as a more accurate representation of the real world.

Our results showed no significant differences between heavy, medium and light Internet users concerning materialism. This result appears to be unique and difficult to compare given the lack of research on materialism and Internet use, particularly among young African-American adults. This may be related to the different functions of Internet use, which are currently much broader than the functions of television use. Nonetheless, heavy Internet users are less materialistic than heavy television viewers in our sample. Although rapidly deteriorating, this may be explained by the ability to control the amount of exposure to commercial advertisements on the Internet compared to the general lack of ability to control exposure to commercials on television. Those who are less materialistic may also prefer using the Internet instead of watching television, while heavy Internet users may also prefer content that does not promote materialistic values.

There was no significant correlation between adherence to materialistic values and self-reported happiness among the sample. This finding questions the results of Pollay (1986) and Schudson (1984), who found that those who hold materialistic values were less likely to be happy. Whereas Richins (1987) and Sirgy et al. (1998) see more materialistic people as being more dissatisfied with their standard of living than less materialistic people, our sample group could probably not be dissatisfied with its standard of living. This could potentially explain why this finding differs from Pollay (1986) and Schudson (1984). In terms of media use and happiness, Internet use is not significant, yet heavy television viewers reported lower happiness than light viewers. This finding is similar to Morgan's (1984) study, which noted heavy television viewers are much less likely to say their lives are "great," and much more likely to say their lives are "lousy."

This study contributes to current literature in at least two ways: it addresses a gap in communications research by extending three prevalent topics in media effects research to include African-Americans college students, and it stretches media scholarship to compare two different media technologies. Our results place our African-American college student sample in the middle of competing literature on the social effects of new media. On one hand, the results support the notion that Internet use can hamper sociability concerning gatherings, which would support most studies similar to this topic (Fodeman & Monroe, 2009; Karim et al., 2009; Soule et al., 2003; Whitty, 2008). On the other hand, the sociability measures were not related to the amount of Internet use, which suggests heavy Internet usage may not necessarily hamper socialization processes. The relationship between Internet use and interpersonal socialization is likely to continue to be a moving target with the constantly evolving uses and platforms available on the Web. Finn (1997), McMillan & Morrison (2006), Ross et al. (2009) and Swickert et al. (2002) would argue personality traits are more likely to determine this relationshipthan time spent on the media.

In essence, the effects of television and Internet use forthe African-American college students in our sample slightly differ fromprevious studies (Ward, 2004; Watkins, 2000). Nonetheless, our study also has two main limitations. First, it is largely exploratory given the breadth of the topics analyzed. This exploratory nature leads to our second limitation which is embodied in the limited ability of our results to be generalized to a larger popular. While this is the first study to examine the relationship between materialism, happiness and Internet use, only with the addition of future studies willa body of literature be large enough to constitute any theoretical formations to predict behavior with the effects of Internet use on African-Americans.

Future Research

Future studies may want to combine time exposed to media with other variables such as purpose of media use and type of content consumed. Addressing demographic, psychosocial, as well as ethnic and cultural variables will deepen our understanding of how these factors may impact the effects of media consumption, particularly in the area of material values and happiness. With the advent of smart phones and media convergence, users can now socialize, watch television and surf the Internet at the same time. How this will affect social interaction

also needs further study. A comprehensive model that takes into account race and ethnicity, personality traits, functions of media use, time of media exposure, and type of content consumed would be beneficial to test the intricate relationships between individual audience members and their personal media use. These additions will hopefully add to the creation of a more diverse body of information based on multiethnic samples, and improve methodological approaches.

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[1]The initial survey (n = 128) did not include race because it was assumed the majority of respondentswould be African-American. The revised survey (n = 83) included demographic variables and of thoseresponses, 88.3% self-reported as Black/African American, 1.3% as Asian, 1.3% as White and 9.1%as "other/more than one race". From observations, it is most likely those who chose the "other/more than one race" category were of mixed (Black and White) race. Adding "other/more than one race" race with African-Americans would constitute a sample of 97.4%.