

The Relationship between Short-form Video Addiction and Thought Suppression

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Abstract: This study aims to explore the relationship between short-form video addiction and thought suppression. Data were collected using a questionnaire survey method. A self-designed general demographic questionnaire, the College Students' Short-form Video Overuse Questionnaire, and the White Bear Suppression Inventory were administered to university students in China. A total of 442 questionnaires were collected, and after excluding invalid responses such as those with overly short response times or patterned answers, 413 valid questionnaires were retained, yielding an effective response rate of 93.439 %. The data were analyzed using SPSS software. The results revealed a significant positive correlation between short-form video overuse and thought suppression ($r = 0.780$, $p < 0.001$). Gender, age, place of origin, and cultural level did not predict thought suppression ($ps > 0.05$). However, short-form video overuse was found to positively predict thought suppression ($\beta = 0.779$, $t = 24.782$, $p < 0.001$). The higher the level of short-form video overuse, the stronger the tendency for individuals to engage in thought suppression. Individuals with excessive short-form video usage may rely more on thought suppression strategies to inhibit thoughts related to watching short-form videos. Due to the rebound effect of thought suppression, this may further exacerbate the problem of short-form video overuse.

Keywords: Short-form Video Addiction, Short-form Video Overuse, Thought Suppression, White Bear

1. Introduction

Unwanted thoughts frequently emerge in our minds, such as a student suddenly thinking about watching short-form videos during study sessions. These intrusive thoughts not only cause distress but also disrupt individuals' normal work and study routines. To counteract these unwanted thoughts, people often resort to thought suppression, a cognitive strategy involving conscious efforts to suppress or inhibit certain thoughts or behaviors (Wegner, 2011; Wegner et al., 1987). However, research indicates that attempts to suppress thoughts can lead to paradoxical effects, such as post-suppression rebound (post-suppression rebound effect) or immediate enhancement (immediate enhancement effect). During suppression, thoughts may not only fail to diminish but might even intensify compared to when no suppression is attempted. Alternatively, while suppression might initially seem successful, suppressed thoughts could re-emerge more strongly afterward (Li et al., 2022; Lavy & van den Hout, 1990; Wegner, 2009; Wegner et al., 1987; Wenzlaff & Wegner, 2000).

Prolonged suppression attempts and repeated failures to suppress can lead to increased stress and may contribute to psychopathological states, such as generalized anxiety disorder, obsessive-compulsive disorder, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, and insomnia (Purdon, 1999). This cycle creates a negative feedback loop, underscoring the importance of understanding the antecedents of thought suppression.

Extensive research has shown that thought suppression is closely related to addiction. For instance, many smokers use thought suppression to cope with cravings and intrusive thoughts during attempts to quit smoking (Toll & Wagner et al., 2001). Similarly, individuals recovering from alcohol addiction often rely on thought suppression to manage stress and intrusive cognitions about alcohol (Garland & Carter et al., 2012). With the rise of digital networks, the "White Bear Effect" has gained new relevance. Social media addiction and escapism are positively associated with thought suppression and symptoms of anxiety, stress, and depression (Uram & Skalski-Bednarz, 2024).

However, no research has yet explored the relationship between short-form video addiction and thought suppression. To address this gap, the present study aims to investigate whether short-form video addiction is associated with increased use of thought suppression strategies.

2. Methods

2.1. Subject

Using a random sampling method, questionnaires were distributed online to university students in various provinces and cities across China. A total of 442 questionnaires were collected. After excluding invalid responses, such as those with excessively short completion times or patterned answers, 413 valid questionnaires were retained, resulting in an effective response rate of 93.439%. Among the respondents, there were 221 males (53.511%) and 192 females (46.489%). In terms of place of origin, 179 participants (43.341%) were from rural areas, while 234 (56.659%) were from urban areas. Regarding educational background, 102 participants (24.697%) had an associate degree, 240 (58.111%) had a bachelor's degree, and 71 (17.191%) had a master's degree or above.

2.2. Research Tools

2.2.1. General Demographic Questionnaire

The first part of the questionnaire, the General Demographic Questionnaire, included items on gender, ethnicity, age group, place of origin, monthly household income, relationship status, educational background, and major.

2.2.2. College Students' Short-form Video Overuse Questionnaire

This study utilized the College Students' Short-form Video Overuse Questionnaire (Zhao et al., 2024) to measure short-form video addiction. The questionnaire consists of 35 items across five dimensions: negative emotions, daily life interference, excessive immersion, fixation behaviors, and physiological discomfort. Responses were rated on a 5-point Likert scale. In this study, the questionnaire demonstrated excellent reliability, with a Cronbach's α coefficient of 0.953.

2.2.3. The Chinese version of the White Bear Suppression Inventory (WBSI).

The questionnaire was originally developed by Wegner and Zanakos (1994) and later translated into Chinese by (Zhou et al., 2012), who also tested its applicability in China. The questionnaire consists of 15 items scored on a 5-point Likert scale, with higher scores indicating a stronger tendency toward thought suppression. In this study, the Cronbach's α coefficient was 0.897.

2.3. Data Statistics

This study utilized SPSS 26.0 for data analysis. Correlation analysis and regression analysis were conducted to examine the relationship between short-form video addiction and thought suppression.

3. Results

Table 1: Correlation Analysis between Short-form Video Addiction and Thought Suppression

	1.Gender	2.Age	3.Place of Origin	4.Educational Background	5
5.Short-form Video Overuse	-0.079	0.095	-0.084	-0.084	——
6.Thought Suppression	-0.085	0.067	-0.040	-0.094	0.780***

Through Pearson correlation analysis (see table 1) , it was found that there is a significant positive correlation between short-form video overuse and thought suppression ($r = 0.780$, $p < 0.001$). This indicates that higher levels of short-form video overuse are associated with a stronger tendency toward thought suppression.

Through regression analysis (see table 2) , it was found that gender, age, place of origin, and educational background did not significantly predict thought suppression ($ps > 0.05$). However, short-form video overuse was a significant positive predictor of thought suppression ($\beta = 0.779$, $t =$

24.782, $p < 0.001$).

Table 2: The Effect of Short-form Video Addiction on Thought Suppression

	Thought Suppression					
	Model1			Model2		
	β	t	p	β	t	p
1.Gender	-0.082	-1.668	0.096	-0.025	-0.802	0.423
Age	0.073	1.492	0.137	-0.005	-0.153	0.879
Place of Origin	-0.041	-0.822	0.411	0.025	0.811	0.418
Educational Background	-0.097	-1.962	0.050	-0.025	-0.796	0.426
2.Short-form Video Overuse				0.779	24.782	0.000
R^2	0.023			0.610		
F	2.361			127.560***		

4. Discussion

This study explored the relationship between short-form video addiction and thought suppression. The results indicated a significant positive correlation between short-form video overuse and thought suppression, suggesting that individuals with higher levels of short-form video overuse exhibit a stronger tendency to suppress intrusive and unwanted thoughts. Regression analysis further supported this finding: after controlling for sociodemographic characteristics such as gender, age, place of origin, and educational background, short-form video overuse remained a significant positive predictor of thought suppression. These results align with the initial hypotheses.

The findings of this study resonate with existing research on the relationship between addictive behaviors and thought suppression. In traditional addiction studies, smokers (Tolla, Sobella, & Wagner et al., 2001) and individuals recovering from alcohol addiction (Bernard et al., 2021) were found to use thought suppression to counter intrusive thoughts and cravings related to addiction. Similarly, studies on social media addiction have highlighted the association between thought suppression tendencies and escapism, as well as mental health problems such as anxiety, depression, and stress (Uram & Skalski-Bednarz, 2024). Extending this line of research into the domain of short-form video consumption, this study suggests that individuals addicted to short-form videos may also experience the "ironic process" of suppression, where efforts to avoid certain thoughts lead to an increase in their occurrence (Wegner et al., 1987; Wegner, 2011).

Unlike specific addictive behaviors such as gambling or substance use, which are significantly influenced by social and cultural contexts or age differences, short-form video consumption—enabled by mobile internet—has become ubiquitous across diverse demographic groups. This implies that individuals, regardless of their background or educational level, may encounter addiction-like triggers in digital environments and experience rebound effects when attempting to suppress related thoughts.

From a psychological mechanism perspective, the failure of thought suppression, along with post-suppression rebound effects and immediate enhancement effects, may explain the cognitive struggles faced by individuals addicted to short-form videos (Li et al., 2022; Lavy & van den Hout, 1990; Wegner, 2009; Wegner et al., 1987; Wenzlaff & Wegner, 2000). Continuous attempts to suppress associations and cravings related to short-form videos may deplete cognitive resources, thereby exacerbating the intrusiveness of related thoughts (Wallaert et al., 2023).

Currently, the problems of short-form video overuse and addiction are becoming increasingly severe, affecting both students and professionals by disrupting their normal work and learning routines. Under the influence of big data algorithms and the fulfillment of individual needs, individuals often waste significant amounts of time watching short-form videos, leading to feelings of boredom, guilt, anxiety, and even depression afterward (Zhu et al., 2024). These issues are particularly pronounced among adolescents and young adults. When addressing short-form video addiction, it is important to consider that attempts to control overuse impulses through thought suppression may paradoxically increase the frequency and intensity of related intrusive thoughts. This finding has implications for intervention strategies, highlighting the need to focus on individuals' cognitive regulation patterns and advocating for more moderate, accepting, and flexible cognitive coping strategies in addressing behavioral addiction in the era of new media.

5. Deficiencies and prospects

The sample size of this study was relatively small, and the generalizability of the results should be interpreted with caution. Future research should aim to increase the sample size to enhance the robustness of the findings.

Additionally, as this study was a cross-sectional investigation, it is challenging to establish causality. Subsequent studies could employ experimental methods to examine the causal relationship between short-form video overuse and thought suppression.

Moreover, future research could further explore the consequences of excessive short-form video use on individuals' reliance on thought suppression and investigate strategies to mitigate these issues effectively.

6. Conclusion

The higher the level of an individual's short-form video overuse, the stronger their tendency to engage in thought suppression. This suggests that individuals who excessively use short-form videos may experience thoughts such as "I don't want to continue watching videos without restraint." Suppressing these thoughts might be a common strategy they employ.

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