

Digital Nudges for Screen Time Reduction: A Randomized Control Trial with Performance and Wellbeing Outcomes

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Abstract

Many consumers nowadays try to reduce their smartphone usage with the aim of increasing productivity and well-being but fail to accomplish this goal. We conducted a randomized control trial with a student population (N=112) over three weeks to test the effectiveness of two widely available digital nudges for screen time reduction. Along with a tracking-only control condition, a passive digital nudge (i.e., grayscale mode) was compared to an active digital nudge (i.e., time limits). The passive nudge led to an immediate, significant reduction of objectively measured screen time compared to the control condition. Conversely, the active nudge led to a smaller and gradual screen time reduction. Those in the control condition, who simply tracked their usage, did not lower their usage. In contradiction to the popular belief that reducing screen time has broad benefits, we found no immediate causal effects of reducing screen time on subjective well-being and academic performance.

Keywords: *screen time; digital nudge; smartphone*

Track: Consumer Behaviour