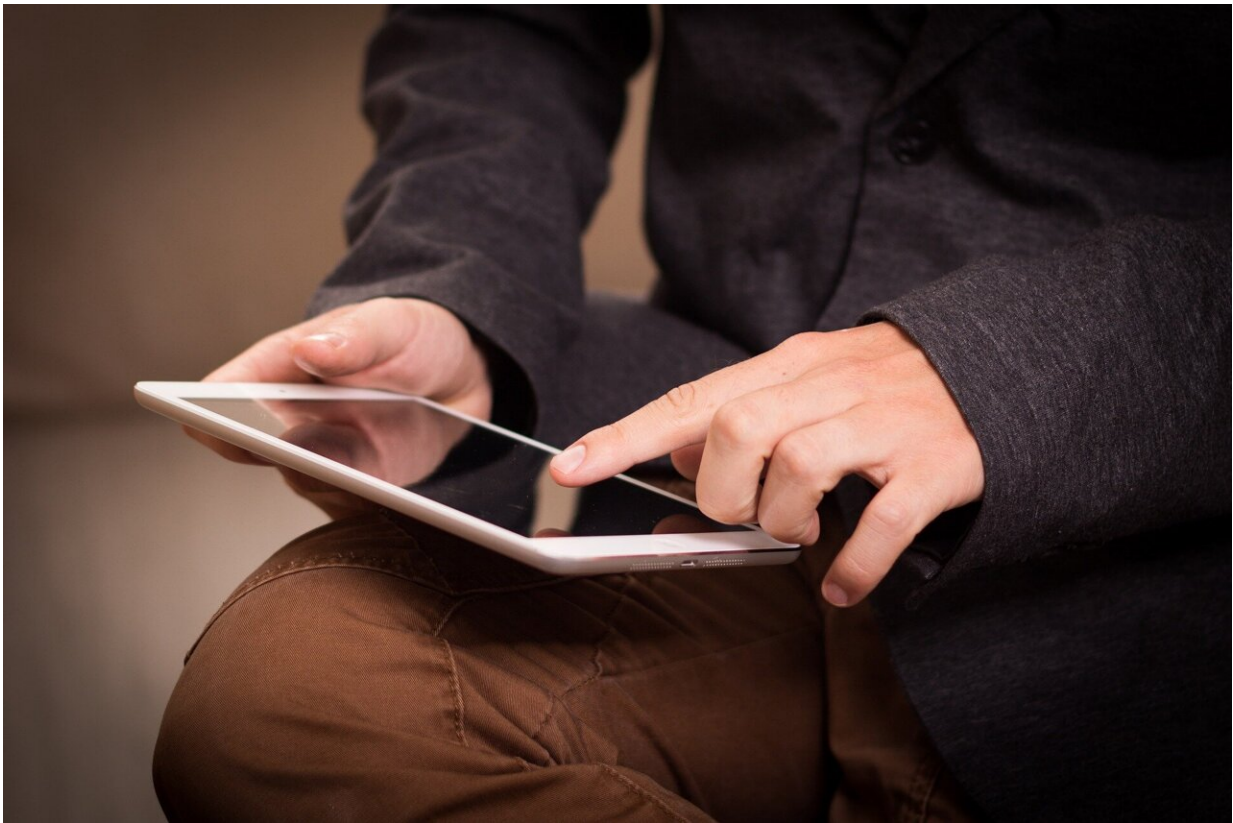


Swiping through online videos increases boredom, study finds

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Swiping through online videos to relieve boredom may actually make people more bored and less satisfied or engaged with the content, according to research published in the *Journal of Experimental*

Psychology: General.

The study included seven experiments with a total of more than 1,200 participants from the United States or college students at the University of Toronto. In two baseline experiments, participants switched from one online [video](#) to the next when they were bored, and they predicted they would feel less bored by switching videos instead of watching them in their entirety.

However, the study found that digital switching—watching short snippets of videos or fast forwarding through them—actually made people more bored, said lead study author Katy Tam, Ph.D., a postdoctoral researcher at the University of Toronto.

"If people want a more enjoyable experience when watching videos, they can try to stay focused on the content and minimize digital switching," Tam said. "Just like paying for a more immersive experience in a movie theater, more enjoyment comes from immersing oneself in online videos rather than swiping through them."

In one experiment with two segments, all the participants watched a 10-minute YouTube video without having the option to fast forward. In another segment, they could freely switch through seven five-minute videos within 10 minutes.

Participants reported feeling less bored when they watched the single video and found the viewing experience to be more satisfying, engaging and meaningful than when they switched through different videos.

There were similar findings for another experiment where participants watched a 10-minute video in one segment but could fast forward or rewind through a 50-minute video for 10 minutes in another segment.

"Digital switching may make the content of online videos seem meaningless because people don't have time to engage with or understand the content," Tam said.

Watching short videos on YouTube, TikTok, Facebook or other online media platforms is a common pastime as people spend more time on their smartphones. Many people will go to great lengths to avoid the restless or empty feelings that are often triggered by [boredom](#).

To avoid boredom, previous research has found people may harm others for pleasure, shop impulsively, give themselves [electric shocks](#), endorse extreme political orientations, or engage in counterproductive work behaviors.

This study didn't examine whether short attention spans contributed to any increases in boredom or digital switching. Because the participants in several experiments were Canadian [college students](#), the findings may differ by age or experience with [digital media](#) and may not be representative of the U.S. population.

Even though many people are quick to grab their smartphones while waiting in line or riding in an elevator, previous research has found that smartphone use increases boredom and undermines enjoyment in social situations. Digital switching may be a related source of boredom, which could have negative mental health consequences.

Chronic boredom is linked with [depressive symptoms](#), anxiety, sadistic aggression and risk-taking, Tam noted.

More information: Fast-Forward to Boredom: How Switching Behavior on Digital Media Makes People More Bored, *Journal of Experimental Psychology* (2024). [DOI: 10.1037/xge0001639](https://doi.org/10.1037/xge0001639)

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