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Digital Media Use, Perceived Learning Benefits, and Everyday Decision-Making: Evidence from an Online Survey in Delhi

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ABSTRACT

Digital media offers learning resources and decision support, yet access, use, and perceived benefit are distinct empirical constructs. This article investigates those distinctions using 500 responses to a cross-sectional online voluntary-response survey conducted in Delhi. It compares general assessments of digital media with task-specific assessments of digital learning and tests associations with perceived decision-making benefit. Only 26.6% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that digital media helped with shopping, lifestyle, or work decisions, whereas 49.8% reported better access to learning resources. Spearman correlations between decision-making benefit and perceived educational/professional usefulness ($\rho = .537$) and opportunities for new skills ($\rho = .535$) were positive, while the relationship with using digital media multiple times daily was near zero ($\rho = .025$, $p = .583$). These findings distinguish frequency of use from the perception of practical benefit and show that broadly worded evaluations can differ from task-specific evaluations. Results describe associations within a non-probability sample, not causal effects or population estimates. The article argues for measurement-sensitive models of digital participation that separately assess frequency, affordances, learning experiences, and decisions.

Keywords: digital media, informal learning, decision-making, digital participation, Delhi, survey research

Introduction

Digital platforms now serve multiple functions in everyday life. A single device can deliver entertainment, information, learning materials, social interaction, and commercial services. Because these activities occur through the same interface, surveys frequently ask whether digital media is beneficial in general. The resulting assessments may obscure differences between access to a resource, the frequency of platform use, and the extent to which information actually assists a decision. This article investigates these distinctions rather than assuming that more frequent use automatically creates more benefit.

Research on digital inequality shows why the distinction matters. Access to a connection does not guarantee the skills, autonomy, time, or institutional support needed to benefit from it. DiMaggio et al. (2001) argued that the social implications of the internet require attention to differentiated use and inequality. Van Deursen and van Dijk (2014) likewise demonstrated that digital divides persist beyond simple questions of access. For learning and decision-making, it is therefore necessary to specify which aspect of use is measured.

Digital learning research offers a related caution. Access to online resources can expand opportunities for self-directed learning, but the educational value of these resources depends on learners' skills, goals, attention, and capacity to evaluate information. The ability to find a video or tutorial is not identical to acquiring a skill or demonstrating better performance. Likewise, an individual may read product information without making a different or more informed purchasing decision. An adequate empirical framework should preserve these distinctions.

The present study uses the original questionnaire responses from 500 online voluntary participants in Delhi. The instrument contains separate items on perceived knowledge, educational and professional growth, skill learning, frequency of use, resource access, and decision-making. This allows a comparison between broad and specific assessments of digital media within the same sample. The analysis focuses on the article's second research objective, the role of digital media in learning, daily activities, and decision-making, while using selected usage measures to evaluate whether frequency is related to perceived benefit.

The central argument is that the value of digital media should not be inferred from exposure alone. This claim is tested using descriptive distributions and rank correlations among original survey items. A meaningful contribution is possible even when relationships are weak or nonsignificant, because such findings identify the limits of common assumptions about digital intensity and practical outcomes.

A major methodological problem in studies of digital benefit is the tendency to move between different levels of analysis without acknowledging the transition. A respondent may have regular access to a smartphone, use several applications, perceive online learning resources as convenient, and

nevertheless report that digital content does not help with a particular everyday decision. Each statement refers to a different phenomenon. The first describes material access, the second describes activity, the third describes an affordance, and the fourth describes a perceived consequence. A theory that treats these as successive stages needs evidence for each transition. Van Deursen and van Dijk (2015) explicitly conceptualised internet appropriation in terms of motivational, material, skills, and usage access. Their approach helps explain why the frequency measure used here should not be substituted for a measure of decision support.

The distinction also matters for interpreting digital participation in an unequal social environment. Educational background, employment conditions, household resources, language, and the perceived credibility of information can influence how a person benefits from digital tools. None of these influences can be assumed to operate identically across respondents. The present study does not estimate a causal model of social stratification, but it adopts a conceptually differentiated approach informed by research on internet skills and outcomes. Scheerder et al. (2017) concluded that scholarship has often concentrated on skills and use while devoting less attention to tangible outcomes. The survey analysed here permits an initial comparison of reported use and perceived benefits, although it cannot measure the tangible outcomes required for a definitive third-level digital-divide analysis.

Literature Review and Analytical Framework

Studies of the digital divide initially focused on access, but subsequent scholarship has demonstrated that access is only one component of digital inequality. DiMaggio et al. (2001) situated internet use within broader patterns of social stratification, including the resources needed to turn connectivity into meaningful activity. This perspective remains relevant when evaluating digital learning. Respondents may have access to platforms without reporting that those platforms help them make decisions.

Van Deursen and van Dijk (2014) argued that differences in internet skills and types of use can persist even where connectivity is widespread. Their analysis suggests that studies should distinguish general online activity from beneficial outcomes. In the present questionnaire, using digital media multiple times daily measures a pattern of frequency, whereas reporting that online content improves academic understanding measures a perceived educational benefit. Combining the two into a single measure would erase their conceptual difference.

Hargittai (2002) showed that online skills vary across users, challenging assumptions that technical access produces equivalent opportunities. Skills can affect search strategies, source evaluation, and the capacity to navigate complex information. When a respondent reports that digital media assists with shopping or work decisions, that assessment may depend on digital literacy and prior knowledge. The current dataset does not contain a validated digital-skills test, so this mechanism remains a theoretical explanation rather than an observed causal pathway.

The third-level digital divide literature extends the question from access and skills to tangible outcomes. Van Deursen and Helsper (2015) described how benefits from internet use are distributed unevenly. This framework is useful because the outcomes of interest in this article are self-reported rather than directly measured. A perception that learning resources are available does not independently establish a gain in qualifications, employment, or decision quality.

Digital media also reshapes the conditions under which people seek information. Search engines, social networks, video services, and mobile applications reduce some costs of finding materials, while increasing the volume and uneven quality of available content. Information abundance may be valuable for individuals with a clear task, but it can also create demands for evaluation and selection. The article therefore distinguishes access to learning resources from the perceived usefulness of digital media in making decisions.

Informal learning may involve watching instructional videos, joining online communities, following professional content, or using platforms to practice new skills. These activities are not equivalent to formal education, but they can supplement classroom or workplace learning. The questionnaire includes items about access to learning resources, learning new subjects, improved understanding, and perceived time and cost savings. Treating these items as separate indicators is preferable to presenting them as a validated learning scale without a reliability assessment.

Decision-making is also multidimensional. A decision can involve discovering options, comparing alternatives, assessing credibility, weighing costs, or acting on information. The survey item on shopping, lifestyle, and work decisions covers several domains within a single statement. A respondent may agree because online information helps with one domain and disagree because it is unreliable in another. This breadth limits interpretation and motivates more specific measurement in future research.

The article uses a three-part analytical distinction. Digital engagement refers to frequency or intensity of use. Perceived affordances refer to access, convenience, and opportunities supplied by platforms. Perceived outcomes refer to respondents' assessments of knowledge, learning, or decision support. This distinction is informed by digital inequality scholarship and helps prevent the interpretation of self-reported opportunities as demonstrated improvements in life outcomes.

An important theoretical question concerns whether broad positive attitudes about digital media correlate more strongly with one another than with specific accounts of usage. Respondents may share a general evaluation of digital platforms that influences answers to items about knowledge, professional growth, and decisions. If so, positive correlations among broad assessments may partly reflect common wording or response tendencies. By contrast, a behavioural frequency item may show little relationship with a benefit item. Such a pattern would support conceptual separation, although it would not prove the existence of a particular psychological mechanism.

The Delhi context provides a useful setting for examining these relationships because the questionnaire covers everyday digital practices across different demographic and occupational groups. However, an online survey necessarily excludes some people with limited digital access or willingness to

participate. The research therefore concerns variation among the achieved respondents and should not be interpreted as an estimate of the experiences of all residents of Delhi.

The framework also requires care in interpreting nonsignificant findings. An association near zero between frequency and decision support does not establish that digital media never improves decisions. It may mean that frequency is a poor indicator of task-specific use, that the question is too broad, or that benefits depend on skills and motivations not captured in the selected items. Such alternative explanations should be considered without claiming that the dataset has established them.

These considerations lead to a focused research contribution. Rather than evaluating whether digital media is generally beneficial, the study asks how respondents differentiate learning resources, educational usefulness, and decision-making assistance. It also tests whether everyday frequency of use provides useful information about perceived decision support. The findings can inform more precise survey instruments and theories of beneficial digital participation.

Van Deursen et al. (2017) advanced this argument by analysing the compoundness and sequentiality of digital inequality. Their findings indicate that disadvantages in skills, activities, and outcomes can accumulate, while benefits in one domain need not guarantee benefits in another. This cross-domain distinction is particularly useful for the present paper. A person who reports efficient online learning may not perceive the same benefit when making a consumer decision. Similarly, frequent use of social platforms may be unrelated to the task of evaluating professional options. The survey's items on education and decisions cover different domains, and the empirical analysis should not force them into a common outcome merely because both involve digital technology.

The concept of collateral benefit offers a further refinement. Van Deursen and Helsper (2018) investigated whether engagement in one online domain can be associated with outcomes in another. Their evidence suggests that internet skills and activity patterns can relate to diverse benefits beyond the immediate purpose of use. This does not imply that all online activities are beneficial. Instead, it establishes the importance of specifying which activity, which benefit, and which social circumstances are under consideration. For the Delhi data, a correlation between general perceptions of educational usefulness and decision support might reflect an orientation toward digital resources, whereas the absence of a frequency association suggests that activity intensity alone is insufficient as an explanation.

Digital skills should also be measured rather than inferred from the possession or use of technology. Van Deursen et al. (2016) developed and validated an Internet Skills Scale that differentiates forms of online competence. Their work demonstrates why a single agreement item about frequent use is a weak substitute for actual skill assessment. A respondent may use digital platforms many times daily but lack the search, evaluation, or content-production skills needed for learning. Conversely, a less frequent user may perform targeted searches efficiently. The present questionnaire does not contain a performance-based skills assessment, so the analysis cannot establish whether digital competence explains the observed differences between frequency and perceived benefit.

A complementary account focuses on the quality of opportunities available through digital media. Digital resources differ in language, accessibility, cost, credibility, instructional structure, and alignment with user goals. Some resources offer interactive feedback, while others merely provide exposure to information. The outcome of interest should therefore be connected to a defined activity. The current questionnaire asks about better access to learning resources and improved understanding of academic or professional topics. Those are related but nonidentical claims. The first may be endorsed after discovering useful content, while the second requires a respondent to judge whether understanding changed. Keeping these indicators separate allows a more informative description of the sample.

Research on informal learning similarly warns against equating participation with achievement. A systematic review of digital media in institutional informal learning settings reported that digital tools can support knowledge acquisition, interest, collaboration, and interaction, but the evidence was organised around specific contexts and uses rather than a universal effect of exposure (Scheerder et al., 2017). This insight matters even though the Delhi survey does not focus on museums or comparable institutions. It suggests that digital learning claims should be connected to concrete instructional activities and outcomes. The survey's broad agreement items provide perceptions of usefulness, not independent tests of whether respondents acquired or retained knowledge.

Educational digital equity research also directs attention to differences between resources and outcomes. Martin et al. (2024) reviewed educational digital-divide research across multiple dimensions and interventions. Their approach highlights the need to consider barriers that remain after technologies become available. For the present study, the relatively higher endorsement of access to learning resources than general knowledge improvement is consistent with the conceptual possibility that availability and learning benefit diverge. It would be incorrect, however, to claim that the survey identifies the barriers responsible for this divergence. The data do not measure instructional quality, access conditions, or learning achievement with sufficient precision to establish such mechanisms.

Measurement is central to the article's contribution. An item asking whether digital media 'provides opportunities' may capture perceived potential rather than personal use of those opportunities. An item asking whether online content 'improves understanding' is closer to an outcome, but remains a subjective attribution. An item asking whether a respondent 'uses digital platforms to learn' describes behaviour more directly, although it still relies on self-report. These distinctions imply that a factor analysis or index construction should be based on theory and psychometric evidence, not solely on the fact that the items appear in the same questionnaire section. In the present analysis, individual items are reported transparently.

The literature also helps frame the interpretation of weak associations. If different digital benefits are domain-specific, a near-zero relationship between frequency and decision support is neither paradoxical nor evidence of technological failure. It may indicate that time online captures entertainment, social

interaction, and passive consumption as well as productive information seeking. It may also reflect variation in the quality of resources and respondents' capacity to evaluate them. Each explanation is plausible, but none is directly tested by the available three-variable comparison. The discussion therefore treats such mechanisms as future research questions rather than established findings.

Research Questions

RQ1. How do respondents evaluate digital media's contribution to knowledge, educational and professional growth, learning opportunities, access to resources, and everyday decision-making?

RQ2. How strongly are perceived educational usefulness and opportunities for skill learning associated with perceived decision-making assistance?

RQ3. Is frequent digital media use associated with perceived decision-making assistance?

RQ4. Do task-specific assessments of digital learning show the same pattern of association with decision-making assistance as broad assessments of digital media benefit? These questions were evaluated through descriptive and exploratory correlational analysis rather than post hoc causal hypotheses.

Research Design and Method

The study follows a quantitative, cross-sectional, descriptive and analytical survey design. The original research recruited 500 respondents through an online voluntary-response procedure in Delhi. The dataset contains demographic characteristics and 36 five-category agreement items concerning digital media preferences, experiences, use patterns, public awareness, learning, and economic activities. The present article selects the items most directly related to learning and everyday decision-making.

The principal outcome is item 22, "Digital media helps me in decision-making (shopping, lifestyle, work)." Other focal items include item 17 on knowledge and awareness, item 18 on educational or professional growth, item 23 on opportunities for learning new skills, item 24 on using digital media multiple times every day, and items 36–40 on specific digital learning experiences. The exact item wording is retained where possible to avoid confusing perceptions with objectively measured outcomes.

Responses were recorded as Strongly disagree, Disagree, Neutral, Agree, and Strongly agree. For descriptive summaries, these categories were coded from 1 to 5. Agreement percentages combine Agree and Strongly agree. Means and standard deviations are included for comparability with common reporting practices, but a single Likert item is ordinal. Rank-based Spearman correlations therefore provide the primary measure of association.

The analyses use all 500 complete responses for the selected focal items. Correlations are two-sided and calculated directly from the original workbook. Because the study is exploratory and examines several relationships, p values are interpreted cautiously and effect sizes are emphasised. Statistical significance does not establish practical importance, and a cross-sectional correlation cannot establish whether digital learning produces a change in decision-making.

No claim is made that the sample represents Delhi or India. Voluntary online recruitment may disproportionately include digitally active respondents and excludes individuals who could not or did not complete the questionnaire. Self-report items may be influenced by social desirability, differences in interpretation, or common response tendencies. The data also lack independent measures of educational attainment gains or decision quality.

The authors must confirm the original ethics approval or waiver, consent procedure, recruitment dates, and survey administration details before journal submission. This draft does not invent an ethics reference or consent process. The results presented here derive from an anonymised working dataset and are reported at aggregate level.

The selection of variables followed the conceptual framework rather than a search for statistically significant relationships. The primary decision-support item was chosen because it explicitly refers to shopping, lifestyle, and work decisions. The general benefit items were selected because they refer to knowledge, educational or professional growth, and opportunities to learn skills. The frequency item was included as a contrast because it measures repeated use rather than an outcome. Finally, task-specific learning items were selected to assess whether reports of actual learning practices and resource access behave similarly to broad evaluative statements. This comparison is exploratory and does not imply that the instrument was originally designed as a validated multidimensional scale.

The questionnaire contains agreement statements rather than time-stamped records of platform activity. It is therefore impossible to establish whether a reported learning experience occurred before or after a particular decision. The analysis also does not know which applications, websites, or information sources respondents used when forming their answers. The phrase 'digital media' may include social platforms, educational applications, video sites, news websites, and communication tools. This breadth increases the relevance of the questionnaire to everyday experiences but reduces the precision with which any specific platform mechanism can be identified.

The ordinal nature of the responses warrants particular attention. Reporting a mean for a five-category agreement item can help readers compare overall patterns, but it assumes a numerical ordering that should not be confused with a measured interval between categories. For this reason, the manuscript reports agreement proportions and uses Spearman rank correlations to summarise relationships. Rank correlations assess whether higher responses on

one item tend to accompany higher responses on another. They do not require the assumption that the psychological distance between 'Disagree' and 'Neutral' equals the distance between 'Agree' and 'Strongly agree'.

A further analytical choice concerns multiplicity. Several correlations are presented because the article compares conceptually different indicators. The p values are descriptive evidence about the compatibility of the observed associations with a null hypothesis under the chosen model, not a mechanism for choosing which findings to discuss. Small nominally significant correlations should not be treated as substantively important simply because the sample is relatively large. The interpretation emphasises the difference between coefficients near .5 and coefficients near zero, together with the precise wording of the corresponding survey questions.

Results

The distributions reveal a difference between broad perceptions of benefit and specific assessments of access to learning resources. Only 27.0% agreed or strongly agreed that digital media improves their knowledge and awareness, and 30.2% agreed that it is useful for education or professional growth. A similar 26.6% agreed that digital media helps them with shopping, lifestyle, or work decisions. These percentages describe the achieved sample and should not be generalised to Delhi residents.

Responses were more favourable for some task-specific learning items. Nearly half of respondents (49.8%) agreed that digital media provides better access to learning resources, while 46.8% reported using platforms to learn new skills or subjects. Agreement was 42.0% for improved understanding of academic or professional topics and 50.4% for saving time and cost through digital learning. These contrasts suggest that respondents may distinguish access and efficiency from general claims of improvement.

The central correlation results show that broad positive evaluations of digital media move together. Perceived decision-making assistance was positively associated with perceived educational or professional usefulness (Spearman $\rho = .537$, $p < .001$) and with perceived opportunities for learning new skills ($\rho = .535$, $p < .001$). It was also associated with perceived improvement in knowledge and awareness ($\rho = .527$, $p < .001$). These are moderate correlations between agreement items, not measured improvements in knowledge or decisions.

In contrast, the association between daily usage frequency and decision-making assistance was near zero ($\rho = .025$, $p = .583$). The item on frequency asks whether respondents use digital media multiple times daily, not whether they seek decision-relevant information. The finding therefore challenges the use of general frequency as a proxy for practical benefit. It does not establish that task-focused use lacks value.

Task-specific learning assessments showed weaker relationships with perceived decision support. The correlation with access to learning resources was $\rho = .063$ ($p = .159$), and the correlation with using platforms to learn skills or subjects was $\rho = .060$ ($p = .179$). Improved understanding of academic or professional topics showed a small positive relationship ($\rho = .111$, $p = .013$). Perceived time and cost savings from digital learning showed $\rho = .045$ ($p = .311$). These small effects differ from the stronger correlations among broad benefit items.

The contrast may reflect construct differences, response wording, or the separation of educational and everyday decision contexts. It would be inappropriate to conclude that access to learning resources is irrelevant to decisions. The available instrument measures agreement with general statements rather than observed information-seeking episodes or decisions. Table 1 reports the descriptive patterns, and Table 2 provides the principal rank correlations.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics for learning, engagement, and decision-related items

Survey indicator	**M**	**SD**	**Agree (%)**
Knowledge and awareness	2.74	0.89	27.0%
Education/professional growth	2.81	0.91	30.2%
Decision-making assistance	2.69	0.92	26.6%
Opportunities for new skills	2.89	0.91	34.0%
Multiple uses per day	2.82	0.91	31.2%
Access to learning resources	3.21	0.94	49.8%
Uses platforms to learn	3.14	0.95	46.8%
Improved academic understanding	3.06	0.93	42.0%
Digital learning saves time/cost	3.23	0.91	50.4%
Engaging/effective learning	3.05	0.91	41.2%

Note. N = 500 for each item. Agreement combines Agree and Strongly agree. Five-category responses coded 1–5.

Table 2. Spearman rank correlations with perceived decision-making assistance

Correlate	**Spearman ρ**	**Two-sided p**
Education/professional growth	0.537	< .001
Opportunities for new skills	0.535	< .001
Knowledge and awareness	0.527	< .001
Multiple uses per day	0.025	0.583
Access to learning resources	0.063	0.159
Uses platforms to learn	0.060	0.179
Improved academic understanding	0.111	0.013
Digital learning saves time/cost	0.045	0.311

Note. Outcome: item 22, perceived help with shopping, lifestyle, and work decisions. N = 500.

The difference between access and outcome indicators is visible without a complex model. The item on access to learning resources has a mean of 3.21 and an agreement share of 49.8%, whereas the item on knowledge and awareness has a mean of 2.74 and agreement of 27.0%. The difference in agreement shares is 22.8 percentage points within the observed sample. This contrast is descriptive and does not demonstrate that a given individual values access while rejecting benefit. A paired analysis of response patterns would be needed to characterise within-person differences more fully. Nevertheless, the marginal distributions show why the two items should not be described as equivalent measures.

The item on time and cost savings in digital learning also attracts relatively favourable responses, with a mean of 3.23 and 50.4% agreement. In contrast, the item on decision-making assistance has a mean of 2.69 and 26.6% agreement. The 23.8 percentage-point gap is consistent with respondents evaluating efficiency differently from decision support. It cannot establish whether digital learning actually saves money or whether respondents make better decisions. Both questions ask for perceptions. A future study could supplement these items with actual expenditure, time-use diaries, and decision tasks.

The association between perceived educational or professional usefulness and decision support is ρ = .537, while the association between perceived skill-learning opportunities and decision support is ρ = .535. These coefficients are similar in magnitude and both have p values below .001. Their resemblance suggests that respondents who endorse one broad benefit statement often endorse another. It does not prove that learning mediates decision-making, because the measures were collected simultaneously and the analysis did not establish a causal pathway. The findings are more appropriately interpreted as coherence among positive evaluations of digital media.

The contrast with task-specific items is striking. Respondents who agree that they use digital platforms to learn new subjects are not substantially more likely to report decision support, ρ = .060. The relationship between perceived access to learning resources and decision support is similarly small, ρ = .063. These estimates are not statistically significant at the conventional .05 level. They do not contradict the moderate correlations among general evaluations because the questions measure different aspects of experience. Indeed, the difference supports the paper's central recommendation to preserve the original meaning of each survey indicator.

A small positive correlation appears for improved understanding of academic or professional topics, ρ = .111, p = .013. Although the unadjusted p value is below .05, the coefficient is small and should not be presented as a meaningful predictive effect without additional evidence. It also arises among several comparisons, increasing the need for caution about chance findings. The analysis therefore does not interpret this coefficient as proof that better understanding leads to better decisions. Its main significance is descriptive: some specific learning assessments show small associations, but these are much weaker than correlations among broad evaluative items.

Discussion

The study’s central finding is that frequent digital media use and perceived practical benefit are not interchangeable. Respondents who reported using digital media multiple times daily were not more likely to endorse the broad statement that digital media helps with shopping, lifestyle, or work decisions. This result does not negate digital media’s potential utility. It indicates that frequency alone is an inadequate measure of the particular benefit captured by the questionnaire.

This interpretation is consistent with scholarship that treats digital inequality as a question of differentiated uses and outcomes. DiMaggio et al. (2001) showed why digital participation must be considered within social resources and practices. Van Deursen and van Dijk (2014) further challenged the assumption that access produces equivalent engagement. In the present sample, even the simple distinction between frequency and benefit generates different empirical patterns.

The stronger correlations among broad evaluations require careful interpretation. Items on improved knowledge, educational usefulness, skill opportunities, and decision support all invite respondents to assess whether digital media is beneficial. A common positive or negative attitude toward digital media may influence these responses. This possibility is not equivalent to evidence of a single validated latent factor. Future research should use multi-item measures, test factor structure, and include behavioural indicators.

The differences between broad and specific learning statements are substantively informative. Respondents were more likely to endorse access to learning resources and time or cost savings than the statement that digital media improves knowledge and awareness. Access and efficiency may be easier to observe directly than a lasting improvement in understanding. However, the present data cannot determine why individuals responded differently. Qualitative follow-up interviews could clarify whether respondents interpret "improves knowledge" as requiring stronger evidence than "provides access."

The small correlations between task-specific learning items and decision support also suggest that respondents may treat learning and decisions as separate activities. A person may use digital media to study a subject without relying on it to choose products or make workplace decisions. Another may use online information for shopping while reporting little educational benefit. The questionnaire groups several decision domains in one item, so it cannot distinguish these possibilities empirically.

The article therefore cautions against constructing a single digital benefit score from heterogeneous items without psychometric validation. A composite combining frequency, access, perceived learning, and decision-making would assume they reflect the same underlying construct. The observed correlations suggest that this assumption cannot be taken for granted. A stronger measurement model would separate behavioural engagement, access affordances, learning activities, perceived learning outcomes, and decision outcomes.

The findings have implications for digital inclusion policy. Counting device ownership, connections, or time online provides incomplete information about whether individuals benefit from digital services. Evaluations should ask what tasks users attempt, what resources they can locate, what difficulties they encounter, and whether outcomes improve. This approach would produce more actionable evidence than an undifferentiated indicator of platform frequency.

For educational institutions, the results support a distinction between resource provision and learning outcomes. Making online materials available can improve access, but a claim of better learning requires evidence of comprehension, skill acquisition, completion, or performance. Institutions could combine platform analytics with assessments and student feedback. Such evidence would help identify whether digital resources work for different learner groups rather than assuming that use is equivalent to learning.

For researchers studying consumer and workplace decisions, more precise outcome measures are necessary. A questionnaire could distinguish information search, alternative comparison, perceived confidence, final choice, and post-decision satisfaction. These stages may relate differently to digital skills and media habits. A longitudinal design could also test whether exposure to specific information precedes a change in decision quality.

The study contributes a bounded empirical observation rather than a universal theory of digital media. In this sample, broad positive evaluations of digital benefit are moderately correlated, whereas frequency and several specific learning measures show weak associations with decision support. This pattern supports the conceptual separation of engagement, affordances, and outcomes. It also illustrates why nonsignificant results deserve clear reporting rather than selective omission.

The analysis cannot determine whether educational benefit causes better decisions, whether people who feel more capable evaluate digital media more favourably, or whether both responses reflect a third factor. The original data were collected at one time and do not include experimentally assigned exposure. Claims of impact would therefore be unjustified. The appropriate language is association between respondents' reported perceptions.

Finally, the use of the original item wording makes the article auditable. A claim about "learning outcomes" would be stronger than an item asking whether respondents find online content useful. Similarly, a claim about "decision quality" would exceed a general statement about perceived help with decisions. Preserving this distinction is particularly important when preparing a manuscript for a selective journal, where conceptual precision and transparent operationalisation matter as much as statistical significance.

A key implication is that survey measures should be aligned with the outcome that a researcher actually wishes to explain. If the research question concerns learning achievement, the relevant outcome is performance on a learning task or an independently assessed skill. If the question concerns access, it is appropriate to measure availability, affordability, usability, and language support. If the question concerns decisions, researchers should measure the process and quality of a defined choice. The present questionnaire contains perceptions that relate to these areas, but it does not provide objective measures for any of them. The paper's contribution is consequently diagnostic rather than causal.

The findings also raise the possibility that broad benefit items share a general evaluative response tendency. Respondents who believe that digital media is valuable may agree that it improves knowledge, supports education, creates learning opportunities, and assists decisions. This response pattern can produce moderate correlations even if the actual behaviours are different. A future measurement study could compare a general digital optimism factor with task-specific factors, using confirmatory factor analysis and tests of discriminant validity. Such an analysis would require a deliberately constructed multi-item instrument and should not be inferred from the correlations reported here.

A second interpretation concerns domain specificity. Digital learning and digital consumer decision-making involve different goals, forms of evidence, and standards of success. A respondent may rely on online videos to understand a course topic but seek advice from family members when making an expensive purchase. Another may use comparison websites for shopping but rarely use online resources for formal education. These examples illustrate plausible differences, not observed behaviour in the dataset. Their relevance is that a broad item combining shopping, lifestyle, and work may obscure domain-specific relationships. More precise survey design could clarify which decisions benefit from which kinds of digital engagement.

A third issue is the social distribution of digital benefits. The digital inequality literature shows that the ability to translate online participation into outcomes can depend on skills and resources (Scheerder et al., 2017; van Deursen & Helsper, 2018). The current analysis does not estimate those

dependencies, so it cannot claim that particular demographic groups experience better outcomes. Nevertheless, the framework suggests a useful next step: compare the relationships among use, skill, and benefit across educational and occupational groups, with explicit attention to measurement invariance and sampling limitations. Without these safeguards, apparent group differences might reflect the wording of survey items rather than meaningful disparities.

For educational practice, the results suggest that evaluation should go beyond counts of downloads, logins, or video views. Such metrics are useful for documenting access and activity, but they are not direct evidence of learning. A stronger evaluation would measure baseline knowledge, the specific resource used, completion of a learning task, and subsequent retention or application. Student feedback could then be interpreted alongside performance evidence. This approach is consistent with the distinction between digital affordances and realised outcomes in the broader literature.

For public policy, the study reinforces the importance of separating digital access indicators from measures of benefit. An initiative that expands connectivity may achieve a meaningful access objective without immediately improving employment or learning outcomes. Conversely, a targeted skills programme may produce benefits for a narrower group without increasing overall time online. Evaluations should identify which outcome was intended and select appropriate measures before collecting data. The present survey does not evaluate a particular policy intervention, but it illustrates why the language of 'impact' should be reserved for designs that can support causal inference.

For communication research, the study provides a concrete example of how operational definitions shape conclusions. If digital participation were represented solely by daily frequency, the association with perceived decision support would be negligible. If it were represented by positive evaluations of educational usefulness, the association would be moderate. Neither estimate is inherently more truthful, because the variables refer to different constructs. The correct conclusion depends on the question asked. This is a reason to report individual items clearly and avoid presenting conceptually heterogeneous measures under a single broad label.

Finally, the findings encourage publication of theoretically meaningful null results. The near-zero relationship between frequency and decision support might appear uninteresting if a paper were organised around demonstrating a positive digital effect. Within a framework that differentiates activity from outcome, however, it becomes an informative result. It suggests that future research should measure purposeful use and competence rather than assuming that intensity of engagement is sufficient. Transparent reporting of such findings can improve the cumulative quality of research on digital media and social benefit.

Limitations and Future Research

The sample was recruited through online voluntary response, which limits external validity. No probability-based selection mechanism or design weights are available. Consequently, the descriptive percentages should not be interpreted as estimates for Delhi's population. A probability-based or carefully stratified design would provide a stronger basis for population inference.

All focal variables are self-reported five-category items. No independent learning assessments, purchase records, or observed decision outcomes were collected. Respondents may also interpret broad terms such as "knowledge," "growth," and "decision-making" differently. A follow-up study should use validated scales and behavioural tasks to reduce measurement ambiguity.

The analysis is cross-sectional. It cannot establish whether media use precedes perceived benefit or whether those who perceive benefits use media more frequently. Longitudinal surveys, experience-sampling designs, and controlled learning interventions would permit stronger conclusions about temporal ordering and potential mechanisms.

Several correlations were examined. Although the largest coefficients are clearly distinct from zero, smaller nominally significant associations should be evaluated cautiously in view of multiple testing. The analysis reports the original p values transparently rather than selecting results solely by significance.

Future work should separate entertainment, learning, news, commerce, and work-related digital activity. A person who spends many hours online may devote little time to the information relevant to a particular decision. Task-specific measures, together with digital literacy and socioeconomic indicators, could help explain when digital engagement translates into meaningful outcomes.

A further limitation is the broad wording of several items. The decision-making statement combines shopping, lifestyle, and work. Respondents may use different information sources and apply different standards in each context. This creates interpretive ambiguity even when the item produces a stable numerical response. Future research should split these domains and use concrete behavioural indicators, such as whether a respondent compared alternatives, verified information, or changed a decision after consulting a particular source.

The sample size permits relatively precise estimates of associations within the dataset, but precision does not remove selection bias. Online voluntary-response recruitment may exclude individuals who lack reliable connectivity or confidence in digital survey participation. Such individuals are especially relevant to digital inequality research. A stronger design would incorporate offline recruitment, document participation rates, and compare respondents and nonrespondents using credible population benchmarks.

The reference framework is drawn primarily from established international digital inequality scholarship. Its applicability to the Delhi context should be tested rather than assumed. Local language practices, platform ecosystems, household structures, educational institutions, and employment conditions may shape digital experiences in ways not captured by the selected items. A qualitative component could identify context-specific constructs before a subsequent probability-based survey is designed.

Conclusion

The Delhi survey indicates that respondents distinguish digital learning access, general perceptions of benefit, and everyday decision support. Agreement that digital media provides learning resources was substantially more common than agreement that it improves general knowledge or helps with decisions. Broad positive assessments were moderately correlated, while daily frequency of use was unrelated to perceived decision support.

These results support a more precise approach to studying digital media's social value. The empirical contribution is a distinction between use and perceived outcome, not a claim that digital media causes learning or improves decisions. Future research should use validated instruments and behavioural evidence to determine when access and participation produce measurable benefits.

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