

Our understanding of media multitasking sits at a trail head. There are many paths to be explored and maps to be created. Our research for the Kaiser Family Foundation on children's media use patterns has led to a few fundamental insights into kids and their media multitasking behaviors. Most young people ages 8-18 media multitask – only 1/5 spend very little or none of their media time with more than one medium. Among those who do media multitask, they devote an average of  $\frac{1}{3}$  of their media time with more than one medium. More traditional media such as television or music do not appear to foster media multitasking in the way that the computer does. The computer functions as a media multitasking station. Young people seem to be constantly switching between multiple different activities on the computer, as evidenced by the increasing “need” among young people for multiple computer screens.

Some young people are more likely to media multitask than are others: young people exposed to the most media, those who have a computer and can see a television from it, those who are sensation seekers, those who live in highly TV-oriented households, and girls. What is thematic throughout our research into media multitasking is the concept of *opportunity* – from a media perspective as well as a user perspective.

Future research in this area must take many different paths. Because research in this area is in its early stages, more work is needed to provide a full understanding of the media multitasking phenomenon: the who, when, how, why and to what effect?

More work is needed on predictors of media multitasking, including individual differences (trait) *and* differences within individuals (state). Who is more likely to media multitask, when and *why*? Observational studies are needed to better understand the moment by moment changes in media multitasking behavior.

In addition to more precise measures of who is media multitasking and how often, future research should focus on *how* the multitasking happens in the natural environment. When is media multitasking primarily serial switching and when is it “simultaneous?” How does media multitasking differ for each medium?

While some progress has been made, a great deal more work is needed on the effects of media multitasking. Continued work on task effectiveness, memory, focus and learning vis-a-vis media multitasking can only expand our understanding. It would be interesting to experiment with the concept of *opportunity* in media multitasking in real-life settings and tasks to see how different people perform on tasks when the lure of other media are readily available or not.

More specifically, a media environment complicated by media multitasking has implications for our understanding of media effects. If young people’s media attention is divided, how are media effects mediated? How are violent messages or educational messages processed when attention is not fully focused on the content? And do high media multitaskers and low media multitaskers process the content differently? Does it matter which media are being multitasked? A media multitasking environment should be a consideration in future media effects work.

Finally, we need to take a longer term view of media multitasking. How does media multitasking affect brain development across the lifespan and over generations? Does all the time spent media multitasking develop the prefrontal cortex at the expense of other areas of the brain? Or with all the multitasking practice, will our brains adapt and be able to balance both multitasking and extended concentration?

Many questions lay afoot. How many research projects can we undertake simultaneously?