TV time: why children watch multi-screens

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New research examines the relationship children have with electronic viewing devices, such as TV, computer game time and internet use, and their habits of interacting with more than one at a time.

The research, by academics at Bristol and Loughborough Universities and published today in the [*International Journal of Behavioral Nutrition and Physical Activity*](http://www.ijbnpa.org/), found that multi-screen viewing in children is common and often involved watching TV with attention focused towards additional interactive applications such as smartphones, laptops or handheld gaming devices.

A sedentary lifestyle, linked to spending lots of time watching TV and playing computer games, is thought to increase the risk of obesity, lower mental well-being, and cause health problems in later life.

It is now possible to watch TV ‘on demand’ via the internet, play computer games on laptops, on hand-held devices or mobile phones, to keep in contact with friends using text, Facebook, Skype, and MSN, and to do all this concurrently.

However, previous studies have not examined if children take part in multi-screen viewing or children’s reasons for doing so.

The researchers questioned 63 10-to 11-year-olds and found that the children enjoyed looking at more than one screen at a time.

They use a second device to fill in breaks during their entertainment, often talking or texting their friends during adverts or while they were waiting for computer games to load.

TV was also used to provide background entertainment while they were doing something else – especially if the programme chosen by their family was considered ‘boring’.

[Dr Russ Jago](http://www.bris.ac.uk/enhs/people/russ-jago.html) from the [University of Bristol’s Centre for Exercise, Nutrition and Health Sciences](http://www.bris.ac.uk/enhs/) in the [School for Policy Studies](http://www.bris.ac.uk/sps/), said: "There is a shortage of information about the nature of contemporary screen-viewing amongst children especially given the rapid advances in screen-viewing equipment technology and their widespread availability.

For example, TV programmes are watched on computers, games consoles can be used to surf the internet, smartphones, tablet computers and hand-held games play music, video games provide internet access, and laptop computers can do all of the above.”

One of the study’s respondents said: “I'm on my DSi and my laptop. On my DSi I'm on MSN and on my laptop I'm on Facebook and then the TV is on.”

Dr Jago added: “Health campaigns recommend reducing the amount of time children spend watching TV.

However, the children in this study often had access to at least five different devices at any one time, and many of these devices were portable.

This meant that children were able to move the equipment between their bedrooms and family rooms, depending on whether they wanted privacy or company.

This suggests that we need to work with families to develop strategies to limit the overall time spent multi-screen viewing wherever it occurs within the home.”

The paper, entitled *"I'm on it 24/7 at the moment": A qualitative examination of multi-screen viewing behaviours among UK 10-11 year olds* by Russell Jago, Simon J Sebire, Trish Gorely, Itziar Hoyos Cillero and Stuart J H Biddle is published in BioMed Central’s open access journal, *International Journal of Behavioral Nutrition and Physical Activity*.

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