

Multiple screen use affects snack choices

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Anastasia Kononova, assistant professor in the Department of Advertising and Public Relations. Credit: Kurt Stepnitz

Using multiple screen devices simultaneously while snacking may influence food choices, according to a new Michigan State University study.

Specifically, when people engage in media multitasking that makes them feel good, they're more prone to eat healthy, said Anastasia Kononova, assistant professor in the Department of Advertising and Public Relations, who led the study.

One such example: shopping online while watching television and texting.

For the study, now published in *Computers in Human Behavior*, 140 participants watched an episode of "Two and a Half Men," without any scenes that included [food](#) and eating, so that eating behaviors weren't influenced. Commercials were also carefully selected to avoid those advertising food or drinks.

There were four groups of participants who followed one of four scenarios: watching TV only; watching TV and texting; watching TV, texting, reading an article online and filling out a quiz; and watching TV, texting and shopping online. Each participant had a choice of healthy snacks - almonds, grape tomatoes and carrots - or unhealthy snacks - potato chips, chocolates and candy.

The third scenario, involving an online article and quiz, was rated the most difficult and the least enjoyable combination. Participants in this group ate 32 percent more [unhealthy snacks](#) than healthy snacks. In general, most people in this group picked only one [healthy snack](#) and two junk food snacks.



Using multiple screens simultaneously can affect snack choices, a new Michigan State University study finds. Credit: Katie Dudlets

However, the group that watched TV, texted and shopped online consumed, on average, 26 percent more healthy snacks than unhealthy.

And those who only watched TV ate the most of both types of snacks.

"Media multitasking can affect rationalization process," Kononova said. "Our main finding was that people like some media multitasking situations and hate others. And, when using multiple screens makes people feel stressed or overwhelmed, they eat worse."

It could be that unpleasant media multitasking increases cognitive load, so it's harder for people to have control over [snack](#) selection and rationalize with themselves about [healthy eating](#), Kononova said. It could also be "stress eating," during which people experience unpleasant feelings and turn to more pleasant foods.

"The findings of this study could be useful for parents, educators and other caregivers who might want to discourage [media](#) multitasking among young people in their care," she said. "At the same time, not every form of multitasking seems to be harmful for one's diet. If you enjoy using multiple screens together, it might actually help your [food choices](#)."

The study is especially relevant since most [young people](#) use multiple screens at a time (TV, phone and laptop), Kononova said.

More information: Anastasia Kononova et al. Screen overload: Pleasant multitasking with screen devices leads to the choice of healthful over less healthful snacks when compared with unpleasant multitasking, *Computers in Human Behavior* (2017). [DOI: 10.1016/j.chb.2017.10.042](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2017.10.042)

Provided by Michigan State University

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