

Multiple media use tied to depression, anxiety

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A Michigan State University study is the first to find a link between using multiple forms of media and depression and anxiety. Credit: Michigan State University

(Medical Xpress)—Using multiple forms of media at the same time – such as playing a computer game while watching TV – is linked to symptoms of anxiety and depression, scientists have found for the first time.

Michigan State University's Mark Becker, lead investigator on the study,

said he was surprised to find such a clear association between media multitasking and [mental health problems](#). What's not yet clear is the cause.

"We don't know whether the media multitasking is causing [symptoms of depression](#) and [social anxiety](#), or if it's that people who are depressed and anxious are turning to media multitasking as a form of distraction from their problems," said Becker, assistant professor of psychology.

While overall media use among American youth has increased 20 percent in the past decade, the amount of time spent multitasking with media spiked 120 percent during that period, Becker said.

For the study, which appears in the journal *Cyberpsychology, Behavior and [Social Networking](#)*, Becker and fellow MSU researchers Reem Alzahabi and Christopher Hopwood surveyed 319 people on their media use and mental health.

Participants were asked how many hours per week they used two or more of the primary forms of media, which include television, music, cell phones, text messaging, computer and video games, web surfing and others. For the mental health survey, the researchers used well-established measures, although the results do not reflect a [clinical diagnosis](#).

Becker said future research should explore cause and effect. If it turns out media multitasking is causing depression and anxiety, recommendations could be made to alleviate the problem, he said.

On the other hand, if depressed or anxious people are turning to media multitasking, that might actually help them deal with their problems. It could also serve as a warning sign that a youngster is becoming depressed or anxious.

"Whatever the case, it's very important information to have," Becker said. "This could have important implications for understanding how to minimize the negative impacts of increased media multitasking."

Provided by Michigan State University

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