

Multitasking in the age of new media

A new UK report shows how many hours we spend each day using different kinds of media. Should we worry about the findings?

1 Estimate how many hours in a typical day you spend on the activities below. Compare your responses with a partner.

watching TV	listening to the radio	using social networking sites
surfing the Internet	texting	sending e-mail on your Smartphone

2 Read the following extracts (a-c) from a recent report about the UK and guess the correct option from the alternatives. Then, scan the article below in order to check your answers.

- (a) People in the UK spend *5 hours / 6 hours / 7 hours* a day using media and communications.
- (b) People in the UK spend around *3.8 hours / 4.8 hours / 5.8 hours* a day watching TV.
- (c) Around *8.5 million / 10.5 million / 13.5 million* people in the UK use a Smartphone to surf the Internet.

Ofcom report shows rise in media use

We spend eight and a quarter hours asleep. We work for, let's say, eight hours a day. Add a few extra hours - three - for eating, shopping and commuting. On top of all that, a recent Ofcom report reveals that we spend seven hours a day watching TV, surfing the net and using mobile phones. Excuse me - how many hours are there in day? Why don't the statistics add up? It seems we have become a nation of multitaskers. The report suggests that the average Briton spends almost half of their waking life using media and communications. So, should we be worried?

Today's executive travels and texts at the same time; checks e-mail on a Blackberry while lunching with colleagues. Due to our ability to multitask - doing two or more things at the same time - we actually access media (TV, radio, Internet) for nearly nine hours a day. For some people, this report from the independent regulator for the UK communications industries holds no real surprises. The statistics tell us things we already know - we are still slaves to TV, with people in the UK spending 3.8 hours a day in front of the box.

Still, the report reveals definite trends. The number of people using their phone to surf the web, which is currently estimated at 13.5m people, has almost tripled over the last three years. The effect of Smartphones on business may be considerable now that people are free from working from just one particular place: their desk. Another interesting trend is that one website is responsible for 45% of all mobile web use in the UK: Facebook. Call me old-fashioned, but the message on Facebook 'I am eating pizza' just doesn't excite me. Radio continues to be popular, maybe because it is easy to do something else at the same time, like answer e-mails.

Time and time again, reports come out which suggest that 'the fabric of society is deteriorating.' However, multitasking has actually been around for a long time. We once learnt that people read magazines at the same time as...watching TV! Guess what: we have all survived. Today's youth have grown up in a world where multitasking is the norm. Maybe there's too much fuss being made about this latest report. Mind you, as someone pointed out, I hope the surgeon about to operate on me isn't a multitasker and gives me their full attention!

3 Read the complete article. What are the main points made in the article? Describe the tone of the article.

4 Decide if the following words are red three, two or one-star words, or black no-star words.

trend	Smartphone	commute	fuss	Internet	deteriorate
TV	executive	mobile phone	slave	surf	multi-tasking

*** - very frequent
 ** - quite frequent
 * - frequent
 No star - less frequent
 Macmillan English Dictionary

5 Work in small groups to discuss the questions. Be ready to report back to the class.

- (a) Do you multitask or not? Is it good practice to multitask at work? Give reasons and examples.
- (b) Do you think the opportunity to work 'on the move' is good for your own business area? Why / why not?
- (c) In your opinion, are social networking sites like Facebook useful or a waste of time? Give reasons.
- (d) Can you identify any other new media trends in your own country? If so, are they positive or negative?