

US teens use screens more than seven hours a day on average – and that's not including school work

By Kristen Rogers, CNN – October 29, 2019

(CNN) US teens spend an average of more than seven hours per day on screen media for entertainment, and tweens spend nearly five hours, a new report finds -- and that doesn't include time spent using screens for school and homework.

Among teens, the amount of time dedicated to several individual screen activities inched up by 42 minutes per day since 2015, the report said. Nearly 62% spend more than four hours a day on screen media and 29% use screens more than eight hours a day, according to a [report](#) by Common Sense Media, a nonprofit organization that helps kids, parents and schools navigate media.

Vicky Rideout, co-author of the report and founder of VJR Consulting, a firm that specializes in research on youth, media and families, said there are "huge opportunities and important risks" within kids' media use.

"It gives young people the chance to look for resources on information that they're grappling with and to use apps that help them meditate or sleep, to connect to peers who might be going through similar challenges that they're going through, to offer support to other people," Rideout said.

Risks include the potential for youth to be exposed to harmful messages online, and for them to become more socially isolated from their peers due to more individualized content viewing.

Researchers analyzed data from a nationally representative survey of more than 1,600 tweens age 8 to 12 and teens age 13 to 18 about their relationship with media. They tracked changes in youth media behaviors, comparing current results to those found in the first wave of the study in 2015.



A mother's warning: If you have white teen sons, listen up ...

Online viewing is through the roof

There has been a large drop in the amount of time tweens and teens spend watching television on a TV.



What parents need to know about girls' stress and anxiety

The screen media time figures don't mean youth were exclusively using screen media for that period. Young people could be multitasking, such as getting dressed while watching a video, for example, and two hours of scrolling on a smartphone at the same time the television was on for two hours would amount to four hours of screen media time by the study's methods.

The survey covered young people's use and enjoyment of various types of media activities and how frequently they engaged with them. It addressed all types of media, including reading books in print, using social media, watching online videos and playing mobile games.

Each group spends nearly 30 minutes less watching on a TV than four years ago, and each group enjoys it less, too. Watching online videos makes up for the drop, though.

More than twice as many young people watch videos every day than in 2015, and the average time spent watching has nearly doubled. YouTube dominates the online video space for both groups, more than video subscription services such as Netflix, Hulu or Amazon Prime Video.

Although YouTube says its content is only for those 13 and older, 76% of tweens say they use the site and only 23% use YouTube Kids, a YouTube meant to be a safer viewing environment for younger people. Among tweens, 53% said YouTube is the site they watch the most, compared to just 7% for YouTube Kids.

"It's a whole new ballgame when kids are watching online video content as opposed to television content because we don't know where it's coming from, and we don't know what the source is or where the algorithms are sending them," Rideout said. "It's something that we really need to look at much more closer now that we realize the shift it can place in recent years toward online video content."



The teenagers so addicted to cellphones they're going to detox centers



Teens: This is how social media affects your brain

Tweens said they enjoy watching online videos more than any other screen media activity now. In 2015, it was fifth in enjoyment. For teens, it comes second behind listening to music, beating out video games, TV and social media.

Deborah Nichols, an associate professor of human development and family studies at Purdue University, said the vast interest in YouTube reflects the "shift away from globalized interest to much more specialized or individualized interest," and that youth are likely to explore their interests in this way.

Screen use differs among demographics

Fifty-three percent of kids have their own smartphone by age 11, and nearly 70% have one by age 12. Smartphone ownership among tweens increased from 24% in 2015 to 41% in 2019, and from 67% to 84% among teens. Among 8-year-olds, nearly 1 in 5 now have their own smartphone.

Nichols finds this "concerning," but said it necessitates having conversations with kids about media literacy earlier.

Socioeconomic status makes a difference in screen time, too. Tweens from higher-income homes were found to use nearly two hours less screen media per day than those from lower-income households, and the difference among teens is similar.

"When you don't have a lot of resources in the home or a lot of resources to do things outside the home, you're going to spend more time with the resources that you do have," Nichols said.



Increasing social media use tied to rise in teens' depressive symptoms, study says

US teens use screens more than seven hours a day

"It's an affordable, accessible source of informal learning and a form of entertainment, and I think that's a main reason you see these differences in screen use between lower-income and higher-income kids," said Rideout.



How girls use social media to build up, break down self-image

The time spent on social media has remained steady, while the age at which young people first start using social media varies. Among older teens who use social media, the median age of first use is 14.

The study found African American teens enjoyed using social media more than their white and Hispanic and Latino counterparts — 51% enjoy it "a lot," compared to 37% of white teens and 43% of Hispanic and Latino teens. Rideout said there's an "interesting intersection of race and income happening."

"African American kids just have a higher degree of enthusiasm for forms of media, whether it's music or games or movies or TV. They also tend to be early adopters and innovators, so I think that reflects a similar pattern."

Media tastes vary vastly between boys and girls, and the difference is starkest when it comes to gaming. Seventy percent of boys said they enjoy playing video games "a lot," compared to 23% of girls. Girls' favorite media activity by far was listening to music.

Half of teen girls say they enjoy using social media a lot compared to 32% of boys, and girls spend more time on it -- an hour and a half a day on average compared to 51 minutes for boys.

"Girls partially are socialized to, sadly, care about appearance and relationships and social media fosters that kind of relationship building," Nichols said.

How young people use screens to learn and create

Twenty-seven percent of tweens and nearly 60% of teens use computers for homework daily, a substantial increase from four years ago when only 11% of tweens and 29% of teens said they used a computer for homework every day.

Douglas Gentile, a professor of psychology at Iowa State University, said the reported screen time levels are "really kind of scary" because they amount to nearly 60 hours spent on screen media weekly, which leaves "little time to do anything else of value."

Some experts debate whether the term "screen time" means much anymore because of "media multitasking," contending that youth may be Skyping their grandparents, reading poetry or writing code. However, the report found that these activities are quite rare. Despite the creative opportunities technology offers, young people devote very little time to creating their own content.

No more than 1 in 10 in either age group say they enjoy "a lot" activities like making digital art or graphics, creating digital music, coding or designing or modifying their own video games.



Not all screen time causes kids to underperform in school, study says

"One thing our study doesn't exactly count is sharing their stuff they've created," Rideout said. "So they may not have created the digital art on their device but they may be taking pictures and sharing that."

Most tweens and teens read for pleasure at least once a week, the report said, but 22% of tweens and 32% of teens said they do it less than once a month, if at all.

What parents can do

For parents concerned about their kids' media use, experts say it comes down to one thing: Talk to your kids.

"It's becoming increasingly challenging, I think, for parents to be able to stay on top of what that content and what that messaging is, but that it's probably more important than ever to do so," Rideout said.

Gentile said it's time for parents to be more thoughtful about how children are using their media.

"A smartphone is a key to everything in the world -- to all of human knowledge, to all of human horrors, and that makes the internet a really valuable asset," Gentile said. "But before I hand my kid the key to it -- shouldn't I know that they understand the risks?"

While we know which types of screen activities youth are devoting their time to, we don't know the quality of the content they're engaging with, according to the report.

"Six hours of makeup tutorial videos on YouTube is different from six hours of 'Planet Earth,'" the report says.

In [guidelines on screen use by youth](#), the American Academy of Pediatrics recommends parents prioritize children's activity and proper sleep, engaging with content with them and establishing screen-free times and zones.

After myriad media and technology developments in the last 20 years, there's been a more recent period of stability, the report says -- and that may give researchers, parents and educators a chance to catch up.

Source: <https://www.cnn.com/2019/10/29/health/common-sense-kids-media-use-report-wellness/index.html>