

Kids' digital day: Almost 8 hours

Media and mobile devices now 'part of air' they breathe

By Greg Toppo
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Kids these days spend so much time with electronic media — cellphones, iPods, video games and computers — that it might as well be a full-time job: more than 53 hours a week, a study finds.

Compared with peers a decade ago, young people spend 79 more minutes of free time each day listening to music, watching TV and movies, playing video games and hanging out online. Nearly twice as many now say they do at least two of these at the same time.

The findings, out today in a Kaiser Family Foundation survey of 2,002 people ages 8 to 18, show that young people spend seven hours and 38 minutes using media in a typical day — up from six hours and 19 minutes a decade earlier.

About the only thing that seems to be fading: ink. Though daily book readership has held steady at about 47% since 1999, the percentage of young people who say they read a magazine every day has plummeted from 55% to 35%. It's worse for newspapers, down from 42% to 23%.

Electronic media are now "a part of the air that kids breathe," says Vicky Rideout, director of Kaiser's Program for the Study of Media and Health.

African-American and Hispanic kids spend nearly one-third more time each day with electronics than white kids. Among other findings:

- Cellphone ownership has increased sharply since 2004, from 39% to 66%.
- Ownership of iPods has jumped even more since 2004, from 18% to 76%.
- 20% of kids' media comes via mobile devices.

The near-ubiquity of mobile devices has had a profound effect on kids' free time, filling up "the interstitial spaces" in their daily lives, says Amanda Lenhart of the Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project. She jokes that iPods and cellphones may be this generation's "magazines and chewing gum," harmless ways to fill time.

Rideout was "frankly astonished" at the sheer amount of time kids spend with electronic media: "Anything that takes up this much time, we really do need to think about it and talk about it."