



Written by [Raven Clabough](#) on August 28, 2018

Troubling Study: Teens Spend More Time on Digital Media, Significantly Less Time Reading

A new study reveals that one-third of American teenagers have not read a single book in the last year, as they have found new ways to be distracted. The study's findings underscore the tremendous impact that digital media has on the lives of young Americans and should raise concerns over the future of the country.



[StudyFinds.org reports](#) that San Diego State University researchers analyzed four decades of data obtained from an ongoing national lifestyle survey that studies the daily habits of more than a million adolescents. The data revealed a number of troubling findings.

For example, while one-third of 10th graders reported reading the daily newspaper in the 1990s, just two percent reported doing the same thing in 2016. Likewise, while 60 percent of 12th graders read a book or magazine nearly daily in the late 1970s, only 16 percent reported doing so in 2016.

“The meteoric rise of internet-based activities cannot be understated: between social media, texting, gaming, and surfing the web, the average high school senior spent six hours a day online in 2016 — double the time from a decade earlier. Eighth graders (4 hours a day) and tenth graders (5 hours a day) didn’t lag far behind,” the report finds.

Even TV-watching has declined, according to the study, as this media outlet now struggles to compete with new technology. While 22 percent of eighth graders reported watching five or more hours of TV a day in the 1990s, that number has declined to just 13 percent in 2016.

Though teens continue to watch movies at a steady rate, the study found that the medium by which they enjoy movies has shifted dramatically. Teens rely on streaming videos instead.

Time on social media, and time online in general, has increased significantly, according to the study. The average 12th grader in 2016 spent twice as much time online as in 2006. Social media has dominated the attention of American teens, with 82 percent visiting social media sites nearly daily in 2016, versus approximately 50 percent in 2008.

And while these figures are certainly troubling, they are not necessarily a surprise. However, the researchers were astonished by the decline in reading habits among the teens, given the availability and convenience of books and magazines on electronic devices.

Jean Twenge, the study’s lead author, observed, “There’s no more going to the mailbox or the bookstore — you just download the magazine issue or book and start reading. Yet reading has still declined precipitously.”



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But despite the findings, Twenge suggests that today's teens are no less curious or intelligent than those of previous generations. Instead, she contends they simply do not have experience reading and analyzing long-form texts.

She claims that this is problematic, as delving into those texts is vital for developing critical thinking skills.

"Think about how difficult it must be to read even five pages of an 800-page college textbook when you've been used to spending most of your time switching between one digital activity and another in a matter of seconds," she notes.

Twenge also contends that the absence of critical thinking among this generation of teens is sure to make a difference when these teens are of voting age.

"Democracies need informed voters and involved citizens who can think through issues, and that might be more difficult for people of all ages now that online information is the norm," she states.

And while our system of government is not a democracy but a constitutional republic, Twenge's point is a valuable one. What the findings seem to emphasize is that today's technology is creating a generation of people who require instant gratification in order to maintain their interests. Reading a lengthy novel does not satisfy that need among many of today's young people, and therefore has ceased to be a priority.

The study's findings raise some other concerns as well. For example, how is it possible that school-age teens have not read a single book in the last year? Does this mean that many schools are not requiring students to read and analyze books? How are students passing their classes without performing this task?

Likewise, why have parents permitted this trend to take place? Have they lost control over their children entirely so that this generation is not churning out a group of well-educated readers, but instead a swarm of zombies whose faces are hidden behind their technology, rarely to be seen?

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