



2026 | COMMON SENSE MEDIA CENSUS

Tech and Media Use by Tweens and Teens

COMMON SENSE MEDIA IS GRATEFUL FOR THE GENEROUS SUPPORT
AND UNDERWRITING THAT FUNDED THIS RESEARCH

Bezos Family Foundation

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A Letter From Our Founder

Long before they're old enough to use them, tweens and teens are living on platforms that were never built with them in mind. Since 2015, Common Sense Media's Census has given us a window into how tweens and teens spend their time with media. This year's survey, fielded among a nationally representative sample of 1,211 youth ages 9 to 17, updates our questionnaire to better capture how young people use specific platforms and content, including short-form video, social media, and AI tools, rather than focusing solely on devices used, to better understand how young people navigate their digital world.

One finding stands out clearly: Many children under 13 are already using social media and AI tools, despite policies restricting them to users 13 and older. Personal smartphone ownership and AI usage crosses 50% by age 11, and social media platform use among tweens is following closely behind. These are products built with an older user in mind, and our data suggests that age-based protections are not yet working as intended for these audiences.

We also see that heavy use doesn't always track with enjoyment. Nearly two-thirds of all youth use AI in their free time, but only about 1 in 10 teens who use it say they enjoy it "a lot." Social media follows a similar pattern: The large majority of teens use it, but under half enjoy it. Short-form video is the one exception where enjoyment keeps pace with how much time young people spend with it. Time spent with media and the value that young people get from it are not the same thing.

These findings point to a clear gap between platform policy and platform reality. Platforms and policymakers have a responsibility to make sure age protections work as designed, not just as written. And parents and educators deserve better tools to understand what their kids are actually using. We hope this report gives all of them a clearer, evidence-based starting point for that work.



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jim Steyer". The signature is fluid and cursive.

Jim Steyer
Founder and CEO
Common Sense Media

Introduction

This report presents the findings of Common Sense Media's ongoing series of surveys about the media and technology lives of tweens and teenagers in the United States. For over a decade, Common Sense Media's Census series has served as a consistent lens examining how young people spend their time with media, reflecting how tweens and teens themselves live their days. The activities that young people engage in, and the content and messages they encounter, are shaped substantively by the media- and tech-related choices they make. These are choices that may be starting earlier, given how young most children are when they get a phone of their own today. And notably, this report tracks all technology use that occurs outside of school or for homework.

Since our first Census in 2015, the media that young people use has changed dramatically. Previous iterations charted the widespread adoption of smartphones in children's lives, as well as the rise of social media. The arrival of AI and an increasingly fragmented video landscape require us to rethink how we measure newer media, such as the short-form video platforms (e.g., TikTok) where young people spend so much of their time. New questions capture these emerging behaviors, which were not commonplace a decade ago and now make up a sizable portion of kids' free time.

Four patterns stand out this year, and together they speak volumes about the media environment that children are growing up in:

1. Social media, AI, and other media spaces that are largely intended for older teens and adults are being used by tweens age 9 to 12 in impactful ways. About half of children already have their own phone by age 10 or 11, and a significant share of children under 13 are already using social media and AI tools that carry 13+ policies.



2. Kids' days are crowded with media use, but days haven't gotten any longer to accommodate this use, so screen time is increasingly competing with sleep, homework, reading for fun, time with other people, and other media use.
3. Even as media and tech use occupies many hours of the day, much of that use isn't time that young people say they enjoy. This suggests a notable difference in use and enjoyment that may be perpetuated by platform engineering that is designed to hold attention.
4. Youth from lower-income households are still encountering digital divides. While mobile phones are ubiquitous, these young people are less likely than their peers from more affluent households to have a computer at home, and even less likely to have one of their own, a divide that could shape their access to schoolwork tools, learning opportunities, and other resources.

Current Report

This report presents findings from a nationally representative survey of 1,211 tweens and teens (age 9 to 17) in the United States, examining how young people spend their free time across today's evolving and expanding media landscape, including time with television, online videos, gaming, social media, and generative AI tools such as chatbots and companions. Youth were asked to estimate how much time they spent on the previous day engaging in each activity across all of their devices.

It's important to note that this report measures how much time young people spend with media, not the content they encounter or how they engage with it. Research suggests that what kids are watching, playing, or interacting with, and in what context, can shape outcomes as much as or more than how long they spend doing it. Time is one important piece of the picture, but not the whole picture.

A note about multitasking: Young people often do more than a single media activity at once. For example, they may be texting friends while gaming,



or scrolling social media while a show plays in the background. When that happens, the time spent on each activity gets counted separately, even though it's happening during the same stretch of the day. So it's possible for a tween or teen to log 12 hours of media activity within an eight-hour period, simply because several of those hours were spent doing two or three things simultaneously. Because of this overlap, the totals in this report shouldn't be treated as a literal count of hours spent throughout a young person's day. They are better understood as a sum of everything a young person is doing on and with media, some at the same time.

Changes since the last Common Sense Census

In previous iterations of the Common Sense Census, we reported the mean, or average, amount of time children spent with media. In this report, we switched to the median instead. The median is the true middle: Half of tweens and teens reported spending more time than this, and half reported less. The mean, by contrast, can be pulled upward by a small number of kids who report very heavy use, so the reported numbers may end up higher than what a typical kid actually experiences. Reporting the median allows us to illustrate what a typical tween or teen does, rather than calculating an average across everyone.

We also narrowed the age range we study, from 8- to 18-year-olds to 9- to 17-year-olds. This gives us a cleaner picture of middle childhood through adolescence, and stops just short of age 18, when one is legally considered an adult. (Media use among younger children, age 0 to 8, is covered in our companion report series, "The Common Sense Census: Media Use by Kids Age Zero to Eight.")

Because of these changes to the survey design, this report does not compare overall media use time to prior Census waves. Instead, it establishes an updated, stand-alone picture of media use among today's tweens and teens. However, where appropriate, device access and ownership comparisons across waves of the survey have been made in-text.

The sections that follow trace each of these patterns in more detail: how crowded children's days have become with media entertainment, how early phone and platform access now begin, where the gap widens between kids' use of media and how much they enjoy it, and how household income can shape these experiences. We hope these findings will help parents and caregivers, educators, platforms, and policymakers see emerging trends and act on them to improve what comes next for our youth.



Executive Summary

Phones and platforms arrive early, and many children under 13 are using AI, short-form video, and social media, which are not meant for them.

While less than a quarter of 9-year-olds have their own smartphone, this nearly doubles by age 10, and ownership crosses the 50% point by age 11. But access to devices is only part of the story. Tweens age 9 to 12 are already being exposed to platforms and websites that are intended for older children and adults, like AI chatbots and social media sites. As these devices become increasingly "personal" and use of these platforms grows, there is increased risk of exposure to unintended content and potential for screen media to impact other aspects of young people's lives.

1.

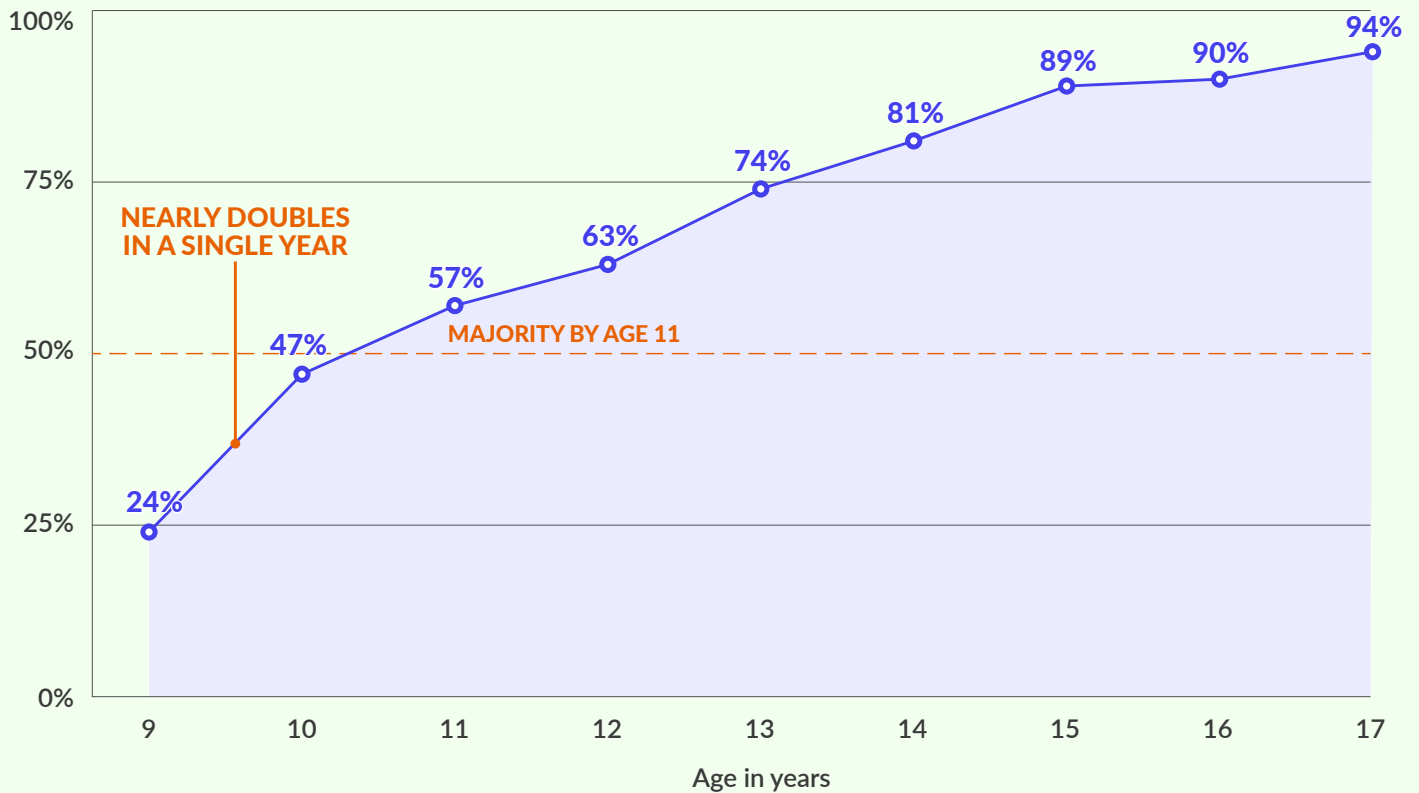
Personal smartphone ownership nearly doubles from age 9 (24%) to 10 (47%). And by age 11, more than half of children have their own smartphone.

While nearly all youth have access to smartphones, computers, streaming services, and internet-connected devices in the home, personal ownership increases dramatically with age. Smartphone ownership nearly doubles from age 9 to 10, jumping from just 24% among 9-year-olds to 47% among 10-year-olds. And by age 11, more than half of tweens have their own smartphone (57%). Smartphone ownership is nearly universal among older teens, with 94% of 17-year-olds having their own device. About two-thirds of teens (67%) and one-third of tweens (36%) have access to their own computer, while tweens are more likely to have their own tablet (68% vs. 52% of teens), suggesting that device accessibility changes with age.



FIGURE A:

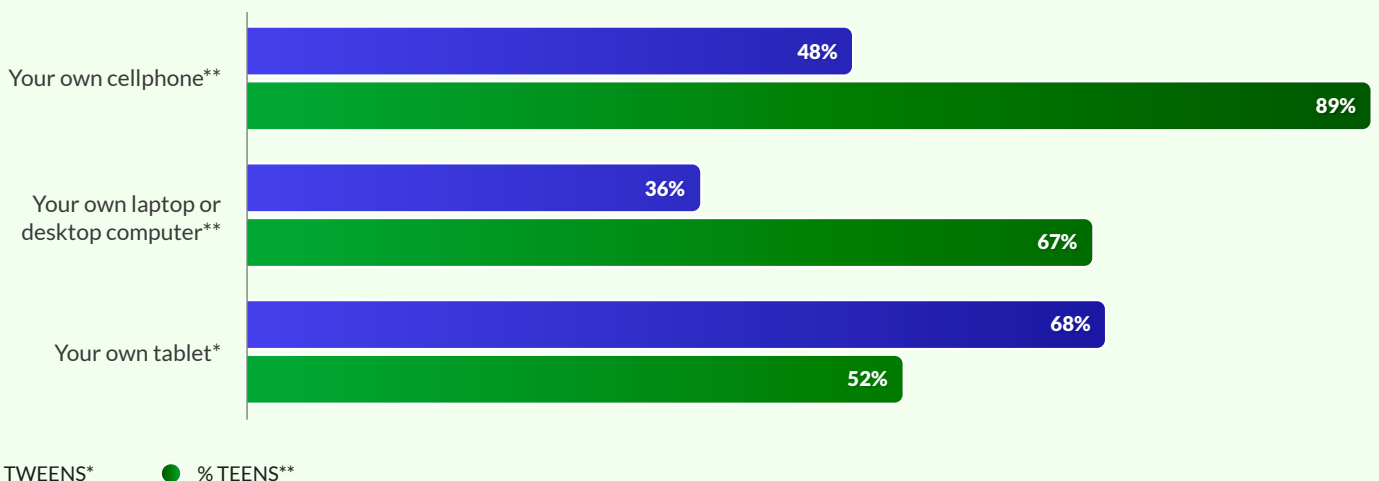
Percentage of youth at each age who have their own smartphone



Base: Among ALL youth in each age: 9-year-olds (n=238); 10-year-olds (n=118); 11-year-olds (n=145); 12-year-olds (n=113); 13-year-olds (n=108); 14-year-olds (n=112); 15-year-olds (n=105); 16-year-olds (n=122); 17-year-olds (n=150).

FIGURE B:

Percentage of youth who have their own cellphone, laptop, desktop computer, or tablet, by age group



Base: tweens (n=614); teens (n=597).

*/** indicates a significant difference between the two age groups.

Q2. "Which of the following items do you personally have? (Not one that belongs to someone else in your house.)"

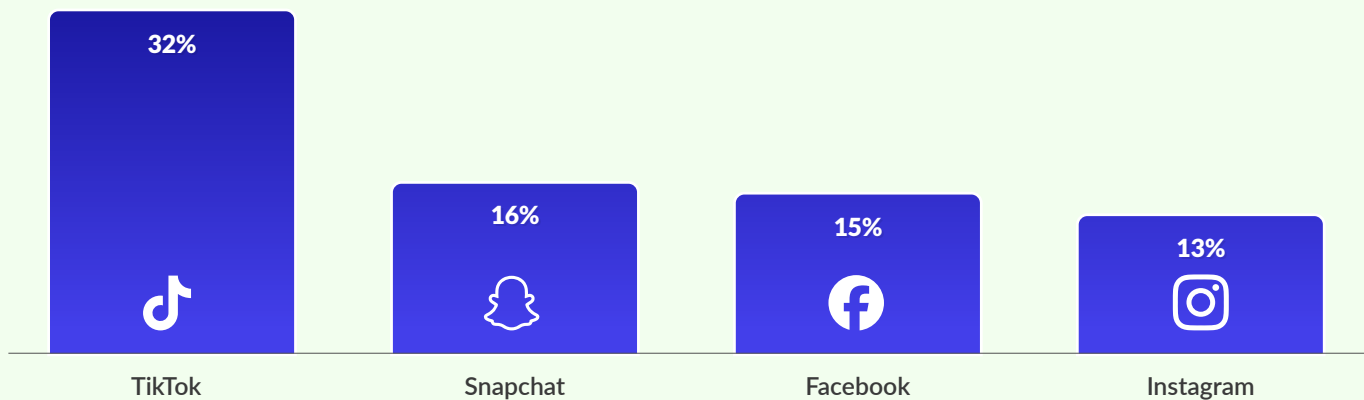


2.

Half of tweens age 9 to 12 (50%) use social media for nearly an hour and a half on a given day, and half (49%) use AI, despite platform policies requiring users to be 13 or older.

When asked about their screen media use on a given day, half of tweens (50%) indicated they had used social media with a median average use time of one hour and 25 minutes.

For tweens who use social media, nearly one-third (32%) are visiting TikTok at least monthly, followed by more than 1 in 10 who are using Snapchat (16%), Facebook (15%), and Instagram (13%) at least monthly.

FIGURE C:**Social media sites visited at least monthly by tweens**

Base: Tweens who use social media, play video games, or consume video/TV content (n=611).

Q12. "Which of the following social media or video sites, if any, do you use on a monthly or more basis?"

Nearly half of tweens (49%) indicated that they have ever used AI chatbots or companions, and of those, 18% indicated that they used them on a given day, with a median average use time of one hour. This suggests that 13+ age gating is not working for many U.S. tweens.

When we look at the percentage of youth who have ever used AI chatbots or companions by age, use climbs quickly through the tween years, rising by roughly 10 percentage points a year, from just over one-third of 9-year-olds

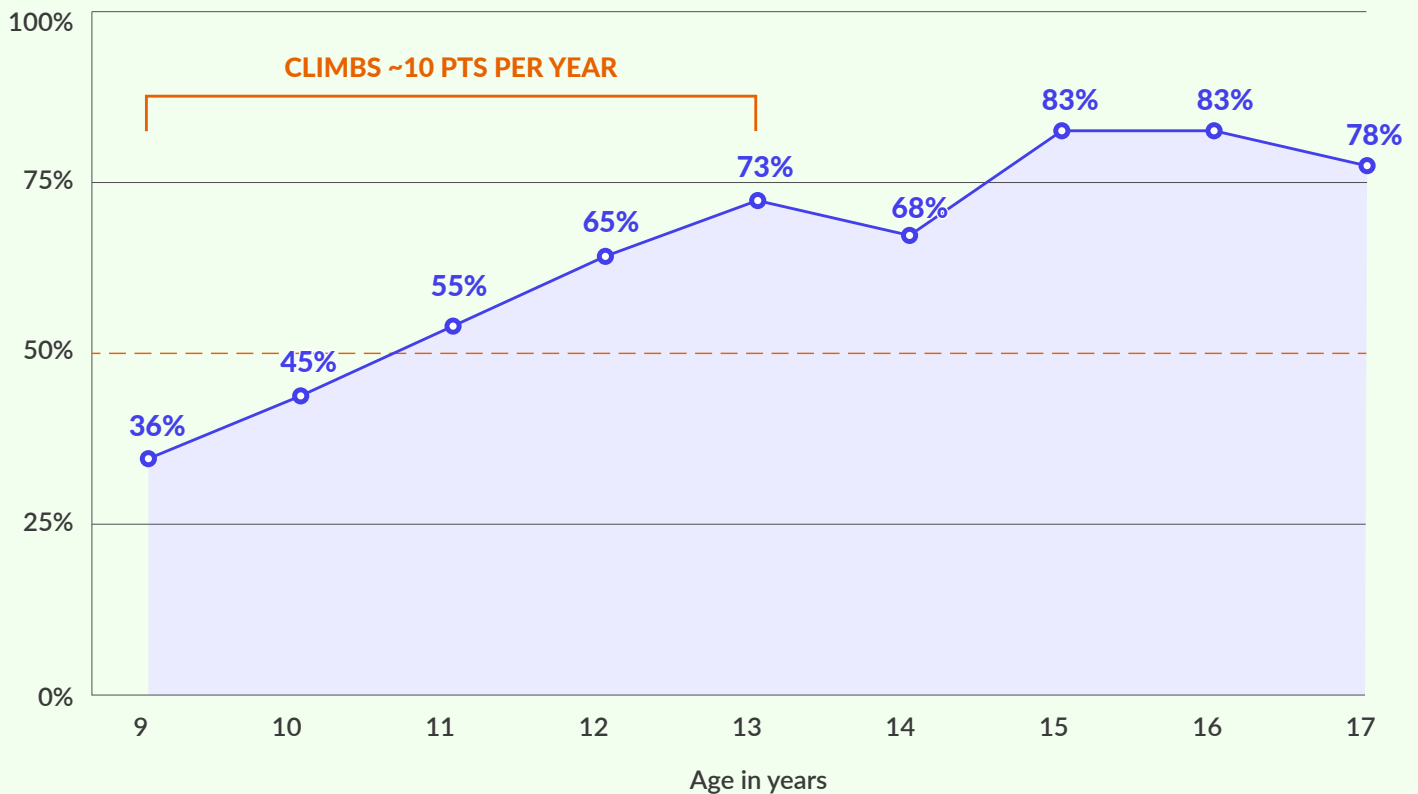


reporting having ever used AI chatbots (36%) to nearly two-thirds by age 12 (65%). By age 11, more than half of kids (55%) have ever used AI chatbots, a threshold crossed before they reach their teen years and before these platforms indicate they should be using them.

Growth in AI chatbot usage continues into the start of the teen years, reaching 73% by age 13 and then appearing to level out by about 15, where more than 8 in 10 kids (83%) report having used AI. Taken together, this suggests AI use may be a habit that is adopted early by tweens and carried into the teen years, despite platform policies that these spaces are intended for older children and adults.

FIGURE D:

Percentage of youth who have ever used AI chatbots or companions, by age



Base: Among ALL youth in each age: 9-year-olds (n=238); 10-year-olds (n=118); 11-year-olds (n=145); 12-year-olds (n=113); 13-year-olds (n=108); 14-year-olds (n=112); 15-year-olds (n=105); 16-year-olds (n=122); 17-year-olds (n=150).

A typical tween's or teen's day is crowded with media and tech, and short-form video (like TikTok and YouTube Shorts) and AI tools (like ChatGPT and Gemini) are becoming an increasingly prominent part of it.

One of the primary patterns that emerges from this year's data is that the typical tween and teen are spending a lot of time with screen media across devices and platforms, outside of time for school or homework. It's possible that a high volume of use is crowding out other important activities known to matter for children's development, like playing outside, sleeping, and doing schoolwork. Whether that screen time helps or hurts may also depend less on how much of it there is than on what fills it. Media used to connect with others, create something, or learn new things can be beneficial, and research points to certain kinds of high-quality content and activities as supportive of children's cognitive and social and emotional growth. It is less clear whether the way today's platforms and technologies are designed and used is delivering those kinds of high-quality experiences, as opposed to simply maximizing how much time kids spend with them.

Typical screen
time per day



Typical Tween



Typical Teen

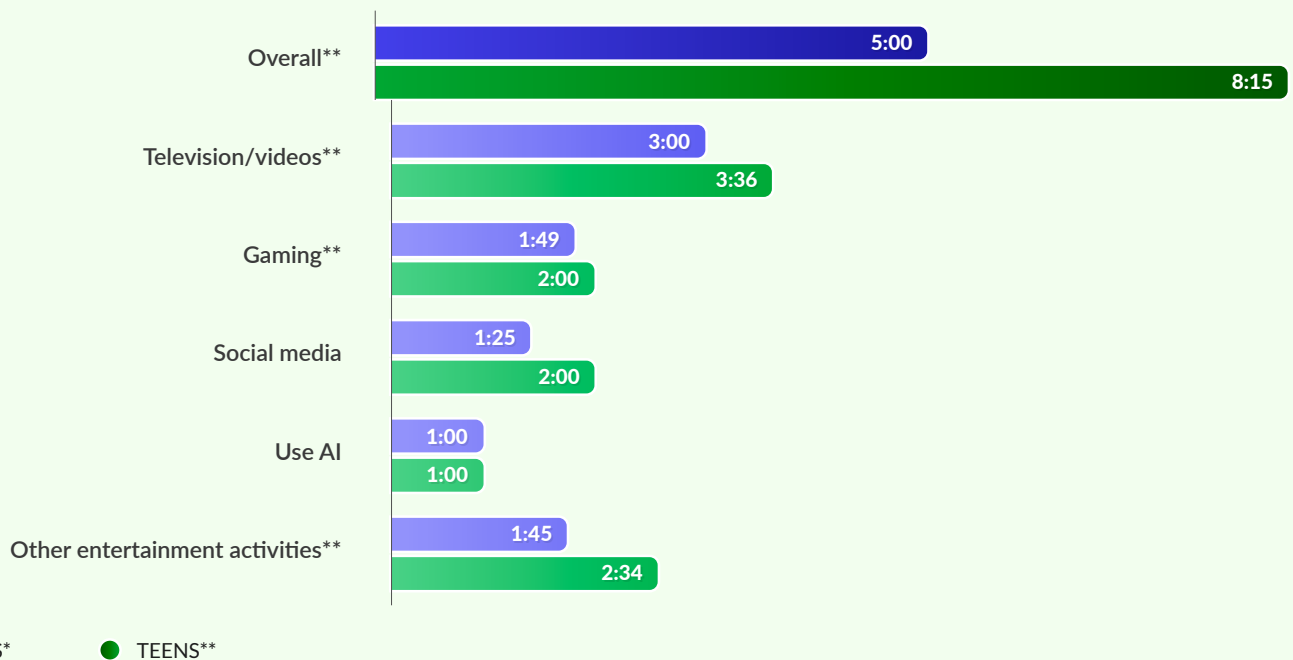
3.

A typical teen spends about eight hours a day on screen media for entertainment, while a typical tween spends about five hours.¹

These numbers suggest that tweens and teens are likely multitasking with media devices, resulting in overlap in tasks and activities (e.g., playing video games while messaging their friends). Watching television and videos (both short-form and long-form) is the most common screen media activity for both tweens and teens (tweens spent a median average of three hours, while teens spent three hours and 36 minutes). Gaming and social media also emerge as popular activities, along with other entertainment activities such as texting and video chatting.

FIGURE E:

Typical daily entertainment screen use, by age group



Base: tweens (n=614); teens (n=597).

*/** indicates a significant difference between the two age groups.

Note: The overall screen media use calculation reflects time spent on all screen media captured among all respondents; each individual activity reflects time spent only among youth who use that activity, and therefore may not sum to the overall amount.

Q6. "Now we'd like to know how much TIME you spent doing each activity YESTERDAY for fun."

¹ We report the median, which reflects the midpoint value, where half of users fall above and half fall below, offering a better presentation of the typical user. See Table 3 for a full list of median and mean averages of usage.



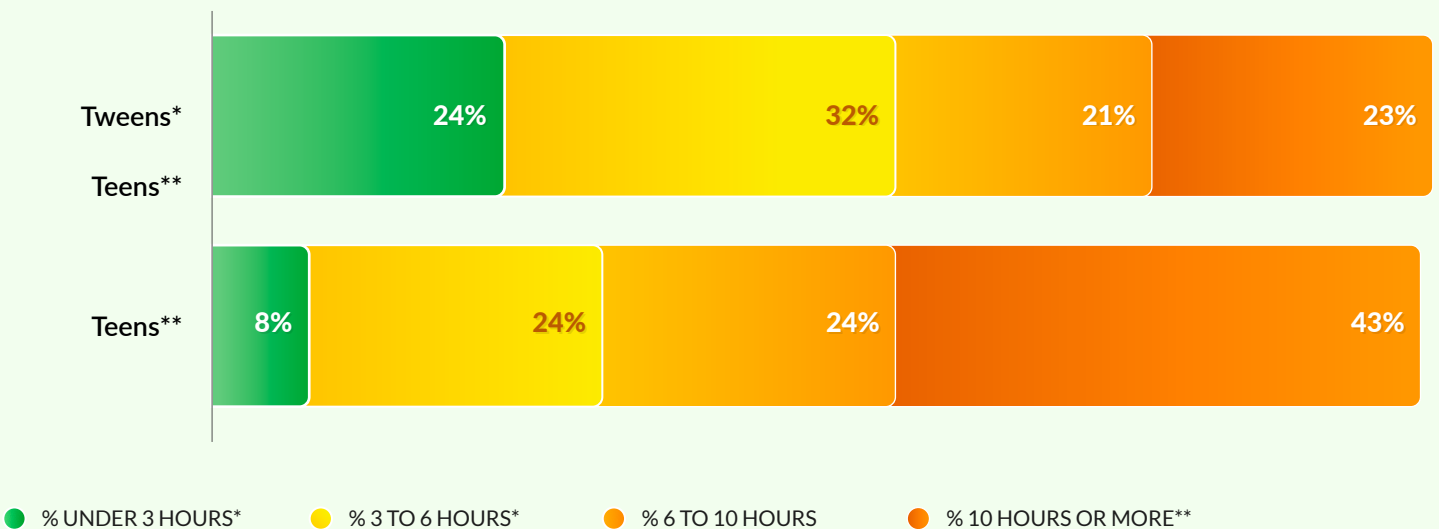
4.

More than 4 in 10 teens are spending 10 hours or more a day on screens for entertainment.

The percentage of youth spending 10 or more hours per day on screen media for entertainment climbs sharply as they move into the teen years, nearly doubling from 23% of tweens to 43% of teens. At the other end, the share who spend less than three hours per day for entertainment shrinks with age, from about one-quarter of tweens (24%) to fewer than 1 in 10 teens (8%).

FIGURE F:

Share of tweens and teens using screen media for entertainment on a given day



Base: tweens (n=614); teens (n=597).

*/** indicates a significant difference between the two age groups.

Q6. "Now we'd like to know how much TIME you spent doing each activity YESTERDAY for fun."

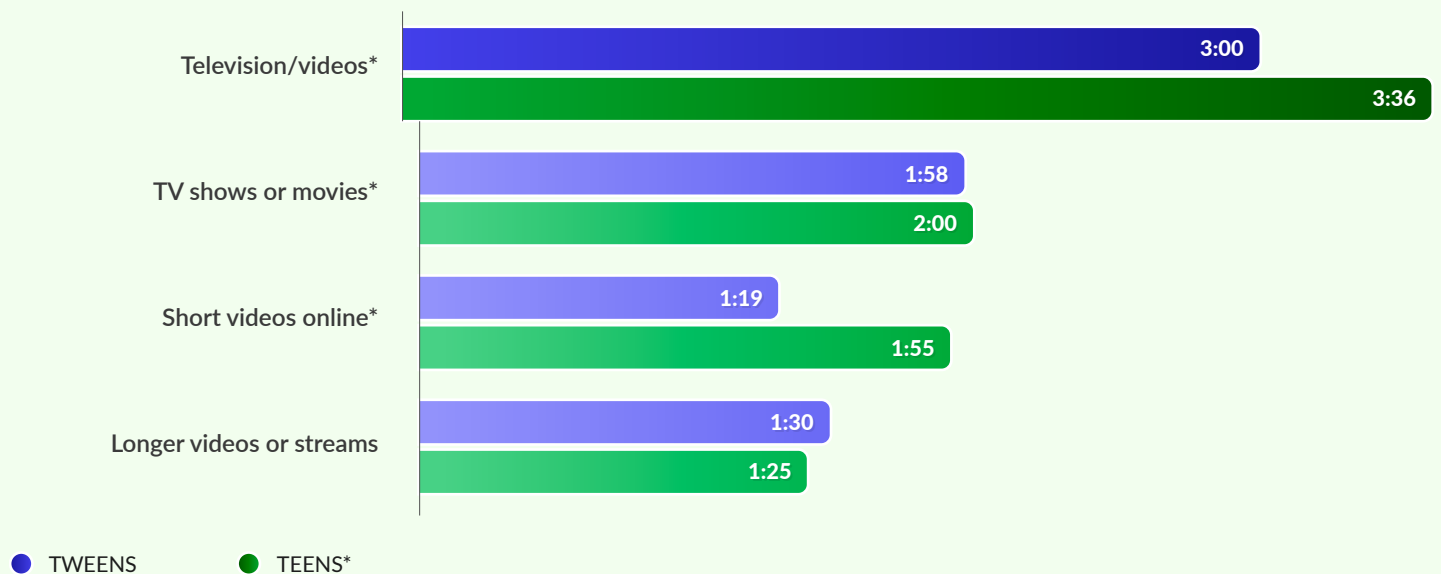
5.

Short-form video, such as TikTok and YouTube Shorts, has become one of the biggest parts of kids' media diets. Teens spend close to two hours a day on short-form video, and tweens already spend over an hour.

For teens, that's nearly as much time as they spend with traditional TV and movies, a format that's been part of childhood for decades. Watching short videos online (such as TikToks or Instagram Reels) is a daily habit for more than half of tweens (58%), as well as 82% of teens, the single highest daily participation rate of any activity we measured for any age. Tweens report spending a median average of just over one hour scrolling through these short videos (one hour and 19 minutes), while teens watch for almost two hours (one hour and 55 minutes).

FIGURE G:

Television and video viewing among users, by age group



Base: tweens (n=614); teens (n=597).

* indicates a significant difference between the two age groups.

Note: The Television/Videos calculation reflects time spent on all other screen media captured in this chart among all respondents; each individual activity reflects time spent only among youth who use that activity, and therefore may not sum to the overall amount.

Q6. "Now we'd like to know how much TIME you spent doing each activity YESTERDAY for fun."



6.

Most tweens and teens didn't read at all for fun on the day surveyed: just 45% of tweens and 23% of teens did, even as participation in other screen activities grew.

Reading for fun is one of the only media activities that moves in the opposite direction as kids get older. Participation is nearly halved by the teen years, falling from 45% among tweens to 23% among teens. Reading also differs by demographic group, with girls more likely than boys to report reading (36% vs. 30%) and to say they enjoy it "a lot" (35% vs. 23%).

Most tweens and teens did not report reading for fun on the target day, but among those who did, the median time spent reading is one hour (mean average of one hour and 45 minutes among teens who read, and one hour and 17 minutes among tweens who read).

Both tweens and teens spend more time on nearly every other screen media activity compared to reading. Notably, among teens who report reading for fun, the median time spent reading (about one hour) is half of what teens report spending on social media (median time of two hours spent on social media among those who used it on the target day), and nearly half of what they report spending on short-form video (median time of one hour and 55 minutes). One possible explanation is that reading requires more sustained attention than many other screen activities, which can be started and stopped within seconds. As young people take on more lower-effort screen activities, reading for pleasure may be displaced.



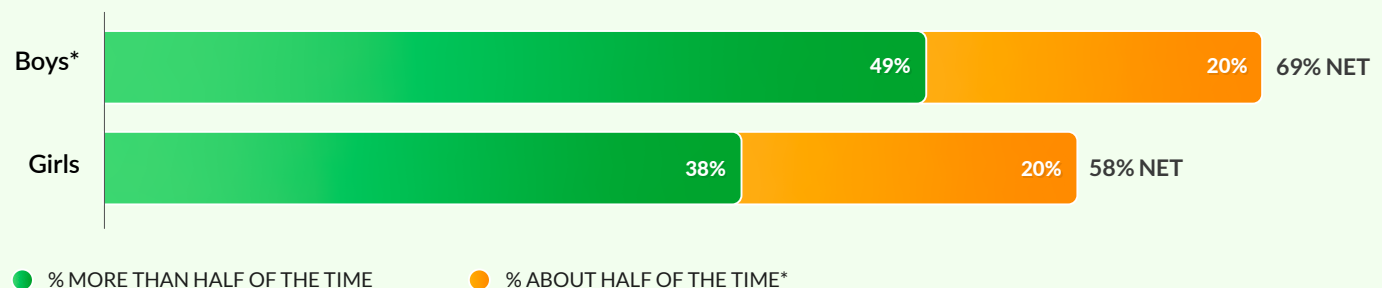
7.

Gaming is a social activity for most tweens and teens, with most young people playing with others when they are gaming (85%), and nearly half (49%) of all boys and more than a third of girls (38%) interacting with other people online while they are playing.

Overall, just over half of tweens and teens (56%) play games on a given day for about two hours (one hour and 49 minutes for tweens and two hours for teens). Gaming behavior is fairly similar by age, with most tweens and teens indicating that they usually play with others, either online or in person (85% of tweens and 86% of teens). Teens indicate that they socialize while gaming at least half of the time or more (48%) compared to tweens (38%). Boys were more likely than girls to indicate they socialize while gaming more than half of the time (49% of boys vs. 38% of girls), though almost one-quarter of girls say they almost never socialize while gaming (23% vs. 17% of boys). While both groups indicate that they often play with friends or family they know in real life (56% of tweens and 61% of teens), teens are more likely than tweens to have riskier practices, such as playing with people they've met through games (29% vs. 20% of tweens) or with random players the game has matched them with (33% vs. 25%).

FIGURE H:

Percentage of youth who chat, talk, or hang out while gaming, by gender

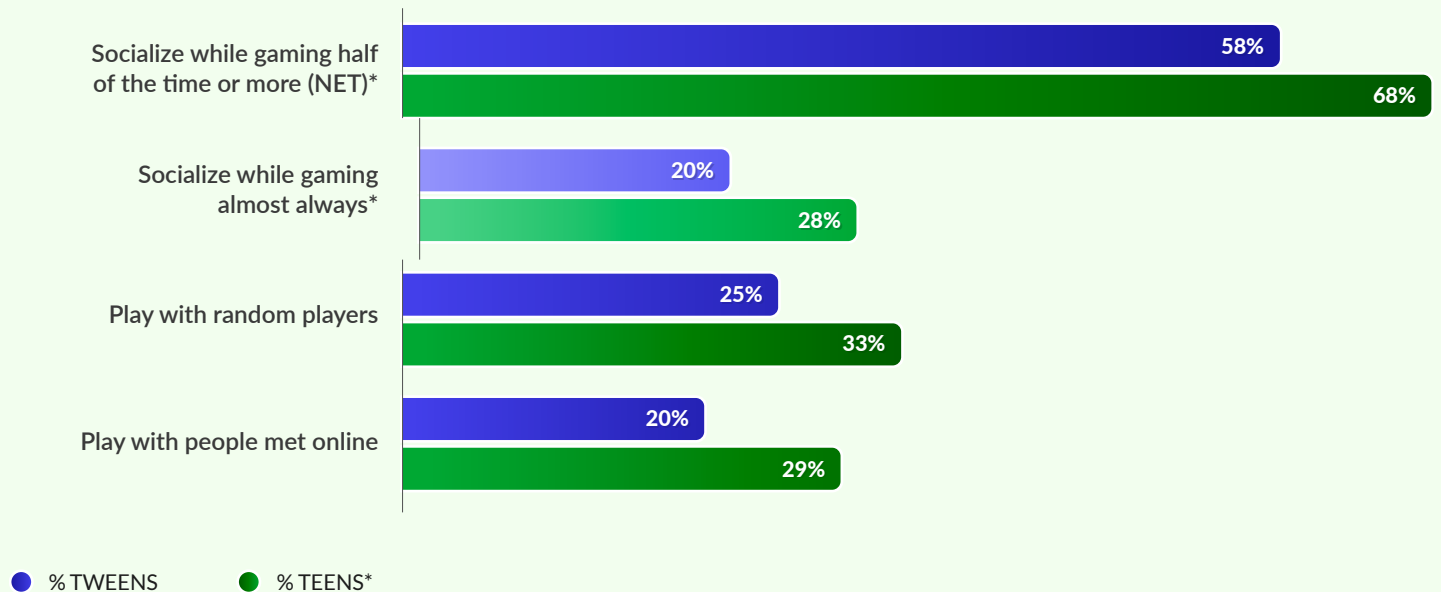


Base: Total who play mobile or video games (N=1,175); boys (n=642); girls (n=523).

* indicates a significant difference between genders.

Q14. "When you play video games, how often are you chatting, talking to, voice calling, or hanging out with friends or others at the same time (socializing together, even if they're not playing with you)?"



**FIGURE I:****Percentage who socialize while gaming, by age group**

Base: Total who play mobile or video games; tweens (n=596); teens (n=579).

* indicates a significant difference between the two age groups.

Q13. "When you play mobile or video games, who do you usually play with? Select all that apply."

Q14. "When you play video games, how often are you chatting, talking to, voice calling, or hanging out with friends or others at the same time (socializing together, even if they're not playing with you)?"



Heavy use doesn't always mean enjoyment.

When it comes to using screen media and enjoying it, there is often a disconnect for many young people. Many tweens and teens are likely to engage in various screen media activities, but enjoyment of those activities varies a lot. Similarly, feelings of overuse increase with age, as teens are much more likely to feel they are using screens "too much," suggesting that heavy use may have other negative effects.

8.

There's a gap between how many tweens and teens use different types of screen media and how many say they enjoy it "a lot." Across TV/video, social media, and AI, usage is widespread, but enjoyment lags. AI chatbot and companion use is common (77% of teens), but few users say they enjoy it "a lot" (11% of teens).

Across most types of screen media, high use doesn't translate into high enjoyment. Far fewer users say they enjoy a given media "a lot" than those who say they use it. This gap is especially pronounced for TV/video, AI chatbots, and social media among teens.

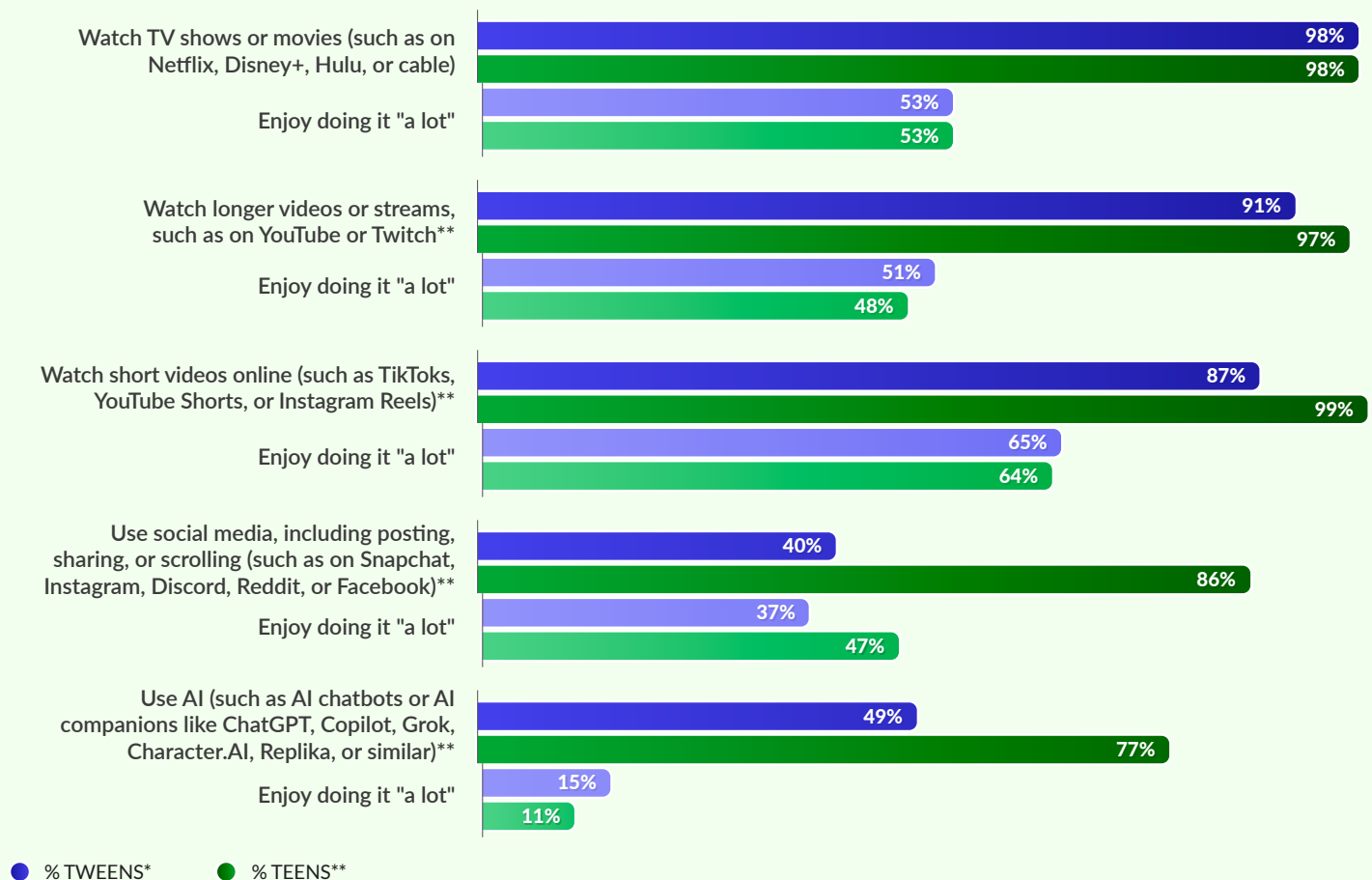
Most tweens and teens watch TV or movies (98%) but only about half say they enjoy it "a lot" (53%). Social media shows a similar pattern: 86% of teens use it in their free time, but only 47% enjoy it "a lot"; for tweens, social media usage is lower (40%) and enjoyment is lower still (37%). This gap suggests that engagement-driving platform features may keep young people in spaces they don't always enjoy. Short-form video is the exception, as the format both age groups enjoy most, with about two-thirds saying they enjoy it "a lot" (65% of tweens; 64% of teens).



The largest use-to-enjoyment gap is with usage of AI chatbots and companions. This usage is now mainstream and skews older: Nearly two-thirds of tweens and teens overall (65%) report using AI tools in their free time, including 77% of teens and 49% of tweens. Time spent looks similar across ages: Among users on the day surveyed, both tweens and teens spent a median of one hour with AI. This suggests that tweens are engaging at rates similar to older peers, despite most platforms requiring parental permission under age 13, a pattern likely to grow as adoption increases. Yet enjoyment doesn't track with use: Only 11% of teen AI users and 15% of tween AI users say they enjoy it "a lot," showing that frequent use doesn't mean young people actually enjoy the activity.

FIGURE J:

Percentage of tweens and teens who use different types of screen media and how many users enjoy it "a lot"



Base: Those who ever did any of the activities; tweens (n=614); teens (n=597).

*/** indicates a significant difference between the two age groups.

Q4. "How often do you do each of the following activities in your free time?" (Percentages reported are those who answered "Every day," "At least once a week," "At least once a month," or "Less than once a month.")

Q7. "How much do you ENJOY doing each of the following activities?"



9.

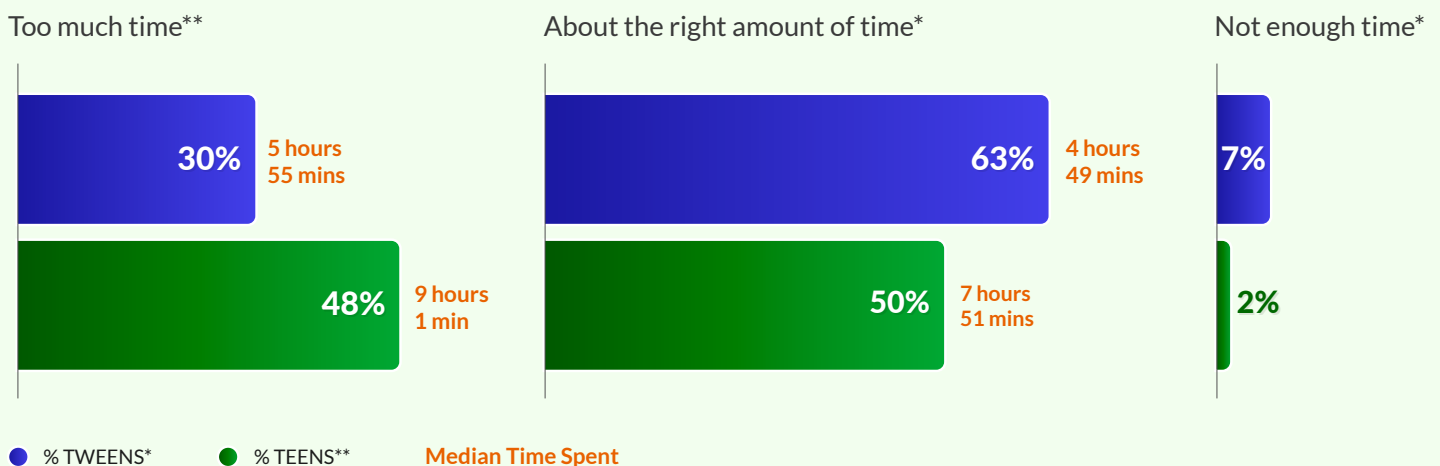
Teens are roughly split on how they feel about their screen time. About half (48%) think it's too much, and they are also the heaviest users.

Among teens, nearly half (48%) think they are spending too much time using screen media, while half (50%) think they are spending the right amount of time using it. Most tweens (63%) say they spend about the right amount of time on screens and devices. Teens and tweens who feel they are spending "too much time" using screen media for entertainment were also found to be using screen media for a longer median time than those who indicated they are spending "about the right amount of time."

Among tweens, the median amount of time spent using screen media for entertainment among those who think they are spending "about the right amount of time" is four hours and 49 minutes, more than an hour less than those who think they are spending "too much time" (five hours and 55 minutes). For teens, the median amount of time spent using screen media is seven hours and 51 minutes among those who think they are spending "about the right amount of time," and nine hours and 1 minute among those who think they are spending "too much time" on screen media.

FIGURE K:

What tweens and teens think about the amount of time they spend using screen media for entertainment



Base: tweens (n=614); teens (n=597).

*/** indicates a significant difference between the two age groups.

Q17. "Do you think you spend too much time, about the right amount of time, or not enough time on screens and devices for entertainment (not including time spent using screens for school)?"



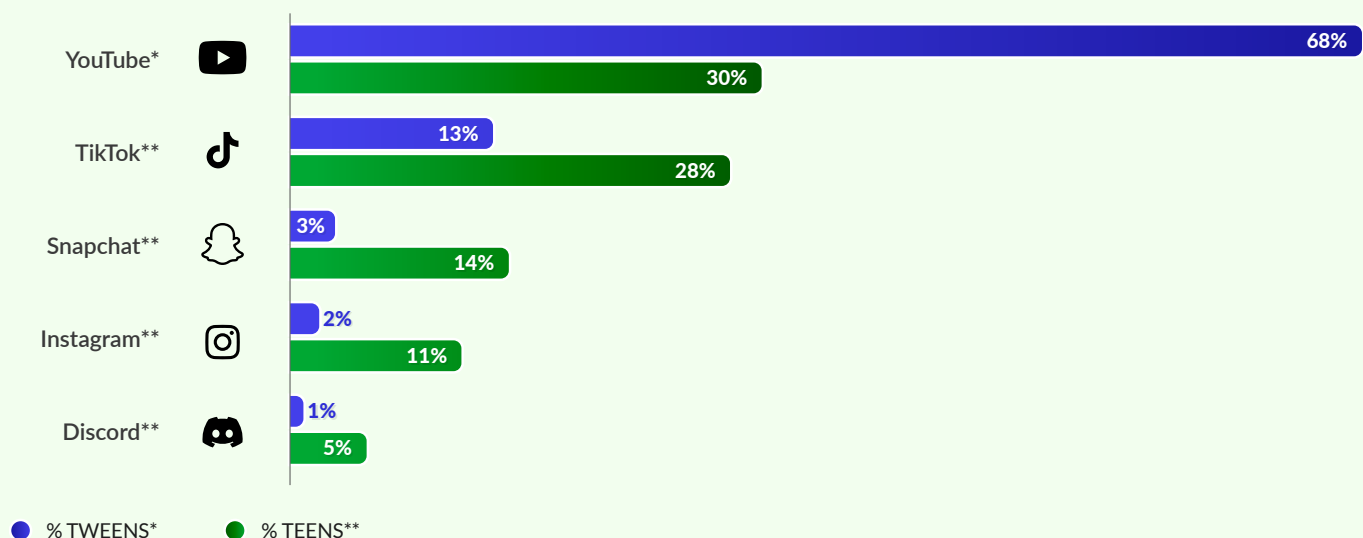
10.

YouTube is the favorite website or platform among tweens, with more than two-thirds of tweens ranking it as their number one video or social media platform. For teens, YouTube and TikTok vie for their number one website or platform.

Both tweens and teens use YouTube at high rates (81% of tweens and 78% of teens use it at least monthly), but tweens are more likely than teens to rank YouTube as their number one site (68% vs. 30% among teens). Nearly two-thirds of tweens (66%) report that YouTube is the one site they couldn't live without, compared to only about one-third of teens (32%). As kids move into their teen years, the top spot increasingly shifts to social media and short-form video apps instead, with YouTube, TikTok, and Snapchat in the top three spots. AI played a limited role in sites that were ranked as number one, with only 4% identifying ChatGPT as the one platform they could not live without.

FIGURE L:

Platforms or websites ranked #1 for usage (top 5), by age group



Base: Total who visit social media/video sites or AI chatbots/companions; tweens (n=548); teens (n=584).

*/** indicates a significant difference between the two age groups.

Q15. "Which of the following do you use the most?"



Digital divides persist.

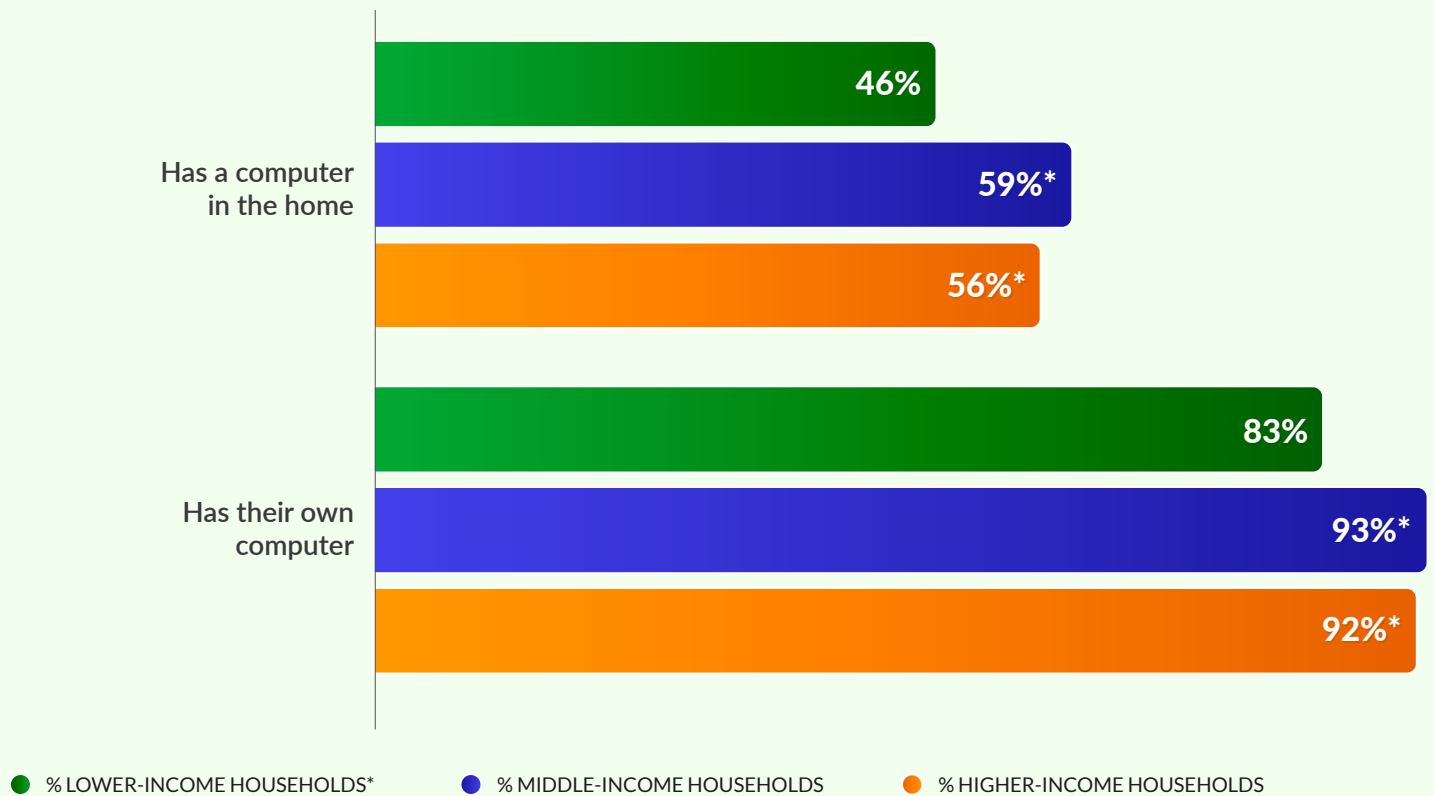
Many of the patterns of screen media use are fairly similar across demographic groups. However, device access differs in meaningful ways. Children from lower-income households report less access to computers, both in the home and personal devices. This difference in access may limit their access to the same digital learning tools as their peers in middle- and higher-income households. Phone ownership, by contrast, is similar across income groups, but phones may not be a substitute for a computer when it comes to completing schoolwork.

11.

Youth from lower-income households are 9 percentage points less likely than their higher-income peers to have a computer at home (83% vs. 92%), and 10 points less likely to have one of their own (46% vs. 56%), a divide that could shape their access to schoolwork tools, learning opportunities, and other resources.

While computer and laptop access at home is high overall among tweens and teens, it is significantly lower among youth from lower-income households (83%) than among middle- (93%) and higher-income (92%) households, a gap of 9 to 10 percentage points. This gap widens at the personal level, with less than half of youth from lower-income households having their own computer or laptop (46%) compared with more than half of youth from middle-income (59%) and higher-income (56%) households. This spread of 10 to 13 percentage points is a gap that could shape not just entertainment access but also access to devices that can help with schoolwork and learning.



FIGURE M:**Percentage of youth with a computer or laptop, by household income**

Base: Among ALL youth in each subgroup: lower income* (n=422); middle income (n=359); higher income (n=428).

* indicates a significant difference between subgroups such that middle-income and higher-income households are significantly higher than lower-income households for both conditions.

Note: "Lower" is household income of less than \$50,000, "middle" is household income of \$50,000 to less than \$100,000, and "higher" is household income of \$100,000 or more.



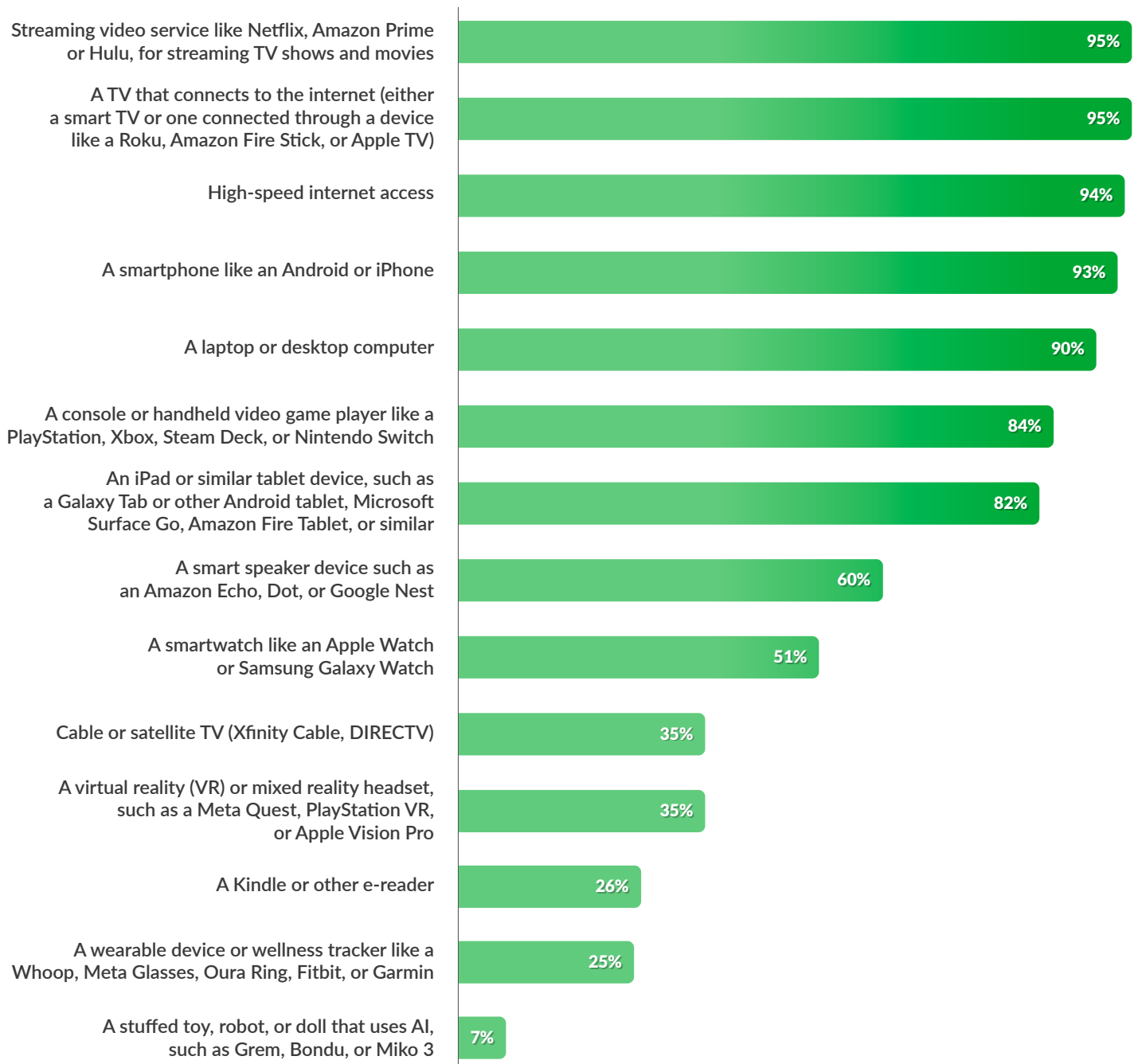
Detailed Findings

Media Devices: Access in the Home and Personal Ownership

Phones and platforms arrive early, and many children under 13 are using AI, short-form video, and social media, which are not meant for them.

Digital access is nearly universal, but personal ownership increases substantially with age for most devices. Most youth live in highly connected households, with the vast majority reporting access to streaming services (95%), internet-connected TVs (95%), high-speed internet (94%), smartphones (93%), and computers (90%).



FIGURE 1:**Percentage of youth with devices in the home**

Base: All youth age 9 to 17 (N=1,211).

Q1. "Which of the following items do you or someone else in your family have in your home?"

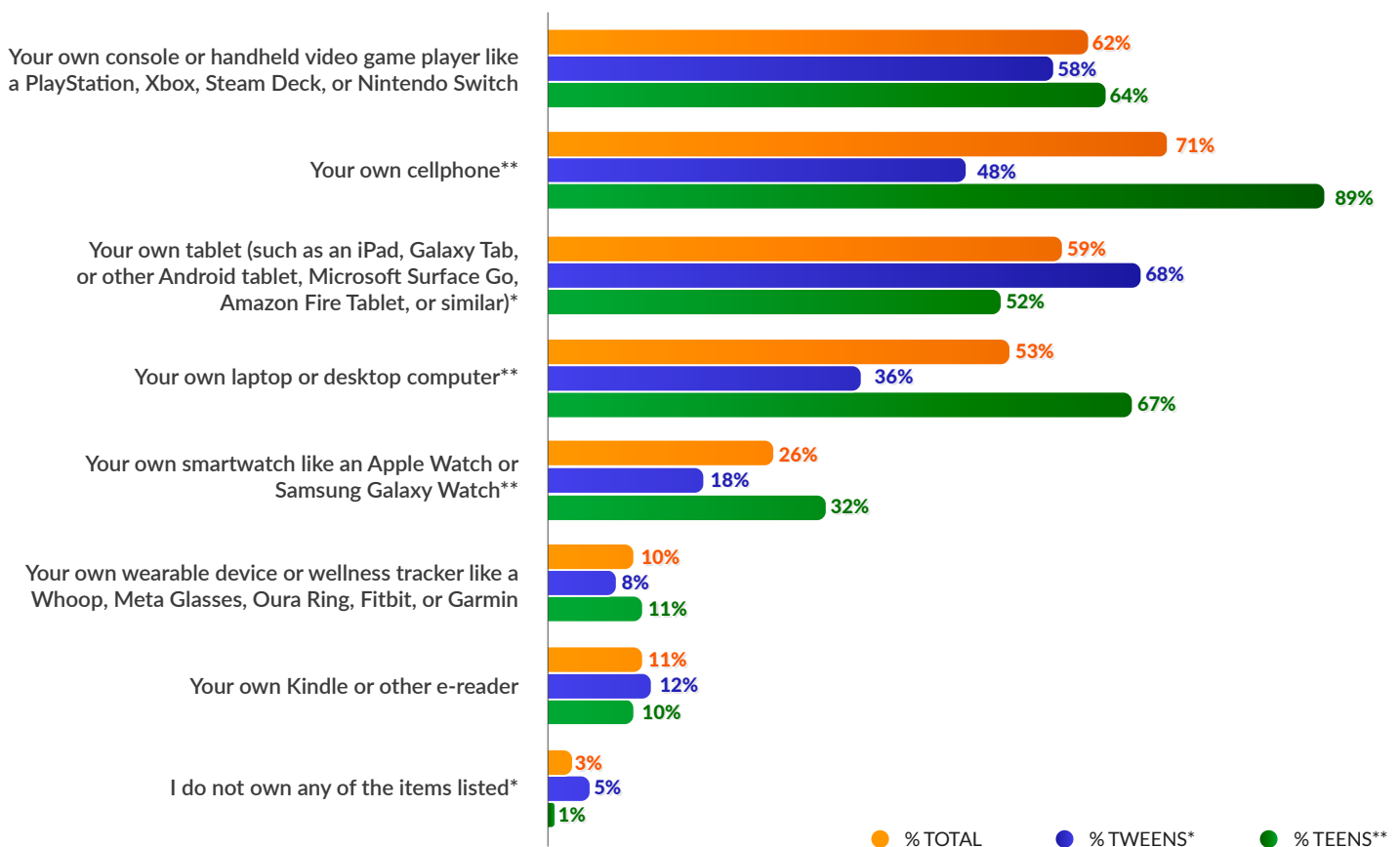


However, having access in the home does not necessarily mean having a personal device for tweens and teens. Personal ownership overall is highest for cellphones (71%), gaming consoles (62%), and tablets (59%).

Teens are far more likely than tweens to personally have their own cellphones and computers, while tweens are more likely than teens to have tablets. The largest device gaps between tweens and teens are with cellphones (48% for tweens vs. 89% for teens), laptops/computers (36% vs. 67%), and smartwatches (18% vs. 32%). In contrast, ownership of gaming consoles is relatively high across both age groups (58% of tweens and 64% of teens), while tweens are more likely to have their own tablets (68% vs. 52% of teens).

FIGURE 2:

Percentage of youth who have their own devices, by age group



Base: Total (N=1,211); tweens (n=614); teens (n=597).

*/** indicates a significant difference between the two age groups.

Note: Personal cellphone ownership includes both smartphones and basic call/text phones.

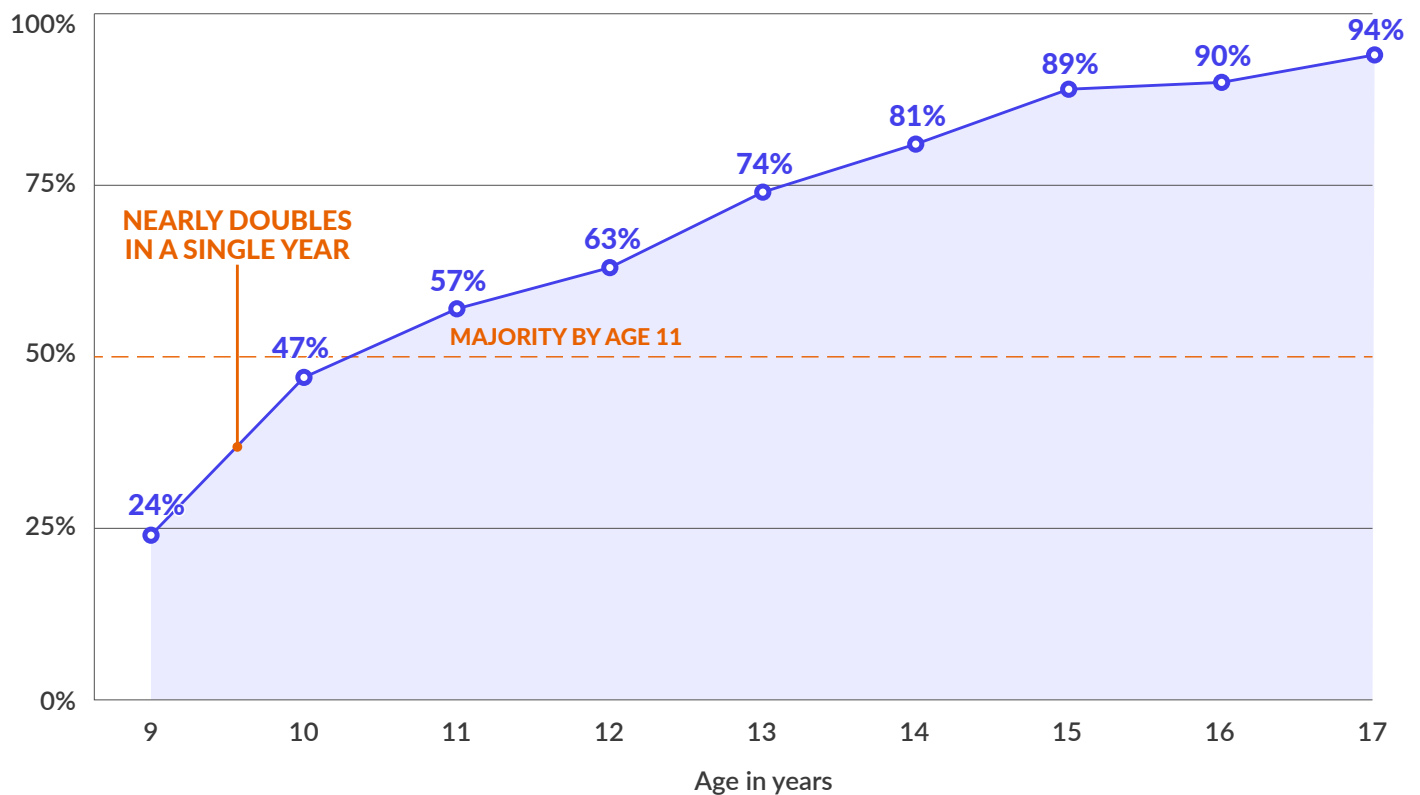
Q2. "Which of the following items do YOU PERSONALLY have? (Not one that belongs to someone else in your house.)"



Smartphone ownership rises steadily, from just 24% of 9-year-olds to 94% of 17-year-olds, with ownership among all youth exceeding 50% by age 11. The biggest jump in personal ownership occurs from age 9 to 10, which may coincide with the transition from elementary to middle school for many youth.

FIGURE 3:

Percentage of youth at each age who have their own smartphone



Base: Among ALL youth in each age: 9-year-olds (n=238); 10-year-olds (n=118); 11-year-olds (n=145); 12-year-olds (n=113); 13-year-olds (n=108); 14-year-olds (n=112); 15-year-olds (n=105); 16-year-olds (n=122); 17-year-olds (n=150).

AI Usage Among Tweens and Teens

Half of tweens age 9 to 12 already use AI chatbots or companions, and by the teen years AI use has become about as common as social media—though few users say they enjoy it "a lot."

AI has moved into the mainstream of youth digital behavior, particularly among teens. Nearly two-thirds of all youth (65%) report ever using AI in their free time, including 77% of teens compared with 49% of tweens. Among those who have used AI, ChatGPT is the most commonly used, having been used by 79% of young people. Teens are significantly more likely to report using ChatGPT (84%) compared to tweens (64%). Google Gemini is the next most common AI chatbot/companion that youth reported using (48%), followed by Meta AI (25%), Snapchat My AI (19%), and Microsoft Copilot (15%). Teens report higher usage than tweens for nearly every AI platform measured, suggesting that AI adoption increases during adolescence.

"For ChatGPT, I would use it for a step-by-step guide on how to do math, for example, if my teacher didn't explain it and I had a question on a certain topic, I would kind of ask and read through it."

Girl, age 17

FIGURE 4:

Percentage of youth who use AI in their free time, by age group



Base: Total (N=1,211); tweens (n=614); teens (n=597).

* indicates a significant difference between the two age groups.

Q4. "How often do you do each of the following activities in your free time? — Use AI (such as AI chatbots or AI companions like ChatGPT, Copilot, Grok, Character.AI, Replika, or similar)."



Teens are not only more likely to use AI, but also use it more frequently.

Nearly half of teens (47%) use AI at least weekly, compared with just 26% of tweens. Daily use is also more common among teens (16% vs. 10%), while tweens are more than twice as likely as teens to report never using AI (51% vs. 23%). Despite these differences in adoption and frequency, enthusiasm for AI remains relatively modest. Only 12% of youth overall say they enjoy using AI "a lot," with similar levels reported among tweens (15%) and teens (11%). Likewise, among AI users, daily time spent using AI is relatively limited and nearly identical across age groups (with both tweens and teens using for about one hour).²

"I like that it works quick, and I kind of want to get premium because you can have more questions that you can ask [it]. But I like how it thinks really fast and I love the way it words things."

Girl, age 14

TABLE 1:

AI chatbot/companion usage: enjoyment, frequency, and time spent, by age group

	Total	Tweens	Teens
		(a)	(b)
Percent who enjoy using AI "a lot"	12%	15%	11%
Percent who use AI ...			
• Once a week or more (NET)	38%	26%	47% ^a
▪ Every day	13%	10%	16% ^a
▪ At least once a week	25%	16%	32% ^a
• Less than weekly (NET)	62%	74% ^b	53%
▪ At least once a month	14%	13%	15%
▪ Less than once a month	13%	10%	15% ^a
▪ Never	35%	51% ^b	23%
Time spent: Median (mean) daily time spent using AI among users.	1:00 (1:14)	1:00 (1:21)	1:00 (1:11)

Base for enjoyment: Ever used AI (such as AI chatbots or AI companions like ChatGPT, Copilot, Grok, Character.AI, Replika, or similar): Total (N=755); tweens (n=293); teens (n=462).

Q7. "How much do you ENJOY doing each of the following activities?"

Base for frequency: Total (N=1,211); tweens (n=614); teens (n=597).

Q4. "How often do you do each of the following activities in your free time?"

Base for time spent among those who use AI: Total (N=172); tweens (n=54); teens (n=118).

Q6. "Now we'd like to know how much TIME you spent doing each activity YESTERDAY for fun."

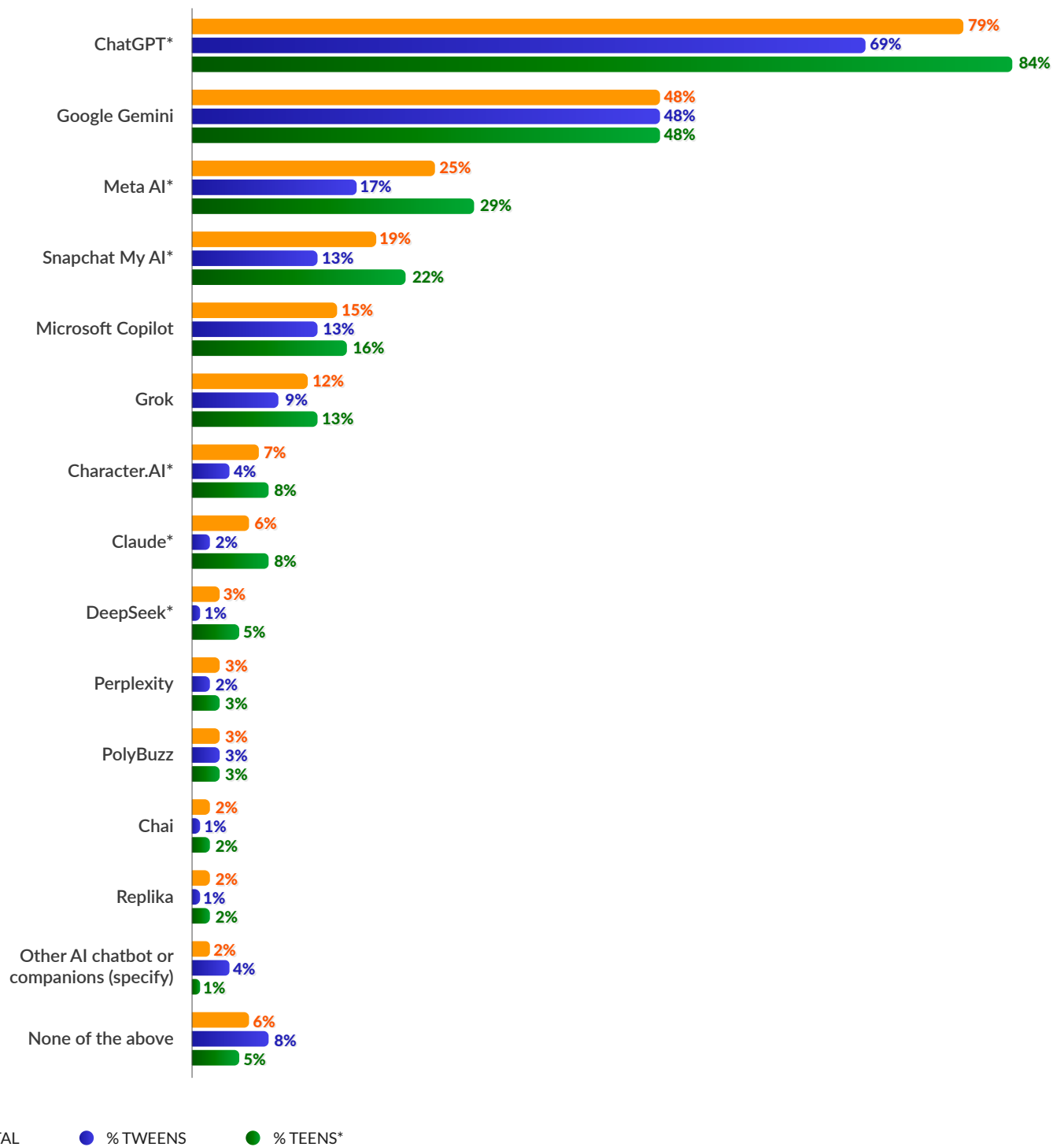
Note: Items with different superscripts (a, b) differ significantly ($p < .05$). Items with no superscript do not differ significantly.

² We report the median average, which reflects the midpoint value, where half of users fall above and half fall below, offering a better presentation of the typical user.



FIGURE 5:

AI chatbots and companions ever used, by age group



Base: Total (N=1,211); tweens (n=614); teens (n=597).

* indicates a significant difference between the two age groups.

Q8. "Which of the following AI chatbots or AI companions have you EVER used?"



Entertainment Screen Usage Frequency Overall

A typical tween's or teen's day is crowded with media and technology, and short-form video (such as TikTok and YouTube Shorts) and AI tools (like ChatGPT and Gemini) are becoming a notable part of it.

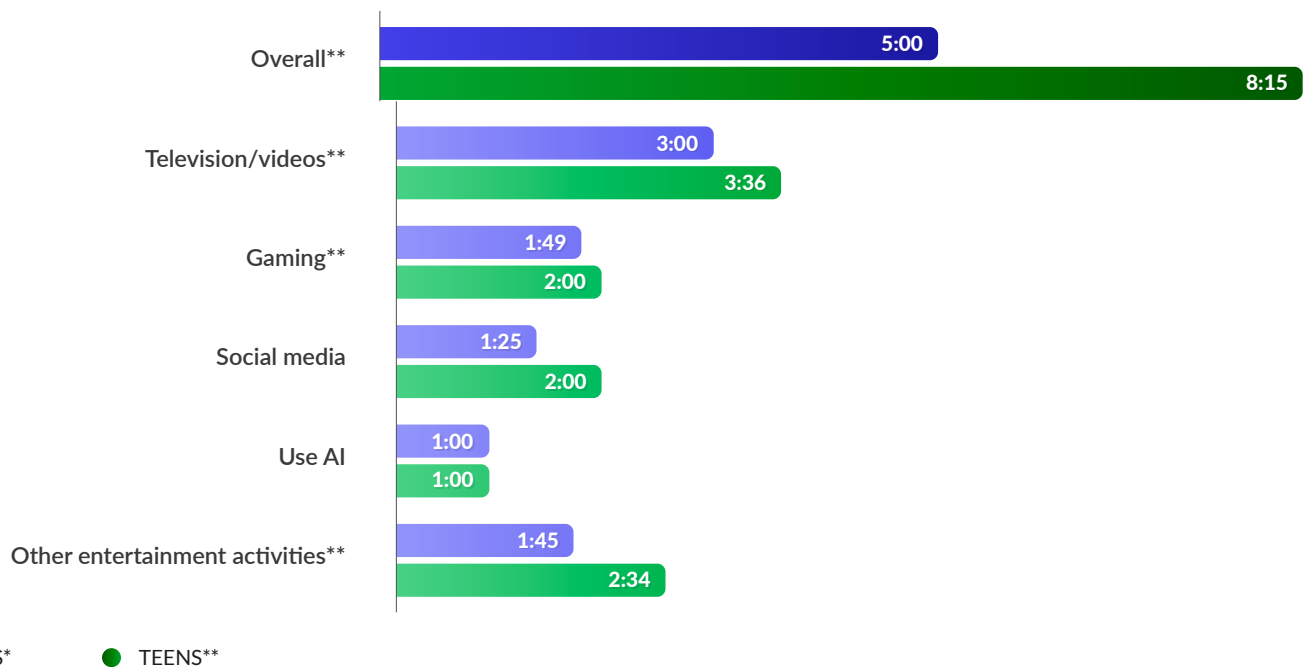
As age increases, so does media use, with a typical teen averaging eight hours and 15 minutes per day, compared with five hours among tweens across all types of media and devices. This increase in time spent on devices as youth age is driven in part by differences in gaming, short-form video viewing, streaming content, and other digital activities. In contrast, there is no significant difference by gender, with boys and girls reporting similar levels of total entertainment screen use despite differences in the types of activities they prefer.



A typical teen spends about 8 hours a day on screen media for entertainment, while a typical tween spends about 5 hours—and more than 4 in 10 teens are spending 10 hours or more.

FIGURE 6:

Typical daily entertainment screen use, by age group



Base: tweens (n=614); teens (n=597).

*/** indicates a significant difference between the two age groups.

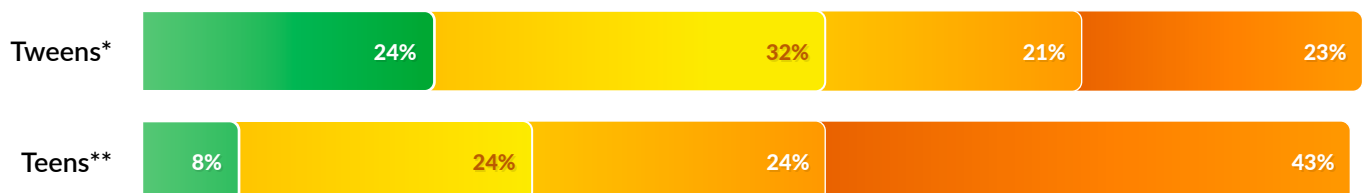
Note: The overall screen media use calculation reflects time spent on all screen media captured among all respondents; each individual activity reflects time spent only among youth who use that activity, and therefore may not sum to the overall amount.

Q6. "Now we'd like to know how much TIME you spent doing each activity YESTERDAY for fun."

Heavy daily screen use becomes markedly more common as youth move into the teen years. The share who use screen media for 10 hours or more per day climbs from less than one-quarter of tweens (23%) to more than 4 in 10 teens (43%).

FIGURE 7:

Percentage of tweens and teens using screen media for entertainment, by hour range



● % UNDER 3 HOURS* ● % 3 TO 6 HOURS* ● % 6 TO 10 HOURS ● % 10 HOURS OR MORE**

Base: tweens (n=614); teens (n=597).

*/** indicates a significant difference between the two age groups.

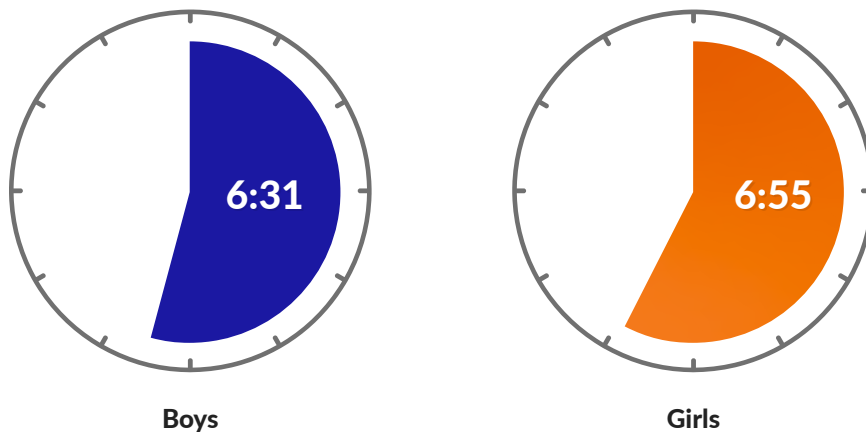
Q6. "Now we'd like to know how much TIME you spent doing each activity YESTERDAY for fun."



Boys and girls report similar levels of overall entertainment media use.

FIGURE 8:

Typical daily entertainment screen use in hours, by gender



Base: boys (n=655); girls (n=546).

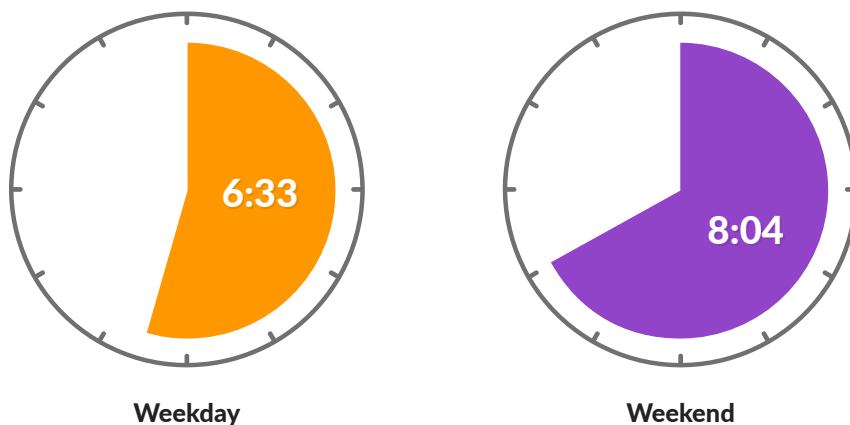
No significant difference between genders.

Q6. "Now we'd like to know how much TIME you spent doing each activity YESTERDAY for fun."

When looking at all tweens and teens, there is no significant difference between weekday and weekend usage for total screen media time. Tweens, however, use screen media for entertainment significantly more on the weekends than weekdays (median average of seven hours and 45 minutes on weekends vs. four hours and 49 minutes on weekdays).

FIGURE 9:

Typical daily entertainment screen use on weekdays and weekends

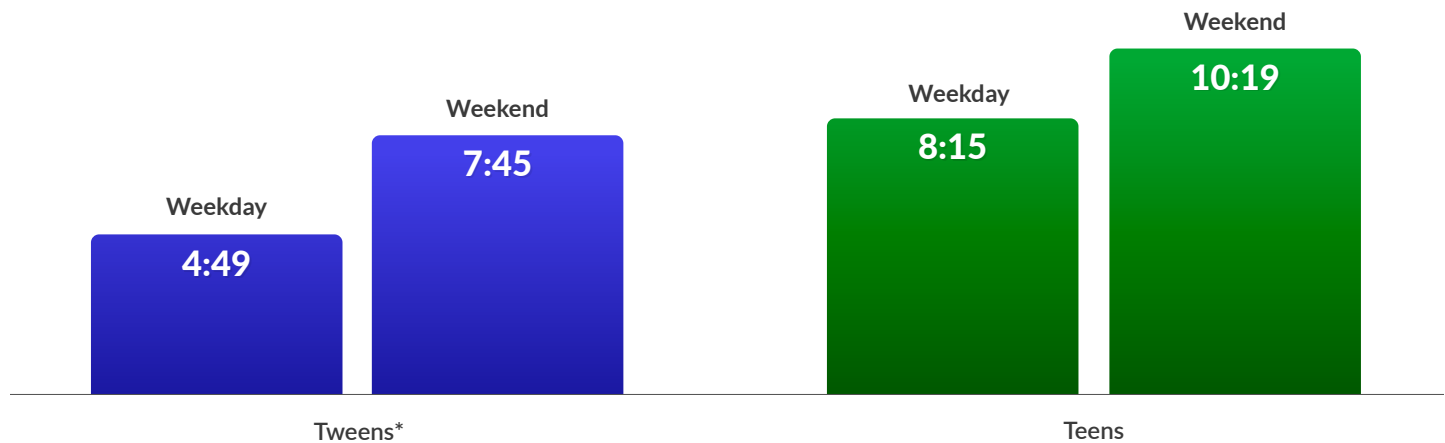


Base: weekday (n=1,102); weekend (n=109).

No significant difference between weekdays and weekends among all.

Q6. "Now we'd like to know how much TIME you spent doing each activity YESTERDAY for fun."



FIGURE 10:**Typical daily entertainment screen use on weekdays and weekends, by age group**

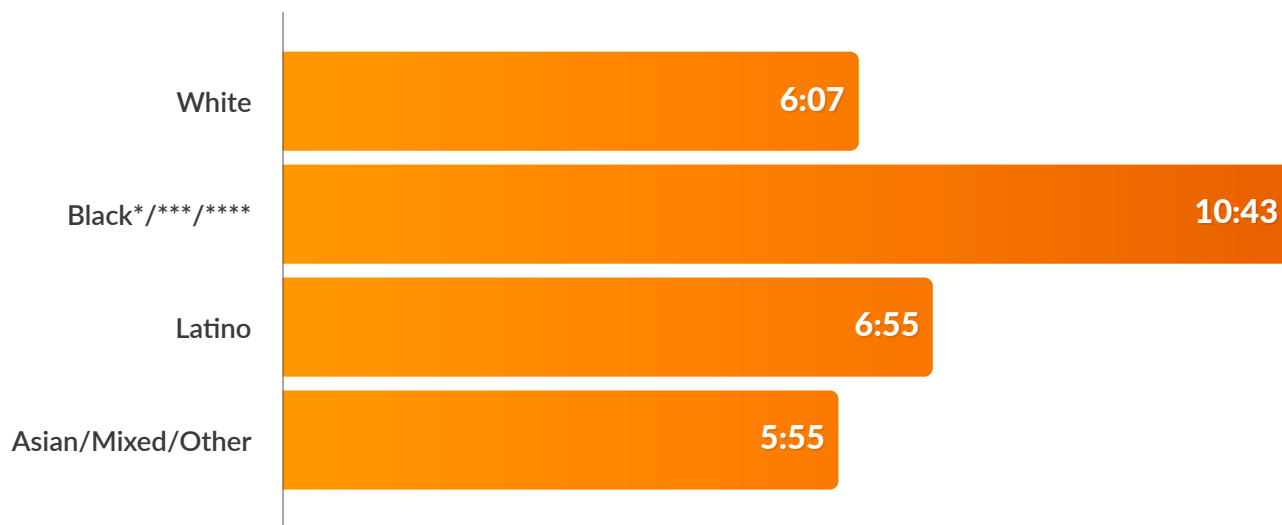
Base: Overall weekday (N=1,102); tweens (n=550); teens (n=552). Overall weekend (N=109); tweens (n=64); teens (n=45).

* indicates a significant difference between weekday vs. weekend use.

Q6. "Now we'd like to know how much TIME you spent doing each activity YESTERDAY for fun."

Black youth report significantly higher median daily entertainment screen use (10 hours and 43 minutes) than youth from other racial/ethnic groups.

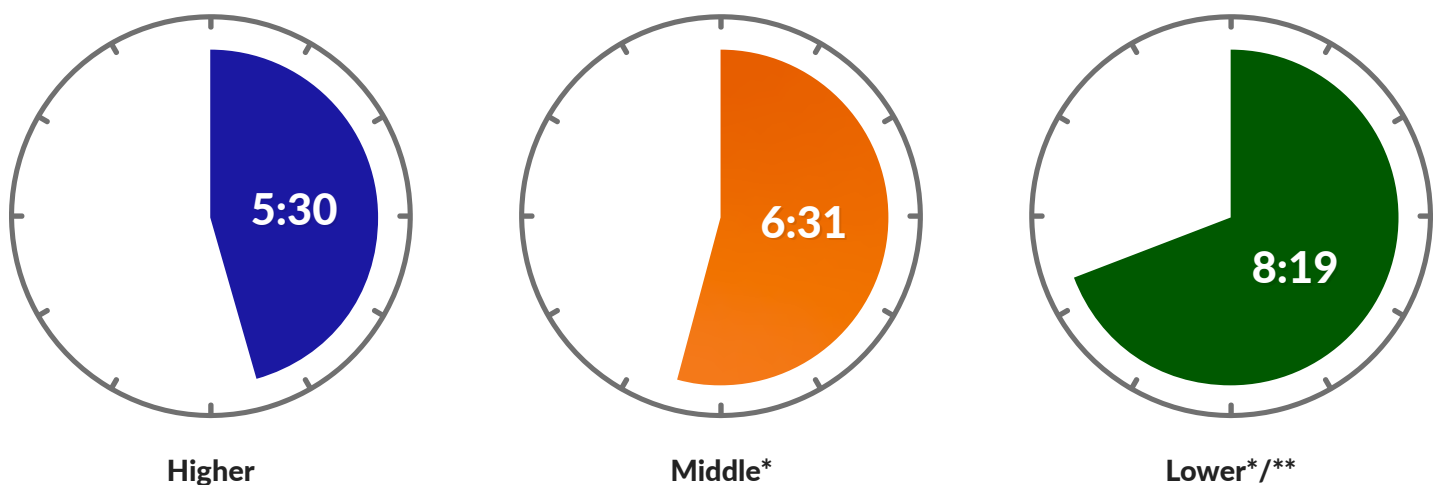
Youth from lower-income households report significantly higher time spent on media overall, with a median average of eight hours and 19 minutes of entertainment screen use per day, compared with six hours and 31 minutes among youth from middle-income households and five hours and 30 minutes among youth from higher-income households.

FIGURE 11:**Typical daily entertainment screen use, by race/ethnicity**

Base: White* (n=614); Black** (n=159); Latino*** (n=256); Asian/Multiracial/Other**** (n=170).

*/**/*** indicates a significant difference between subgroups.

Q6. "Now we'd like to know how much TIME you spent doing each activity YESTERDAY for fun."

FIGURE 12:**Typical daily entertainment screen use, by household income**

Base: higher income* (n=428); middle income** (n=359); lower income*** (n=422).

*/**/*** indicates a significant difference between subgroups.

Note: "Lower" is household income of less than \$50,000, "middle" is household income of \$50,000 to less than \$100,000, and "higher" is household income of \$100,000 or more.

Q6. "Now we'd like to know how much TIME you spent doing each activity YESTERDAY for fun."



Entertainment Screen Usage Frequency, by Media Type

For this report, youth were asked to estimate how much time they spent on the previous day engaging in each activity across all of their devices. These estimates reflect the total time spent engaging in an activity, rather than time devoted exclusively to that activity. Because youth frequently multitask, time estimates for different activities may overlap. For example, a respondent may be messaging friends while playing video games, or scrolling social media while watching TV. As a result, the total time reported across activities should not be interpreted as representing distinct, non-overlapping periods of device use.

General Media Activities

A wide range of media activities are part of youths' free time experiences, and several forms of entertainment reach near-universal participation.

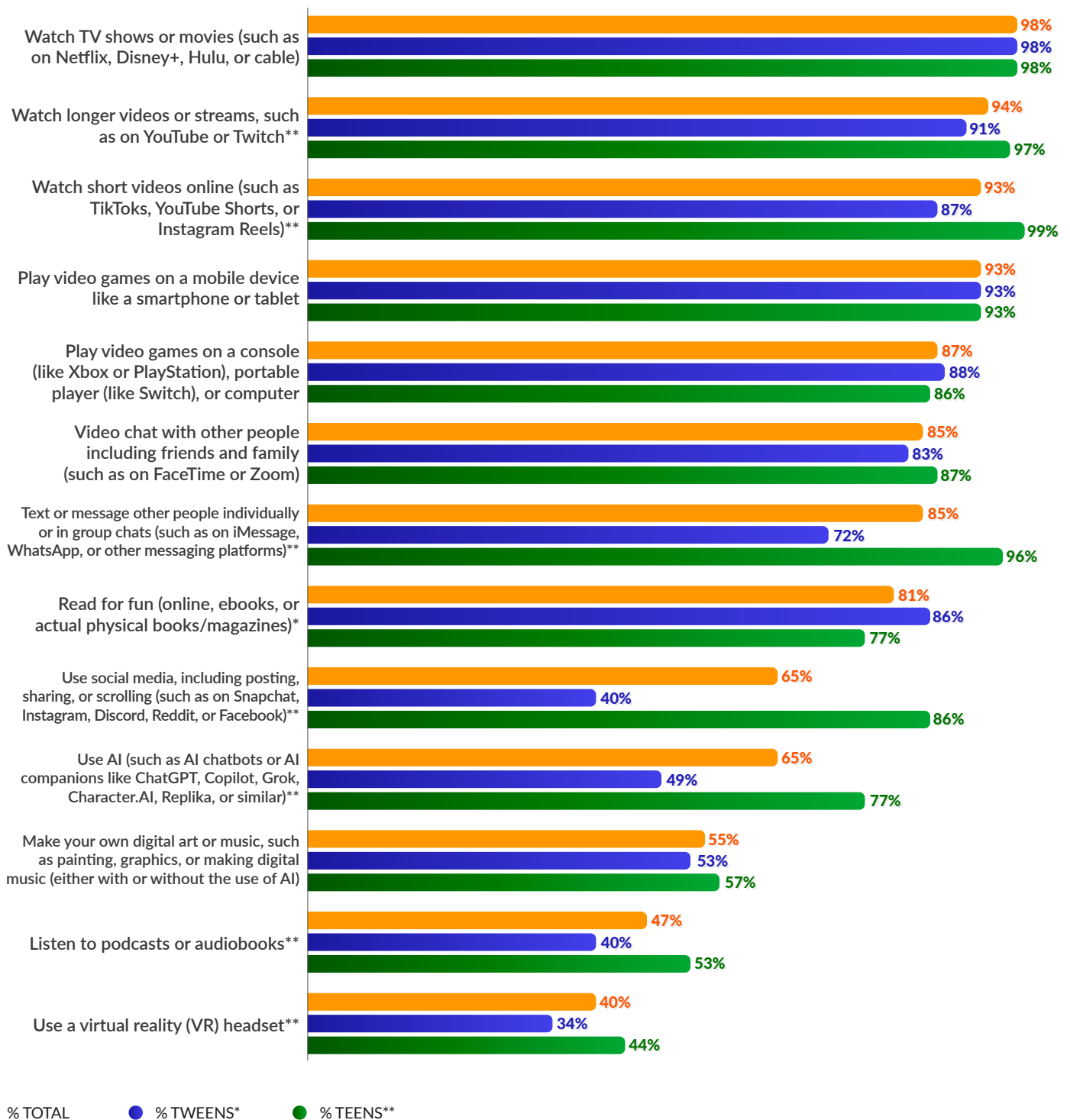
Nearly all tweens and teens report spending free time watching TV shows or movies (98% each), playing video games on mobile devices (93% each), playing console or computer games (88% of tweens and 86% of teens), and video chatting with others (83% and 87%). There are some age differences that emerge for activities that are more social, interactive, and technology-driven.

Engagement in a range of digital activities increases as youth move from the tween into the teen years, including watching longer videos or streams (91% of tweens to 97% of teens), watching short-form videos (87% to 99%), texting or messaging others (72% to 96%), using social media (40% to 86%), using AI tools (49% to 77%), listening to podcasts or audiobooks (40% to 53%), and using a VR headset (34% to 44%). The largest gaps are observed for social media, messaging, and AI use, suggesting that as youth move into later adolescence, media engagement increasingly expands beyond entertainment into communication, content creation, information seeking, and technology exploration.



FIGURE 13:

Activities done in free time, by age group



Base: Total (N=1,211); tweens (n=614); teens (n=597).

*/** indicates a significant difference between subgroups.

Q4. "How often do you do each of the following activities in your free time?" (Percentages reported are those who answered "Every day," "At least once a week," "At least once a month," or "Less than once a month.")



Daily Media Activities

As youth age, daily media use increasingly centers on social connection, content consumption, and gaming. Teens are significantly more likely than tweens to engage every day in most online activities, including watching short-form videos (82% vs. 58%), texting or messaging others (76% vs. 39%), using social media (63% vs. 23%), watching longer videos or streams (57% vs. 51%), video chatting (31% vs. 23%), playing video games on a console (36% vs. 25%), and using AI tools (16% vs. 10%). In contrast, tweens are significantly more likely to play games on mobile devices (52% vs. 44%) and to read for fun (35% vs. 15%) on a daily basis. Daily use of TV shows or movies, making digital art or music, listening to podcasts or audiobooks, and VR does not differ significantly by age.

TABLE 2:

Daily media activities, by age group

Percentage who report doing the following "every day"...	Tweens	Teens
	(a)	(b)
Watch short videos online (such as TikToks, YouTube Shorts, or Instagram Reels)	58%	82% ^a
Text or message other people individually or in group chats (such as on iMessage, WhatsApp, or other messaging platforms)	39%	76% ^a
Watch longer videos or streams, such as on YouTube or Twitch	51%	57% ^a
Watch TV shows or movies (such as on Netflix, Disney+, Hulu, or cable)	51%	48%
Play video games on a mobile device like a smartphone or tablet	52% ^b	44%
Use social media, including posting, sharing, or scrolling (such as on Snapchat, Instagram, Discord, Reddit, or Facebook)	23%	63% ^a
Play video games on a console (like Xbox or PlayStation), portable player (like Switch), or computer	25%	36% ^a
Video chat with other people including friends and family (such as on FaceTime or Zoom)	23%	31% ^a
Read for fun (online, ebooks, or actual physical books/magazines)	35% ^b	15%
Use AI (such as AI chatbots or AI companions like ChatGPT, Copilot, Grok, Character.AI, Replika, or similar)	10%	16% ^a
Make your own digital art or music, such as painting, graphics, or making digital music (either with or without the use of AI)	9%	9%
Listen to podcasts or audiobooks	7%	7%
Use a virtual reality (VR) headset	6%	5%

Base: tweens (n=614); teens (n=597).

Note: Items with different superscripts (a, b) differ significantly ($p < .05$). Items with no superscript do not differ significantly. Significance should be read across rows over time and within each category (i.e., percent who used).



Media Time for Users

Findings by Age

Media device usage increases and becomes more socially oriented as youth move from the tween (9–12) to teen (13–17) years. Teens are significantly more likely than tweens to use social media (79% vs. 50%), text or message others (81% vs. 61%), video chat (40% vs. 34%), and engage in other online activities (31% vs. 18%). While gaming participation is similar across age groups, teens spend more time gaming when they do participate. AI use is also more common among teens (26% vs. 18%), though it remains a relatively niche activity compared with social media, gaming, and video viewing.

Television and videos are the dominant forms of screen media for both groups, accounting for the greatest amount of time spent overall. A typical tween reports spending three hours on TV/videos in a day, while a typical teen reports just over three and a half (3:36) hours per day. Approximately two-thirds of tweens (67%) and teens (64%) watched TV shows or movies, while short-form video viewing was especially widespread, reaching 85% of teens and 73% of tweens. Across nearly every activity, teens spend more time than tweens, reflecting a broader increase in digital engagement during adolescence.

One notable exception is reading, where tweens are significantly more likely than teens to participate (45% vs. 23%). For teens who do read, they are spending nearly a half hour more time reading than tweens (mean average of one hour and 46 minutes vs. one hour and 17 minutes among tweens). Overall, the findings suggest a shift from a more balanced mix of entertainment and reading among tweens toward heavier screen use that is increasingly centered on social connection, communication, and digital content consumption among teens.

Short-form video, such as TikTok and YouTube Shorts, has become one of the biggest parts of kids' media diets, while reading for fun is one of the only activities that diminishes as kids get older.



TABLE 3:

Entertainment screen media usage among tweens and teens who use each item

	Used on Previous Day			Median (Mean) Time Among Users		
	Tweens	Teens	Overall	Tweens	Teens	Overall
	(a)	(b)		(a)	(b)	
Social media ¹	50%	79% ^a	71%	1:25 (2:19)	2:00 (2:30)	1:58 (2:28)
Gaming	54%	58%	56%	1:49 (2:06)	2:00 (2:50) ^a	2:00 (2:31)
Television/videos	92%	96% ^a	94%	3:00 (3:41)	3:36 (4:46) ^a	3:03 (4:18)
• TV shows or movies	67%	64%	65%	1:58 (2:03)	2:00 (2:29) ^a	2:00 (2:17)
• Short videos online	73%	85% ^a	79%	1:19 (1:54)	1:55 (2:16) ^a	1:30 (2:07)
• Longer videos or streams	55%	57%	56%	1:30 (1:47)	1:25 (2:04)	1:30 (1:57)
Use AI	18%	26% ^a	23%	1:00 (1:21)	1:00 (1:11)	1:00 (1:14)
Other entertainment activities	80%	86% ^a	84%	1:45 (3:02)	2:34 (4:40) ^a	2:02 (3:58)
• Making digital art/music	18%	17%	18%	1:30 (1:28)	1:04 (2:08)	1:12 (1:51)
• Listening to podcasts or audiobooks	17%	13%	14%	#	#	1:01 (1:54)
• Reading	45% ^b	23%	33%	1:00 (1:17)	1:00 (1:46)	1:00 (1:27)
• Using VR	20%	14%	17%	#	#	2:00 (2:46)
• Text or message other people	61%	81% ^a	73%	1:00 (1:46)	1:15 (2:23) ^a	1:04 (2:10)
• Video chat with other people	34%	40% ^a	38%	1:01 (1:46)	1:30 (2:30) ^a	1:15 (2:11)
• Any other online activities (like shopping, email, coding, or using other apps)	18%	31% ^a	25%	1:00 (1:19)	1:00 (1:44)	1:00 (1:35)
Total media	44%	56%	100%	5:00 (7:32)	8:15 (12:09)	6:45 (10:06)

Base: Overall (N=1,211); tweens (n=614); teens (n=597).

Base sizes for time spent vary by item (youth were asked about time spent for each item used on previous day).

indicates sample size is too small for reliable results (n<50).

Note: Items with different superscripts (a, b) differ significantly ($p<.05$). Items with no superscript do not differ significantly. Significance should be read across rows over time and within each category (i.e., percent who used; median time among users).

Findings by Gender

Girls are significantly more likely than boys to use social media on a given day (75% vs. 66%) and to watch TV shows or movies (70% vs. 61%). Girls are also more likely to video chat with others (42% vs. 34%), suggesting that their screen media use is more centered on social connection and interpersonal communication. While texting participation is higher among girls (78% vs. 68%), girls who text also spend significantly more time doing so (mean average of 2:26 vs. 1:51), suggesting deeper engagement with this activity.

In contrast, boys are significantly more likely than girls to participate in gaming (68% vs. 43%), watch longer-form videos or streams (59% vs. 52%), and use virtual reality (20% vs. 12%). While time spent is generally similar across most activities, girls report significantly greater engagement in the broader category of "other" entertainment activities (mean average of 4:24 vs. 3:30 among users), driven in part by their levels of participation in video chatting and time spent texting compared to boys.

Overall, girls appear more likely to gravitate toward social and communication-oriented activities, including social media and video chatting, while boys are more likely to engage in gaming, streaming content, and emerging technologies such as VR. Although participation patterns differ across several activities, both groups show equally high participation in short-form video viewing (79%), underscoring the broad appeal of this content format across youth regardless of gender.

TABLE 4:

Typical daily entertainment screen media usage, by gender

	Used on Previous Day			Median (Mean) Time Among Users		
	Girls	Boys	Overall	Girls	Boys	Overall
Social media	(a) 75% ^b	(b) 66%	71%	(a) 2:00 (2:31)	(b) 1:40 (2:26)	1:58 (2:28)
Gaming	43%	68% ^a	56%	1:40 (2:15)	2:00 (2:39) ^a	2:00 (2:31)
Television/videos	94%	95%	94%	3:04 (4:24)	3:00 (4:12)	3:03 (4:18)
• TV shows or movies	70% ^b	61%	65%	2:00 (2:18)	2:00 (2:16)	2:00 (2:17)
• Short videos online	79%	79%	79%	1:30 (2:09)	1:30 (2:06)	1:30 (2:07)
• Longer videos or streams	52%	59% ^a	56%	1:30 (2:01)	1:10 (1:54)	1:30 (1:57)
Use AI	24%	22%	23%	1:00 (1:10)	1:00 (1:18)	1:00 (1:14)
Other entertainment activities	86% ^b	81%	83%	2:16 (4:24) ^b	2:00 (3:30)	2:02 (3:58)
• Making digital art/music	18%	17%	18%	1:30 (2:09)	1:10 (1:30)	1:12 (1:51)
• Listening to podcasts or audiobooks	14%	15%	14%	#	#	1:01 (1:54)
• Reading	36%	30%	33%	1:00 (1:34)	1:00 (1:17)	1:00 (1:27)
• Using VR	12%	20% ^a	17%	#	2:00 (3:12)	2:00 (2:46)
• Text or message other people	78% ^b	68%	73%	1:10 (2:26) ^b	1:01 (1:51)	1:04 (2:10)
• Video chat with other people	42% ^b	34%	38%	1:19 (2:13)	1:10 (2:03)	1:15 (2:11)
• Any other online activities (like shopping, email, coding, or using other apps)	26%	24%	25%	1:01 (1:38)	1:00 (1:34)	1:01 (1:35)
Total media	48%	52%	99%	6:55 (10:22)	6:31 (9:46)	6:45 (10:06)

Base: Overall (N=1,211); girls (n=546); boys (n=655).

Base sizes for usage vary by item (youth were asked usage for each item owned).

indicates sample size is too small for reliable results (n<50).

Note: Items with different superscripts (a, b) differ significantly ($p<.05$). Items with no superscript do not differ significantly. Significance should be read across rows over time and within each category (i.e., percent who used; median time among users).



Findings by Race and Ethnicity

Social media, gaming, TV shows/movies, short-form video, and longer video viewing are broadly common across racial/ethnic groups. Black and Latino youth are significantly more likely than White youth to video chat with others (51% and 41% vs. 32%), while White youth are more likely than Latino youth to text or message others (76% vs. 68%).

TABLE 5:

Typical entertainment screen media usage, by race/ethnicity

	Used on Previous Day			
	White	Black	Latino	Asian/ Multiracial/ Other
	(a)	(b)	(c)	(d)
Social media	75%	68%	69%	65%
Gaming	53%	61%	57%	62%
Television/videos	94%	94%	95%	95%
• TV shows or movies	64%	71%	67%	61%
• Short videos online	79%	82%	76%	83%
• Longer videos or streams	52%	52%	57%	68% ^{a,b}
Use AI	22%	28%	23%	21%
Other entertainment activities	85% ^c	80%	78%	89% ^c
• Making digital art/music	17%	19%	20%	15%
• Listening to podcasts or audiobooks	12%	18%	15%	14%
• Reading	34% ^b	23%	31%	40% ^b
• Using VR	14%	25%	17%	15%
• Text or message other people	76% ^c	73%	68%	72%
• Video chat with other people	32%	51% ^a	41% ^a	41%
• Any other online activities (like shopping, email, coding, or using other apps)	21%	23%	24%	38% ^{a,b,c}

Base sizes vary by activity.

Note: "Other" includes Asian, Native Hawaiian, Pacific Islander, multiracial, and refusals. Items with different superscripts (a, b, c, d) differ significantly ($p < .05$). Items with no superscript do not differ significantly.



Black youth consistently report the highest levels of engagement across several activities. Compared with White, Latino, and Asian/Multiracial/Other youth, Black youth spend significantly more time using social media (median of 2:30 vs. 1:30, 1:49, and 1:30, respectively), watching TV shows or movies (2:10 vs. 2:00, 2:00, and 1:30), watching longer videos or streams (2:00 vs. 1:15, 1:22, and 1:15), and texting or messaging others (1:45 vs. 1:04, 1:01, and 1:01). Black youth also spend more time video chatting (1:58) than Asian/Multiracial/Other youth (1:01).

TABLE 6:**Typical entertainment screen media usage, by race/ethnicity**

	Median (Mean) Time Among Users			
	White	Black	Latino	Asian/ Multiracial/ Other
	(a)	(b)	(c)	(d)
Social media	1:30 (2:15)	2:30 (3:30) ^{a,c,d}	1:49 (2:31)	1:30 (2:07)
Gaming	2:00 (2:27)	2:49 (3:10)	2:00 (2:28)	1:58 (2:13)
Television/videos	3:00 (3:57)	4:55 (6:19) ^{a,c,d}	3:10 (4:14)	3:00 (3:55)
• TV shows or movies	2:00 (2:11)	2:10 (2:57) ^{a,c,d}	2:00 (2:16)	1:30 (2:02)
• Short videos online	1:30 (2:01)	2:03 (2:58) ^{a,c,d}	1:30 (2:04)	1:30 (1:52)
• Longer videos or streams	1:15 (1:49)	2:00 (3:04) ^{a,c,d}	1:22 (1:51)	1:15 (1:44)
Use AI	1:00 (1:09)	#	#	#
Other entertainment activities	2:00 (3:35)	4:04 (6:14) ^{a,c,d}	2:15 (4:04)	1:45 (3:23)
• Making digital art/music	1:01 (1:37)	#	#	#
• Listening to podcasts or audiobooks	#	#	#	#
• Reading	1:00 (1:27)	#	1:00 (1:37)	1:00 (1:07)
• Using VR	#	#	#	#
• Text or message other people	1:04 (2:06)	1:45 (3:03) ^{a,c,d}	1:01 (1:58)	1:01 (2:03)
• Video chat with other people	1:25 (2:09)	1:58 (2:55) ^d	1:01 (2:09)	1:01 (1:37)
• Any other online activities (like shopping, email, coding, or using other apps)	1:00 (1:36)	#	1:15 (1:51) ^d	1:00 (00:59)

Base sizes vary by activity.

indicates sample size is too small for reliable results ($n < 50$).

Note: "Other" includes Asian, Native Hawaiian, Pacific Islander, multiracial, and refusals. Items with different superscripts (a, b, c, d) differ significantly ($p < .05$). Items with no superscript do not differ significantly.



Social Media/Video Site Usage and Gaming Habits

While YouTube is the most widely used platform across both age groups (81% of tweens and 78% of teens), teens are significantly more likely than tweens to use nearly every other social media platform measured on a monthly basis, including TikTok (65% of teens vs. 32% of tweens), Instagram (55% vs. 13%), Snapchat (46% vs. 16%), Discord (22% vs. 7%), Pinterest (20% vs. 8%), Reddit (7% vs. 1%), and X (9% vs. 2%). The largest gaps appear on Instagram, Snapchat, and TikTok, highlighting how social media becomes increasingly central to teens' digital lives. Correspondingly, tweens are much more likely than teens to report using none of the listed platforms (13% vs. 3%).

"Then TikTok, I mainly use TikTok to make videos, lip syncs most of the time. And I like how you can just add a sound and a lot of my friends also use it, so I like to go and like their videos and comment on theirs. And I like it because of the videos, they're very interesting."

Girl, age 14



Platform preferences diverge by gender, with girls gravitating toward Instagram, Snapchat, and Pinterest, and boys toward Discord, Twitch, and Reddit.

"So Discord has a lot of features like screen sharing, and I just mainly use it for the talking. Yeah, I play with my friends a lot on Minecraft, and a lot of times I just use it to talk to them sometimes for schoolwork."

Boy, age 13

TABLE 7:

Social media and video site usage, by age group

Social media or video sites visited at least monthly...	Total	Tweens (a)	Teens (b)
YouTube	79%	81%	78%
TikTok	50%	32%	65% ^a
Instagram	36%	13%	55% ^a
Snapchat	33%	16%	46% ^a
Facebook	23%	15%	30% ^a
Discord	16%	7%	22% ^a
Pinterest	15%	8%	20% ^a
WhatsApp	14%	11%	16% ^a
Twitch	8%	5%	10% ^a
X (formerly Twitter)	6%	2%	9% ^a
Reddit	5%	1%	7% ^a
Threads	3%	1%	4% ^a
Other (specify)	1%	1%	1% ^a
None of the above	7%	13% ^b	3%

Base: Among those who use social media, play video games, or consume video/TV content (N=1,208); tweens (n=611); teens (n=597).

Note: Items with different superscripts (a, b) differ significantly ($p < .05$). Items with no superscript do not differ significantly.

Girls gravitate toward more socially oriented and visual platforms, while boys are more likely to use platforms connected to gaming communities and livestreamed content. Girls are significantly more likely to use Instagram (41% vs. 32%), Snapchat (37% vs. 29%), Facebook (26% vs. 20%), and Pinterest (26% vs. 4%), while boys are more likely to use Discord (22% vs. 8%), Twitch (11% vs. 4%), and Reddit (7% vs. 3%).

"On Snapchat, I have FOMO, so a lot of my friends download it ... you can take pictures, send it to your friends, and then you can see what they're saying or when they're in chat. And there's different filters that you can use, so just to make it more cool."

Girl, age 14

TABLE 8:

Social media and video site usage, by gender

Social media or video sites visited at least monthly...	Boys	Girls
	(a)	(b)
YouTube	83% ^b	74%
TikTok	48%	53%
Instagram	32%	41% ^a
Snapchat	29%	37% ^a
Facebook	20%	26% ^a
Discord	22% ^b	8%
Pinterest	4%	26% ^a
WhatsApp	12%	16%
Twitch	11% ^b	4%
X (formerly Twitter)	6%	7%
Reddit	7% ^b	3%
Threads	2%	4%
Other (specify)	1%	1%
None of the above	7%	8%

Base: Among those who use social media, play video games, or consume video/TV content; boys (n=652); girls (n=546).

Items with different superscripts (a, b) differ significantly ($p < .05$). Items with no superscript do not differ significantly.



Gaming is a social activity for most tweens and teens, with nearly half of boys (49%) and more than a third of girls (38%) interacting with others while playing.



Reported gaming behavior reinforces the broader trend toward socializing as youth age. Teens are significantly more likely than tweens to play with random players matched through games (33% vs. 25%) and with people they have met through gaming (29% vs. 20%), indicating that gaming becomes a more networked and socially expansive activity with age. In contrast, tweens are more likely to play alone (55% vs. 49%) or with friends and family in person (53% vs. 45%). Similarly, Black youth are more likely than White and Latino youth to play with random players (37% vs. 28% and 26%) and with people they met through gaming (37% vs. 25% and 19%), suggesting greater engagement with broader online gaming communities.

TABLE 9:
Gaming socializing, by age group

When playing mobile or video games...	Total	Tweens	Teens
		(a)	(b)
I play alone/solo	52%	55% ^b	49%
Play with others (NET)	85%	85%	86%
• I play online with friends or family I know in real life	59%	56%	61%
• I play with friends or family in person (like in the same room or playing together)	48%	53% ^b	45%
• I play with random people the game matches me with	30%	25%	33% ^a
• I play online with people I've met through games	25%	20%	29% ^a

Base: Total who play mobile or video games (N=1,175); tweens (n=596); teens (n=579).
Note: Items with different superscripts (a, b) differ significantly (p<.05). Items with no superscript do not differ significantly.
Q13. "When you play mobile or video games, who do you usually play with? Select all that apply."



TABLE 10:

Gaming socializing, by race/ethnicity

When playing mobile or video games...	White	Black	Latino	Asian/ Multiracial/ Other
	(a)	(b)	(c)	(d)
I play alone/solo	58% ^{b,c}	46%	40%	56% ^c
Play with others (NET)	82%	88%	87%	81%
• I play online with friends or family I know in real life	57%	58%	57%	66%
• I play with friends or family in person (like in the same room or playing together)	47%	52%	48%	49%
• I play with random people the game matches me with	28%	37% ^c	26%	36% ^c
• I play online with people I've met through games	25%	37% ^{a,c}	19%	28%

Base: White (n=596); Black (n=154); Latino (n=248); Asian/Multiracial/Other (n=165).

Note: Items with different superscripts (a, b, c, d) differ significantly ($p < .05$). Items with no superscript do not differ significantly.

Q13. "When you play mobile or video games, who do you usually play with? Select all that apply."

Trends in frequency of socializing while gaming reinforce both the age and gender differences and preferences in media usage. Teens are significantly more likely than tweens to socialize while gaming at least half of the time (48% vs. 38%), and boys are more likely than girls to do so (49% vs. 38%). Conversely, tweens and girls are more likely to report socializing while gaming less than half of the time or almost never. Overall, the data suggests that gaming serves as a social outlet, particularly for teens and boys.



TABLE 11:**Frequency of gaming socializing, by age group and gender**

When playing mobile or video games...	Total	Tweens	Teens	Boys	Girls
		(a)	(b)	(c)	(d)
Almost always/more than half of the time (NET)	44%	38%	48% ^a	49% ^d	38%
• Almost always	24%	20%	28% ^a	27% ^d	21%
• More than half of the time	19%	18%	20%	21%	17%
About half of the time	20%	20%	20%	20%	20%
Less than half of the time (NET)	36%	42% ^b	31%	31%	42% ^c
• Less than half of the time	16%	16%	16%	14%	19%
• Almost never	20%	26% ^b	15%	17%	23% ^c

Base: Total who play video games on mobile or console (N=1,175); tweens (n=596); teens (n=579); boys (n=642); girls (n=523).

Note: Items with different superscripts (a, b, c, d) differ significantly ($p < .05$). Items with no superscript do not differ significantly. Significance should be read across rows and within each demographic group (age, gender).

Q14. "When you play video games, how often are you chatting, talking to, voice calling, or hanging out with friends or others at the same time (socializing together, even if they're not playing with you)?"

Heavy Use Doesn't Always Mean Enjoyment

Teens are roughly split on how they feel about their screen time: About half (48%) think it's too much.

Perception of Time Spent

More than half (56%) of all tweens and teens say they spend about the right amount of time on screens and devices. However, perceptions of usage differ significantly by age. Teens are more likely than tweens to feel they spend too much time on screens (48% vs. 30%), indicating greater awareness of or concern about their screen use. Given the higher levels of screen time observed among teens, this suggests that many teens may recognize the extent of their own screen and device consumption.

In contrast, tweens are more likely to feel their screen use is appropriate (63% vs. 50%) and are also more likely than teens to say they do not spend enough time on screens and devices (7% vs. 2%).

TABLE 12:

Tween and teen perceptions of time spent on screens and devices

	Total	Tweens (a)	Teens (b)
Too much time	40%	30%	48% ^a
About the right amount of time	56%	63% ^b	50%
Not enough time	4%	7% ^b	2%

Base: Total (N=1,211); tweens (n=614); teens (n=597).

Note: Items with different superscripts (a, b) differ significantly ($p < .05$). Items with no superscript do not differ significantly.

Q17. "Do you think you spend too much time, about the right amount of time, or not enough time on screens and devices for entertainment (not including time spent using screens for school)?"



When youth are asked which platform they rank as number one for usage or which one they could not live without, YouTube is the clear leader overall, selected by nearly half of youth (46%) on both measures. However, differences exist between tweens and teens on preference. Tweens are overwhelmingly more likely than teens to rank YouTube first for usage (68% vs. 30%) and to say it is the one platform they could not live without (66% vs. 32%). This suggests that YouTube serves as a preferred digital platform for younger youth, functioning as both a primary entertainment destination and an essential part of their media experience.

Among teens, preferences are more fragmented and centered around social media platforms. Teens are significantly more likely than tweens to rank TikTok as number one for platform usage (28% vs. 13%) and the one platform they could not live without (24% vs. 12%). Teens are also more likely to prioritize Snapchat, Instagram, and Discord on both measures. Notably, AI tools play only a limited role in youth platform attachment. Only 4% identify ChatGPT as the one platform they could not live without, while Google Gemini reaches 3%, indicating that AI tools have not yet become as central to young people's daily lives as video and social media platforms.

TABLE 13:

Social media/video sites and AI companions ranked first for usage among all youth who ever used social media/video sites or AI, by age group

Percentage who rank the following as their most used site	Total	Tweens (a)	Teens (b)
YouTube	46%	68% ^b	30%
TikTok	22%	13%	28% ^a
Snapchat	9%	3%	14% ^a
Instagram	8%	2%	11% ^a
Discord	3%	1%	5% ^a

Base: Total who visit social media/video sites or AI chatbots/companions (N=1,132); tweens (n=548); teens (n=584).

Mentions of 3% or more shown.

Note: Items with different superscripts (a, b) differ significantly ($p < .05$). Items with no superscript do not differ significantly.

Q15. "Which of the following do you use the most?"



TABLE 14:**The one site or app youth say they couldn't live without, by age group**

The one site they couldn't live without...	Total	Tweens	Teens
		(a)	(b)
YouTube	46%	66% ^b	32%
TikTok	19%	12%	24% ^a
Snapchat	8%	4%	11% ^a
Instagram	7%	2%	10% ^a
ChatGPT	4%	3%	4%
WhatsApp	3%	3%	3%
Google Gemini	3%	3%	3%
Discord	3%	1%	4% ^a

Base: Total who visit social media/video sites or AI chatbots/companions on at least a monthly basis (N=1,132); tweens (n=548); teens (n=584).

Mentions of 3% or more shown.

Note: Items with different superscripts (a, b) differ significantly ($p < .05$). Items with no superscript do not differ significantly.

Q16. "If you had to pick one site you didn't want to live without, which would it be?"

The activities that teens are more likely to do every day are also the activities they are more likely to enjoy. Teens are significantly more likely than tweens to report enjoying "a lot" texting and messaging (55% vs. 39%) and using social media (47% vs. 37%), mirroring the higher daily usage rates observed among teens for both activities. In contrast, tweens are more likely to report getting a lot of enjoyment out of gaming activities (playing video games or virtual reality) and listening to podcasts/audio books compared to teens. Enjoyment of short-form videos, TV shows and movies, video chatting, and longer-form video content is similar across age groups.

TABLE 15:

Enjoyment of entertainment screen media, by age group

Enjoy... "a lot"	Tweens	Teens
	(a)	(b)
Watching short videos online (such as TikToks, YouTube Shorts, or Instagram Reels)	65%	64%
Playing video games or mobile games on a console, portable player, computer, or mobile device	68% ^b	60%
Watching TV shows or movies (such as on Netflix, Disney+, Hulu, or cable)	53%	53%
Watching longer videos or streams, such as on YouTube or Twitch	51%	48%
Texting or messaging other people individually or in group chats (such as on iMessage, WhatsApp, or other messaging platforms)	39%	55% ^a
Video chat with other people including friends and family (such as on FaceTime or Zoom)	43%	46%
Using social media, including posting, sharing, or scrolling (such as on Snapchat, Instagram, Discord, Reddit, or Facebook)	37%	47% ^a
Making your own digital art or music, such as painting, graphics, or making digital music (either with or without the use of AI)	36%	32%
Using a virtual reality (VR) headset	39% ^b	28%
Reading for fun (online, ebooks, or actual physical books/magazines)	37%	22%
Listening to podcasts or audiobooks	24% ^b	13%
Using AI (such as AI chatbots or AI companions like ChatGPT, Copilot, Grok, Character.AI, Replika, or similar)	15%	11%

Base: Those who ever did any of the activities; tweens ($n=614$); teens ($n=597$).

Note: Items with different superscripts (a, b) differ significantly ($p<.05$). Items with no superscript do not differ significantly.

Q7. "How much do you ENJOY doing each of the following activities?"

Boys are significantly more likely than girls to report enjoying video games

"a lot" (80% vs. 45%) and to enjoy using a VR headset (38% vs. 23%). In contrast, girls are significantly more likely than boys to report enjoying a variety of social, communication-oriented, and content-consumption activities. Girls are more likely to enjoy "a lot" texting or messaging others (60% vs. 38%), video chatting (53% vs. 37%), using social media (53% vs. 36%), watching TV shows or movies (58% vs. 48%), reading for fun (35% vs. 23%), and creating digital art or music (38% vs. 29%). Enjoyment of short-form videos is similarly high among both groups (66% of girls and 63% of boys).

TABLE 16:

Enjoyment of entertainment screen media, by gender

Enjoy... "a lot"	Boys	Girls
	(a)	(b)
Watching short videos online (such as TikToks, YouTube Shorts, or Instagram Reels)	63%	66%
Playing video games or mobile games on a console, portable player, computer, or mobile device	80% ^b	45%
Watching TV shows or movies (such as on Netflix, Disney+, Hulu, or cable)	48%	58% ^a
Watching longer videos or streams, such as on YouTube or Twitch	51%	47%
Texting or messaging other people individually or in group chats (such as on iMessage, WhatsApp, or other messaging platforms)	38%	60% ^a
Video chat with other people including friends and family (such as on FaceTime or Zoom)	37%	53% ^a
Using social media, including posting, sharing, or scrolling (such as on Snapchat, Instagram, Discord, Reddit, or Facebook)	36%	53% ^a
Making your own digital art or music, such as painting, graphics, or making digital music (either with or without the use of AI)	29%	38% ^a
Using a virtual reality (VR) headset	38% ^b	23%
Reading for fun (online, ebooks, or actual physical books/magazines)	23%	35% ^a
Listening to podcasts or audiobooks	16%	17%
Using AI (such as AI chatbots or AI companions like ChatGPT, Copilot, Grok, Character.AI, Replika, or similar)	12%	12%

Base: Those who ever did any of the activities; boys (n=655); girls (n=546).

Note: Items with different superscripts (a, b) differ significantly ($p < .05$). Items with no superscript do not differ significantly.

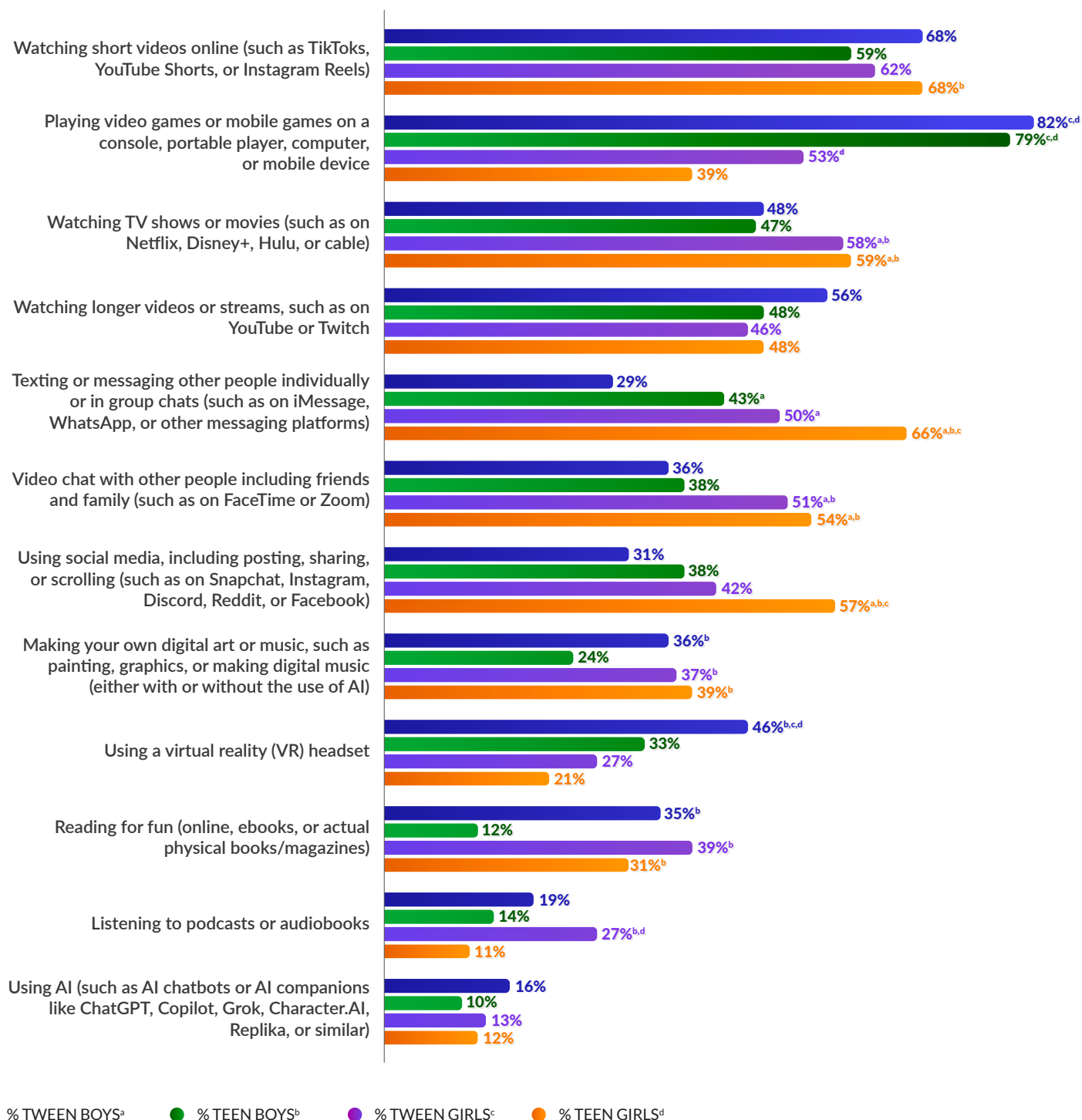
Q7. "How much do you ENJOY doing each of the following activities?"



When looking at activities enjoyed "a lot" by gender and age, we see certain patterns emerge for different groups. Boys across our sample were more likely to enjoy playing games than girls, who were more likely to watch TV shows or movies, text, and video chat with others. Teen girls were the most likely to enjoy using social media. Tweens were more likely than teens to use VR headsets, read for fun, and listen to podcasts or audiobooks.

FIGURE 14:

Activities enjoyed "a lot," by gender and age



Base: Those who ever did any of the activities; tween boys (n=339); teen boys (n=316); tween girls (n=272); teen girls (n=274).

Note: Items with different superscripts (a, b, c, d) differ significantly ($p < .05$). Items with no superscript do not differ significantly. Significance should be read within each item and between subgroups (tween boys, teen boys, tween girls, teen girls).

Q7. "How much do you ENJOY doing each of the following activities?"



Black youth are more likely than other racial and ethnic groups to report enjoying several forms of entertainment screen media "a lot." Black youth tend to express stronger enthusiasm across a broad range of entertainment, social, creative, and emerging technology activities. The largest differences are observed for short-form videos (74% vs. 61% among White youth), longer videos or streams (61% vs. 44% to 49% among other groups), video chatting (55% vs. 41% to 47%), social media (57% vs. 38% to 47%), making digital art or music (48% vs. 30% to 33%), and AI tools (21% vs. 9% to 15%).

TABLE 17:**Enjoyment of entertainment screen media, by race/ethnicity**

Enjoy... "a lot"	White	Black	Latino	Asian/ Multiracial/ Other
	(a)	(b)	(c)	(d)
Watching short videos online (such as TikToks, YouTube Shorts, or Instagram Reels)	61%	74% ^a	66%	62%
Playing video games or mobile games on a console, portable player, computer, or mobile device	60%	70%	65%	69%
Watching TV shows or movies (such as on Netflix, Disney+, Hulu, or cable)	51%	53%	57%	51%
Watching longer videos or streams, such as on YouTube or Twitch	48%	61% ^{a,c,d}	49%	44%
Texting or messaging other people individually or in group chats (such as on iMessage, WhatsApp, or other messaging platforms)	47%	49%	49%	50%
Video chat with other people including friends and family (such as on FaceTime or Zoom)	41%	55% ^a	47%	43%
Using social media, including posting, sharing, or scrolling (such as on Snapchat, Instagram, Discord, Reddit, or Facebook)	41%	57% ^{a,d}	47%	38%
Making your own digital art or music, such as painting, graphics, or making digital music (either with or without the use of AI)	33%	48% ^{a,c,d}	30%	31%
Using a virtual reality (VR) headset	31%	43%	29%	27%
Reading for fun (online, ebooks, or actual physical books/magazines)	30%	24%	28%	32%
Listening to podcasts or audiobooks	16%	18%	19%	16%
Using AI (such as AI chatbots or AI companions like ChatGPT, Copilot, Grok, Character.AI, Replika, or similar)	9%	21% ^a	15%	11%

Base: Those who ever did any of the activities; White (n=614); Black (n=159); Latino (n=256); Other (n=170).

Note: Items with different superscripts (a, b, c, d) differ significantly ($p < .05$). Items with no superscript do not differ significantly.

Q7. "How much do you ENJOY doing each of the following activities?"



Digital Divides Persist

Household access to smartphones, tablets, and computers is consistently high across racial/ethnic and income groups. Black youth are significantly more likely than all other racial/ethnic groups to live in a household with a cellphone (99% vs. 93% of White youth, 92% of Latino youth, and 89% of Asian/Multiracial/Other youth, respectively).

Levels of personal ownership among youth are comparable across racial/ethnic groups, with a few exceptions. By income, higher-income households are more likely than lower-income households to have tablets (85% vs. 78%). In addition, middle- and higher-income households are significantly more likely to have a computer in the home than lower-income households (83% of lower-income households vs. 93% and 92% among middle- and higher-income households).

Youth from lower-income households are more likely than those from higher-income households to personally own a cellphone (75% vs. 66%), while youth from middle- and higher-income households are significantly more likely than those from lower-income households to personally own a computer (59% and 56% vs. 46%).

Youth from lower-income households are 9 percentage points less likely than their peers from higher-income households to have a computer at home, and 10 points less likely to have one of their own.



TABLE 18:**Household and personal device ownership, by race/ethnicity and family income**

	Race/Ethnicity				Family Income		
	White	Black	Latino	Asian/ Multiracial/ Other	Lower	Middle	Higher
	(a)	(b)	(c)	(d)	(e)	(f)	(g)
Have in the home...							
Cellphone	93%	99% ^{a,c,d}	92%	89%	94%	93%	92%
Tablet	82%	86%	80%	86%	78%	83%	85% ^e
Computer or laptop	92% ^c	91%	84%	92% ^c	83%	93% ^e	92% ^e
Have their own...							
Cellphone	70%	78% ^d	72%	66%	75% ^g	72%	66%
Tablet	56%	65%	58%	65%	55%	63% ^e	60%
Computer or laptop	50%	56%	53%	63% ^a	46%	59% ^e	56% ^e

Base: Among ALL youth in each subgroup: White (n=614); Black (n=159); Latino (n=256); Asian/Multiracial/Other (n=170); lower income (n=422); middle income (n=359); higher income (n=428).

Note: Items with different superscripts (a, b, c, d, e, f, g) differ significantly ($p < .05$). Items with no superscript do not differ significantly. Significance should be read across rows and within demographic groups (race/ethnicity, income).

Note: "Lower" is household income of less than \$50,000, "middle" is household income of \$50,000 to less than \$100,000, and "higher" is household income of \$100,000 or more.



Discussion

Taken together, these findings describe a generation of tweens and teens whose free time is saturated with media use. As younger children move into the tween and teen years, media use becomes a staple of their social diet, an outlet for entertainment and information-seeking, and, through gaming and social platforms, can be a space for connecting with friends and even strangers. Texting, social media use, gaming, and video viewing are common across the tween and teen years, with AI chatbots and companions emerging as a popular product, despite their relative newness in the market (e.g., ChatGPT was first made available in November 2022). The sections below walk through the implications of these patterns, organized across the four themes introduced in this report: phone and platform adoption; screen media use; media enjoyment; and digital divides.

Implications

Phones and platform adoption

Phone adoption patterns have remained relatively consistent over the past several years (see Rideout et al., 2022), with the average age of getting a first phone still 11 years. This suggests that efforts to push back the age of smartphone ownership (e.g., the "Wait Until 8th" pledge, or the broader cultural conversation sparked by *The Anxious Generation*) have not shifted the age of ownership older, although the fact that the age of ownership has not gotten younger may reflect some success from these movements. It is also possible that many parents are choosing flip phones, starter phones, or other models with limited functionality. It may also simply take a few more years for families' practices to catch up with these cultural conversations, or it's possible that parents aren't fully aligned with these efforts.

Also pressing is the fact that many children under 13 are regularly using social media and AI tools that have 13-plus policies. Underage social media use carries more risks of problematic use and unsafe social contacts (Charmaraman, 2022). While platforms have stated commitments to removing underage users through age inference, our findings suggest that these methods are currently



ineffective at population scale. Consequently, many children are encountering products, content, and design choices built with an older user in mind well before they reach the age those products were designed for.

Screen media for entertainment use

A typical tween's or teen's day is crowded with screen media and technology. The high levels of engagement raise questions about what tweens and teens may be giving up in exchange for time spent on screens. With more than 4 in 10 teens spending 10 or more hours per day on screen media, there is limited room left in a 24-hour day for sleep, homework, physical activity, and in-person time with friends and family, once other responsibilities like school and work are accounted for. These totals capture multitasking across devices and activities, rather than sequential, non-overlapping hours (for example, a teen could reach a 10-hour total in fewer hours by texting while watching a movie). Still, this overlap does not eliminate our concern about the displacement of other activities. It may simply mean that displacement is happening across several activities simultaneously, rather than sequentially. This level of constant engagement is not accidental, as many of the platforms that are most popular with young people (such as short-form video and social media apps) are built around algorithmically optimized feeds designed to keep users scrolling and commercially benefiting platforms.

Short-form videos are now one of the most popular and highest-duration daily media experiences for tweens and teens. This marks a significant shift in viewing patterns over the past eight years, when Musical.ly (now TikTok) was introduced to the U.S. market. With Instagram, Facebook, and YouTube adding short-form video features to products over the following years and optimizing engagement through predictive algorithms, it is not surprising that scrolling on short-form feeds now takes up more of young people's days than long-form video. However, recent research (see van der Wal et al., 2026) suggests that longer usage of feed-based social media, rather than connection-focused platforms, is associated with lower well-being, self-esteem, and friendship closeness.

Gaming is also an important social space for young people, and one that may carry its own risks alongside benefits. Most tweens and teens who play video games play with others, and this social gaming can extend beyond people they know to those they have met through the game itself or to random players the



game has matched them with. This suggests that a meaningful share of young people are regularly interacting with strangers in gaming environments that may have limited moderation or parental visibility. These gaming spaces may be areas where children are exposed to unknown risks.

Use and enjoyment of screen media

Importantly, this research suggests that widespread use of media does not necessarily mean deep or meaningful engagement. AI tools, for example, are used regularly by many teens, yet only a small percentage say they enjoy using these tools "a lot," and few consider them a platform they couldn't live without. This may partly reflect a common use pattern for teens using AI today: often for practical or functional purposes, more akin to how someone might use a search engine or word processor, rather than as a source of entertainment. As AI tools continue to become embedded in the apps and platforms we use, this gap between use and enjoyment may shift.

This use-vs.-enjoyment pattern is not unique to AI. Across many activities we measured, there isn't always alignment on how much time youth spend on something and how much they say they enjoy it. This pattern also echoes recent work showing that teens often express ambivalence about their relationship with social media and gaming, given the mix of positive and negative content and contacts they encounter there (Weinstein & James, 2022).

Digital divides

Differences in use by gender, race/ethnicity, and household income suggest disparities that deserve continued attention. Girls use social media more often, while boys favor gaming, but both platforms are notable in their place as social tools that are used to connect with others in ways that can be prosocial but also potentially dangerous. Tweens and teens from lower-income households report higher levels of daily screen use, which is a consistent pattern over the past several decades. Many scholars have pointed out that this is due to structural inequalities that reduce community and school opportunities (e.g., after-school programs) and add stress to working families (Munzer et al., 2026). Youth from lower-income households also report lower access to computers in the home, a difference that may negatively impact their ability to access screens for entertainment but also for learning and connection.



Not every child's day looks the same, and closing these gaps will require both a safer media ecosystem overall and greater support for marginalized families.

Closing

This report establishes a new baseline for understanding tween and teen media use, and it raises questions about how new technology, including AI tools, will continue to be integrated into the media landscape of young people. As these platforms keep evolving, often faster than families, schools, or policymakers can keep up, continued research and monitoring will be essential to understand how these technologies shape the everyday lives of our children, and especially tweens and teens, who are often searching for community and support, both in person and in their online communities. Parents and caregivers, educators, and platforms themselves will have a responsibility to support healthier outcomes and guide youth in these changing and growing media environments.



Methodology

Overview

Common Sense Media engaged SSRS to conduct the Media Use by Tweens and Teens Study among youth age 9 to 17 living in the United States. SSRS invited the young people to participate in a self-administered online survey through their parents, who are members of the SSRS Opinion Panel. Data collection was conducted from April 29 to May 11, 2026, among a sample of 1,211 tweens and teens.

This most recent survey focuses on specific types of platforms and content (e.g., short-form video, AI platforms, social media), rather than device use, and is able to capture media use that is reflective of the multitasking environment of young people. Because of this change in design, we are unable to compare the time use estimates to prior waves, but are still able to compare specific metrics (such as cellphone ownership) when time use is not calculated. Because multitasking may be taking place, it is also difficult to discern how much of this use is happening at a distinct time or passively (such as having a TV on in the background while scrolling social media).

The survey was conducted via web in English (1,168) and Spanish (43). Data was weighted to represent the target population of youth age 9 to 17. The margin of sampling error for the complete set of weighted data is ± 3.2 percentage points.

This report provides information about the sampling procedures and the methods used to collect, process, and weight data for this study.

The time-based measures (i.e., time spent doing the activities asked in Q6) were determined to be positively skewed with exceptionally high values. For this reason, median values were reported instead of mean, which can be disproportionately influenced by extreme values. The median represents the midpoint of the distribution and provides a more robust measure of the typical respondent's experience. Group differences were evaluated using post hoc pairwise



comparisons using Wilcoxon rank-sum tests.³ For multiple pairwise comparisons, p-values were adjusted using the Benjamini-Hochberg procedure (1995).⁴

Sample Design: SSRS Opinion Panel

SSRS Opinion Panel members are recruited randomly based on nationally representative ABS (Address Based Sample) design (including Hawaii and Alaska). ABS respondents are randomly sampled by Marketing Systems Group (MSG) through the U.S. Postal Service's Computerized Delivery Sequence File (CDS), a regularly updated listing of all known addresses in the U.S. For the SSRS Opinion Panel, known business addresses are excluded from the sample frame. Additional panelists are recruited via random digit dial (RDD) telephone sample of cellphone numbers connected to a prepaid cellphone. This sample is selected by MSG from the cellphone RDD frame using a flag that identifies prepaid numbers. Prepaid cell numbers are associated with cellphones that are "pay as you go" and do not require a contract.

The SSRS Opinion Panel is a multi-mode panel (web and phone). Most panelists take self-administered web surveys; however, the option to take surveys conducted by a live telephone interviewer is available to those who do not use the internet as well as those who use the internet but are reluctant to take surveys online.

Survey Sampling

The sample for this study consisted of U.S. youth age 9 to 17. Participants were recruited through SSRS Opinion panelists who are U.S. adults (18+) with children age 9 to 17 living in their household. The sample was drawn using a probability proportional to size (PPS) methodology to ensure adequate representation of each demographic group while minimizing the variability of the final weights. The sample was additionally stratified by preferred survey language, mode, and age group of child/children in their household (either 6 to 11 years or 12 to 17 years) to meet the sample size targets.

³ Wilcoxon, F. (1945). Individual comparisons by ranking methods. *Biometrics Bulletin*, 1(6), 80–83.

⁴ Benjamini, Y., & Hochberg, Y. (1995). Controlling the false discovery rate: A practical and powerful approach to multiple testing. *Journal of the Royal Statistical Society: Series B (Methodological)*, 57(1), 289–300. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.2517-6161.1995.tb02031.x>.



Questionnaire Design

SSRS pretested the draft survey instrument via online cognitive interviews with 10 young people age 9 to 17, recruited through SSRS Virtual Insights. Recruitment took place from March 31 to April 7, 2026, and the interviews were conducted from April 1 to 9, 2026. Table 19 summarizes the age distribution of the participants. Their valuable insights played a key role in helping Common Sense Media with fine-tuning the web questionnaire, ensuring that it was easy to navigate and answer among people their age.

TABLE 19:

Number of youth who participated in the pretest, by age

Age	Number
9 years old	1
10 years old	1
11 years old	1
12 years old	2
14 years old	1
15 years old	1
16 years old	3

TABLE 20:

Distribution of youth who participated in the pretest, by sex

Sex	Number
Girl	4
Boy	6

Following the pretests, SSRS made adjustments to the survey instrument based on the feedback collected from the youth. Changes to the survey instrument did not substantially change its content but further clarified questions and response options to ensure data validity.

SSRS reviewed the questionnaire primarily to identify potential problems in the instrument that might increase respondent burden, cause respondents



to refuse or terminate the survey, create problems with respondent comprehension, or pose practical challenges for mode-specific administration such as complex skip patterns.

To enhance accessibility, the questionnaire was translated into Spanish, providing respondents with the option to take the survey in either English or Spanish based on their comfort level. With the exception of the screening questions, both the parent and the child respondents were allowed to (or "could") skip questions if they wanted.

Data Collection

Screening

Panelists were screened at the start of the survey for their parental status. Respondents who indicated that they are not a parent/legal guardian of a youth age 9 to 17, or if they were but did not consent for their child to take the survey, were not invited to continue with the survey.⁵

Web Contact Procedures

A "soft launch" inviting a limited number of panelists to have their child take the survey was conducted from April 29 to 30, 2026. Soft launch data was checked to ensure the functionality of the program and the administration length of the survey were within the scope of work. After checking soft launch data to ensure that all questionnaire content and skip patterns were correct, an additional sample was released to ensure the final sample met the study goals.

In households with multiple eligible youths, the parent/legal guardian was instructed to select the youth with the most recent birthday. The survey could be completed immediately if the selected child was available or resumed later when they became available.

Web panelists were emailed an invitation to complete the screener and to recruit their child to the survey. The email for each respondent included a unique password-embedded link. After a parent completed and qualified

⁵ A total of N=217 panelists were screened out as ineligible (6% of the invited sample).



through the screener, they were asked to have their child immediately continue the survey, if available, or if the child was not available, to have the survey link sent to the child's email address (with parental consent) or to the parent's email address for later completion.

All panelists who did not respond to the email invitation received up to six reminder emails, including a targeted "nudge" encouraging them to prompt their child to complete the survey. Panelists who had opted to receive text messages from the SSRS Opinion Panel received up to three text message reminders. Youth participants, for whom their parental consent was provided to receive communications, received up to five reminder emails and up to two text message reminders sent either to the youth's contact information or to the parent's.

In appreciation for consenting for their child to participate in the survey, panelists received post-paid compensation in the form of an electronic gift card, sent via email immediately after completion of the survey. Youth respondents also received post-paid compensation.

Median web survey length, including both the parent screener and the main youth survey, was approximately 11 minutes.

Follow-Up Online In-Depth Interviews (IDI)

At the conclusion of the online survey, tweens and teens were asked if they would be interested in participating in a follow-up IDI with the SSRS research team. Of the 654 tweens and teens who expressed interest, 68 were invited to participate in a follow-up interview from May 12 to 27, 2026. Among those invited, 11 received parental consent and were recruited. Ultimately, SSRS conducted IDIs with eight tweens and teens to gain deeper insight into participants' survey responses, particularly regarding their use of AI chatbots and social media. Interviews were conducted from May 23 to June 2, 2026. The distribution of IDI participants by age and gender is summarized below.



TABLE 21:**Number of IDI participants by age and gender**

Age	Gender	
	Male	Female
9 years old	0	1
11 years old	1	1
13 years old	1	1
14 years old	0	1
17 years old	1	1

Programming, Data Processing, and Integration

Programming

Prior to the field period, SSRS programmed the study into its Forsta Plus (formerly known as Conformat) Web/CATI platform for administration in English or Spanish. Extensive checking of the program was conducted to ensure that skip patterns and sample splits followed the design of the questionnaire.

Additional steps were employed to ensure a quality experience in survey administration regardless of the device utilized by respondents, whether a desktop computer, tablet, or mobile phone. The web program was optimized for administration via smartphone or other mobile handheld devices. The web program was also checked on multiple devices, including desktop computers and handheld mobile devices, and different web browsers to ensure consistent and optimized visualization across devices and web browsers. The web survey was accessed directly by respondents, using their unique survey links with embedded passwords. This also gave them the ability to return to their survey later if they chose to suspend their survey.

Quality Control Checks

For web surveys, quality checks were incorporated into the survey. For this study, respondents who failed the quality checks were not included in the final data set. This included:



1. Age and gender of the child could not be confirmed due to missing or skipped data on the parent screener section ($n=18$).
2. Respondents who sped through the survey ($n=3$).

A total of $n=21$ completed surveys were removed after applying these cleaning standards (0.2%).

Weighting and Design Effects

Data was weighted to represent the residential population of U.S. children and teens age 9 to 17. The weighting involves multiple stages, reflecting the nature of sampling for probability-based panels. First, to account for recruitment into the Panel, a base weight was created for the entire SSRS Opinion Panel. Then, a study-level base weight was created by adjusting this Panel-wide base weight for the probability of selection into the individual study. An adjustment for sampling only one child in the household was made to the study-level base weight. Finally, to create the final weight, the study-level data was calibrated to parameters for the study's target population.

Panel-Wide Base Weight

The Panel-wide base weight adjusts for the SSRS Opinion Panel recruitment and retention process—specifically, differential probabilities of being selected for the recruitment sample, completing the registration survey, joining the Panel, and remaining on the Panel.

Recruitment Design Weight

The design weight accounts for differential probabilities of selection for the recruitment sample. The design weight for the SSRS Opinion Panel was computed differently depending on whether the panelist was recruited from address-based sample (ABS), a prepaid cell sample, or the SSRS dual-frame RDD telephone Omnibus.



ABS Recruits

The design weight for ABS recruits corrects for the disproportionate ABS design by adjusting the distribution of sample across the ABS strata to match the distribution of the ABS frame across strata.

ABS recruits come from a variety of sample sources, some of which employ different stratification schemes. The design weight for ABS recruits is tailored to the stratification scheme used for the sample from which the panelist was recruited. Currently, ABS recruitment waves for the SSRS Opinion Panel are stratified on a combination of geographic region and model-based indicators of the presence of key subpopulations.

Prepaid Cell Recruits

The design weight for prepaid cell recruits accounts for any disproportionate sampling of prepaid cellphone numbers from the cellphone RDD frame.

Telephone Omnibus Recruits

The design weight for the telephone Omnibus recruits is their original base weight computed at the time of the original omnibus interview. This base weight accounts for selection probabilities associated with the overlapping dual-frame Omnibus sample design.⁶ This base weight is a function of the land-line and cell frame sample sizes, as well as each respondent's telephone usage and number of adults in the household.

Recruitment, Non-Response, and Attrition Adjustments

Two adjustments are applied to the recruitment design weight:

- A nonresponse adjustment correcting for variability in the recruitment response rate.
- An attrition adjustment correcting for variability in the rate at which originally recruited panelists are retained on the Panel.

⁶ Buskirk, T. D., & Best, J. (2012) Venn diagrams, probability 101, and sampling weights computed for dual frame telephone RDD designs. *Journal of Statistics and Mathematics*. Vol. 15: 3696–3710.

Both steps use a weighting class adjustment in which adjustment cells are defined by a cross of the recruitment channel and geographic strata.

For ABS recruits, a household size adjustment is also applied to correct for the sampling of one adult within each sampled address.

Non-Internet Adjustment

For projects that collect data entirely online, people who do not use the internet are necessarily not included in the sample. To account for this non-coverage and make the results more representative of the entire target population, we make a non-internet adjustment to the base weight.

This uses a model-based propensity score adjustment to make adults with internet access representative of all adults (regardless of whether they have internet access). Propensity scores are estimated by modeling panel response mode on a range of demographic, attitudinal, and behavioral covariates. The model is a conditional inference tree built in R using the *partykit* package.

Panel-Wide Calibration

To create the final Panel-wide base weight, the full Panel is raked to target parameters for the population of U.S. adults (ages 18+). Panel-wide raking parameters include gender, age, educational attainment, race/ethnicity, Census division, civic engagement, population density, internet use frequency, voter registration status, party identification, religion, household size, and home tenure. This raking step uses panelist profile variables; missing data in these variables is filled in using hot decking prior to raking.

Final Study-Level Weight

Study-Level Base Weight

The study-level base weight adjusts for differential probabilities of selection from the SSRS Opinion Panel into the sample for this specific study. The study-level base weight is calculated as:



$$P_{ABW} * \frac{N_h}{n_h}$$

where P_{ABW} is the Panel-wide base weight calculated as described above; and, for each stratum h , N_h is the number of panelists available and n_h is the number invited into the study.

Study-level sampling strata were formed from quantiles of P_{ABW} , with higher-weight panelists being given a higher probability of selection. These weight-based strata were crossed with preferred survey language to meet the required sample size targets for each group. In alignment with the study's target population, web panelists that are a parent/guardian of a child age 9 to 17 in the household were eligible for selection into the sample.

Within Household Probability of Selection Adjustment for the Children

An adjustment was made to account for the fact that only one child age 9 to 17 was interviewed within each household. If the number of children age 9 to 17 in the household is denoted by A , then the probability that any child age 9 to 17 is interviewed is $1/A$ and the probability of selection adjustment, a_1 , would be $a_1 = (1/A)^{-1} = A$.⁷

Final Study-Level Weight

The adjusted final base weight is the product of the Study-Level base weight and the within household probability of selection adjustment for children age 9 to 17:

$$\text{Final BW} = \text{PPS_base weight} \times A$$

Study-Level Calibration

With the study-level base weight applied, the data was weighted to balance the demographic profile of the sample to the target population parameters.

⁷ The standard procedure is to cap A at 3.



Weighting was accomplished by raking sample distributions to target population distributions using iterative proportional fitting. This procedure balances each calibration variable to target benchmarks individually and iteratively. The entire set of calibration variables is cycled through until the weights converge across all dimensions.

Data was weighted to distributions of: age (child), sex (child), education (child), race/ethnicity (child), region (child), education (parent), sex by education (parent), age by education (parent), number of children age 9 to 17 in household (parent), home tenure (parent), civic engagement (parent), population density (parent), and internet use frequency (parent). Missing data in the raking variables was imputed using hot decking. Hot deck imputation replaces the missing values of a respondent randomly with another similar respondent without missing data. The following table shows the data sources used for calibration totals.

TABLE 22:
Calibration variable sources

<i>Dimensions</i>	<i>Source</i>
Sex (child)	2024 American Community Survey ⁸
Age (child)	
Education (child)	
Race/ethnicity (child)	
Region (child)	
Parent's education (parent)	
Parent's sex (parent)	
Parent's age (parent)	
Number of children age 9–17 in household (parent)	
Home tenure (parent)	
Population density (parent)	Weighted SSRS Opinion Panel
Internet frequency (parent)	
Civic engagement (parent) ⁹	

Weights were trimmed at the second and 98th percentiles to prevent individual interviews from having too much influence on survey-derived estimates. The table below compares unweighted and weighted sample distributions to target population benchmarks.

⁸ Ruggles, S., Flood, S., Sobek, M., Backman, D., Cooper, G., Rivera Drew, J. A., et al. (2025). IPUMS USA: Version 16.0 [data set]. <https://doi.org/10.18128/D010.V16.0>.

⁹ Civically engaged respondents are defined as those who have volunteered in the past 12 months or who talk to/spend time with their neighbors daily.



TABLE 23:

Sample demographics

Category	Values	Parameter	Unweighted	Weighted
Sex (child)	Male	51.3%	54.7%	52.1%
	Female	48.7%	45.3%	47.9%
Age (child)	9–11 Years Old	32.7%	41.4%	33.1%
	12–14 Years Old	33.4%	27.5%	33.3%
	15–17 Years Old	33.9%	31.1%	33.6%
Education (child)	Public school/Not attending	87.2%	85.9%	86.9%
	Private school	12.8%	14.1%	13.1%
Race/ethnicity (child)	White, non-Latino	47.4%	51.3%	48.2%
	Black, non-Latino	12.0%	13.3%	12.1%
	Latino, born in	23.2%	19.5%	22.1%
	Latino, born out	3.3%	1.8%	3.2%
	Asian, non-Latino	5.4%	6.7%	5.5%
	Other non-Latino	8.7%	7.4%	8.8%
Census region (child)	Northeast	15.9%	14.9%	15.9%
	Midwest	20.8%	20.1%	21.1%
	South	39.5%	42.1%	39.6%
	West	23.8%	23.0%	23.3%
Education (parent)	Less than high school	11.1%	6.5%	9.9%
	High school grad	22.3%	24.2%	22.2%
	Some college/assoc degree	27.7%	27.0%	28.2%
	College grad+	38.9%	42.3%	39.7%
Sex by education (parent)	Male, HS grad or less	16.7%	9.2%	15.6%
	Male, some college	11.9%	9.4%	12.1%
	Male, college grad+	17.2%	18.9%	17.6%
	Female, HS grad or less	16.7%	21.6%	16.5%
	Female, some college	15.7%	17.6%	16.1%
	Female, college grad+	21.7%	23.4%	22.1%
Age by education (parent)	18–34, HS grad or less	6.0%	9.3%	6.1%
	18–34, some college	4.0%	6.8%	4.2%
	18–34, college grad+	1.7%	3.2%	1.7%
	35–54, HS grad or less	25.2%	18.9%	23.6%
	35–54, some college	22.0%	19.2%	22.4%
	35–54, college grad+	34.1%	36.1%	34.8%
	55+, HS grad or less	2.3%	2.5%	2.4%
	55+, some college	1.7%	1.0%	1.7%
Child 9–17 in household (parent)	1	58.3%	54.3%	57.7%
	2	31.8%	32.6%	32.2%
	3+	9.9%	13.1%	10.1%
Home tenure (parent)	Own	72.2%	69.0%	72.4%
	Rent	27.8%	31.0%	27.6%
Civic engagement (parent)	Civically engaged	44.1%	42.1%	44.6%
	Not civically engaged	55.9%	57.9%	55.4%
Population density (parent)	1 Lowest 20%	20.9%	20.7%	20.8%
	2	21.3%	22.7%	21.7%
	3	21.4%	20.8%	20.9%
	4	19.0%	18.4%	19.1%
	5 Highest 20%	17.3%	17.3%	17.5%
Internet frequency (parent)	Almost constantly	52.7%	56.3%	52.9%
	Several times a day or less	47.3%	43.7%	47.1%



Effects of Sample Design on Statistical Inference

Post-data collection statistical adjustments require analysis procedures that reflect departures from simple random sampling. SSRS calculates the effects of these design features so that an appropriate adjustment can be incorporated into tests of statistical significance when using this data. The so-called "design effect" or *deff* represents the loss in statistical efficiency that results from a disproportionate sample design and systematic non-response. The total sample design effect for this survey is 1.33.

SSRS calculates the composite design effect for a sample of size n , with each case having a weight, w , as:¹⁰

$$deff = \frac{n\sum w^2}{(\sum w)^2}$$

The survey's margin of error is the largest 95% confidence interval for any estimated proportion based on the total sample—the one around 50%. For example, the margin of error for the entire sample is ± 3.2 percentage points. This means that in 95 of every 100 samples drawn using the same methodology, estimated proportions based on the entire sample will be no more than 3.2 percentage points away from their true values in the population. Margins of error for subgroups will be larger. It is important to remember that sampling fluctuations are only one possible source of error in a survey estimate. Other sources, such as respondent selection bias, questionnaire wording, and reporting inaccuracy, may contribute additional error of greater or lesser magnitude.

Sample Disposition and Response Rate

The completion rate among youth whose parents consented to their participation was 87.1%. Table 24 shows the parents' completion and response rates for this study.

¹⁰ Kish, L. (1992). Weighting for unequal pi. *Journal of Official Statistics*, Vol. 8, No. 2, 183–200.



TABLE 24:**Completion rate/response rate (parent)**

Completion rates/Composite response rates	Total
Total sample (invited to participate)	2,588
Screen-outs	217
Total eligible	2,371
Quality control removals	26
Incompletes	615
Quota full	340
Completions*	1,390
Incidence/Eligibility rate	86.50%
Survey completion rate (completions/total invited to participate)	53.71%
Survey RR3	59.45%

* Excludes screen-outs or data quality removals that completed the survey.

Cumulative Response Rate

Cumulative response rate takes into consideration the response rate for the panel recruitment survey, the percent of recruitment survey respondents who agree to join the panel, and this survey's response rate. The cumulative RR3 comes to 2.84%.

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