



2021

The Common Sense Census:

Media Use by Tweens and Teens

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Media Use by Tweens and Teens, 2021

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

Carnegie Corporation of New York

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A Letter from Our Founder

This month we hit a milestone that many of us never believed possible: two years of the coronavirus pandemic. Since March 2020, we as a community have seen cautious highs followed by tremendous lows as the country has moved from relaxed guidelines to new variants. Today, we are starting to see a fuller picture of the complex impact the last two years have had on everything from the economy and health care to education and mental health.

For parents, caregivers, educators, and even policymakers across the country, kids' media use has been among some of the issues at the center of this conversation. As school went remote, as activities were canceled, as new variants forced kids and families back indoors, it was clear to anyone who spent time with kids that screens were taking up more and more time in their days. Our Common Sense Census program has tracked trends in media use among tweens and teens since 2015. This year's report is our first opportunity to see kids' media use during the pandemic and compare the numbers to previous years.

What we found is noteworthy, but probably not surprising: Media use has grown faster since the start of the pandemic—over a two-year period—than it had over the previous four years. But this report goes a few steps further by exploring the content behind those numbers: how kids are spending that time, and how their engagement with media makes them feel. And that is where the findings become a lot more nuanced. For example, 84% of teens use social media, but only 34% of them say they enjoy social media “a lot.” And social media use is going up among tweens, a group who are technically not supposed to be using social media in the first place.

What does all this media use—and no real certainty if these trends will continue—mean for caregivers? The future of media will certainly go beyond online videos and the current social platforms. Virtual reality and the metaverse have the potential to make media more immersive and ubiquitous than it is today. Understanding how kids are using media will prove vital in helping to establish boundaries that accurately reflect the outsize role of media in kids' lives during the pandemic and beyond.

But this report should also be a wake-up call for policymakers, who are seeing unprecedented bipartisan support for action on making technology work better for all. We need deeper research and understanding of how media will continue to impact our kids' mental, physical, and emotional development. And if kids are spending this much time with media, we need to ensure that all digital spaces are safe and healthy for kids to explore.

The last two years have been hard for all of us, but especially so for our kids. As parents, caregivers, educators, and policymakers, we now have an opportunity and a responsibility to make the years to come better, safer, and healthier for kids everywhere.



Founder and CEO
James P. Steyer

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jim Steyer". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Credits

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Introduction

Over the past two years, the coronavirus pandemic forced many young people to spend much more time at home, away from friends and activities, than they did in pre-pandemic times. One question many adults have had is: How has this affected the amount of time they spend with screens? This report presents the results of a nationally representative, probability-based tracking survey of U.S. tweens and teens, designed to answer that question.

In the first year of the pandemic, remote learning required many students to spend hours a day taking classes online. But many also turned to screen media to stay in touch with friends and family, to pursue hobbies and creative interests, and to keep themselves entertained. The survey reported here concerns the amount of time young people spent using media for non-school-related activities, that is, outside of the time spent using digital devices for classes or homework.

We were most interested to see whether there were any lasting differences in young people's use of screen media as society began to open up again in the fall of 2021. Therefore, this report compares the frequency, enjoyment, and time spent engaging in various types of media activities among 8- to 18-year-olds in 2019, just prior to the virus arriving in the United States, and fall 2021, as most schools around the country opened back up for in-person learning.

We focus on three primary measures of young people's engagement with media:

- How much they *enjoy* various media activities, such as watching television, playing video games, or using social media
- How *often* they engage in each of these activities—daily, weekly, monthly, or less often
- How much *time* they spend engaging with each type of media activity per day, on average

The amount of time young people spend engaging in a media activity is certainly not the only important measure when it comes to assessing the role of media in their lives. The content of the media that young people engage with, how they use it, and how they respond to media are clearly critically important as well. Our previous reports closely examined:

- The types of content children watched on YouTube (Radesky, 2020)
- How tweens and teens used digital media to help them stay connected with friends and family during the coronavirus pandemic as well as the types of topics they researched online for informal learning, and the role of technology in helping young people create and share artistic content (Rideout & Robb, 2021)
- How they used social media to promote their mental well-being (Rideout et al., 2021)

However, the amount of time young people spend engaging with screen media is also important. Therefore, documenting time spent with media is one of the key elements of this report, including tracking changes over time. In addition, the survey also tracks young people's access to various types of media devices in the home (e.g., computer, video game player), and their personal ownership of digital technology (such as having their own smartphone or computer).

The 2021 wave of the survey also includes new detail about social media, which we hope will be useful in light of the recent release of Facebook's internal research on the effects of Instagram on young users (Wells et al., 2021). We document which specific sites tweens and teens use, which ones they use the most, and which ones they wouldn't want to give up if they could keep only one.

The types of media activities included in the surveys are:

- Watching television, whether through broadcast, cable, or a subscription service
- Watching online videos, such as on YouTube
- Using social media
- Playing video or computer games
- Playing mobile video games, such as on a smartphone or tablet
- Reading, including ebooks, reading online, and reading print
- Using digital devices to create content, such as art, music, or creative writing
- Listening to podcasts
- Using virtual reality

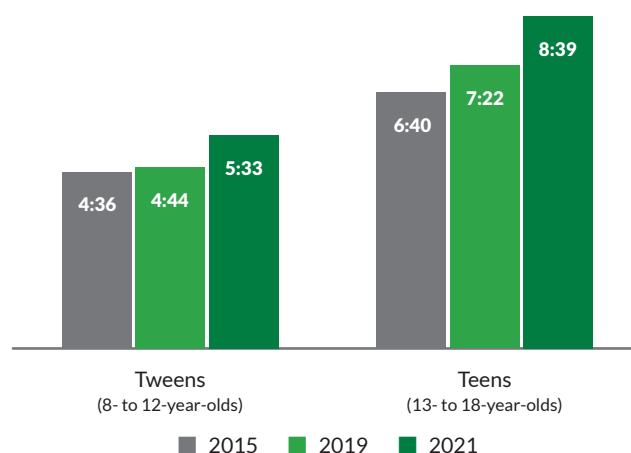
All data in the report is presented separately for tweens (8- to 12-year-olds) and teens (13- to 18-year-olds), and the 2021 results are examined for variations by gender, race/ethnicity, and family income. The 2019 and 2021 waves of the survey used separate cross-sectional samples of respondents, with the text and format of each question staying as consistent as possible (allowing for some modest changes to reflect the changing media environment).

As far as we know, this is the only nationally representative survey tracking media use patterns among a truly random sample of 8- to 18-year-olds in the United States. Our goal is to provide data on the large trends and patterns of media usage among young people to inform the work of content creators, policymakers, educators, health care providers, parents, caregivers, and media effects researchers.

1. Media use in tweens and teens has grown faster since the start of the pandemic than it has over the four years prior to the pandemic.

From 2015 to 2019, media use for tweens grew only 3%, and for teens, 11%. But from 2019 to 2021 alone, media use grew by 17% for tweens and teens. On average, 8- to 12-year-olds use about five and a half hours of screen media per day (5:33), while 13- to 18-year-olds use about eight and a half hours of screen media (8:39) (Figure A). Between 2019 and 2021, the total amount of screen media used each day went from 4:44 to 5:33 among tweens, and from 7:22 to 8:39 among teens.¹ This is a much faster increase in just two years than was seen in the previous *four* years. From 2015 to 2019, total screen use among tweens increased by an average of just eight minutes a day, compared to 49 minutes in the past two years. Among teens, screen time ticked up 42 minutes a day from 2015 to 2019 (compared to 1:17 minutes in the past two years) (Rideout & Robb, 2019). Since 2019, the biggest increases were in time spent watching online videos (up 23 minutes a day among teens), using social media (up 17 minutes a day among teens and eight minutes a day among tweens), and browsing websites (up 14 minutes a day among teens and 10 minutes a day among tweens) (Tables A and B, pages 9–10).

FIGURE A. Total entertainment screen use among tweens and teens, per day, 2015 to 2021



Note: Entertainment screen use includes time spent watching television and online videos, playing video games, using social media, browsing websites, creating content, e-reading, and other digital activities. In 2021, time spent reading ebooks was included in the total for the first time (accounting for six minutes among tweens and eight among teens), and time spent watching movies in movie theaters and using an iPod Touch were not included (these had accounted for seven minutes among tweens and six minutes among teens in 2019).

Between 2019 and 2021, the total amount of screen media used each day went from 4:44 to 5:33 among tweens, and from 7:22 to 8:39 among teens. This is a much faster increase in just two years than was seen in the previous four years.

1. These figures represent the total amount of screen content young people consume or engage with, adding together the amount of time they spend watching television and online videos, playing video games, using social media, and other screen-based activities. They do not mean that young people devote five and a half or eight and a half hours each day exclusively to screen media, since they could be engaging in other activities at the same time (such as eating or riding a bus), or using more than one screen at a time (such as scrolling social media while watching television).

2. If forced to choose, teens say YouTube is the site that they wouldn't want to live without (Figure B). In fact, watching online videos is the favorite media activity among 8- to 18-year-olds, appealing to both tweens and teens, boys and girls, and across racial/ethnic groups and income levels.

More than six in 10 tweens and teens watch online videos every day, and say they enjoy watching “a lot” (Figure C). Since 2019, the percent of young people who say they watch online videos “every day” is up by 8 percentage points among both tweens and teens (to 64% among tweens and 77% among teens) (Table C, page 11). Sixty-one percent of tweens and 62% of teens enjoy watching online videos “a lot,” far more than the percent who enjoy any other activity that much (next most popular among tweens is television, which 48% enjoy “a lot,” and among teens is video games, which 39% enjoy “a lot”) (Table D, page 11). Watching online videos is the activity enjoyed the most among boys and girls as well as Whites, Blacks, Hispanic/Latinos, and young people from lower-, middle-, and higher-income families (Table 5, page 20). Tweens spend an average of 57 minutes a day watching online videos, and teens spend 1:22 (up 23 minutes a day since 2019 among teens) (Tables A and B, pages 9–10). If forced to choose a single site or platform they wouldn't want to live without, 32% of teens would choose YouTube, followed by 20% choosing Snapchat, and 13% choosing TikTok (among the 79% of 13- to 18-year-olds who are regular users of social media and online videos) (Figure B).

FIGURE B. Site teens wouldn't want to live without, 2021
Among the 79% of 13- to 18-year-olds who are regular users of social media and online videos (use at least once a week), percent who choose each site as the one they wouldn't want to live without

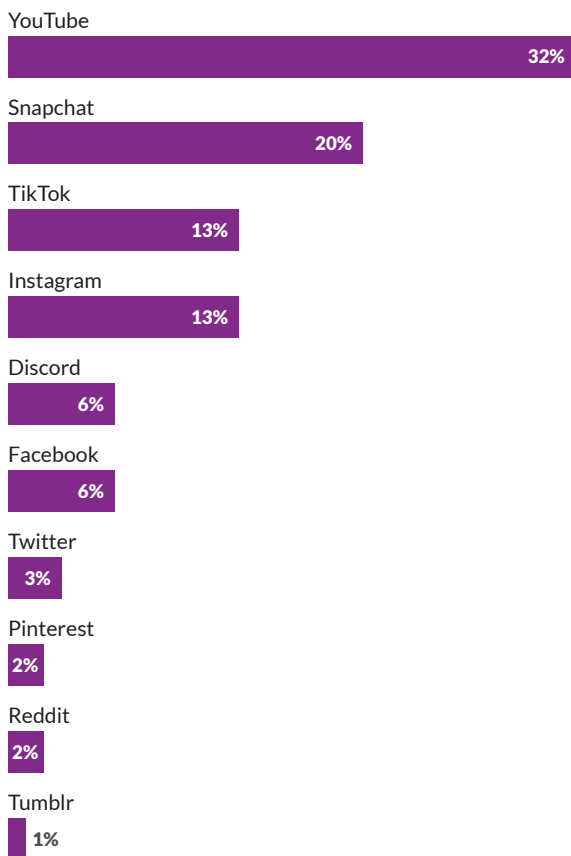
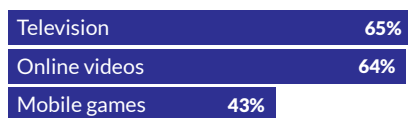


FIGURE C. Top entertainment screen media activities among tweens and teens, 2021

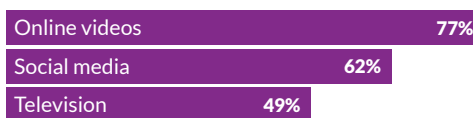
Tweens who do each activity “every day”



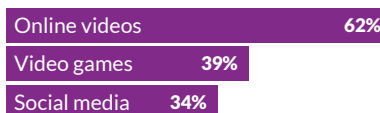
Tweens who enjoy each activity “a lot”



Teens who do each activity “every day”



Teens who enjoy each activity “a lot”



Notes: *Video games* refers to games played on a console, computer, or portable game player. *Mobile games* refers to games played on a smartphone or tablet.

3. Use of social media is growing among 8- to 12-year-olds.

Thirty-eight percent of tweens have used social media (up from 31% in 2019), and nearly one in five (18%) now say they use social media “every day” (up 5 percentage points since 2019) (Table 16, page 33).

The time spent using social media is also up eight minutes a day among this age group (from 10 to 18 minutes a day, on average) (Table A, page 9). The top five social media sites tweens have ever used are Snapchat (13%), Instagram (10%), Facebook (8%), Discord (5%), and Pinterest (4%) (Figure D).²

4. Teens (13- to 18-year-olds) now spend nearly an hour and a half a day using social media but have conflicted feelings about the medium.

On average, teens spend 1:27 a day using social media, up from 1:10 in 2019 (Table B, page 10). But even though teens devote a lot of time to social media, they don’t enjoy it as much as they do other types of media. Only a third (34%) of teens say they enjoy using social media “a lot,” compared with 62% who say they enjoy watching online videos that much (Table D, page 11). Overall, 84% teens say they’ve used social media. The top five social media sites teens have ever used are Instagram (53%), Snapchat (49%), Facebook (30%), Discord (17%), and Twitter (16%) (Figure E).

FIGURE D. Top social media sites among tweens, 2021
Percent of all 8- to 12-year-olds who have ever used ...

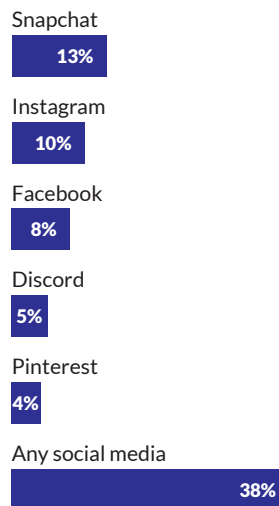
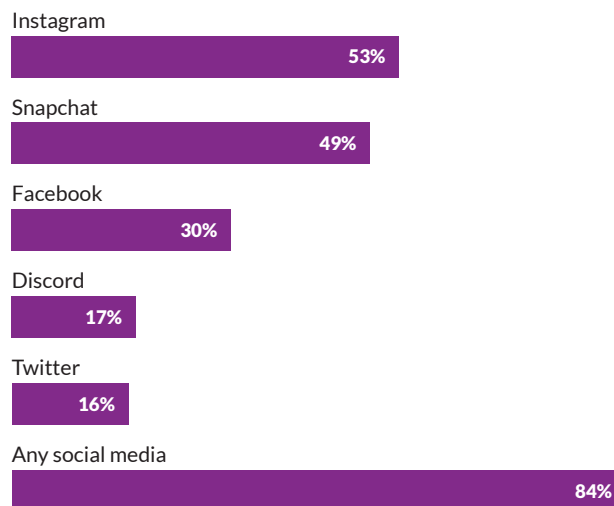


FIGURE E. Top social media sites among teens, 2021
Percent of all 13- to 18-year-olds who have ever used ...



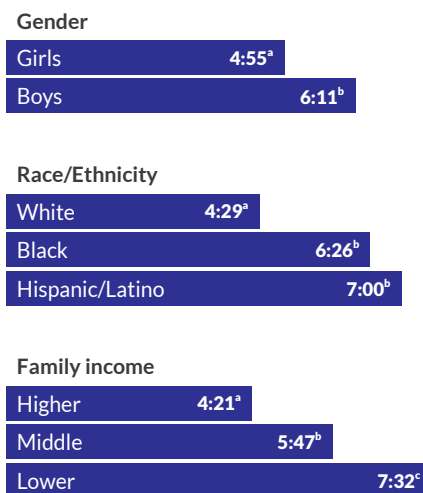
2. *Social media* was defined in the survey as being sites such as Snapchat, Instagram, Discord, Reddit, or Facebook; platforms such as YouTube, TikTok, and Twitch were considered online video sites.

5. Among both tweens and teens, there are substantial variations in the average amount of screen media engaged with each day, by gender, race/ethnicity, and household income.

Boys use more screen media than girls (1:16 minutes a day more, on average, among tweens, and 1:14 more among teens) (Figures F and G). Black and Hispanic/Latino children use more screen media than their White peers (for example, a difference of about two hours (1:57) a day between Black and White tweens and two and a half hours (2:31) a day between Hispanic/Latino and White tweens). And finally, tweens and teens from lower-income families engage with substantially more screen media than their peers from higher-income households (a difference of 3:11 a day among tweens and 2:03 among teens).

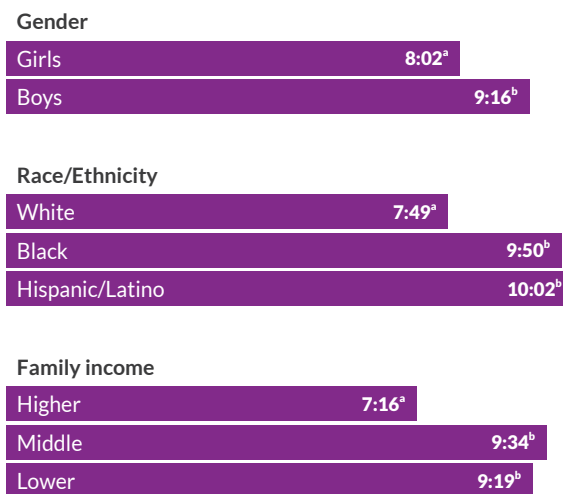
Boys use more screen media than girls, Black and Hispanic/Latino kids use more than White kids do, and children from lower-income households use more than those in higher-income homes.

FIGURE F. Average daily entertainment screen use among 8- to 12-year-olds, by demographics, 2021



Notes: Lower income is <\$35,000; middle is \$35,000 to 99,999; and higher is \$100,000 or more. Items with different superscripts (a, b, c) differ significantly ($p < .05$).

FIGURE G. Average daily entertainment screen use among 13- to 18-year-olds, by demographics, 2021



Notes: Lower income is <\$35,000; middle is \$35,000 to 99,999; and higher is \$100,000 or more. Items with different superscripts (a, b) differ significantly ($p < .05$).

6. Though children consumed more media overall after the pandemic than they had before, one form of media did not increase in usage: reading.

About a third of tweens (34%) and one in five teens (21%) say they spend some time reading for their own pleasure every day (Figure H), about the same as in 2019 (35% and 22%, respectively) (Table 18, page 35). On average, tweens and teens spend 34 minutes a day reading, including books, magazines, ebooks, and online articles (not a statistically significant difference from 2019, when the average was 29 minutes a day).

7. Nearly half (46%) of all 13- to 18-year-olds have listened to podcasts, and one in five say they do so at least once a week.

Twenty-two percent of teens say they enjoy listening to podcasts “a lot” or “somewhat” (Figure I). It is interesting to note that teens engage with a wide variety of types of media, including media based primarily on the spoken word.

FIGURE H. Reading frequency among teens, 2021
Percent of 13- to 18-year-olds who read for pleasure ...

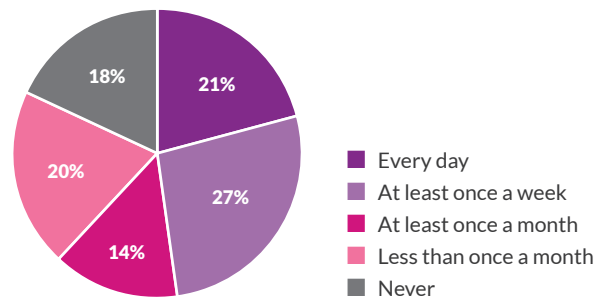
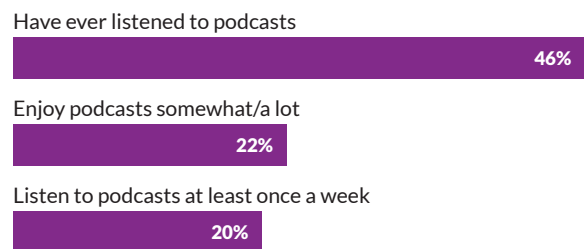


FIGURE I. Teens and podcasts, 2021
Percent of 13- to 18-year-olds who ...

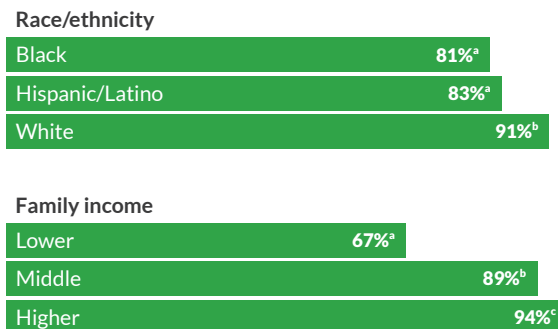


8. Large numbers of Black, Hispanic/Latino, and children in lower-income households still do not have access to a computer at home, one of the most basic building blocks of digital equity.

While 94% of children in higher-income households and 91% of White children have at least one computer in the home, only 67% of those in lower-income households and 81% and 83% of Black and Hispanic/Latino children, respectively, do (Figure J). It is hard to imagine the possibility of educational equity with such a wide disparity in digital access.

FIGURE J. Access to home computers, by race/ethnicity and by income, 2021

Percent of 8- to 18-year-olds with a laptop or desktop computer in the home



Notes: Lower income is <\$35,000; middle is \$35,000 to 99,999; and higher is \$100,000 or more. Items with different superscripts (a, b, c) differ significantly ($p < .05$).

TABLE A. Entertainment screen media use among 8- to 12-year-olds, 2019 vs. 2021

Percent who did each activity and average time spent per day

Among 8- to 12-year-olds ...	Percent who used on target day		Average time among users		Average time among all	
	2019	2021	2019	2021	2019	2021
Television/Videos	84%	87%	3:00	3:04	2:30	2:40
• Television on TV set	57%	62%	1:52	1:55	1:04	1:11
• Television on other devices	18% ^a	28% ^b	1:42	1:32	:19	:25
• Online videos	54%	58%	1:44	1:39	:56	:57
• DVDs	7%	5%	1:48	#	:08	:06
• Movies (in theater)	3%	NA	#	NA	:04	NA
Gaming	64%^a	59%^b	2:18	2:27	1:28	1:27
• Console/portable video games	30%	30%	2:24	2:13	:44	:40
• Computer games	11%	15%	1:36	1:27	:11	:13
• Mobile video games	45% ^a	37% ^b	1:17 ^a	1:31 ^b	:34	:33
Social media	13%^a	22%^b	1:17	1:20	:10^a	:18^b
Other						
• Browsing websites	17% ^a	30% ^b	1:23	1:19	:14 ^a	:24 ^b
• Video-chatting	10% ^a	18% ^b	:55	1:07	:05 ^a	:12 ^b
• E-reading [†]	8%	10%	1:19	1:26	:07	:09
• Making art/music	10%	11%	1:14	1:05	:07	:07
• Writing [‡]	1% ^a	2% ^b	#	#	* ^a	:01 ^b
• Anything else	11% ^a	19% ^b	1:01	1:18	:07 ^a	:15 ^b
Total screen media[§]	92%	95%	5:07^a	5:50^b	4:44^a	5:33^b

Indicates sample size of users is too small for reliable results (n < 50).

* Indicates more than zero, but less than half a minute.

† In 2019, the e-reading total did not include time spent reading ebooks; in 2021 it does.

‡ On a digital device (computer, tablet, or smartphone).

§ In 2019, screen media included time spent using iPod Touches, which accounted for one minute of watching online videos and two minutes of playing mobile games among tweens, but otherwise accounted for less than half a minute in any other activity. In 2021, iPod Touches were dropped from the survey.

Notes: All times are rounded to the nearest minute. Totals are rounded to the nearest minute after summing unrounded times. As a result, totals shown in the table may differ slightly from the sum of rounded times. 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; average time among users; average time among all). NA indicates this item was not asked in 2021.

TABLE B. Entertainment screen media use among 13- to 18-year-olds, 2019 vs. 2021

Percent who did each activity and average time spent per day

Among 13- to 18-year-olds ...	Percent who used on target day		Average time among users		Average time among all	
	2019	2021	2019	2021	2019	2021
Television/Videos	86%^a	92%^b	3:21	3:34	2:53^a	3:16^b
• Television on TV set	50%	52%	2:14	2:16	1:07	1:10
• Television on other devices	33%	32%	1:54	2:03	:38	:39
• Online videos	61% ^a	77% ^b	1:37	1:46	:59 ^a	1:22 ^b
• DVDs	4%	4%	#	#	:04	:05
• Movies (in theater)	3%	NA	#	NA	:04	NA
Gaming	56%	59%	2:52	3:01	1:36	1:46
• Console/portable video games	30% ^a	35% ^b	2:43	2:37	:49	:55
• Computer games	13% ^a	18% ^b	2:35	2:29	:19	:26
• Mobile video games	35%	33%	1:19	1:16	:27	:25
Social media	61%^a	67%^b	1:56	2:10	1:10^a	1:27^b
Other						
• Browsing websites	47% ^a	60% ^b	1:18	1:25	:37 ^a	:51 ^b
• Video-chatting	20% ^a	26% ^b	1:33	1:18	:19	:20
• E-reading [†]	16%	18%	1:33	1:20	:15	:15
• Making art/music	10%	13%	1:18	1:29	:08	:12
• Writing [‡]	5%	4%	#	#	:04	:03
• Anything else	30%	33%	1:34	1:28	:28	:29
Total screen media[§]	96%	97%	7:40^a	8:55^b	7:22^a	8:39^b

Indicates sample size of users is too small for reliable results ($n < 50$).

[†] In 2019, the e-reading total did not include time spent reading ebooks; in 2021 it does.

[‡] On a digital device (computer, tablet, or smartphone).

[§] In 2019, screen media included time spent using iPod Touches, which accounted for less than half a minute in any activity among teens. In 2021, iPod Touches were dropped from the survey.

Notes: All times are rounded to the nearest minute. Totals are rounded to the nearest minute after summing unrounded times. As a result, totals shown in the table may differ slightly from the sum of rounded times. 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; average time among users; average time among all). NA indicates this item was not asked in 2021.

TABLE C. Daily media activities, by age, 2019 vs. 2021

8- to 12-year-olds who ... "every day"	2019	2021	13- to 18-year-olds who ... "every day"	2019	2021
Watch television	63%	65%	Watch online videos	69% ^a	77% ^b
Watch online videos	56% ^a	64% ^b	Use social media	63%	62%
Play mobile games	46%	43%	Watch television	57% ^a	49% ^b
Read for pleasure	35%	34%	Play mobile games	46% ^a	40% ^b
Play video games*	NA	23%	Play video games*	NA	26%
• On a console/portable player	24%	NA	• On a console/portable player	27%	NA
• On a computer	15%	NA	• On a computer	17%	NA
Use social media	13% ^a	18% ^b	Read for pleasure	22%	21%
Use virtual reality	2%	3%	Use virtual reality	4%	3%
Listen to podcasts	NA	2%	Listen to podcasts	NA	6%

* In 2019, respondents were asked separate questions about the frequency of their use of games played on a computer, and of games played on a console/portable player. In 2021, those items were combined into a single question "How often do you play video games on a console (like Xbox or PlayStation), portable player (like Switch), or computer?"

Notes: NA indicates the question was not asked in that wave of the survey. Superscripts (a, b) are used to denote whether differences between groups are statistically significant ($p < .05$). Items with different superscripts differ significantly.

TABLE D. Media enjoyment, by age, 2019 vs. 2021

8- to 12-year-olds who enjoy ... "a lot"	2019	2021	13- to 18-year-olds who enjoy ... "a lot"	2019	2021
Watching online videos	67% ^a	61% ^b	Watching online videos	58%	62%
Playing video games*	52%	47%	Playing video games*	43%	39%
Watching television	50%	48%	Using social media	41% ^a	34% ^b
Playing mobile games	55% ^a	45% ^b	Playing mobile games	30%	28%
Reading for pleasure	38%	33%	Watching television	33% ^a	27% ^b
Using social media	8% ^a	12% ^b	Reading for pleasure	24%	23%
Using virtual reality	6% ^a	9% ^b	Using virtual reality	5%	5%
Listening to podcasts	N/A	3%	Listening to podcasts	N/A	5%

* In 2021, includes playing on a console, portable player, or computer. In 2019, enjoyment of computer games was asked separately. Therefore, changes over time for this category cannot be evaluated.

Note: Superscripts (a, b) are used to denote whether differences over time are statistically significant ($p < .05$). Items with different superscripts differ significantly.

The Common Sense Census: Media Use by Tweens and Teens, 2021

Use of screen media is up 17% for tweens and teens since the start of the pandemic.



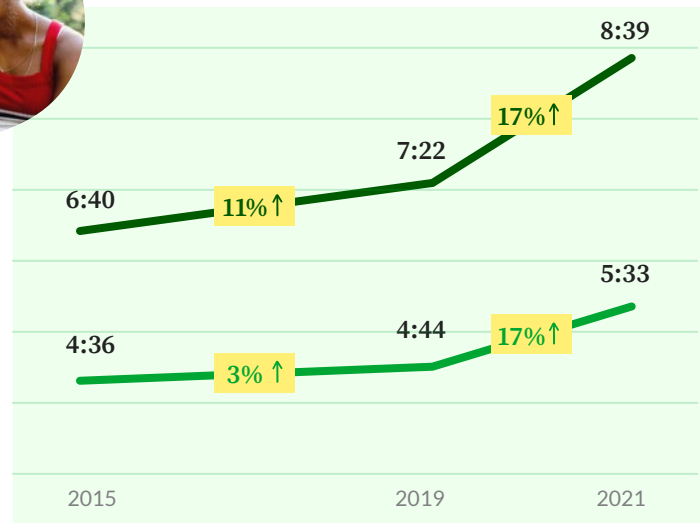
Media use grew faster in the last two years than it did in the four years prior to the pandemic.

Overall, boys use more screen media than girls.

Black and Hispanic/Latino children use screens more than White children.

And children in higher-income households use screens for entertainment less than children in middle- and lower-income households.

Total entertainment screen use per day (average)



Average daily entertainment screen use, 2021

By gender



By race/ethnicity



By household income



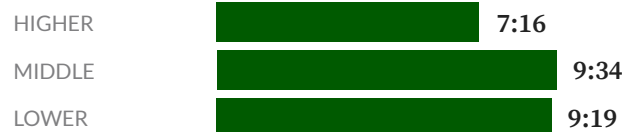
By gender



By race/ethnicity



By household income

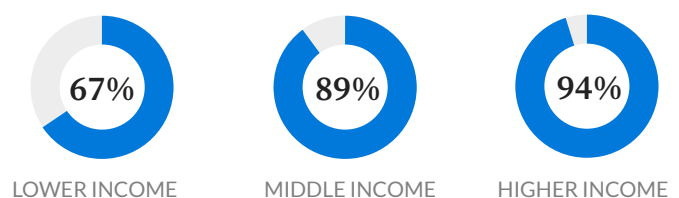


Note: Tweens are 8- to 12-year-olds. Teens are 13- to 18-year-olds.

Digital Divide:
Children in higher-income households have access to computers at greater rates than those in lower-income households.



Percent of 8- to 18-year-olds with a laptop or desktop computer in the home, 2021

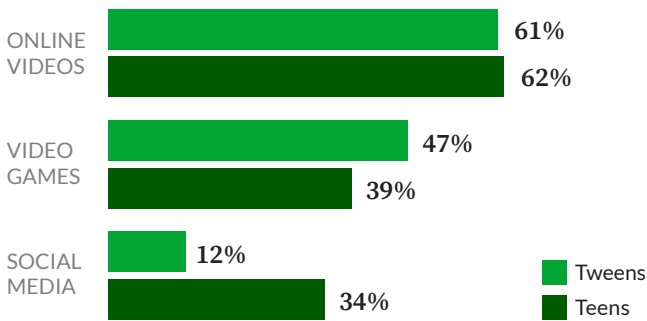


Note: "Lower" income is <\$35,000; "middle" is \$35,000-99,999; and "higher" is \$100,000 or more.

Watching online videos is the favorite media activity of both tweens and teens.



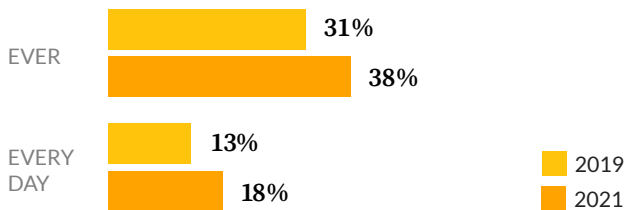
Percent of 8- to 18-year-olds who enjoy each activity “a lot,” 2021



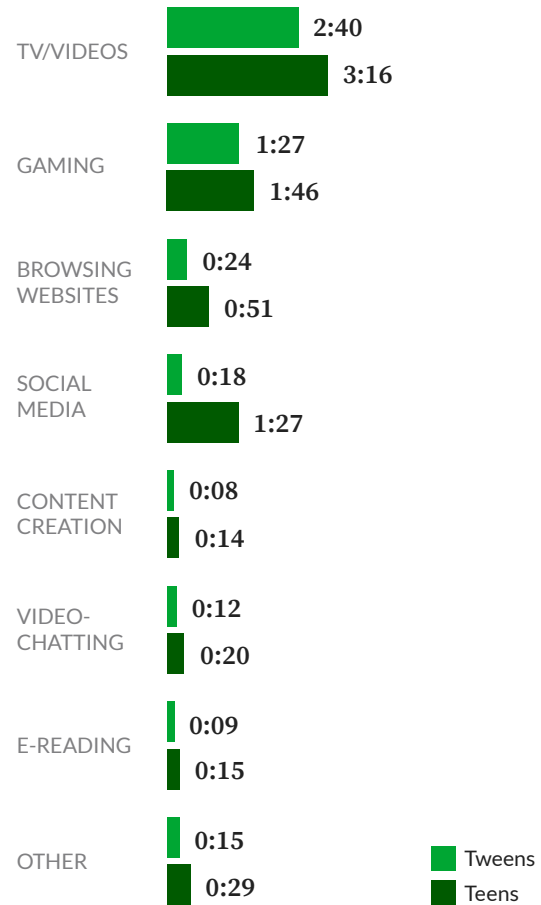
Social media use is growing among tweens.



Among tweens, percent who use social media ...



Average daily entertainment screen use, by activity and age, 2021

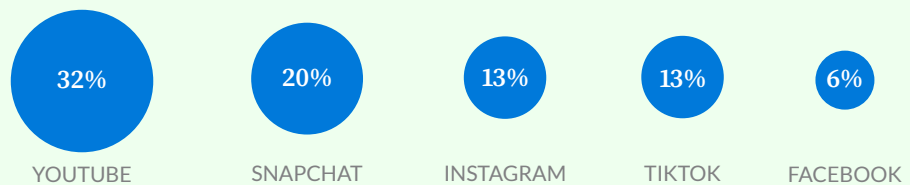


E-reading includes ebooks and online reading (articles, stories, news, etc.)

When forced to choose, more teens prefer YouTube over other popular platforms.*



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



* Among the 79% of 13- to 18-year-olds who use social media and online videos at least once a week.
 ** Top 5 responses



Screen Media Use: Overview

One question this study was designed to help answer is whether screen media use has changed since the onset of the coronavirus pandemic. Many have speculated that use of screen media increased during the first year of the pandemic, as most young people were restricted from normal activities and forced to spend more time at home. This survey sought to examine if there were any lasting changes in the time young people spend with screens as in-person activities began ramping up in the fall of 2021.

Time devoted to screen activities. On average, 8- to 12-year-olds use about five and a half hours of screen media per day (5:33), while 13- to 18-year-olds use about eight and a half hours (8:39) (Figure 1). These figures represent the total amount of screen content young people consume or engage with, adding together the amount of time they spend watching television and online videos, playing video games, using social media, and the like. These findings on total amount of screen media used do not mean that young people devote five and half or eight and a half hours each day exclusively to screen media, for two reasons:

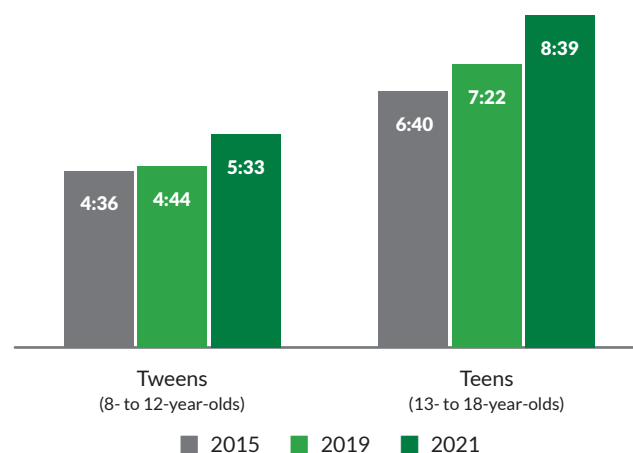
- They often spend some proportion of time using multiple screens at once (for example, scrolling social media while watching television), meaning two hours of screen content could fit into a single hour of the day.
- They often watch or use screen media while they are doing other things, like riding in a car or bus, or eating breakfast.

It's also important to remember that these time estimates represent the average among all young people; individual use of media varies widely.

The findings indicate that the total amount of screen media used by young people increased substantially between spring 2019 and fall 2021. Among tweens, total use of screen media went from 4:44 to 5:33 (an increase of 49 minutes a day, on average). Among teens, total screen media usage went from 7:22 to 8:39 (an increase of 1:17 a day, on average) (Figure 1).

These increases in use of entertainment screen media in the two years between 2019 and 2021 are far greater than the increases we saw from 2015 to 2019. In that four-year span, total screen use among tweens increased by an average of just eight minutes a day; in the past two years, it increased an average of 49 minutes a day. Among teens, the average screen use ticked up by 42 minutes a day between 2015 and 2019; over the past two years, it increased by an hour and 17 minutes a day, on average. In other words, from 2015 to 2019, media use for tweens grew only 3%, and for teens, 11%. But from 2019 to 2021 alone, media use grew by 17% for tweens and teens. Although we cannot determine how much COVID-19 restrictions played a role, it is clear that media use has shifted dramatically from before the pandemic to the time of our measurement.

FIGURE 1. Total entertainment screen use among tweens and teens, per day, 2015 to 2021



Note: Entertainment screen use includes time spent watching television and online videos, playing video games, using social media, browsing websites, creating content, e-reading, and other digital activities. In 2021, time spent reading ebooks was included in the total for the first time (accounting for six minutes among tweens and eight among teens), and time spent watching movies in movie theaters and using an iPod Touch were not included (these had accounted for seven minutes among tweens and six minutes among teens in 2019).

In addition to looking at the average (mean) daily time spent in each media activity, another useful way of exploring the data is to look at the proportion of young people who spend various segments of time using screen media. For example, in any given day, what proportion of young people use less than two hours of screen media, and what proportion use more than eight hours?

Using this metric, we see that almost all tweens and teens spend *some* time with screens each day—in any given day, just 5% of tweens and 3% of teens don’t engage with screen media at all (Table 1). Among tweens, nearly half (47%) use more than four hours of screen media a day, including 20% who use more than eight hours. Among teens, three out of four (75%) use more than four hours of screen media per day, including 41%

who use more than eight hours of screen media. The number of tweens and teens using more than eight hours of screen media a day is up from just two years ago, especially among teens (from 29% to 41% of all teens).

Top screen activities and key changes over time. Watching video content, including TV shows and online videos, accounts for the most screen use among both tweens and teens (2:40 among tweens and 3:16 among teens), followed by gaming on consoles, portable players, computers, or mobile devices (1:27 among tweens and 1:46 among teens) (Table 2). Among teens, social media also accounts for a substantial amount of screen use (1:27), as does browsing websites (51 minutes). Other screen activities, such as video-chatting, reading, or making digital art or music, take up far less time each day on average.

TABLE 1. Entertainment screen media use, by age, 2019 vs. 2021

Percent who use the following amount of screen media per day	Among 8- to 12-year-olds		Among 13- to 18-year-olds	
	2019	2021	2019	2021
None	8%	5%	4%	3%
2 hours or less	26%	24%	15% ^a	7% ^b
2:01 to 4 hours	25%	23%	18%	15%
4:01 to 8 hours	26%	27%	33%	34%
More than 8 hours	15% ^a	20% ^b	29% ^a	41% ^b

TABLE 2. Average daily entertainment screen use, by activity and age, 2019 vs. 2021

Average daily use devoted to ...	Among 8- to 12-year-olds		Average daily use devoted to ...	Among 13- to 18-year-olds	
	2019	2021		2019	2021
Television/Videos*	2:30	2:40	Television/Videos*	2:53 ^a	3:16 ^b
Gaming	1:28	1:27	Gaming	1:36	1:46
Browsing websites	:14 ^a	:24 ^b	Social media	1:10 ^a	1:27 ^b
Social media	:10 ^a	:18 ^b	Browsing websites	:37 ^a	:51 ^b
Content creation [†]	:08	:08	Video-chatting	:19	:20
Video-chatting	:05 ^a	:12 ^b	E-reading	:15	:15
E-reading	:07	:09	Content creation [†]	:12	:14
Other [‡]	:07 ^a	:15 ^b	Other [‡]	:28	:29
Total screen use[§]	4:44^a	5:33^b	Total screen use[§]	7:22^a	8:39^b

* In 2019, time spent watching movies in movie theaters was included in this category and accounted for an average of four minutes a day among both tweens and teens. This item was not included in 2021.

† Includes making digital art or music or writing on a digital device.

‡ Includes using maps or other functional apps, emailing, shopping, and doing any other digital activity not specifically asked about in the survey.

§ In 2019, screen use included iPod Touches, which accounted for one minute of watching online videos and two minutes of playing mobile games among tweens, but otherwise accounted for less than half a minute in any other activity among either age group. In 2021, iPod Touches were dropped from the survey.

Note: Superscripts (a, b) are used to denote whether differences over time are statistically significant (p < .05). Items with different superscripts differ significantly.

The biggest increases in screen use between 2019 and 2021 were in time spent watching online videos (up 23 minutes a day among teens), using social media (up 17 minutes a day among teens and eight minutes a day among tweens), browsing websites (up 14 minutes a day among teens and 10 minutes a day among tweens), and video-chatting (up seven minutes a day among tweens).

Among both tweens and teens, there are substantial variations in the average amount of screen media engaged with each day, by gender, race/ethnicity, and household income (Table 3). Boys use more screen media than girls (1:16 minutes a day more, on average, among tweens, and 1:14 more among teens). Black and Hispanic/Latino tweens and teens use more screen media than their White peers. Among 8- to 12-year-olds, Black tweens use nearly two hours more screen media per day, on average, than White tweens (1:57 more for Black vs. White tweens a day). Hispanic/Latino tweens use an

average of 2:31 more than White tweens. Black and Hispanic teens average about two hours more screen media per day than White teens (2:01 more among Black, and 2:13 more among Hispanic/Latinos). And finally, tweens and teens in lower-income families engage with more screen media than their peers from higher-income households (a difference of 3:11 a day among tweens and 2:03 among teens).

The largest increases in screen use from 2019 to 2021 were among teens from middle-income households (an increase of 2:17 a day), Hispanic/Latino tweens and teens (an increase of 1:47 and 1:48 a day, respectively), tweens from lower-income households (1:43 a day), and teen boys (an increase of 1:40 a day from 2019 to 2021) (Table 4). In our next wave of data collection, we will be interested to see if those changes hold, or if they are a temporary artifact of this particular wave of data collection.

TABLE 3. Screen use, by age and demographic, 2021

Average daily screen use among ...	Gender		Race/Ethnicity			Family income		
	Boys	Girls	White	Black	Hispanic/Latino	Lower	Middle	Higher
8- to 12-year-olds	6:11 ^a	4:55 ^b	4:29 ^a	6:26 ^b	7:00 ^b	7:32 ^a	5:47 ^b	4:21 ^c
13- to 18-year-olds	9:16 ^a	8:02 ^b	7:49 ^a	9:50 ^b	10:02 ^b	9:19 ^a	9:34 ^a	7:16 ^b

TABLE 4. Screen use, by age and demographic, 2019 vs. 2021

Average daily screen use among ...	Boys			Girls					
	2019	2021	Change	2019	2021	Change			
8- to 12-year-olds	5:16 ^a	6:11 ^b	+ :55	4:10 ^a	4:55 ^b	+ :45			
13- to 18-year-olds	7:36 ^a	9:16 ^b	+1:40	7:07	8:02	+ :55			
	White			Black			Hispanic/Latino		
	2019	2021	Change	2019	2021	Change	2019	2021	Change
8- to 12-year-olds	4:15	4:29	+ :14	6:04	6:26	+ :22	5:12 ^a	7:00 ^b	+1:47
13- to 18-year-olds	6:40 ^a	7:49 ^b	+1:09	8:32	9:50	+1:18	8:14 ^a	10:02 ^b	+1:48
	Lower income			Middle income			Higher income		
	2019	2021	Change	2019	2021	Change	2019	2021	Change
8- to 12-year-olds	5:49 ^a	7:32 ^b	+1:43	4:52 ^a	5:47 ^b	+ :55	3:59	4:21	+ :22
13- to 18-year-olds	8:32	9:19	+ :47	7:17 ^a	9:34 ^b	+2:17	6:49	7:16	+ :27

Note: Lower income is <\$35,000; middle is \$35,000 to 99,999; and higher is \$100,000 or more. Superscripts (a, b, c) are used to denote whether differences between groups (Table 3) or over time (Table 4) are statistically significant ($p < .05$). Items with different superscripts differ significantly. Data in the Change columns reflects the difference between 2019 and 2021 before rounding.

Frequency of screen use. Another measure for assessing young people’s relationship with various types of media activities is the frequency with which they engage in those activities, such as watching television, playing games, or using social media. In this survey, we track the proportion of young people who say they engage in an activity “every day.”

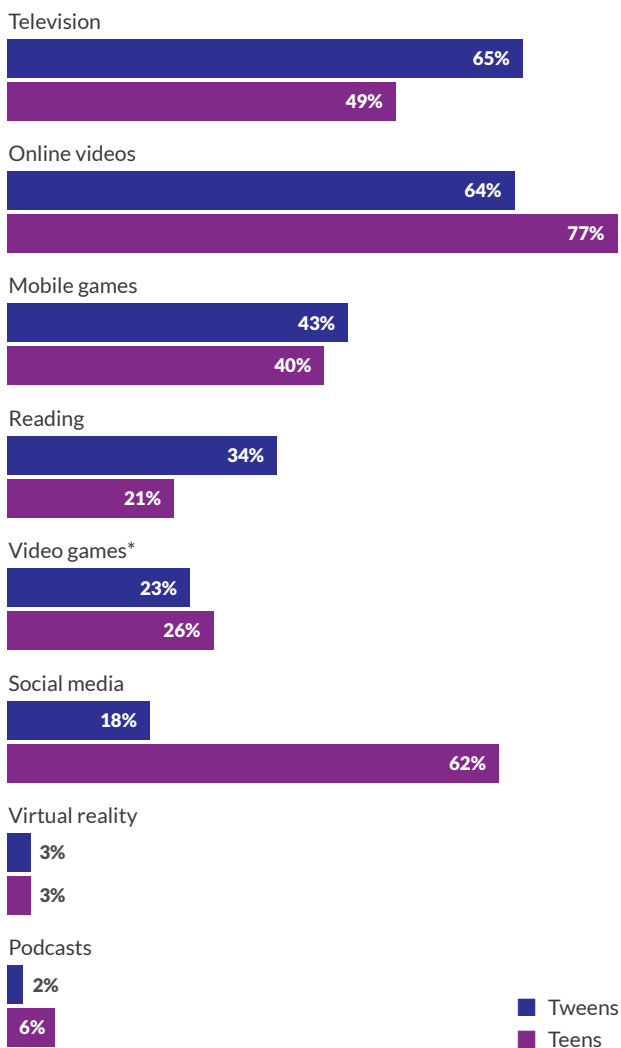
Among tweens, the top two media activities engaged in most frequently are watching television (65% do so daily) and watching online videos (64%) (Figure 2). Among teens, the two most common activities are watching online videos (77% do so daily) and using social media (62%). About half (49%) of teens watch television daily as well.

Among tweens, the top two media activities engaged in most frequently are watching television (65% do so daily) and watching online videos (64%).

Since 2019, the percent of young people who watch online videos “every day” is up among both tweens (8 percentage points) and teens (8 percentage points). Television viewing has continued to decline among teens (down 8 percentage points). Mobile gaming is also down among teens (6 percentage points). Because of changes in question structure, it’s not clear whether there have been changes in the frequency tweens and teens play video games on console players, portable players, and computers. Daily use of social media is up 5 percentage points among tweens, and held steady among teens (Table C, page 11).

FIGURE 2. Daily entertainment screen media activities, by age, 2021

Percent of tweens and teens who engage in each activity “every day”



* On a console, portable player, or computer.

Enjoyment of screen media. Sometimes there is a difference between what young people do most frequently, and what they say they enjoy doing the most. For example, many young people say they watch television every day, but fewer say they enjoy it “a lot.” Forty-nine percent of teens say they watch television every day, but only 27% say they enjoy it “a lot.” Even more dramatically, 62% of teens use social media “every day,” but only 34% say they enjoy it “a lot.” The one medium with congruence between use and enjoyment is online videos, which more than six in 10 tweens and teens use every day and enjoy “a lot.”

Watching online videos is by far the favorite media activity for both tweens (61% enjoy it a lot) and teens (62%) (Figure 3). Watching television is the next most popular activity among tweens (48%), and playing video games is next among teens (39%). Social media is the third favorite media activity among teens, with 34% saying they enjoy it “a lot,” while playing video games is next among tweens (47% enjoy playing “a lot”). In general, enjoyment of media is highest among tweens and goes down among teens, with two exceptions: online videos, which appeal across age groups, and social media, which most tweens don’t use.

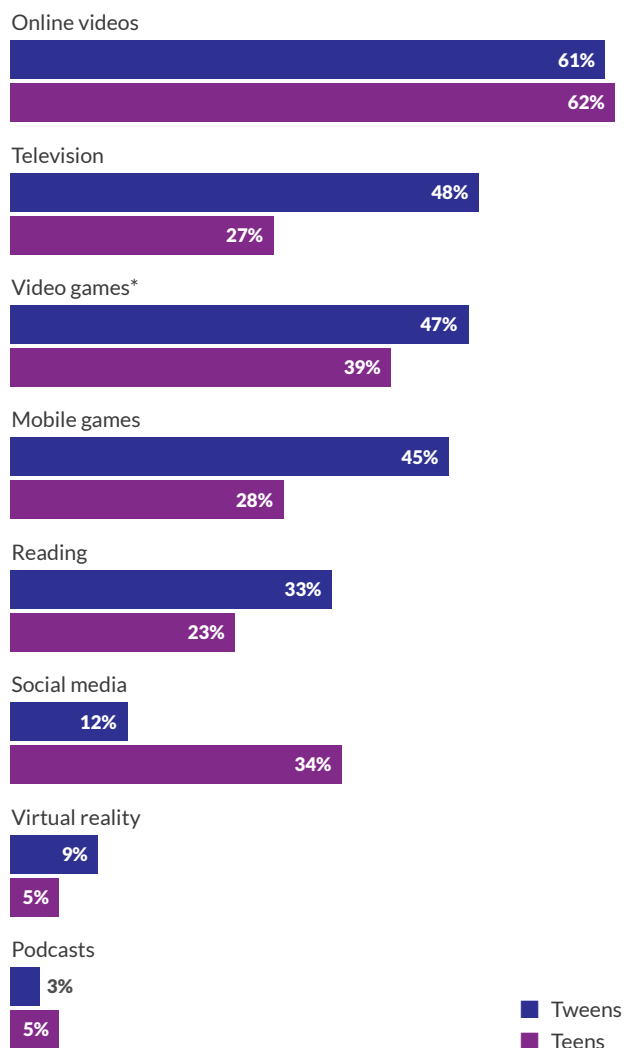
Watching online videos is notable for being popular across demographic groups, enjoyed by boys and girls, Whites, Blacks and Hispanics/Latinos, and young people from lower-, middle-, and higher-income households (Table 5, page 20). And video gaming is notable for being the most split along gender lines, with a 36-percentage-point difference in enjoyment between boys and girls (but no difference by race/ethnicity or household income). On the other hand, girls enjoy using social media more than boys do (30% vs. 19% enjoy it “a lot”). Black and Hispanic/Latino children as well as tweens and teens in lower-income households also enjoy using social media more than their peers do.

Teens’ enjoyment of social media went down since 2019 (from 41% to 34% who enjoy it “a lot”), as did their enjoyment of television (down from 33% to 27%). The proportion of tweens who say they enjoy playing mobile games decreased by 10 percentage points to 45%, while the proportion who enjoy using social media a lot increased by 4 percentage points to 12% (Table D, page 11).

The one medium with congruence between use and enjoyment is online videos, which more than six in 10 tweens and teens use every day and enjoy “a lot.”

FIGURE 3. Favorite entertainment screen media activities, by age, 2021

Percent of tweens and teens who enjoy each media activity “a lot”



* On a console, portable player, or computer.

TABLE 5. Enjoyment of entertainment screen media, by demographics, 2021

Percent of 8- to 18-year-olds who say they enjoy each activity “a lot”	Gender		Race/Ethnicity			Family income		
	Boys	Girls	White	Black	Hispanic/Latino	Lower	Middle	Higher
Watching online videos	64% ^a	59% ^b	60%	64%	66%	65%	62%	60%
Playing video games*	60% ^a	24% ^b	40%	48%	45%	45%	44%	40%
Watching television	35%	39%	37% ^a	46% ^b	36% ^a	36%	39%	36%
Playing mobile games [†]	40% ^a	31% ^b	33%	40%	37%	41% ^a	38% ^a	31% ^b
Reading for pleasure	21% ^a	34% ^b	31% ^a	19% ^b	22% ^b	26%	28%	28%
Using social media	19% ^a	30% ^b	21% ^a	35% ^b	28% ^b	30% ^a	24% ^{ab}	22% ^b
Using virtual reality	9% ^a	4% ^b	7%	7%	4%	10% ^a	5% ^b	7% ^{ab}
Listening to podcasts	5%	4%	4% ^a	8% ^b	4% ^{ab}	8% ^a	3% ^b	4% ^b

* On a console or portable player.

[†] On a smartphone or tablet.

Notes: *Lower* income is <\$35,000; *middle* is \$35,000 to 99,999; and *higher* is \$100,000 or more. Superscripts (a, b) are used to denote whether differences between groups are statistically significant (p < .05). Items with different superscripts differ significantly.

Media Devices: Access in the Home and Personal Ownership

Young people’s homes continue to offer many devices and platforms for engaging with media. These include larger devices such as TV sets, computers, and video game consoles, as well as mobile devices such as tablets and smartphones. And the types of content platforms available now include streaming services as well as broadcast and cable. In this section of the report, we document the presence of these devices and services in the home, how many young people have their own media devices, and any changes over time.

Media devices in the home. Interestingly, there does not appear to have been an increase in the number of families owning either computers, tablets, or video game players during the pandemic (Table 6). With so many young people attending remote school, and family members relying even more than usual on screen media for entertainment, it is somewhat surprising to see ownership of those devices remain steady over the past two years. As was the case in 2019, about nine out of 10 families have at least one smartphone in the home (94%), a TV set (89%), and a computer (87%), and about three out of four have a tablet (74%) and a video game player (79%).

The one major trend in the home media environment that we do see over the past two years is the continued increase in the number of families with subscription streaming services, such as Netflix or Hulu, which went from 72% in 2019 to 84% in 2021. Cable and satellite subscriptions continued to decline in tandem with the increase in streaming subscriptions, from 41% to 32% of families with cable, and from 21% to 13% with satellite. In terms of new media technologies, about one in six tweens and teens now report having a virtual reality headset in the home (up from 14% in 2019, not a statistically significant difference).

TABLE 6. Technology in the home, 2019 vs. 2021

Percent of 8- to 18-year-olds with a ... in the home	2019	2021
Smartphone	91% ^a	94% ^b
TV set	87%	89%
Computer (laptop or desktop)	89%	87%
Subscription streaming service*	72% ^a	84% ^b
Video game player	78%	79%
Tablet	75%	74%
Cable TV*	41% ^a	32% ^b
Satellite TV*	21% ^a	13% ^b
Virtual reality headset	14%	17%

* Asked of parents.

Note: Superscripts (a, b) are used to denote whether differences over time are statistically significant ($p < .05$). Items with different superscripts differ significantly.

The one major trend in the home media environment that we do see over the past two years is the continued increase in the number of families with subscription streaming services, such as Netflix or Hulu, which went from 72% in 2019 to 84% in 2021.

Personal device ownership. As mentioned above, there were no substantial changes in the number of households with at least one computer, tablet, or video game player over the past two years. In this section, we look at a slightly different measure, the number of tweens and teens who have their own digital devices. And here too, surprisingly, we did not see substantial changes. The proportion of teens with their own smartphone crept up by 4 percentage points to 88% (not a statistically significant change), and the number of tweens with their own tablet nudged up 5 percentage points to 57%, also not a statistically significant change (Table 7). Due to changes in question wording between the 2019 and 2021 surveys, we are not able to determine whether there was a change in the proportion with their own laptop or desktop computers.

The number of tweens and teens with their own digital devices is up dramatically in the past six years, but not in the past two years (Figure 4). In 2015, 24% of tweens had their own smartphone, and today 43% do. In 2015, 67% of teens had their own phone, while today 88% do (Rideout & Robb, 2019). When looked at in more detail by individual ages, about three in 10 of all 8- and 9-year-olds have their own phones; among 12- to 13-year-olds, about seven in 10 do; and among those age 14 or older, about nine in 10 have their own phones.

TABLE 7. Personal device ownership, by age, 2019 vs. 2021

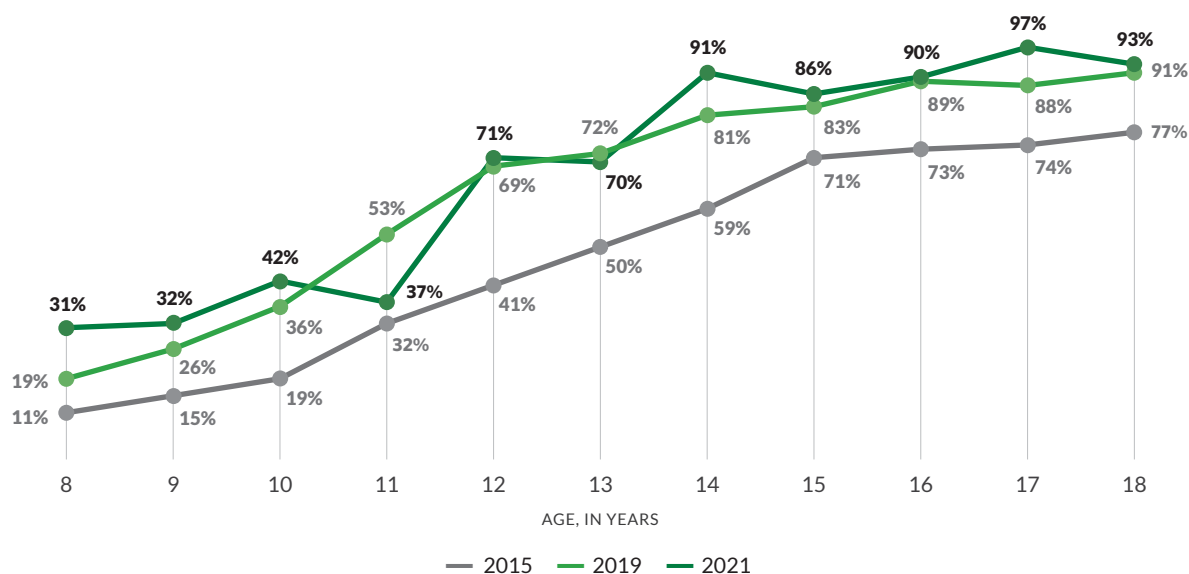
Percent of 8- to 12-year-olds who own a ...	2019	2021
Tablet	52%	57%
Smartphone	41%	43%
Computer	NA*	43%
Percent of 13- to 18-year-olds who own a ...	2019	2021
Smartphone	84%	88%
Computer	NA*	64%
Tablet	35%	36%

* In 2019, respondents were asked whether they had their own laptop (23% of tweens and 49% of teens did). In 2021, question wording was changed to include laptop or desktop computer, so results are not comparable.

Note: None of the differences over time were statistically significant.

FIGURE 4. Smartphone ownership, by individual age, 2015 to 2021

Percent of 8- to 18-year-olds who have their own smartphone



Despite the necessity of computers and tablets for remote learning, and despite efforts by school districts and others to provide devices to families without them during the first year of the pandemic, large numbers of children in lower-income households—and children of color—still do not have access to these basic building blocks of digital equity (Chandra et al., 2020). While 94% of tweens and teens in higher-income households and 91% of White children have at least one computer in the home, only 67% of children in lower-income families, and 81% and 83%, respectively, of Black and Hispanic/Latino children do (Table 8). It is hard to imagine there could be educational equity with such a wide disparity in digital access. Similarly, 60% of tweens and teens in lower-income families have a tablet in the home, compared to 81% of children in higher-income households. There is even a 10-percentage-point gap in access to a smartphone in the home, with 14% of tweens and teens from lower-income homes saying no one in the home has a smartphone.

Despite the necessity of computers and tablets for remote learning, and despite efforts by school districts and others to provide devices to families without them during the first year of the pandemic, large numbers of children in lower-income households—and children of color—still do not have access to these basic building blocks of digital equity.

TABLE 8. Household and personal device ownership, by race/ethnicity and family income, 2021

Among 8- to 18-year-olds	Race/Ethnicity			Family income		
	White	Black	Hispanic/Latino	Lower	Middle	Higher
Percent who have a ... in the home						
• Smartphone	95%	93%	93%	86% ^a	95% ^b	96% ^b
• Tablet	75%	71%	72%	60% ^a	75% ^b	81% ^c
• Computer	91% ^a	81% ^b	83% ^b	67% ^a	89% ^b	94% ^c
Percent who have their own ...						
• Smartphone	65% ^a	74% ^b	70% ^{ab}	68%	69%	65%
• Tablet	45%	45%	46%	40%	47%	47%
• Computer	53%	55%	55%	41% ^a	55% ^b	58% ^b

Notes: Lower income is <\$35,000; middle is \$35,000 to 99,999; and higher is \$100,000 or more. Superscripts (a, b, c) are used to denote whether differences between groups are statistically significant ($p < .05$). Items with different superscripts differ significantly.



Television

Watching television—whether through broadcast, cable, or streaming services—continues to be a mainstay of young people’s media diets. Sometimes their viewing occurs on a TV set, and sometimes on a laptop, tablet, or phone.

Watching television still occupies more time in young people’s media diets than any other single media activity, even though there seems to be more excitement for other forms of entertainment (i.e., young people are more likely to enjoy other activities “a lot”). Tweens watch about an hour and a half of television daily (1:36), and teens average closer to two hours a day (1:50) (Table 9). Time watching television held fairly steady among teens from 2019 to 2021 and increased among tweens (from 1:22 to 1:36 a day, on average).

Nearly two out of three tweens (65%) watch television “every day,” as do about half (49%) of teens. But while the proportion of tweens who spend some time watching television every day remained largely the same from 2019 to 2021, there was a decline in daily TV viewing among teens, from 57% to 49%.

About half (48%) of tweens say they like watching television “a lot”—far less than say the same about watching online videos (61%), but about the same as two years ago, and in line with the level of enjoyment tweens have for other media, such as playing video games (also 47%) (Table D, page 11).

Television loses some of its appeal as young people grow from the tween years to the teen years. Only about one in four teens (27%) say they enjoy watching television “a lot,” far fewer than the proportion who enjoy watching online videos (62%); and the popularity of television among teens is trending downward (two years ago, a third said they enjoyed television a lot).

About a quarter (26%) of tweens’ TV viewing and more than a third (35%) of teens’ viewing happens on devices like a smartphone, tablet, or computer. More than eight in 10 (84%) young people have access to a subscription or streaming service like Netflix, Hulu, or Disney+, compared to about a third (32%) with cable and just 13% with a satellite TV service.

About a quarter (26%) of tweens’ TV viewing and more than a third (35%) of teens’ viewing happens on devices like a smartphone, tablet, or computer.

TABLE 9. Television: Enjoyment, frequency, and time spent, by age, 2019 vs. 2021

	Among 8- to 12-year-olds		Among 13- to 18-year-olds	
	2019	2021	2019	2021
Enjoyment: Percent who enjoy watching television “a lot”	50%	48%	33% ^a	27% ^b
Frequency: Percent who watch television “every day”	63%	65%	57% ^a	49% ^b
Time spent: Average daily time spent watching television (among all)*	1:22^a	1:36^b	1:45	1:50
• On a TV set	1:04	1:11	1:07	1:10
• On other devices*	:19	:25	:38	:39

* 2019 included time spent on an iPod Touch, which accounted for less than half a minute; 2021 survey did not include iPod Touch.

Notes: Superscripts (a, b) are used to denote whether differences over time are statistically significant ($p < .05$). Items with different superscripts differ significantly. Totals are rounded to the nearest minute after summing unrounded times. As a result, totals shown in the table may differ slightly from the sum of rounded times.

Watching television is something young people devote a substantial amount of time to each day regardless of gender, race/ethnicity, or household income. But Black young people are especially committed to television, with nearly three out of four saying they watch “every day” (73% v. 56% of Hispanic/Latino children, and 52% of Whites) (Table 10). White tweens and teens average nearly an hour and a half of television viewing every day (1:27), while their Black and Hispanic/Latino peers average more than two hours (2:14 and 2:04, respectively). Similarly, while young people from all income groups watch a fair amount of television, those from higher-income households watch less frequently and for a shorter amount of time than those in lower- or middle-income households.

Watching television is something young people devote a substantial amount of time to each day regardless of gender, race/ethnicity, or household income.

TABLE 10. Television: Enjoyment, frequency, and time spent, by demographics, 2021

Among 8- to 18-year-olds	Gender		Race/Ethnicity			Family income		
	Boys	Girls	White	Black	Hispanic/Latino	Lower	Middle	Higher
Enjoyment: Percent who enjoy watching television “a lot”	35%	39%	37% ^a	46% ^b	36% ^a	36%	39%	36%
Frequency: Percent who watch television “every day”	54%	58%	52% ^a	73% ^b	56% ^a	62% ^a	58% ^a	50% ^b
Time spent: Average daily time spent watching television ...								
• Among those who watch	2:37	2:30	2:16 ^a	2:58 ^b	2:52 ^b	2:48 ^a	2:49 ^a	2:06 ^b
• Among all	1:41	1:47	1:27 ^a	2:14 ^b	2:04 ^b	1:56 ^a	1:58 ^a	1:22 ^b

Notes: Television viewing includes watching on DVDs and watching television on a TV set, a computer, a tablet, or a smartphone. Lower income is <\$35,000; middle is \$35,000 to 99,999; and higher is \$100,000 or more. Superscripts (a, b) are used to denote whether differences between groups are statistically significant (p < .05). Items with different superscripts differ significantly.

Online Videos

Watching online videos on sites such as YouTube or TikTok is the media activity young people enjoy doing the most, by far. Sixty-one percent of tweens and 62% of teens say they enjoy watching videos online “a lot,” far above any other media activity covered in this survey (Table 11). (The next closest among tweens was watching television, which 48% said they enjoy doing “a lot,” and among teens it was playing video games, which 39% enjoy “a lot” (Table D, page 11).) It’s also the activity they are most likely to do every day. For example, 77% of teens say they watch online videos every single day (by comparison, 62% say they use social media every day, and 49% watch television that often).

During the pandemic, watching online videos has become even more popular among young people than it was before. From 2019 to 2021, the proportion of both tweens and teens who watch every day went up by 8 percentage points, and among teens, average viewing time went up by 23 minutes a day.

Watching online videos on sites such as YouTube or TikTok is the media activity young people enjoy doing the most, by far.

TABLE 11. Online videos: Enjoyment, frequency, and time spent, by age, 2019 vs. 2021

	Among 8- to 12-year-olds		Among 13- to 18-year-olds	
	2019	2021	2019	2021
Enjoyment: Percent who enjoy watching online videos “a lot”	67% ^a	61% ^b	58%	62%
Frequency: Percent who watch online videos “every day”	56% ^a	64% ^b	69% ^a	77% ^b
Time spent: Average daily time spent watching online videos* ...				
• Among those who watch	1:44	1:39	1:37	1:46
• Among all	:56	:57	:59 ^a	1:22 ^b

* 2019 data included time spent on an iPod touch, which accounted for one minute among tweens and less than half a minute among teens; the 2021 survey did not include iPod Touch.

Note: Superscripts (a, b) are used to denote whether differences over time are statistically significant ($p < .05$). Items with different superscripts differ significantly.

Watching videos online is incredibly popular across demographic groups, but especially among Hispanic/Latinos and young people from lower-income households, who are more likely to say they watch online videos “every day,” and who watch for longer periods of time (Table 12). For example, 79% of Hispanic/Latino tweens and teens say they watch online videos every day, compared to 67% of Whites. Tweens and teens in lower-income households who watch online videos tend to watch for longer, averaging 2:12 a session, compared with 1:29 among those in higher-income households who watch.

Watching videos online is incredibly popular across demographic groups, but especially among Hispanic/Latinos and young people from lower-income households.

TABLE 12. Online videos: Enjoyment, frequency, and time spent, by demographics, 2021

Among 8- to 18-year-olds	Gender		Race/Ethnicity			Family income		
	Boys	Girls	White	Black	Hispanic/Latino	Lower	Middle	Higher
Enjoyment: Percent who enjoy watching online videos “a lot”	64% ^a	59% ^b	60%	64%	66%	65%	62%	60%
Frequency: Percent who watch online videos “every day”	73%	70%	67% ^a	73% ^{ab}	79% ^b	78% ^a	70% ^b	69% ^b
Time spent: Average daily time spent watching online videos ...								
• Among those who watch	1:48	1:38	1:40	1:51	1:47	2:12 ^a	1:46 ^b	1:29 ^c
• Among all	1:16 ^a	1:05 ^b	1:06 ^a	1:08 ^{ab}	1:22 ^b	1:23 ^a	1:14 ^a	1:02 ^b

Notes: Lower income is <\$35,000; middle is \$35,000 to 99,999; and higher is \$100,000 or more. Superscripts (a, b, c) are used to denote whether differences between groups are statistically significant (p < .05). Items with different superscripts differ significantly.

Video gaming continues to be one of the more popular media activities for both tweens and teens, but enjoyment is split dramatically along gender lines. Previous research indicates that playing video games online was a popular way for young people to hang out with friends during the pandemic, when it was often tougher to see friends face-to-face (Rideout & Robb, 2021).

Somewhat surprisingly, the current survey doesn't document any big changes in video game playing from 2019 to 2021. The number of homes with a video game console or portable player has not changed (79% have one), and the average amount of time spent playing did not change substantially.

The survey explored a variety of types of gaming: mobile games (those played on a smartphone or tablet), computer games, and games played on a dedicated video game player, such as a console or portable player. In general, tweens enjoy playing games more than teens, especially mobile gaming (45% of tweens enjoy playing mobile games a lot, compared with 28% of teens) (Table 13). On average, tweens spend 1:27 a day gaming, and teens spend 1:46, but those numbers obscure substantial differences between boys and girls. Among all 8- to 18-year-olds, boys spend an average of 2:20 a day playing video games, and girls average just under an hour (:54) (Table 14, page 30).

TABLE 13. Video games: Enjoyment, frequency, and time spent, by age, 2019 vs. 2021

	Among 8- to 12-year-olds		Among 13- to 18-year-olds	
	2019	2021	2019	2021
Enjoyment: Percent who enjoy playing video games “a lot”				
• On a mobile device (smartphone or tablet)	55% ^a	45% ^b	30%	28%
• On a console, computer, or portable player*	NA	47%	NA	39%
Frequency: Percent who play video games “every day”				
• On a mobile device (smartphone or tablet)	46%	43%	46% ^a	40% ^b
• On a console, computer, or portable player*	NA	23%	NA	26%
Time spent: Average daily time spent gaming (among all)				
• On a mobile device [†]	1:34	1:33	1:27	1:25
• On a computer	1:11	1:13	1:19	1:26
• On a console or portable player	1:44	1:40	1:49	1:55

* In 2019, computer and console/portable games were asked separately, so those results are not included here.

[†] Participants were asked in 2019 about time spent on iPod Touches, which accounted for two minutes among tweens, and less than half a minute among teens; these items were dropped from the 2021 survey.

Notes: Superscripts (a, b) are used to denote whether differences over time are statistically significant ($p < .05$). Items with different superscripts differ significantly. Totals are rounded to the nearest minute after summing unrounded times. As a result, totals shown in the table may differ slightly from the sum of rounded times.

The differences between boys and girls are especially pronounced when it comes to games played on a gaming console, portable device, or computer. Sixty percent of all boys enjoy those types of games “a lot,” compared with 24% of girls; there are no differences by race/ethnicity or household income when it comes to enjoyment of this type of video gaming (Table 13). Forty percent of all boys play console, portable, or computer-based video games “every day,” compared to just 10% of all girls.

Young people from higher-income households spend less time than others their age playing mobile games or those on a console or portable player. There are no statistically significant differences in time devoted to console/portable gaming by race/ethnicity, but including computer and mobile gaming, White tweens and teens spend less time than Hispanic/Latino children gaming (1:31 vs. 1:53 per day, on average), with Black children in between (1:41, not significantly different from either other group).

Forty percent of all boys play console, portable, or computer-based video games “every day,” compared to just 10% of all girls.

TABLE 14. Video games: Enjoyment, frequency, and time spent, by demographics, 2021

Among 8- to 18-year-olds	Gender		Race/Ethnicity			Family income		
	Boys	Girls	White	Black	Hispanic/Latino	Lower	Middle	Higher
Enjoyment: Percent who enjoy playing video games “a lot”								
• On a mobile device (smartphone or tablet)	40% ^a	31% ^b	33%	40%	37%	41% ^a	38% ^a	31% ^b
• On a console, computer, or portable player	60% ^a	24% ^b	40%	48%	45%	45%	44%	40%
Frequency: Percent who play video games “every day”								
• On a mobile device (smartphone or tablet)	49% ^a	34% ^b	40%	39%	46%	48% ^a	42% ^{ab}	38% ^b
• On a console, computer, or portable player	40% ^a	10% ^b	23% ^a	35% ^b	25% ^a	31% ^a	27% ^a	20% ^b
Time spent: Average daily time spent gaming (among all)								
	2:20^a	:54^b	1:31^a	1:41^{ab}	1:53^b	1:46^a	1:51^a	1:19^b
• On a mobile device (smartphone or tablet)	:33 ^a	:24 ^b	:25 ^a	:29 ^{ab}	:37 ^b	:32 ^a	:34 ^a	:22 ^b
• On a computer	:29 ^a	:11 ^b	:20	:15	:23	:14	:21	:22
• On a console or portable player	1:17 ^a	:18 ^b	:45	:57	:52	1:00 ^a	:55 ^a	:35 ^b

Notes: Lower income is <\$35,000; middle is \$35,000 to 99,999; and higher is \$100,000 or more. Superscripts (a, b) are used to denote whether differences between groups are statistically significant (p < .05). Items with different superscripts differ significantly. Totals are rounded to the nearest minute after summing unrounded times. As a result, totals shown in the table may differ slightly from the sum of rounded times.

Top Video and Social Media Sites Among Teens

In this wave of the survey, we asked teens about their use of specific online platforms. Among the 79% of teens who are regular users of social media and online video sites (that is, they use them at least once a week), we asked which sites they ever use, which site they use “the most,” and which site they wouldn’t want to live without if they were forced to choose (Figure 5).

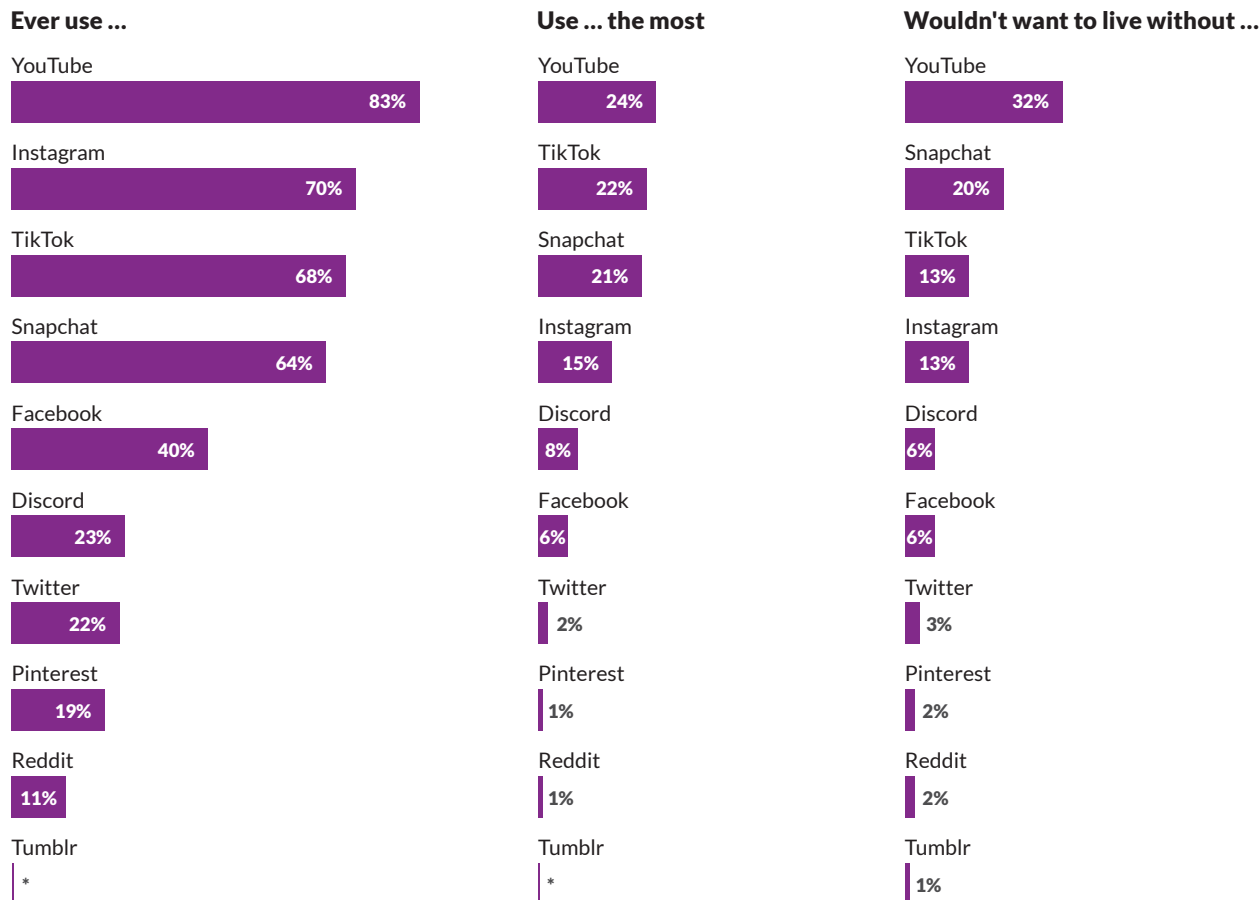
The top four sites among teens are YouTube, TikTok, Snapchat, and Instagram, with YouTube the clear top choice. When asked to pick the one site they wouldn’t want to live without, about a third (32%) of teens chose YouTube, with Snapchat coming

second at 20%. Given the recent societal conversation about the negative impact of Instagram on some users (Romo, 2021), it is interesting to note that just 15% of teens say it’s the site they use most often, and 13% pick it as the one site they wouldn’t want to live without.

Certain sites are used fairly equally by teen boys and teen girls (e.g., Snapchat, Twitter, and Facebook), while others are clearly more gendered (e.g., 30% of girls use Pinterest vs. 8% of boys). Large numbers of both boys and girls use Instagram, but girls are more likely to (78% vs. 62% of boys), while boys are more likely to use YouTube (86% vs. 80% of girls) (Table 15, page 32).

FIGURE 5. Top video and social media sites, 2021

Among the 79% of 13- to 18-year-olds who are regular users of social media and online videos (at least once a week), percent who ...



* Indicates more than zero, but less than one-half percent.

Similarly, there are some differences in use of specific sites based on race/ethnicity and on income. Lots of young people, whether White, Black, or Hispanic/Latino, use TikTok and YouTube, and there are no differences by race/ethnicity in the likelihood of ever using those sites. (There are also no significant differences by race/ethnicity in the percent of teens who use Facebook.) Many teens across racial and ethnic groups use Instagram, but Black and Hispanic/Latino teens are more likely to do so than White teens (81% and 77%, respectively, vs. 65% of Whites). And teens of all races use Snapchat, but Whites are more likely to do so than Blacks (68% vs. 54%; use compared with Hispanic/Latino teens does not differ significantly) (Table 15).

Black teens are the most likely to use Twitter (36%) compared with 21% of Hispanic/Latino teens and 20% of Whites. And it is interesting to note that the only differences in likelihood of using Facebook are by household income: No differences were found by gender or race/ethnicity, but teens from lower- and middle-income households are more likely than their peers from higher-income households to ever use Facebook (46% and 45%, respectively, compared with 31% of teens from higher-income households).

TABLE 15. Online sites used by teens, by demographics, 2021

Among the 79% of all 13- to 18-year-olds who use social media and online videos at least once a week, percent who say they ever use ...	Gender		Race/Ethnicity			Family income		
	Boys	Girls	White	Black	Hispanic/Latino	Lower	Middle	Higher
YouTube	86% ^a	80% ^b	82%	89%	81%	81%	85%	81%
Instagram	62% ^a	78% ^b	65% ^a	81% ^b	77% ^b	66%	74%	67%
TikTok	66%	70%	67%	77%	73%	68% ^{ab}	73% ^b	62% ^a
Snapchat	62%	66%	68% ^a	54% ^b	68% ^a	54% ^a	67% ^b	64% ^{ab}
Facebook	40%	40%	39%	44%	39%	46% ^a	45% ^a	31% ^b
Discord	29% ^a	18% ^b	26% ^a	14% ^b	24% ^{ab}	11% ^a	24% ^b	27% ^b
Twitter	23%	20%	20% ^a	36% ^b	21% ^a	16% ^{ab}	27% ^b	18% ^a
Pinterest	8% ^a	30% ^b	19%	14%	19%	16%	19%	20%
Reddit	14% ^a	7% ^b	11%	10%	8%	2% ^a	9% ^b	15% ^c
Tumblr	1%	2%	2%	3%	1%	1%	2%	1%
Other	1%	1%	2%	1%	1%	2%	1%	1%

Notes: Lower income is <\$35,000; middle is \$35,000 to 99,999; and higher is \$100,000 or more. Superscripts (a, b, c) are used to denote whether differences between groups are statistically significant ($p < .05$). Items with different superscripts differ significantly.

During the coronavirus pandemic, social media has been an especially important way for tweens, teens, and adults to stay in touch. There has also been growing concern from some experts about the possible negative impact of social media on young peoples' mental health (Twenge et al., 2018). Other researchers have pointed to possible beneficial impacts, especially during the pandemic (Rideout et al., 2021). There has also been discussion about the possible creation of new social media platforms designed specifically for those younger than 13 (Instagram for kids, 2021).

In this survey, we focus on tracking the proportion of young people who use social media, the frequency of use, the amount of time devoted to social media, how much young people enjoy using social media, and which specific sites they use. We also explore demographic differences in social media use, and how young people's social media practices have or have not changed since 2019. Social media was defined in the survey as being sites such as Snapchat, Instagram, Discord, Reddit, or Facebook; platforms such as YouTube, TikTok, and Twitch were considered online video sites.

Thirty-eight percent of tweens and 84% of teens use social media, including 18% of tweens and 62% of teens who say they use it every day (Table 16). Tweens spend an average of 18 minutes a day using social media, while teens say about an hour and half (1:27) on average.

There have been some interesting changes in social media use since before the pandemic. Use of social media among tweens has gone up, with an increase of 5 percentage points among those who say they use social media "every day," and the average amount of time spent using social media among this age group increased accordingly by eight minutes a day. Tweens are also more likely to say they enjoy using social media than they were in 2019.

TABLE 16. Social media: Enjoyment, frequency, and time spent, by age, 2019 vs. 2021

	Among 8- to 12-year-olds		Among 13- to 18-year-olds	
	2019	2021	2019	2021
Enjoyment: Percent who enjoy social media "a lot"	8% ^a	12% ^b	41% ^a	34% ^b
Frequency: Percent who use social media ...				
• Every day	13% ^a	18% ^b	63%	62%
• Ever	31% ^a	38% ^b	82%	84%
• Never	68% ^a	62% ^b	17%	16%
Time spent: Average daily time spent using social media (among all)*	:10 ^a	:18 ^b	1:10 ^a	1:27 ^b

* The 2019 survey included time spent on an iPod touch, which accounted for less than half a minute; the 2021 survey did not include iPod Touch.

Notes: In 2019, social media was defined as sites such as Snapchat, Instagram, or Facebook. In 2021, Discord and Reddit were added to the list of examples. Superscripts (a, b) are used to denote whether differences over time are statistically significant ($p < .05$). Items with different superscripts differ significantly.

Among teens, on the other hand, the proportion who say they use social media every day stayed about the same, and enjoyment of social media actually went down by 7 percentage points; but the average amount of time spent on social media sites went up to nearly an hour and a half a day (from 1:10 to 1:27). Only a third (34%) of teens say they enjoy using social media “a lot,” compared with 62% who say they enjoy watching online videos that much.

Only a third (34%) of teens say they enjoy using social media “a lot,” compared with 62% who say they enjoy watching online videos that much.

It seems that initiation into social media may indeed be trending younger, at a relatively modest rate thus far, and that while the time devoted to social media among teens may be increasing, enjoyment is not.

Among all tweens, 13% have ever used Snapchat, 10% have used Instagram, 8% Facebook, 5% Discord, and 4% have used Pinterest (Figure D). Among all teens, about half have ever used Instagram (53%) and Snapchat (49%), 30% have ever used Facebook, 17% have used Discord, and 16% have used Twitter (Figure E).

Because social media usage is so much higher among teens than tweens, our exploration of demographic differences in social media usage focuses on young people age 13 to 18. Teen girls enjoy using social media much more than boys do: Forty-two percent say they enjoy it “a lot,” compared with 27% of teen boys (Table 17). Girls are also more likely to use social media every day (68% vs. 57%). However, boys who do use social media do so for almost as long as girls do, meaning the difference in overall average daily time devoted to social media between boys and girls is not statistically significant (1:20 among boys and 1:36 among girls).

Black teens also enjoy social media much more than White or Hispanic/Latino teens (51% enjoy it “a lot,” compared with 36% of Hispanic/Latino teens and 30% of White teens). Looking at social media use by household income reveals some counter-vailing trends: Teens in lower-income households use social media less frequently than others their age, but once online they spend more time there. In the end, teens in higher-income households average the least daily time with social media (1:14), and teens in middle-income households the most (1:39), with teens in lower-income households in between (1:25, not significantly different from either group).

TABLE 17. Social media: Enjoyment, frequency, and time spent among teens, by demographics, 2021

Among 8- to 18-year-olds	Gender		Race/Ethnicity			Family income		
	Boys	Girls	White	Black	Hispanic/Latino	Lower	Middle	Higher
Enjoyment: Percent who enjoy social media “a lot”	27% ^a	42% ^b	30% ^a	51% ^b	36% ^a	37%	35%	33%
Frequency: Percent who use social media “every day”	57% ^a	68% ^b	64%	68%	60%	46% ^a	66% ^b	65% ^b
Time spent: Average daily time spent using social media ...								
• Among those who use	2:04	2:16	2:05 ^a	2:50 ^b	2:19 ^{ab}	2:33 ^a	2:19 ^a	1:50 ^b
• Among all	1:20	1:36	1:23	1:50	1:38	1:25 ^{ab}	1:39 ^a	1:14 ^b

Notes: Lower income is <\$35,000; middle is \$35,000 to 99,999; and higher is \$100,000 or more. Superscripts (a, b) are used to denote whether differences between groups are statistically significant (p < .05). Items with different superscripts differ significantly.

The survey also included questions about reading for pleasure, on digital devices as well as on other platforms. There were no notable differences in reading habits between 2019 and 2021.

We asked young people how often they read “for your own enjoyment (not for school or homework)” as well as how much time they spent reading the previous day. We also asked respondents to specify whether they read books or material in shorter formats (such as articles), in print or online, and on which digital devices (such as a computer or a smartphone). Finally, we asked participants how much they enjoy reading.

About a third of tweens (33%) and a quarter of teens (23%) say they enjoy reading “a lot,” with no statistically significant changes since before the pandemic (Table 18). Similarly, about a third of tweens (34%) and one in five teens (21%) say they

spend some time reading for their own pleasure every day, about the same as in 2019. Nearly two-thirds of tweens (63%) and nearly half (48%) of teens say they read for pleasure at least once a week or more (including those who read daily). But about one in 10 tweens (12%), and nearly one in five teens (18%) say they never read anything other than what is required for school or homework.

But about one in 10 tweens, and nearly one in five teens say they never read anything other than what is required for school or homework.

TABLE 18. Reading for pleasure: Enjoyment, frequency, and time spent, by age, 2019 vs. 2021

	Among 8- to 12-year-olds		Among 13- to 18-year-olds	
	2019	2021	2019	2021
Enjoyment: Percent who enjoy reading “a lot”	38%	33%	24%	23%
Frequency: Percent who read for pleasure ...				
• Every day	35%	34%	22%	21%
• At least once a week	31%	29%	29%	27%
• At least once a month	11%	12%	17%	14%
• Less than once a month	9%	12%	17%	20%
• Never	13%	12%	15%	18%
Time spent: Average daily time spent reading (among all)	:29	:34	:29	:34
• Print books	:21	:23	:12 ^a	:16 ^b
• Ebooks (e-reader, phone, tablet)	:05	:06	:08	:08
• Online (articles, stories, poems, news, blogs)*	:01 ^a	:03 ^b	:07	:07
• Print magazines or newspapers	:02	:03	:02	:03

* In 2019, participants were asked about reading online on iPod Touches, but averaged less than half a minute a day doing so; this item was dropped from the survey in 2021.

Notes: Superscripts (a, b) are used to denote whether differences over time are statistically significant ($p < .05$). Items with different superscripts differ significantly. Totals are rounded to the nearest minute after summing unrounded times. As a result, totals shown in the table may differ slightly from the sum of rounded times.

Tweens read for pleasure more frequently than teens do (34% do so every day, compared with 21% of teens), which may be because teens have so much more required reading for school, or because they have other media activities available to them, such as using social media. Both tweens and teens average a little more than half an hour a day reading for fun (34 minutes each), not a statistically significant difference from pre-pandemic reading levels (29 minutes for each group).

In general, girls enjoy reading more than boys, and they do so more frequently (Table 19). For example, 65% of girls enjoy reading “a lot” or “somewhat,” compared to 48% of boys; and 30% of girls read every day, compared with 24% of boys. Girls also average more time reading than boys do (37 minutes a day vs. 29 minutes for boys).

TABLE 19. Reading for pleasure: Enjoyment, frequency, and time spent, by demographics, 2021

Among 8- to 18-year-olds	Gender		Race/Ethnicity			Family income		
	Boys	Girls	White	Black	Hispanic/Latino	Lower	Middle	Higher
Enjoyment: Percent who enjoy reading* ...								
A lot/somewhat	48% ^a	65% ^b	56%	55%	56%	52%	58%	58%
• A lot	21% ^a	34% ^b	31% ^a	19% ^b	22% ^b	26%	28%	28%
• Somewhat	28%	31%	24% ^a	35% ^b	34% ^b	26%	29%	31%
Only a little/not at all	32% ^a	23% ^b	29%	25%	28%	26%	26%	29%
• Only a little	24% ^a	20% ^b	22%	22%	25%	21%	21%	24%
• Not at all	8% ^a	3% ^b	7% ^a	3% ^b	3% ^b	5%	6%	5%
Frequency: Percent who read for pleasure ...								
• Every day	24% ^a	30% ^b	29% ^a	22% ^{ab}	21% ^b	21% ^a	26% ^{ab}	31% ^b
• Less than monthly	37% ^a	26% ^b	34%	31%	32%	35%	32%	30%
Time spent: Average daily time spent reading for pleasure ...								
• Among those who read	1:30	1:27	1:21 ^a	1:33 ^{ab}	1:50 ^b	2:02 ^a	1:27 ^b	1:20 ^b
• Among all	:29 ^a	:37 ^b	:34	:29	:32	:42	:31	:34

* Doesn't total 100% because it excludes those who say they "never" read.

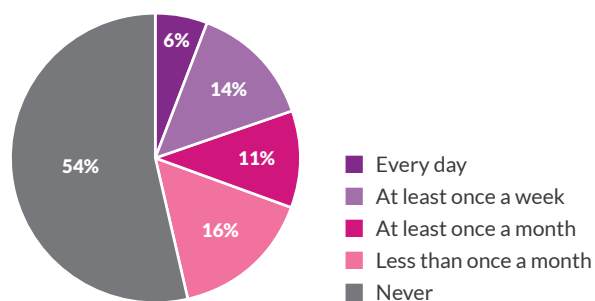
Notes: Lower income is <\$35,000; middle is \$35,000 to 99,999; and higher is \$100,000 or more. Superscripts (a, b) are used to denote whether differences between groups are statistically significant (p < .05). Items with different superscripts differ significantly. Net percentages are rounded after summing unrounded sub-items. As a result, net totals shown in the table may differ slightly from the sum of individual items.

In recent years, podcasts have taken off in popularity, and with this survey we wanted to see the degree to which young people were participating in this trend. Many tweens and teens have indeed listened to podcasts, but most do so infrequently.

About one in four tweens (23%) and just under half (46%) of all teens have listened to podcasts (Table 20). Boys and girls are equally likely to have listened (35% of each). Tweens and teens in lower-income households are the most likely to have listened to podcasts (43% have done so, compared to 35% of those middle-income families and 32% of children in higher-income households). By race/ethnicity, Hispanic/Latino young people are the most likely to have ever listened to a podcast (39%, compared with 30% of White children). Six percent of teens say they listen to podcasts every day, and a total of one in five (20%) say they listen at least once a week (Figure 6).

One in 10 tweens (11%) and two in 10 teens (22%) say they enjoy listening to podcasts a lot or somewhat. Children in lower-income households are the most likely to enjoy listening.

FIGURE 6. Frequency of podcast listening, teens, 2021
Percent of 13- to 18-year-olds who listen to podcasts ...



Nearly half of all teens have listened to podcasts, and one in five say they do so at least once a week.

TABLE 20. Podcasts: Use and enjoyment, by demographics, 2021

Percent who ...	Age		Gender		Race/Ethnicity			Family income		
	8 to 12	13 to 18	Boys	Girls	White	Black	Hispanic/Latino	Lower	Middle	Higher
Have ever listened to podcasts	23% ^a	46% ^b	35%	35%	30% ^a	37% ^{ab}	39% ^b	43% ^a	35% ^b	32% ^b
Enjoy podcasts “a lot” or “somewhat”	11% ^a	22% ^b	18%	15%	14%	20%	18%	23% ^a	15% ^b	15% ^b

Notes: Lower income is <\$35,000; middle is \$35,000 to 99,999; and higher is \$100,000 or more. Superscripts (a, b) are used to denote whether differences between groups are statistically significant (p < .05). Items with different superscripts differ significantly.



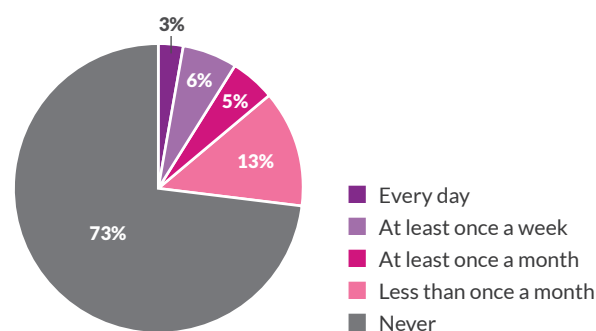
Virtual Reality

Virtual reality (VR) headsets are used to fully immerse users in a 360-degree experience of movies or gaming, blocking everything else from the user’s field of vision and hearing but the content being engaged with. Over the years there have been expectations for a substantial uptake of virtual reality by young people, which have yet to materialize. Nonetheless, Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg continues to believe strongly in a future in which many young people engage with the “metaverse” through virtual reality (Brown, 2021).

The proportion of 8- to 18-year-olds with a VR headset in the home did nudge up from 2019 to 2021, from 14% to 17%, although that was not a statistically significant change. One in six young people now have access to virtual reality in their home. About one in five tweens (22%) and one in four teens (27%) have ever tried virtual reality, with boys and young people from lower-income families more likely to do so than girls or young people from middle- or higher-income households (Table 21). Nearly three in 10 of 8- to 18-year-old boys (29%) have tried virtual reality, compared with two in 10 (20%) girls. Use is highest among young people in lower-income households (37%, compared with 21% among those in middle-income and 23% of those in higher-income homes).

Three percent of teens say they use virtual reality every day, and a total of 9% say they do so at least once a week (Figure 7). At this point, only 13% of tweens or teens say they enjoy using virtual reality “a lot” or “somewhat”; boys (17%) are more likely than girls (9%) to enjoy it.

FIGURE 7. Frequency of virtual reality use, teens, 2021
Percent of 13- to 18-year-olds who use virtual reality ...



One in six young people now have access to virtual reality sets in their homes.

About one in five tweens and one in four teens have ever tried it.

TABLE 21. Virtual reality: Use and enjoyment, by demographics, 2021

Percent who ...	Age		Gender		Race/Ethnicity			Family income		
	8 to 12	13 to 18	Boys	Girls	White	Black	Hispanic/Latino	Lower	Middle	Higher
Have ever used virtual reality	22% ^a	27% ^b	29% ^a	20% ^b	21%	28%	26%	37% ^a	21% ^b	23% ^b
Enjoy virtual reality “a lot” or “somewhat”	13%	13%	17% ^a	9% ^b	14%	11%	10%	15% ^a	10% ^b	16% ^a

Notes: Lower income is <\$35,000; middle is \$35,000 to 99,999; and higher is \$100,000 or more. Superscripts (a, b) are used to denote whether differences between groups are statistically significant (p < .05). Items with different superscripts differ significantly.



Content Creation

One special affordance of digital technology is that it allows young people to become content producers instead of just consumers. We know from previous research that using social media for creative expression is very important to many teens (Rideout et al., 2021), and that some use their digital devices to create content, such as taking photographs, creating graphic arts, producing videos, using art-based apps, making beats, composing music, recording songs, or writing lyrics, poetry, articles, or stories. Naturally lots of art, music, and writing are created offline, using pen and paper, paint, clay, and traditional musical instruments. But computers, tablets, and smartphones have offered young people new ways to learn to produce or create their own content and share it with others.

Research conducted in spring 2021 indicated that many tweens and teens used their digital devices during the lockdowns to learn to create and share art and music (Rideout & Robb, 2021). But the current survey indicates that although

these uses are very important to many young people, they are not the activities tweens and teens do anywhere near as frequently, or for anywhere near as long, as they watch, play, or scroll through content created by others. From 2019 to 2021, there were only modest changes in the amount of time devoted to content creation using digital devices.

In any given day, about one in 10 tweens and teens will use their digital devices to create some type of art or music (11% of tweens and 13% of teens) (Table 22). Those who do engage in these activities devote about an hour (1:05 among tweens) or an hour and a half (1:29 among teens) to them. Therefore, on average among all young people, tweens devote seven minutes and teens 12 minutes a day to creating digital art or music. Overall, there was an increase of four minutes a day among teens, on average, in the amount of time devoted to making digital art or music between 2019 and 2021, but this change was not statistically significant.

TABLE 22. Content creation: Time spent writing or making art or music on digital devices, by age, 2019 vs. 2021

	Among 8- to 12-year-olds		Among 13- to 18-year-olds	
	2019	2021	2019	2021
Creating art or music on a digital device				
• Percent who did the previous day	10%	11%	10%	13%
• Average time among those who did	1:14	1:05	1:18	1:29
• Average time among all	:07	:07	:08	:12
Writing for pleasure on a digital device				
• Percent who did the previous day	1% ^a	2% ^b	5%	4%
• Average time among those who did	#	#	#	#
• Average time among all	* ^a	:01 ^b	:04	:03

Indicates sample size too small for analysis.

* Indicates more than zero but less than one-half minute.

Notes: Superscripts (a, b) are used to denote whether differences over time are statistically significant ($p < .05$). Items with different superscripts differ significantly. Totals are rounded to the nearest minute after summing unrounded times. As a result, totals shown in the table may differ slightly from the sum of rounded times.

In any given day, 10% of 8- to 18-year-olds write something for pleasure, such as a poem, story, or blog post (Table 23). In 2019, 8% did, not a statistically significant difference. When they do write, young people are most likely to do so by hand (7% in any given day), rather than on a digital device (4%). When looked at by age, on any given day 2% of tweens and 4% of teens spend at least some time writing on digital devices; on average, tweens spend one minute and teens three minutes a day using their digital devices to write something other than schoolwork.

From 2019 to 2021, there were only modest changes in the amount of time devoted to content creation using digital devices.

TABLE 23. Writing for pleasure, by method, 2019 to 2021

Among all 8- to 18-year-olds, on any given day, percent who spend any time writing ...	2019	2021
By hand	5%	7%
On a computer	2%	2%
On a smartphone	2%	1%
On a tablet	1%	1%
Other	*	*
Total who wrote something	8%	10%

* Less than one-half of one percent but greater than zero.

Conclusion

In our report on the 2019 wave of this survey, we wrote, “For the first time, this wave of the survey indicates that the pace of change in young people’s media lives may have slowed ... [W]e are now in a period of (perhaps temporary) relative stability. And that may give researchers, parents, and educators a chance to catch up.” Little did we know the changes that were in store for all of us in 2020, and what a central role screens would play in our lives that year.

The primary purpose of this survey is to explore whether and how the use of screen media for entertainment changed among 8- to 18-year-olds from shortly before the coronavirus pandemic hit the United States to a point about a year and a half into the pandemic (in the fall of 2021), as schools and other in-person activities were opening up again. What we found is that the use of screen media did indeed increase during this time, by about three-quarters of an hour a day among tweens, and an hour and a quarter a day among teens.

How should we assess the size of the increase in screen use among tweens and teens? In the two years from 2019 to 2021, screen use increased far faster than it had in the previous four years. In fact, the increase in screen use among tweens was six times as large in the past two years as it had been in the four years before that. While the pandemic was likely a major contributor to changes in screen use, it’s also worthwhile to note that platforms like TikTok have continued to swell in popularity, and that may also be driving increased use. Would there have been such dramatic shifts if the pandemic had not occurred? It’s impossible to say, but it’s certainly possible that multiple factors are contributing to increases in screen use.

And yet, despite the radical changes imposed on many young people’s lives during the first year and a half of the pandemic, there haven’t been dramatic changes in the overall patterns of media use by tweens and teens. The amount of time they devote to many of these activities has indeed risen; social media use has begun to spread somewhat among younger age groups; and online videos have cemented their place at the top of young people’s media hierarchies. But the top activities have remained the same—online videos, gaming, and social media—and the general patterns between tweens and teens, or boys and girls, have continued.

In some ways, it was surprising to see a *lack* of change where we might have expected it. For example, video gaming didn’t increase dramatically during the pandemic, even though we might have expected to see more homes getting gaming consoles and more time spent gaming. We also might have expected more tweens and teens to get their own tablets or smartphones during this time, but the survey does not indicate that this happened.

We are beginning to see a modest trend toward the use of social media at earlier ages; this is especially interesting given the ongoing debates about the impact of social media on young people’s well-being, and Facebook’s plan (now delayed) to create an Instagram platform for kids (Santariano & Mac, 2021). The other new media product pushed by Facebook (now operating under the corporate name Meta) is immersive media, accessed through virtual reality. At this point, use of the new medium has been slow to catch on; slower, in fact, than the growth of podcasts. Time will tell whether Meta is able to generate a demand for their new product(s), and if so, the impact they have on the company’s young customers.

We know from previous research that many young people used their digital devices during the pandemic to socialize with friends online, learn about things they were interested in, and create and share their own content (Rideout & Robb, 2021). This work reminds us that we should be careful of demonizing “screen time” as it’s clearly played an important role for many tweens and teens during the pandemic.

But what we learn from the current survey is that while activities like content creation, video-chatting, and reading online occur frequently among young people and are important and meaningful to them, they also still constitute a tiny fraction of overall screen use. In the end, the amount of time young people devote to content produced by others still dominates overwhelmingly, whether it is content they watch, read, play with, or scroll through. Given the huge amounts of time children give to media, it’s all the more important to elevate quality media by creating and highlighting the shows, games, apps, and books that engage, inspire, and provide positive representations.



Methodology

This report presents the results of a nationally representative, probability-based online survey of 1,306 8- to 18-year-olds in the United States. The survey was conducted from September 29 to October 25, 2021. The purpose of the survey was to examine changes in screen media use among young people during the coronavirus pandemic, comparing the 2021 results to a baseline survey conducted in spring 2019. The 2019 survey included a sample of 1,677 respondents age 8 to 18 years old and used the same methodology as described below for 2021. To the extent possible, the current survey duplicates questions asked in the previous survey; changes in specific questions are noted below and in relevant tables.

The project was directed by Michael Robb, senior director of research at Common Sense Media, and Vicky Rideout, president of VJR Consulting. Data analyses were conducted by Ms. Rideout and Alanna Peebles, assistant professor of communication, media, and technology at San Diego State University, with assistance from Supreet Mann, research manager at Common Sense Media.

The survey was fielded by Ipsos, using their **KnowledgePanel**[®], a probability-based web panel designed to be representative of the United States. Respondents were offered the opportunity to complete the survey in English or Spanish. A copy of the English language questionnaire is included in the Appendix to this report.

Media included in the study

The survey concerns the use of media for entertainment purposes, therefore all questions focus on non-school-related activities.

Media activities. The media activities covered in the survey include watching television, watching online videos, playing video games (including computer, mobile, or console games), using social media, browsing websites, video-chatting, creating digital art or music, reading (print or digital), writing (on digital devices), listening to podcasts, and using digital devices for other purposes, such as emailing, shopping, or using functional apps such as for weather or directions. All of the above

activities except reading print (physical books, magazines, or newspapers) and listening to podcasts are considered part of screen media use. E-reading (e.g., online articles, ebooks) is considered part of screen use.

Media devices. The media devices covered in the survey include: TV sets, computers, tablets, smartphones, books, newspapers, magazines, video game consoles, portable/hand-held video game players, and virtual reality headsets.

Changes in media-related questions from 2019 to 2021. By 2019, it had become clear that the iPod Touch was an aging technology that was no longer a significant part of tweens' and teens' lives. Tweens reported an average of three minutes of total screen media use on an iPod, and teens reported less than half a minute of iPod use, on average, in any screen activity. Therefore in 2021 questions specific to iPod Touches were dropped from the survey. In 2019, the survey included questions about time spent attending movies in movie theaters, which did not manifest as a major part of tweens' and teens' daily screen use, accounting for just four minutes a day, on average; in 2021 those questions were also dropped from the survey.

Survey sample

The survey was conducted online among a nationally representative, probability-based sample of 1,306 young people in the United States, age 8 to 18 years old. Black respondents were over-sampled to ensure a total sample size of at least 200. Unlike members of most other online survey panels, KnowledgePanel[®] members were recruited using scientifically based methods such as address-based sampling and random-digit-dial telephone calls. Households that were not already online were provided with a device and internet access for the purpose of participating in the surveys. The use of a probability sample means the results are substantially more generalizable to the U.S. population than are results based on so-called “convenience” or “opt-in” samples.

Parental consent and respondent compensation. For all respondents, a parent or legal guardian was contacted first, and permission was received for the tween or teen to participate. No compensation was provided to participants.

Outliers. Twenty-two respondents were identified as outliers, and removed from the data set. These participants reported either more than 24 hours spent in any one media activity (e.g., social media, video gaming) or on any one media device (e.g., smartphone, computer).

Weighting. The use of probability-based recruitment methods for the KnowledgePanel® is designed to ensure that the resulting sample properly represents the population of the United States, including geographically (e.g., Northeast, Midwest, South, and West, and urban/suburban/rural); demographically (e.g., age, gender, race/ethnicity, and family income); and in terms of home internet access. Study-specific post-stratification weights were applied once the data was finalized, to adjust for any survey nonresponse and to ensure the proper distributions for the specific target populations (in this case, 8- to 18-year-olds). For this study, the benchmark distributions presented in the table below (from the U.S. Census Bureau’s March 2019 American Community Survey and the March 2020 Supplement of the Current Population Survey) were used for the ranking adjustment of weights.

U.S. BENCHMARKS AND DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE OF SURVEY SAMPLE

	Benchmark	Unweighted n	Unweighted percent	Weighted n	Weighted percent
Age					
• 8- to 12-year-olds	46%	560	43%	598	46%
• 13- to 18-year-olds	54%	746	57%	708	54%
Gender					
• Boys	51%	657	50%	660	51%
• Girls	49%	635	49%	635	49%
Race/Ethnicity					
• White	50%	672	52%	659	51%
• Hispanic/Latino	25%	261	20%	331	25%
• Black	14%	211	16%	177	14%
• Other/2+ races	11%	162	12%	138	11%
Family income*					
• <\$25,000	12%	145	11%	154	12%
• \$25,000 to \$49,999	18%	207	16%	229	18%
• \$50,000 to \$74,999	16%	227	17%	215	17%
• \$75,000+	54%	727	56%	707	54%

*Income breaks used in data analysis were less than \$35,000, \$35,000 to \$99,999, and \$100,000 or more. Source of demographic benchmarks: March 2019 American Community Survey, and March 2020 Supplement of the Current Population Survey, U.S. Census Bureau.

Data

Margin of error. The margin of error in the full sample is +/- 3.2%. The margin of error for subgroups is higher.

Statistical significance. Where relevant, differences between demographic groups (e.g., Whites, Blacks, and Hispanic/Latinos, or lower-, middle-, or higher-income households), and changes over time (e.g., changes between video game use in 2019 and video game use in 2021) have been tested for statistical significance. Unless otherwise noted, findings are referred to in the report in a comparative manner (e.g., “more than,” “less than”) only if the differences are statistically significant at the level of $p < .05$ (meaning that there is a 95% chance that the difference is “real,” and not a result of chance). In tables where statistical significance has been tested, superscripts are used to indicate whether results differ significantly. Items with different superscripts differ significantly; those that share a common superscript, or that do not have a superscript, do not differ significantly.

Notation of hours and minutes. Throughout the report, time spent with media is presented in hours:minutes. For example, two hours and 10 minutes is represented as 2:10.

Rounding. Percentages will not always add up to 100 due to rounding, multiple response options, or because those who marked “don’t know” or who skipped a question were not included. Times for individual media activities are rounded to the nearest minute. Time estimates for categories that combine multiple activities (e.g., total gaming, which includes console, computer, and mobile gaming) are summed from unrounded data; the total is then rounded.

Measuring media use

All data in this report is based on self-reports. Because of the range of media activities covered, such as playing video games on a console player or watching television on a TV set, there is no “passive” method of data collection that could provide these reports (e.g., a time measurement app on a smartphone). In this survey, we asked respondents to focus on the media activities they engaged in on the previous day, and then we asked them to estimate the time they spent in each activity on each type of device. Responses were collected evenly over the seven days of the week. The primary time-based finding presented in the report is the average (mean) time spent in each activity among all tweens or teens. The average reflects how many young people engaged in the activity, and how much time they spent doing so. This gives us a quick way of assessing broad national trends.

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Appendix: Survey Questionnaire

P1. Which of the following, if any, do you have in your home?

- a. Cable TV
- b. Satellite TV
- c. A subscription to a streaming service like Netflix, Amazon Prime, Disney+, or Hulu

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

- a. TV set
- b. Tablet
- c. Smartphone
- d. Video game player (such as Xbox, Switch, or PlayStation)
- e. Laptop or desktop computer
- f. A virtual reality (VR) headset (such as Oculus Rift, Google Cardboard, or PlayStation VR)
- g. None of the above

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

- a. Tablet
- b. Smartphone
- c. Laptop or desktop computer
- d. None of the above

Q3. How often do you do each of the following activities?

- a. Use social media (such as Snapchat, Instagram, Discord, Reddit, or Facebook)
- b. Play video games on a mobile device like a smartphone or tablet
- c. Play video games on a console (like Xbox or PlayStation), portable player (like Switch), or computer
- d. Watch television
- e. Watch videos online (such as on YouTube, TikTok, or Twitch)
- f. Listen to podcasts
- g. Read for your own enjoyment (not for school or homework), such as books, ebooks, magazines, online articles
- h. Use a virtual reality headset

RESPONSE OPTIONS:

- 1. Every day
- 2. At least once a week
- 3. At least once a month
- 4. Less than once a month
- 5. Never

- Q4. This next question is about what you did YESTERDAY. We want to know whether you did any of the following activities yesterday. Which of the following activities, if any, did you do YESTERDAY?**
- a. Use a computer for something other than school or homework
 - b. Use a tablet for something other than school or homework
 - c. Use a smartphone for something other than school or homework
 - d. [If ever do] Play video games on a console or portable player (such as Xbox, Switch, PlayStation)
 - e. Watch DVDs
 - f. [If ever do] Watch television on a TV set
 - g. Write something, such as a story, article, poem or blog (just for fun, not for school or homework)
 - h. None of the above
- Q5. [If wrote something yesterday] When you wrote a story, article, poem, blog, or similar item yesterday (not for school or homework), what did you use to write it?**
- a. Computer
 - b. Tablet
 - c. Smartphone
 - d. Wrote it by hand
 - e. Other
- Q6. [If ever read] Did you spend any time reading for your own enjoyment yesterday, not for school or homework? (Such as books, magazines, online articles, poems, newspapers or ebooks)**
- a. Yes
 - b. No
- Q7. [If read something for pleasure yesterday] Which of the following did you read for your own enjoyment yesterday? Do not include anything you read for school or homework.**
- a. Print books
 - b. Electronic books, on an e-reader, tablet, or smartphone
 - c. Online articles, stories, poems, news, or blogs (on a computer, tablet, or smartphone)
 - d. Magazines (in print)
 - e. Newspapers (in print)
- Q8. Which of the following activities did you do for fun yesterday (not for school or homework)? Select all the devices on which you did each activity. If you didn't do an activity, select "Didn't do."**
- a. [If ever do] Use social media (such as Snapchat, Instagram, Discord, Reddit, or Facebook)
 - b. [If ever do] Play video games
 - c. Browse websites
 - d. Video-chat with friends and family (such as Skype, Zoom, WhatsApp, or FaceTime)
 - e. [If ever do] Watch videos online (such as on YouTube, TikTok, or Twitch)
 - f. Watch TV shows or movies online (such as on Netflix, Amazon Prime, Disney+, or Hulu)
 - g. Make your own digital art or music (such as painting, graphics, photo or video editing, making digital music)
 - h. [If ever do] Read online (such as articles, stories, news, or blogs)

- i. Anything else (don't count texting, but do count anything else that was not school-related, such as shopping, email, coding, or using other apps)

RESPONSE OPTIONS:

1. Did on a computer
2. Did on a tablet
3. Did on a smartphone
4. Didn't do

Now we'd like to know how much TIME you spent doing each activity YESTERDAY. For example, if you spent about a half-hour doing the activity, you would fill out the boxes like this: [0] Hours [30] Minutes. If you spent about two hours doing the activity, you would fill out the boxes like this: [2] Hours [0] Minutes. If you spent about an hour and 15 minutes doing the activity, you would fill out the boxes like this: [1] Hours [15] Minutes

Q9. [If did each activity].Thinking JUST ABOUT YESTERDAY, how much time did you spend doing each of the following:

	Hours	Minutes
a. Watching television on a TV set		
b. Watching DVDs		
c. Playing video games on a console or portable player (such as Xbox, Switch, or PlayStation)		
d. Reading books in print (for something other than school or homework)		
e. Reading ebooks, on an e-reader, tablet, or smartphone (for something other than school or homework)		
f. Reading print magazines (for something other than school or homework)		
g. Reading print newspapers (for something other than school or homework)		

Q10. [If did each activity the previous day] Still thinking just about what you did yesterday, how much time did you spend USING A COMPUTER for something other than school or homework:

	Hours	Minutes
a. Using social media on a computer (such as Snapchat, Instagram, Discord, Reddit, or Facebook)		
b. Playing video games on a computer		
c. Browsing websites on a computer		
d. Video-chatting on a computer (such as Skype, Zoom, WhatsApp, or Face Time)		
e. Watching videos on a computer, such as on YouTube, TikTok, or Twitch		
f. Watching TV shows or movies on a computer (such as on Netflix, Amazon Prime, Disney+, or Hulu)		
g. Making your own digital art or music (such as painting, graphics, photo or video editing, making digital music)		
h. Reading articles, stories, news, or blogs on a computer (not for school)		
i. Writing something on a computer like a story, diary, blog, poem, or article (not for school)		
j. Doing anything else on the computer that wasn't school-related (such as shopping, email, coding)		

Q11. [If did each activity the previous day] Continuing to think just about what you did yesterday, how much time did you spend using A TABLET for something other than school or homework:

	Hours	Minutes
a. Using social media on a tablet (such as Snapchat, Instagram, Discord, Reddit, or Facebook)		
b. Playing video games on a tablet		
c. Browsing websites on a tablet		
d. Video-chatting on a tablet (such as Skype, Zoom, WhatsApp, or Face Time)		
e. Watching videos on a tablet, such as on YouTube, TikTok, or Twitch		
f. Watching TV shows or movies on a tablet (such as on Netflix, Amazon Prime, Disney+, or Hulu)		
g. Making your own digital art or music (such as painting, graphics, photo or video editing, making digital music)		
h. Reading articles, stories, news, or blogs on a tablet (not for school)		
i. Writing something on a tablet like a story, diary, blog, poem, or article (not for school)		
j. Doing anything else on a tablet that wasn't school-related (such as shopping, email, or using other apps)		

Q12. Finally, how much time did you spend using A SMARTPHONE yesterday:

	Hours	Minutes
a. Using social media on a smartphone (such as Snapchat, Instagram, Discord, Reddit, or Facebook)		
b. Playing video games on a smartphone		
c. Browsing websites on a smartphone		
d. Video-chatting on a smartphone (such as Skype, Zoom, WhatsApp, or Face Time)		
e. Watching videos on a smartphone, such as on YouTube, TikTok, or Twitch		
f. Watching TV shows or movies on a smartphone (such as on Netflix, Amazon Prime, Disney+, or Hulu)		
g. Making your own digital art or music (such as painting, graphics, photo or video editing, making digital music)		
h. Reading articles, stories, news, or blogs on a smartphone (not for school)		
i. Writing something on a smartphone like a story, diary, blog, poem, or article (not for school)		
j. Doing anything else on the smartphone that wasn't school-related (don't count texting, but do count time spent on other activities such as shopping, email, or using other apps)		

Q13. [If ever do each activity] How much do you ENJOY doing each of the following activities?

- a. Reading
- b. Watching television
- c. Watching videos online (such as on YouTube, TikTok, or Twitch)
- d. Using social media (such as Snapchat, Instagram, or Facebook)
- e. Playing video games on a console (like Xbox or PlayStation), portable player (like Switch), or computer
- f. Playing video games on a mobile device like a smartphone or tablet
- g. Using a VR headset
- h. Listening to podcasts

RESPONSE OPTIONS:

- 1. A lot
- 2. Somewhat
- 3. Only a little
- 4. Not at all

Q14. [If use social media at least once a week] Which online sites, if any, do you use?

- a. Discord
- b. Facebook
- c. Instagram
- d. Pinterest
- e. Reddit
- f. Snapchat
- g. TikTok
- h. Tumblr
- i. Twitter
- j. YouTube
- k. Other (specify)

Q15. Which site do you use the most?

Q16. Which site do you use second most often?

Q17. If you had to pick one online site you didn't want to live without, which would it be?

About Common Sense

Common Sense is the nation's leading nonprofit organization dedicated to improving the lives of all kids and families by providing the trustworthy information, education, and independent voice they need to thrive in the 21st century. Our independent research is designed to provide parents, educators, health organizations, and policymakers with reliable, independent data on children's use of media and technology and the impact it has on their physical, emotional, social, and intellectual development. For more information, visit commonsense.org/research.



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