

# “Teenagers and New Technology”

By Andres Padilla-Lopez

## Teenage Use of Electronic Devices

Allison, a fifteen-year-old teenager from Redwood City, California, receives more than 27,000 text messages a month. This averages out to about 900 texts per day. Allison explains, “I text while I’m doing like everything. . . . I need to answer that text. I need to know who’s talking to me, to know what they’re going to say.”

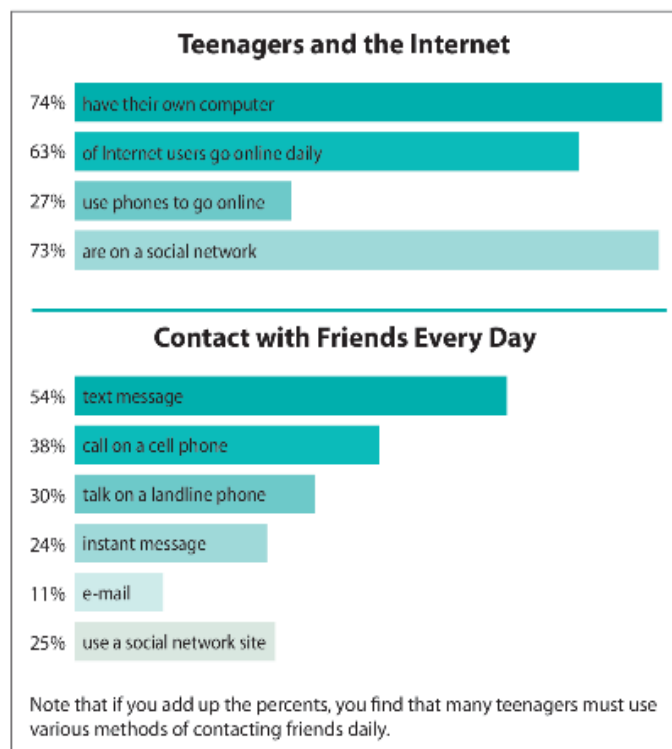
Another teenager, also from Redwood City, spends six to seven hours a day playing video games. He admits that his game playing has interfered with his grades. But, he argues that video games “give me a shot of energy” and “playing just makes me happy... I can’t stop playing them. I don’t want to stop playing them.”

In an interview with a British reporter, one teenager said with feeling, “I’d rather give up a kidney than my phone.” Another told the same reporter that she spends over an hour on school days and about double that time on weekends hanging out with some 450 Facebook friends.

So, how do you use electronic devices? Are your Facebook friends the same as your real-life friends, or do they include people you’ve never met? Are the friends you’ve never met more interesting than your real-life friends? Do you feel lost without your cell phone? Must you answer every text message immediately? Are you itching to get out of class to play video games? Or perhaps you worry about the amount of time you spend on your electronic devices. Maybe you think that texting and Facebook are a waste of time.

### Facts and Figures

Recent studies estimate that 93 percent of teenagers between the ages of 12 and 17 years of age regularly go online to use the Internet. Studies also show that 75 percent of all teenagers own cell phones. Half of that 75 percent sends fifty or more texts a day. One in three sends 100 or more texts per day. Some teenage cellphone users don’t even use their phones to make actual phone calls—except to their parents. Instead, they use texting to communicate. And, as all cell phone owners know, today’s phones enable you to do much more than just texting. They allow users to take and share pictures, play games, listen to music, swap videos, and access the



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Internet and social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter. The average teenager has 201 Facebook friends!

## **The Pros and the Cons**

One high school student from California aptly sums up the conflicting attitudes held by both adults and teenagers about the use of digital devices. Vishal is a bright seventeen-year old with a passionate interest in filmmaking. As he puts it, technology is “bad for me as a student” because it has caused his grades to go down. On the other hand, he says, it is “good for me as a learner.” Vishal’s access to technology has distracted him and made it difficult for him to concentrate on his assigned schoolwork, but it has also helped him to pursue in depth his interest in filmmaking.

Currently educators, scientists, parents, and even some teenagers themselves worry about the long-term effects of always being connected to electronic devices. Educators notice a decline in students’ ability to concentrate on any one thing for an extended period of time. Scientists wonder about the long-term effects on a teenager’s still-developing brain. What do the instant gratification and rapid stimulation offered by electronic media do to a teenager’s brain? Scientists also fear that yielding to one distraction after another develops an inability to focus. Parents worry about the presence of predators on social networking sites. They are also alarmed by the threat of cyber-bullying. Teenagers, like Vishal and Allison, ask themselves if their slipping grades and inability to concentrate on school tasks are worth it.

On the other hand, supporters argue that today’s powerful cell phones offer teenagers new worlds of opportunity. They stress that understanding new technology is essential to future success. They recognize that tools, such as texting and Facebook, meet needs common to all teenagers, such as defining their personal identity and establishing their independence. These technologies provide new avenues for teenagers to do the things teenagers have always wanted to do: flirt, boast, gossip, complain, tease, and get news. Some educators see new technologies as an exciting way of connecting with students. Others view them as a tool for personalizing education and encouraging individual students’ interests. Wherever you stand on the various issues raised, there is no doubt that electronic devices are here to stay. How we use these devices, whether we choose to have them work for us or against us, is up to us.