

## Breaking Teen Myths

By: Nic Covey, Director of Insights, The Nielsen Company

**CI SUMMARY:** It's easy to get caught up in the hype around teenagers. The notion that teens are too busy texting and Twittering to be engaged with traditional media is exciting, but false. To develop the best strategy around teens and media, start by challenging popular assumptions about teens. Don't focus on the outliers, but on the macro-level trends of media and preferences for the segment. The averages will show you that teens can often be reached by the same means as their parents.

In the recent report, *How Teens Use Media*, Nielsen debunks many of the myths around teen media consumption. This article excerpts some of the most important findings of that study:

### Myth: Teens are abandoning TV for new media

#### Reality: Television still accounts for most of a teen's media clock

In fact, they've been watching more TV than ever—up 6% over the past five years in the U.S. Nielsen's A2M2 Three Screen Report showed that the typical teen television viewer watched 104:24 (hh:mm) of television per month in the first quarter of 2009. While less than the average for all television viewers (153:27), it tops teen Internet use over the course of a month considerably (11:32).

Compared to teens in other markets where TV viewing is measured electronically by Nielsen, U.S. teens actually watch less television per day than most. In South Africa, teens averaged more than five hours per day of TV viewing. In Taiwan, teens averaged just 2 hours and 47 minutes.

**U.S. teens actually watch less television per day than most...**

Online video is becoming an important part of the overall teen viewing experience. Twelve million U.S. teens—about two-thirds of those online—watched online video in May 2009. Year-over-year, the audience grew 10% and the average number of minutes increased a stunning 79% to 3 hours and 6 minutes per month among viewers. Torrid growth, yes, but surprisingly, the average teen still lags behind viewing of adults 18-24, adults 25-32 and adults 35-44.

**Males make up 73% of the teen mobile audience...**

As mobile network speeds and device capabilities improve, more teens are looking to their phones for video as well. In the first quarter of 2009, 18% of U.S. teens 13–17 with mobile phones watched some form of video content on their phone. The experience has been much more popular with teen males, who make up 73% of the teen mobile audience. Teens who watch mobile video do so much more than the average mobile video user—watching 6 hours and 30 minutes a month compared to just 3 hours and 37 minutes.

### Myth: Teens are the biggest users of the Internet

#### Reality: With fewer hours at a connected desk, teens actually use the Internet less than most

Many consider teens of today to be the Internet generation: Born roughly between 1990 and 1996, today's teens grew up with a mouse in their hands. They are portrayed as Digital Natives, perpetually connected, guided by both the opportunities and constraints of worldwide connectivity. Indeed, some 90% of U.S. teens have access to the Internet at home, and 73% have access on a school PC. Among teens with Internet access at home, 55% say they have a wireless connection at home.

Teens spend 11 hours and 32 minutes per month online—far below the average of 29 hours and 15 minutes. As with other media, the gap between teen and adult time spent is less an indication of interest and more a function of access. Unlike adults, many of whom spend hours of the work day with a broadband Internet connection, much of a teen's waking moments are spent in the classroom, at extracurricular activities, at a part-time job and moving about an otherwise hyper-social high school ecosystem.

### Report Deflates Teen Tech Tendencies

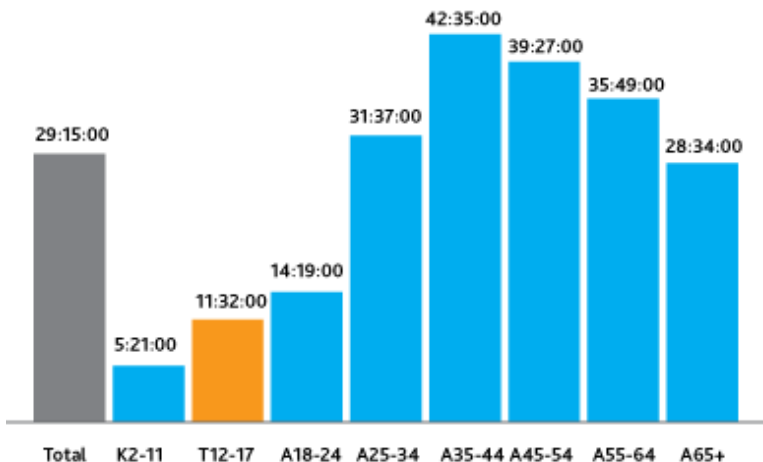
Instead of replacing traditional media with new-media consumption, teens are simply making time for both.

### Call It Back To School 2.0

JCPenney, OfficeMax and Staples are all heavying up on their social media outreach this year, reasoning that that's where their target customer is. Some analysts, however, point out that the medium is unproven and teens seem to often regard marketing messaging in social networks as an intrusion.

# Teens Spend Less Time Online than Almost All Other Age Groups

Average Monthly Time Spent Using Internet in the U.S.  
Q1 2009 (hh:mm:ss)



Source: The Nielsen Company

Across the markets, teen Internet use mirrors the Internet use of adults in many ways. The most popular online categories for teens—general interest portals and search—are the same as for their elders. Member communities (social networks and blogs) do have a unique place within the teen experience, though. In the U.S., nearly half of online teens 12–17 visited MySpace and Facebook in May 2009 (45% and 44%, respectively). Reach of these sites among teens is still slightly higher than among all U.S. Internet users, though the demographics of social networking are expanding (41% of U.S. Internet users visited Facebook and 33% visited MySpace in May 2009). Teens make slightly more prolific online publishers, too. Two-thirds (67%) of teen social networkers say they update their page at least once a week, compared to just half (53%) of all social networkers.

**Teen Internet use mirrors the Internet use of adults...**

**Myth: The only way to reach teens over the phone is through texting**

**Reality: Teens are early adopters of ALL mobile media**

Teens do text at phenomenal rates, but that's not all they do on their phones. Increasingly, the mobile phone plays a critical role in the media lives of teens. In the U.S., 77% of teens have their own mobile phone and another 11% say they regularly borrow one.

Of all the mobile behaviors of teens, texting is most talked about. Fingers flying and phone cameras flashing, 83% of U.S. mobile teens use text-messaging and 56% use MMS/picture messaging. The average U.S. mobile teen now sends or receives an average of 2,899 text-messages per month compared to 191 calls. The average number of texts has gone up 566% in just two years, far surpassing the average number of calls, which has stayed nearly steady.

**83% of U.S. mobile teens use text-messaging...**

## The Average Number of Teen Texts Increased 566%

Average Number of Monthly Texts and Phone Calls—U.S. Mobile Teens 13–17



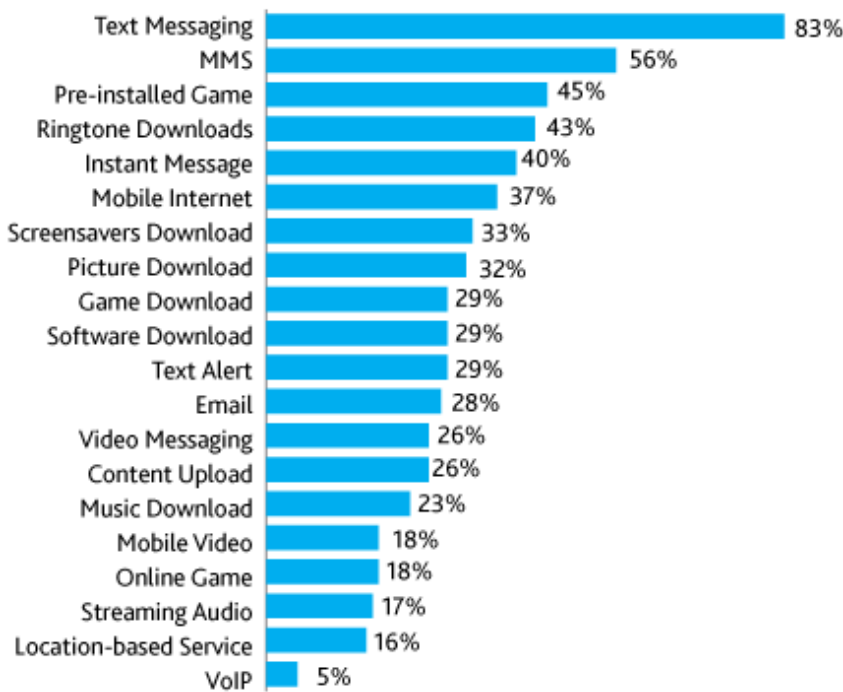


Source: The Nielsen Company

Still, texting isn't the only means of communicating with teens over the mobile phone. Teens are avid users of a wide variety of advanced mobile data features. More than one-third of teens download ringtones, instant message or use the mobile Web, while about one-quarter of U.S. teens download games and applications. To a lesser extent, teens are using video messaging (26%), watching mobile video (18%) and using location-based services on their phone (16%).

## Teens Use a Variety of Mobile Features

Mobile Media Use by U.S. Teen 13-17 Mobile Users—Q1 2009



Source: The Nielsen Company

### Myth: All gamers are teens and all teens do is game

### Reality: Teens account for just 23% of the console audience and less than 10% of PC gaming minutes

When we think of teen media use, gaming is often one of the first activities that come to mind. Over the course of the past 20 years, though, the gaming audience has broadened. New devices and games have extended gaming beyond boys to girls, young adults, and with the introduction of Nintendo's Wii, people on the younger and older sides of the demographic spectrum. In the fourth quarter of 2008, teens 12-17 made up 23% of the U.S. console gaming audience, over indexing for their overall audience composition, but still leaving three-quarters of console minutes for older and younger gamers. On the PC, teens account for fewer than 10% of all game minutes played in a typical month—a medium that has done a better job attracting females ages 25-54.

Though teens don't make up the entirety of the video gaming audience, the medium does reach most of them in some way. Today, 83% of U.S. teens have at least one console in their home. Seventy-five percent of males 12-17 and 57% of females 12-17 used a console at least once during the fourth quarter of 2008 (compared to 36% of the total population, two and older). The typical teen averaged 25 minutes of console use per day last year—considerably less than they spent on TV, but comparable to their time spent online. The average time spent

is significantly higher for teen boys (41 minutes) than teen girls (8 minutes).

The games they choose to play may surprise some, who think teens spend all of their time on shooter games. Of the top five most anticipated video games among teens since 2005, just two were rated “Mature” by the Entertainment Software Rating Board (ESRB), two were rated “Teen” and one was rated “Everyone”. The most anticipated video game among gamers 13–17 since 2005 has been *Halo 3*, a first-person shooter game rated “Mature” by the ESRB. At its peak, 61% of active gamers said they had a definite interest in *Halo 3*. The other Mature-rated game in the top five was *Grand Theft Auto IV*, which—with a 37% “definite interest” among teens—tied *Guitar Hero: Aerosmith* (rated Teen) for the second most anticipated video game. *Mario Party 7* (33%) and *Guitar Hero: World Tour* (32%) round out the list of the five most anticipated games. Play-along music and fantasy driving games, it turns out, are as relevant to the teen gaming experience as some more violent or mature ones.

## The games they choose to play may surprise some...

### In a word, teens are more “normal” than most think

It’s true: the media universe is expanding for teens. Social networks are playing an increasingly important role and many teens are accessing the Web over their phones. Teens are time-shifting video with DVRs and place-shifting on their video MP3 players. Yet teens are not unique in this media revolution. The media experience has evolved, and cross-platform engagement will be critical to reaching all consumers, not just teens. Media innovations have impacted everyone’s experience—not just the *High School Musical* set.

As the Nielsen report, *How Teens Use Media*, argues more fully, it isn’t necessary to reconfigure the playbook to reach this highly-buzzed about audience. Discard the assumption that, as a rule, teens are “alien” and plan for them as you would any demographic segment—with careful attention and calculus, not panic. Keep your eye on the averages, keep your head on your shoulders and before you rewire the system, remind yourself: Teens are people, too.

*For additional insights on teen media use, including further detail on these categories plus theatrical activity, DVR and DVD use, newspaper readership, music consumption and advertising engagement, download a free copy of Nielsen’s full report, [How Teens Use Media](#).*

Contact us to learn more.