

MEDIA and the **AMERICAN CHILD**

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and
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PREFACE

When we began a revised edition of the first author's *Television and the American Child* (Academic Press, 1991), we had four goals: expand the coverage to include other media; extend the age range to give greater attention to the very young and to teenagers; and emphasize the central role of cognitive stages, particularly in regard to tastes and preferences in media use and responses to advertising, brand names, and products; and, as before, to base interpretations and conclusions on evidence with valid claims to scientific credibility. We leave it to our readers to judge our success.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We owe a major debt to the many dozens of individuals who conducted the studies upon which we have drawn. We hope they will find our treatment of their work of interest.

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We found several analyses to be particularly helpful. These key studies include:

Acuff, D. S. (1997). *What kids buy and why: The psychology of marketing to kids*. New York, NY: Free Press.

Anderson, C. A., Berkowitz, L., Donnerstein, E., Huesmann, L. R., Johnson, J. D., Linz, D., Malamuth, N. M. & Wartella, E. (2003). The influence of media violence on youth. *Psychological Science in the Public Interest*, 4(3), 81–110.

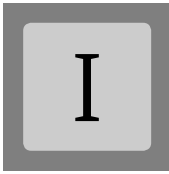
The Kaiser Family Foundation-sponsored media use studies:

Rideout, V. J., Foehr, U. G., Roberts, D. F. & Brodie, M. (1999). *Kids & media at the new millennium*. A Kaiser Family Foundation Report. Menlo Park, CA: Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation. Accessed 6/30/05 at <http://www.kff.org/entmedia/loader.cfm?url=/commonspot/security/getfile.cfm&PageID=13265>.

Rideout, V. J., Vandewater, E. A. & Wartella, E. (2003). *Zero to six: Electronic media in the lives of infants, toddlers and preschoolers*. A Kaiser Family Foundation Study. Menlo Park, CA: Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation.

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DEMOGRAPHICS AND PREFERENCES IN MEDIA USE, WITH SPECIAL ATTENTION TO THE VERY YOUNG



Childhood and adolescence in the United States (and well beyond) is marked by the centrality of the media. Growing up in the contemporary world means immersion in the sights and sounds supplied by television and computer. Later childhood and adolescence extends these daily experiences to include music accessed through the airwaves, purchased on CD, or acquired through download or streaming audio; a smorgasbord of games to be played on the computer or through high-tech console systems; and, of course, an abundance of glossy magazines that appeal to every whim, hobby, and pursuit. The prominence of media is astonishing—for the degree of gratification they provide, as testified to by the amount of time allocated to them, and the myriad of content-specific uses they serve.

Young people's use of the media raises significant questions. Spending time with media is one of the pleasures afforded by modern life, and analysis of media use patterns constitutes a window into the ways that young people are entertained, informed, persuaded, and educated. Another set of reasons for studying media use is more troubling. There is ample evidence that either the amount of time spent with particular media or the content viewed, read, or heard can have adverse effects (Comstock & Scharrer, 1999). A great deal of research has convincingly linked either

2 Demographics and Preferences

amount of media exposure or exposure to particular types of content with a range of important outcomes, including but not limited to performing poorly in school; learning aggression; behaving antisocially; developing unhealthy attitudes and behavior regarding such disparate topics as nutrition, alcohol consumption, cigarette smoking, and sexual behavior; and increasing the odds that a child will be overweight.

We eventually take up all of these troubling (and often controversial) issues, but we begin with a review of media use. We assess preferences within major media categories—genres, programs, and types favored. We focus on aggregates defined by demographics—age, gender, race or ethnicity, and socioeconomic status (usually operationalized by parental education or income)—and orientations toward the media. When possible, we record the uses young people make of media, such as entertainment, information, or communication with others.

We give preference to data that are current and drawn from national, representative samples in order to ensure comprehensive, valid conclusions. We adopt the four-part conceptualization of media offered by Roberts and Foehr (2004):

- Print
- Audio
- Screen
- Interactive media

treating each separately before integrating the data into estimates and characterizations of total media use.

The data on media exposure are striking for their cohesion around two major themes: (1) young people allocate a staggering amount of time to media, and (2) despite the obvious attraction of new media technologies (and with the sole exception of the attention to music that is a hallmark of adolescence), in terms of time use television still reigns supreme.

The most reliable source of data on the media use of young people in the United States comes from a nationally representative sample of just over two thousand (2,032, to be precise) 8- to 18-year-olds, surveyed in 2004 by Roberts, Foehr, and Rideout (2005), under the auspices of the Kaiser Family Foundation. In the dataset, young people of color were over-sampled to allow for comparisons based on race or ethnicity; the respondents were accessed in schools; and questions pertaining to amount of media exposure asked about the number of minutes and hours spent using each form of media on the previous day. The timing of data collection varied, so that each day of the week was represented in "time spent yesterday." Some of the questions posed to the children and teenagers were duplicated from previous data collected in 1999 (Roberts & Foehr, 2004), so that, occasionally, comparisons between 1999 and 2004 are permitted.

A somewhat similar study, also commissioned by the Kaiser Family Foundation, widens the lens to include children younger than 8-years old. These data, collected in 1999, combine in-home responses of parents reporting on behalf of 1,090 very young children (aged 2 to 7) and in-school responses of an additional 2,014 8- to 18-year-olds, employing nationally representative probability samples (Rideout, Foehr, Roberts & Brodie, 1999; Roberts & Foehr, 2004).

Addressing still unanswered questions regarding media use patterns among the youngest of the young, the Kaiser Family Foundation in partnership with the Children's Digital Media Center (CDMC) funded a nationwide study, this time among those six and younger (Rideout, Vandewater & Wartella, 2003). These data were collected in 2003 via a nationally representative telephone survey using random-digit dialing procedures to elicit responses from 1,065 parents of children who ranged from six months to six years old. Finally, the Kaiser Family Foundation sponsored an update to the six-month to six-year-old data, drawing responses from 1,051 nationally representative parents in September through November 2005 (Rideout & Hamel, 2006).

We will also draw from a number of key contributions in the area of young people's use of computer-based media. These include recent data from Robinson and Alvarez (2005) and the U.S. Department of Education (2003).

These sources make possible a comprehensive view of the role of the media in the daily lives of children and adolescents in the United States. For each category of media, we begin with estimates of use. We turn then to differences that demographic variables make. Next, we review content preferences. Finally, we isolate the media use of children seven years of age or younger because of (recent) increased interest in and concern over media use among very young children by parents, caregivers, and academics (child psychologists, pediatricians, teachers, and social researchers). Throughout, we trace media patterns of young people during childhood and adolescence, from six months to eighteen years of age.

I. MEDIA EXPOSURE: PRINT

In many ways, print media—newspapers, magazines, and books—are the granddaddies among the current media choices available to young people. They have been around for so long that one cannot picture a time when they would have been called “new media.” Parents and critics alike have expressed concern over the vulnerability of print media to displacement by the newer, flashier, and occasionally even mesmerizing possibilities accessed through screen and interactive media. The fear is that kids will no longer benefit from the imagination-evoking and vocabulary-producing effects of reading.

A. Use of Print Media

The data, in fact, document that print media occupy a consistent, albeit modest, presence in the daily lives of young people. Roberts, Foehr, and Rideout (2005) confine themselves to time spent with print media outside of school or work. They place daily leisure-time exposure to all print media at an average of 43 minutes per day for 8- to 18-year-olds. Parents and caregivers may be comforted to know that reading books accounts for the bulk of the print media time, averaging 23 minutes per day. Magazine reading occurs for an average of 14 minutes per day, and newspaper reading for a scant six minutes.

When the sample of respondents is divided by age, estimates of print media use are surprisingly uniform across the board (see Table 1.1). The exception is newspaper reading, an activity engaged in significantly more among the oldest age group (15- to 18-year-olds) compared to the youngest (8- to 10-year-olds)—but even so, the oldest group spent just seven minutes a day with newspapers compared to four minutes for the youngest group.

The Roberts and colleagues (2005) data also show that nearly three-quarters of 8- to 18-year-olds spend at least five minutes with print media on any given day (73%) whereas slightly less than half (47%)

Table 1.1
Average Exposure to Various Media, Ages Six Months to 18 Years

	Age				
	0–3*	4–6*	8–10	11–14	15–18
Screen media	1:47	2:10	4:41	4:25	3:40
TV	1:01	1:10	3:17	3:16	2:36
Audio	1:03	0:49	0:59	1:42	2:24
Print	0:37	0:41	0:44	0:41	0:45
Computers	0:05	0:16	0:37	1:02	1:22
Video games	0:01	0:10	1:05	0:52	0:33

*For these age groups, audio media means listening to music, and print media means reading or being read to. Screen media includes TV, videotapes, DVDs, and movies.

Adapted from Roberts, D. F., Foehr, U. G. & Rideout, V. (2005). *Generation M: Media in the lives of 8–18 year-olds*. A Kaiser Family Foundation Study. Menlo Park, CA: Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation. Also from Rideout, V. J., Vandewater, E. A. & Wartella, E. (2003). *Zero to six: Electronic media in the lives of infants, toddlers and preschoolers*. A Kaiser Family Foundation Study. Menlo Park, CA: Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation.

spend 30 minutes or more. Although most young people access print media every day, many tend to spend modest amounts of time with such media. Books, far lengthier than what magazines and newspapers offer (and sometimes more demanding of thought and attention), inspire the dedication of 30 minutes or more a day among just 30 percent of the nation's 8- to 18-year-olds.

Many have expressed concern that young people today are no longer reading newspapers, and there is no doubt that the amount of time adults spend reading newspapers has declined (Comstock & Scharrer, 1999; Robinson & Godbey, 1997). Nevertheless, the data reported by Roberts and colleagues (2005) show about one in every three children and adolescents (34%) takes at least a glance through the paper for five minutes or more on any given day. Roberts and Foehr (2004) point out that although time spent reading newspapers is low for young people in the United States, the proportion of young people accessing newspapers each day has not changed dramatically. Comparing their estimates with those collected in the late 1950s and early 1960s (Schramm, Lyle & Parker, 1961), in the early 1970s (Lyle & Hoffman, 1972a), and in the late 1970s (Newspaper Advertising Bureau, 1978), they find sufficient similarity to conclude, "if 'newspaper reading' is taken to mean at least glancing at some part of the paper for a few minutes, the proportion of U.S. children and adolescents who do so has remained fairly constant over the past 50 years" (Roberts & Foehr, 2004, p. 99). Thus, any increased vulnerability of newspapers to displacement by other media rests not on changes in the use by and familiarity of children and teenagers with newspapers but with attractiveness of other media when decisions about use are made later in life.

B. Demographic Variables That Impact Use of Print Media

Spending leisure time reading books decreases as children grow up (see Table 1.1). In the data of Roberts and colleagues (2005), 63 percent of 8- to 10-year-olds devoted at least five minutes "yesterday" to this activity compared to 44 percent of 11- to 14-year-olds and 34 percent of 15- to 18-year-olds. We concur with the interpretation of the investigators that this shift is likely explained by the increased required reading for schoolwork among those older that would leave less time for reading for pleasure and might make such an activity less appealing.

The youngest kids, although more likely to have spent some time reading a book, were less likely than the two older groups to have spent five minutes or more with a newspaper or a magazine (see Table 1.1). Thus, the desire to keep up with news, sports, and features in the paper as well as an interest in magazines that cover fashion, sports, popular culture, or various hobbies, as we would expect, increases with age.