

Assessing US Kids as Digital Overusers

They have gaps in usage, but these 'digital natives' rack up lots of screen time

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Kids continue to be an anomaly of the digital era. While few have smartphones or inhabit the social networks that preoccupy teens and adults, their sheer amount of screen time nonetheless manages to feel like a national crisis.

Pollsters are busy accumulating survey responses in which parents worry about the amount of time their kids spend staring at digital screens. Some polling goes for drama, as in a June 2018 survey conducted for Comcast by Wakefield Research, where 76% of parents said their kids are “more addicted to their devices than to candy.”

Others are more matter-of-fact, like a June 2018 survey by Edelman Intelligence for GoGo SqueeZ which found a similar proportion of parents who said their kids engage in more screen time than the parents would like.

US Parent Internet Users' Attitudes Toward Screen Time for Their Children, June 2018

% of respondents

76% of parents say their kids engage in more screen time than they'd like

73% of parents schedule activities for their kids to minimize screen time

50% of parents say their kids are likely to engage in screen time on their own, when they have an hour of free time

Note: n=1,000 with children ages 12 and under
Source: GoGo Squeez survey conducted by Edelman Intelligence, July 23, 2018

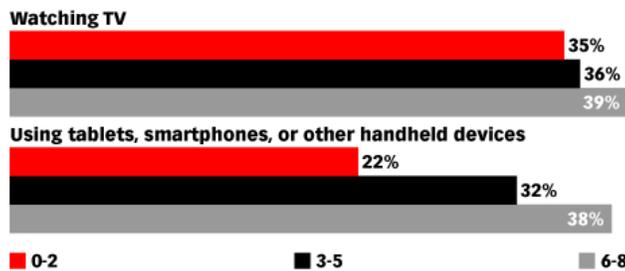
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As discussed in a new eMarketer report—[US Kids and Digital 2018: What Matters and What Doesn't for These Digital Natives](#)—the screen time problem is not limited to kids approaching their teens. Rather, a March 2018 YouGov survey (in conjunction with an organization called Read About 15 Minutes and the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association) found many parents of kids ages 2 and younger lamenting the amount of time their children spend using digital devices—and watching TV.

US Parents Who Say Their Child Spends Too Much Time Watching TV and Using Devices, by Age of Child, Jan 2018

% of respondents in each group



Source: American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA) & Read Aloud 15 Minutes, "Popular Technology Survey," June 18, 2018

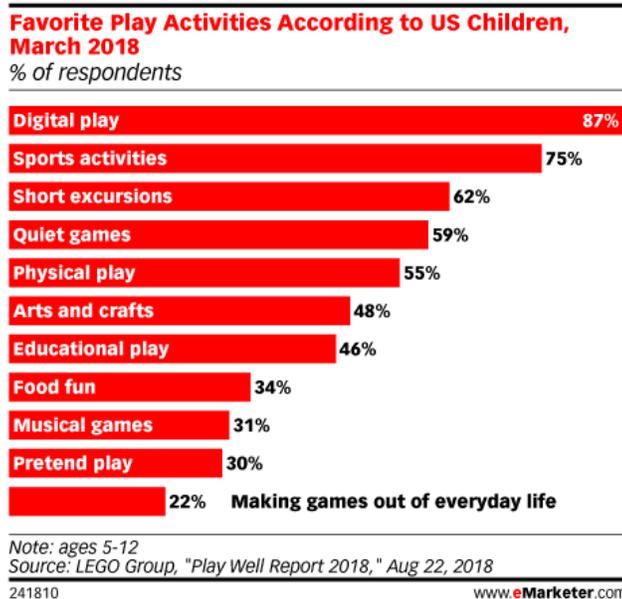
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Part of parents' worry about kids' screen time is its tendency to displace other activities. For example, in a June 2018 survey for Northwestern Mutual by Wakefield Research, more than one-third of parents complained that their kids "spend more time on their tech devices instead of with their families each day."

There is also worry that sedentary screen time—much of it devoted to digital video and video gaming—cuts into kids' physical activity and

thus yields a deficit in physical fitness. And that problem is embedded in the way kids like to spend their time. In a March 2018 survey by Lego among kids ages 5 to 12, “digital play” ranked atop the hierarchy of their recreational pastimes, with 87% citing it as their favorite—32 percentage points higher than those citing “physical play.”



As smart speakers become more common household appliances, they can add to the amount of time kids spend with digital technology. In an odd twist, though, some parents see speaker usage as a benign alternative to a screen and hope that the former will displace some of the latter. Indeed, that’s one of the reasons why some parents buy smart speakers, according to June 2018 polling by National Public Radio and Edison Research.

Among parents who have owned smart speakers for a year or more, 24% said they bought them in part to reduce kids’ screen time. Among respondents who have owned the device for less than a year, 43% said the same. If they do have access, kids use smart speakers for multiple purposes. Often it’s simply for fun, as with the 55% whose parents say they use the speakers to play music. But speakers can have practical utility, as with the 25% of kids who use them for help with homework.

eMarketer PRO subscribers can access the full [US Kids and Digital 2018: What Matters and What Doesn't for These Digital Natives](#) report [here](#).

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