Data Sheet on Minors and Social Media

What Platforms are Teens Using?

"What is your favorite social media platform?"

- Snapchat: 34.3%
- TikTok: 29.3%
- Instagram: 25.3%
- Twitter: 3.0%
- Facebook: 3.0%
- Other: 3.0%

This list doesn’t include YouTube, which accounts for an astounding amount of watchtime.

The number of US teenagers who are online continuously is increasing at a dramatic pace, almost doubling from 2015 to 2018: 24% to 45%.


Via: Ledger of Harms (https://ledger.humanetech.com/#study_168)
Impacts on Attention

The level of social media use on a given day is linked to a significant correlated increase in memory failure the next day. Assessing nearly 800 people aged 25–75, research showed similar effects irrespective of age and of the user’s memory levels on previous days. These effects occur in one direction only: levels of social media use predict later memory failure, but levels of memory failure do not predict social media use on subsequent days.

Via: Ledger of Harms (https://ledger.humanetech.com/#study_154)

The mere presence of your smartphone, even when it is turned off and face down, drains your attention. An experimental study of several hundred adults showed that both working memory and the ability to solve new problems were drastically reduced when their phones were turned off but present on their desks, as opposed to being in another room. Ironically, participants who said they were highly dependent on their phones showed the greatest increase in memory and fluid intelligence scores when their phones were moved to the other room. Researchers noted that smartphones act as "high-priority stimuli," unconsciously draining significant attentional resources even when we consciously ignore them.

Via: Ledger of Harms (https://ledger.humanetech.com/#study_6)

Media multi-tasking is significantly linked to later levels of attentional difficulties. Tracking more than 800 adolescents across time demonstrated that the degree to which young teens (aged 11–13 years old)
multi-tasked was a significant predictor of attentional problems 3 months later (p < 0.05), highlighting the potential impact of distracting digital environments on young teens’ development.

Via: Ledger of Harms (https://ledger.humanetech.com/#study_27)

Children under age 14 spend nearly twice as long with tech devices (3 hours and 18 minutes per day) as they do in conversation with their families (1 hour and 43 minutes per day).

Via: Ledger of Harms (https://ledger.humanetech.com/#study_54)

Impacts on Mental Health

After nearly two decades in decline, high depressive symptoms for 13-18 year old teen girls rose by 65% between 2010–2017

Via: Ledger of Harms (https://ledger.humanetech.com/#study_30)

A longitudinal study of several thousand adolescents indicated that their level of social media usage was a significant predictor of their depression levels over the course of 4 years. For every increased hour spent using social media, teens show a 2% increase in depressive symptoms.

Via: Ledger of Harms (https://ledger.humanetech.com/#study_26)
66% is the increase in the risk of suicide-related outcomes among teen girls who spend more than 5 hours a day (vs. 1 hour a day) on social media.


Via: Ledger of Harms (https://ledger.humanetech.com/#study_24)

A systematic review and meta-analysis (of 20 studies) showed strong, consistent evidence of an association between bedtime access to or use of electronic devices and reduced sleep quantity and quality, as well as increased daytime sleepiness.


Via: Ledger of Harms (https://ledger.humanetech.com/#study_28)

The amount of time spent using social media is significantly correlated with later levels of alcohol use. Research on several thousand teens demonstrated that while time spent on other forms of electronic media (including TV or video games) has comparatively little impact, the amount of time spent on social media is significantly linked to alcohol use 4 years later. Data indicates that social media has this unique effect through "social norming": repeatedly exposing teens to multiple images of their peers and role models drinking alcohol makes such behavior seem normal and acceptable, encouraging imitation.


Via: Ledger of Harms (https://ledger.humanetech.com/#study_31)

Summarization of THORN Report on Online Harms to 9–17 year olds from 2020
The following data points are from the report “Responding to Online Threats: Minors’ Perspectives on Disclosing, Reporting, and Blocking: Findings from 2020 quantitative research among 9–17 year olds.”

The researchers surveyed 2,000 American children between 9 and 17. The report is by Thorn and Benenson Strategy Group.

Sharing nudes is becoming normalized
- Approximately 40% of 13–17 year olds reported it was “normal for people my age to share nudes with each other.”
- 1 in 5 girls ages 13–17, and 1 in 10 boys ages 13–17, said they have shared their own nudes.
- The above two points are from Thorn’s 2019 SG-CSAM Report. The rest of this document is from the 2020 report.

Problematic online interactions are very common
- Nearly half of participants (48%) said they had been made to feel uncomfortable, been bullied, or had a sexual interaction online.

Sexual interactions are common, including with adults
- 1 in 3 participants reported having had an online sexual interaction. These included:
  - being asked for a nude image or video
  - being asked to go “on cam” with a nude or sexually explicit stream
  - being sent a nude photo or video
  - being sent sexually explicit messages
- 25% of 9–17 year olds reported having had a sexual interaction with someone they believed to be an adult
- 19% of 9–12 year olds reported having had a sexual interaction with someone they believed to be an adult

LBGTQ children are more at-risk
- A majority of LGBTQ+ minors (57%) reported having had a potentially harmful online experience -- over 10 percentage points higher than non-LGBTQ+ minors that same age (46%).
- 45% of LGBTQ+ minors reported being bullied or made uncomfortable online, compared to 37% of non-LGBTQ+ minors.
- 42% of LGBTQ+ minors experienced a sexually explicit online interaction, compared to 30% of all non-LGBTQ+ minors.
- More than 1 in 4 (28%) LGBTQ+ minors have had a nude photo or video shared with them online, compared to 1 in 5 (20%) non-LGBTQ+ minors.
- Nearly 1 in 3 LGBTQ+ minors (32%) reported an online sexual encounter with someone they believed to be over 18 -- ten percentage points higher than their non-LGBTQ+ peers (22%).

**Girls are more at-risk**
- Over half (54%) of teen girls surveyed reported having had a potentially harmful online experience and 41% reported experience with an online sexual interaction. By comparison, 40% of teen boys reported having had a potentially harmful online experience and 31% reported experience with an online sexual interaction.
- Teen girls were nearly three times more likely to be solicited for a nude (28%) than teen boys (11%). Teen girls were also nearly two times more likely to have been sent sexual messages (32%) than teen boys (17%).
- Approximately 1 in 3 teenage girls (34%) reported having had an online sexual encounter with someone they believed to be over 18.
- Approximately 1 in 6 (16%) 9–12 year old girls reported having had an online sexual encounter with someone they believed to be over 18.

**The most problematic platforms**
- The platforms with the highest number of survey participants reporting a potentially harmful online experience included Snapchat (26%), Instagram (26%), YouTube (19%), TikTok (18%), and Messenger (18%).
- Platforms where the most participants said they have had an online sexual interaction were Snapchat (16%), Instagram (16%), Messenger (11%), and Facebook (10%).
  - Following these four, WhatsApp, Google Hangouts/Meet, TikTok, Twitter, and YouTube each had 9% of participants say they had a sexual interaction on the platform.
• More than one-fifth of users (23% Snapchat, 22% Instagram, 21% WhatsApp) have reported experiencing sexually explicit interactions on one of these platforms.
• Nearly one-sixth of users have experienced an online sexual interaction with someone they believed to be an adult on Snapchat (15%) and Instagram (13%)
  ○ About 1 in 10 users have experienced similar situations with adults on WhatsApp (11%), Facebook (10%), and Messenger (10%).
• Importantly there are a number of newer, less popular platforms with some of the highest rates of sexually explicit interactions among users.
  ○ Users are more likely to experience sexual interactions on platforms such as Kik (23%), Telegram (21%), and Amino (20%) than on the average platform.

Many children are not disclosing harmful experiences
• In theory, more than 2 in 3 minors (68%) said they would report a potentially harmful online experience offline to a caregiver or a peer.
  ○ However, in practice, for those who’ve actually had a potentially harmful online experience, far fewer (41%) have sought help from the people in their lives.
• One in four 9–17 year olds (24%) who have had a potentially harmful online experience turned to “no one” for support.
• Of these minors, nearly two-thirds (62%) said they chose not to report because they felt it was not “a big deal” and one in four said they didn’t because of anonymity concerns (24%) or embarrassment (23%).
• Only 37% of 9–17 year olds who had an online sexual interaction told a parent/caregiver/trusted adult/peer.