

Book Excerpt, Middle of Chapter 1: The Rise of New Media

First, parents must recognize that they are now living in the digital age, reaping the benefits of technology and globalized communication, while simultaneously facing the challenges associated with the constant streaming of media. The statistics below paint a clear picture of exactly what parents are facing in this digital age.

According to research from PewResearch Center:

- Social Networking among teens who use the Internet increased 25% from November 2006 to July 2011. That means sites like Facebook and Instagram increased their number of teen users by one-fourth in a mere five years (Lenhart “Digital,” 2015).
- 24% of teens report going online “almost constantly” due to the unfettered access to smartphones (Lenhart “Teens,” 2015). That means nearly one-fourth of the teen population is rarely unplugged and offline. They are endlessly connected to information and social media.
- An enormous 71% of teens use more than one social networking site, with Facebook leading the way (Lenhart “Teens,” 2015). The average teenager possibly has hundreds of online connections on multiple sites. The connections can vary from personal friends and family to businesses and political groups. Some connections may be total strangers.
- Among American teens (ages 13 – 17) 88% report having access to a mobile phones, with 73% of teens having smartphones (Lenhart “A Majority,” 2015). The increase in smart phone use among teenagers has drastically increased the exposure to new media and total time spent online.
- Cell phones and smartphones not only provide Internet access to users, but also instant communication through text messaging. The mean for daily text messages sent and received by a teen (ages 12 – 17) is 167, with the median being 60 (Lenhart “Digital” 6). This statistic does not take into account communications using separate phone applications such as Snapchat or Vine. The average teenager is experiencing high amounts of communication without any personal interaction.
- The statistics for tablets and computer access are also very high. 87% of American teens (ages 13 – 17) have access to a laptop or desktop computer, and 58% have access to a tablet (Lenhart “A Majority,” 2015).
- Regarding gaming consoles, 91% of American teens (ages 12 – 17) reported having access to a gaming console. This statistic weighs heavily towards males, with 91% of teen boys in the same age group *owning* game consoles, where only 70% of girls report *having access* to a console (Lenhart “A Majority,” 2015). Game consoles are being used less and less for actual gaming, and more for online interaction.

Based on this data, it is clear that media and technology have become paramount in the lives of children and young adults. With this in mind, parents must realize that the influence of the media on the family can either make or mar the present and future generations. Indeed, parents must find a way to capitalize on the benefits while facing the many challenges presented by constant and instant access to new media. Otherwise, the opinions revealed in one British survey may become a prevalent ideology.

In a recent survey, 3,000 British adults said the top five things they could not *live without* were sunshine, the Internet, clean drinking water, refrigerators, and Facebook. Flushing toilets came in ninth. There has been a clear shift in the hierarchy of needs, not in reality, but in perception. Vast amounts of people, grown adults, with formed minds, actually view the Internet as more important than water. One pollster commented, “Brits are obsessed by the weather, so it’s not surprising sunshine was rated as the top thing we couldn’t live without, but to say you can’t live without material things over drinking water is crazy” (as cited in Coyne, Bushman, & Nathanson, 2012). Indeed it is. It is paradoxical (and ludicrous even) to rank Facebook ahead of the most basic physical needs. As humans we are relational beings; therefore, we have social needs, but our survival depends on food and water, not friends, likes, and shares.