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MailOnline

The 'toxic' Web generation: Children spend six hours a day in front of screens

By [Laura Clark](#)

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Youngsters are shunning books and outdoor games to spend up to six hours a day in front of a screen, a survey has revealed.

Children as young as five are turning their bedrooms into multi-media 'hubs' with TVs, computers, games consoles, MP3 players and mobile phones all within easy reach.

The trend triggered warnings that the next generation will struggle to compete in the adult world because they lack reading and writing skills.

At the same time their mastery of technology is not widely appreciated by their parents.

The market research involving 1,800 children aged five to 16 found that they spend an average of 2.7 hours a day watching TV, 1.5 on the internet and 1.3 playing on games consoles, although in some cases these activities are simultaneous, such as watching TV while playing on a console.

In contrast, youngsters spend just over half an hour reading books, according to the survey by ChildWise.

Almost a third take a games console to bed rather than a book, while a quarter never read in their own time.

And instead of kicking a football around, more than a quarter of boys regularly meet in an online games 'environment' where they discuss tactics and technical problems.

Parents justified internet access on the grounds that it would help with homework but the survey found education had become an 'afterthought', with only 9 per cent of youngsters looking up information for schoolwork the last time they went online.

In contrast, 34 per cent played games, 32 per cent used instant messaging, 31 per cent visited a social networking site and 28 per cent watched video clips on sites such as YouTube.

More than half of children now have their own PC or laptop and a third say their computer is the single piece of equipment they could least live without, compared with a declining number - one in five - who name TV.

A report on the findings from ChildWise concluded that many youngsters were 'leaving traditional books behind' but were caught in a 'communications trap'.

It said: 'Their online abilities often exceed those of their parents' generation, but this is not necessarily recognised or valued.

'Their conventional reading and writing skills are frequently criticised and their limited experience and expertise in this area



The logged-on generation

makes it harder for them to compete in an adult-dominated world.'

Rosemary Duff, research director of ChildWise, said: 'They are a generation abandoning print and paper.'

Comments (10)

Response to Sam, Telford:

I have kids your age, and I agree with you entirely I was in one of the first school years to have computer studies as a full blown lesson (on old BBC-B comps), and since then I have always had one, whether it was the old Sinclair Spectrum, Apple Mac or PC.

We were encouraged to embrace this sort of technology in the 1980's and most of us who did have taught our kids exactly the same thing.

I would like to see if the author of this piece can explain how that is a bad thing, given the fact that so much employment these days requires a high level of computer literacy and technological familiarity.

We have become reliant on technology of many forms, and if they were taken away it would be a severe blow to not only the industries making them, but also the industries using them as well as members of the general public.

As for TV being indispensable I wouldn't quite say that, but it is a very useful educational tool as well as entertainment.

Click to rate Rating 27

- Michael, UK, 19/1/2009 14:37

I am all for tv, computers, games and books, it keeps them off the streets getting up to no good, as long as they are not looking at illegal content or playing violent games, I do not have a problem with 6 hours once chores and homework is done. And yes, I have to fork out for constructed activities like football, piano and Taekwondo classes.

Click to rate Rating 10

- Tracey, London England, 19/1/2009 14:25

Better they sit in front of a computer screen than being left to run wild out on the streets!

Click to rate Rating 12

- Sandie Seward, Basildon, Essex. U.K., 19/1/2009 13:47

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