



WHITE PAPER

# TEEN DIGITAL LIFE

**April 2011**

A report by Arekibo Communications

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

---

03

Introduction

---

04

Mobile

---

05

Apps Economy

---

06

Sleep Deprivation

---

07

Gaming

---

08

Social Networking

---

09

Mobile Operators

---

---

10

Advertising

---

11

Traditional Media

---

12

Digital Teen Survival Guide

---

13

Key Points

---

14

For Futher Information

---

15

Sources

---

# INTRODUCTION

---

“Modern teens’ are growing up in a vastly different media landscape than their predecessors. Mobile technologies, ubiquitous internet access and changing patterns of media use are creating a generation of teens to whom digital technologies are vital.”



In this dynamic market Arekibo, a leading digital media agency in Dublin, spoke to Jack Connery, a 16 year old intern, about the digital media lives of modern teens. Jack provides a fascinating insight into current uses of digital media by the next generation of leaders.

This white paper builds on similar research by Morgan Stanley, who in 2009 interviewed their 15 year old intern Matthew Robson about his peers’ media use in the UK<sup>1</sup>. As with the original report, this is not an academic analysis into modern media consumption by teens but an indicative view of trends and attitudes towards digital media.

Jack reports that teens are adept at negotiating multiple media and content for entertainment and communication. New media technologies have already eclipsed “traditional media” to become the most significant sources entertainment and information in teenage lives.

# MOBILE



“Wi-Fi is a ‘killer feature’ for phones as it allows for free and easy access email, social networking sites and the web. It is definite that Wi-Fi is a big factor for teens when choosing a new phone.”

As is to be expected almost every teenager has a mobile phone and, in spite of falling sales, Nokia is still the most common brand. Smartphones have become a desired commodity in the classroom with an increasing number of teens using them. iPhones are seen as the “ultimate phones out at the moment,” however Blackberry devices are also popular. Google’s Android phones are less common.

Jack says, “The iPhone is very expensive for students and it can be hard to save up the €579 required for the entry level model. Teenagers usually get new phones for Christmas or birthdays but as they are so expensive many parents ask teens to pay some of the expense.” Price and expense work to influence the type of devices teens use. Higher-end iPhone and Android phones tend to be given to teens from parents or older siblings as hand-me-downs. Teens seem to be willing accept a second hand smartphone over a new lower-end phone. Modern teenagers are tech savvy and have high expectations of digital technology.

Their ideal phone must have Wi-Fi, 3G, application stores, a camera, MP3 player and regular updates. Despite these high-end expectations, smartphones are still mostly used for texting and calling.

“Wi-Fi, rather than 3G, is a ‘killer feature’ for phones as it allows for free and easy access email, social networking sites and the web. It is definite that Wi-Fi is an extremely big factor for teens when choosing a new phone. The durability of a mobile is also taken in to consideration as it is expected that the phone will be dropped and manhandled in social situations. The sensitivity of the touchscreen (capacitive rather than resistive touch screens) is also a deciding factor – resistive touchscreens found in lower-end phones can become frustrating to use.”

# APPS ECONOMY



“The discovery and swapping of applications provides a social platform for students. One of the key points of success for any app or hardware is the number of updates the application receives.”

Following the release of budget-friendly data and usage plans by Ireland’s major mobile operators, smartphones have become the standard in many Irish classrooms. With this applications have joined music and other digital media as the modern versions of trading cards and pogs.

The discovery and swapping of applications provides a social platform for students. One of the key points of success for any app or hardware is the number of updates the application receives. Apps that are frequently updated, without additional costs, are more desired than those that receive few updates.

For both genders cost is a major deciding factor in their use of mobile apps. Even a low price of 50c is prohibitive for most students.

As one would expect games, such as Angry Birds – which is regularly updated for free, are the most downloaded applications in the classroom. Because they are free, and can be played without the need for additional hardware, smartphones have surpassed handheld consoles as the primary source for gaming.

Teens’ use of gaming apps are as much a result of the number of free games available on app stores than anything else. The predominance of gaming apps may be a result of their low dependence on web access and “replay value.” Jack adds, “Social networking apps, one of the main draws for teens to smartphones, come pre-installed on most phones so rarely factor into their considerations when downloading apps or purchasing a phone.”

# SLEEP DEPRIVATION



“Leaving a mobile phone under their pillow while they sleep, in case they get a text or call, is now commonplace. This stops teenagers from getting in to a deep and consistent sleep.”



Getting a good night sleep is becoming harder for teenagers due to the “always-on” nature of digital technologies.

Jack described the demanding nature of these mobile technologies, “leaving a mobile phone under their pillow while they sleep, in case they get a text or call, is now commonplace. This stops teenagers from getting in to a deep and consistent sleep. The light from screens can prevent your body from producing melatonin, the hormone that is produced naturally in darkness and helps regulate sleep. Keeping your brain active before you go to bed can make it harder to fall asleep.

“For teenagers to get a good night’s sleep they need to leave all electronic devices like their laptops and phones out of sight for an hour before they go to sleep. This can be hard as texting and social networking are probably the biggest distractions for teens before they go to bed.”

# GAMING



“For teenagers gaming is a bit of fun with their friends, it may be on the iPhone, iPod Touch or at home playing online games while also chatting with your friends through the online connection.”

Gaming has moved predominantly from the sitting room to handheld devices and as a result has become a social activity for teenagers. Jack says, “Whether it’s playing on the iPhone or iPod Touch or if you’re playing online on your Xbox or PlayStation it is now common to play with friends.” However, online gaming is not accessible for all teens. “The cost of an Xbox Live contract for three months is €20, for a teen to buy this they must have enough for their essential purchases like phone credit or food. If Microsoft had cheaper 48 hour or week long passes then more teens would use the online service.

“For teenagers gaming is a bit of fun with their friends, it might be in school, on the iPhone or iPod Touch or at home playing online games while also chatting with your friends through the online connection.”

While the Nintendo Wii has been a very popular console it has “gotten old very quickly”, unlike Microsoft’s Xbox and Sony’s PS3 for which manufacturers constantly push updates to the hardware and software.

Gaming consoles have become the centre of teens’ media consumption in the home with social networking, digital TV, streaming movies and offline storage available on Microsoft’s Xbox and Sony’s PlayStation. There is little perceived difference between these, however as the PlayStation 3 allows for free access to the web, this is more teen friendly.

# SOCIAL NETWORKING



“It would be common to spend about an hour each day actively using social networking sites although teens would be logged in all day.”

It is perhaps no surprise to say that social networking is a huge part of teenage life. “It would be common to spend about an hour each day actively using social networking sites although teens would be logged in all day.” Facebook is the most popular out of them all with around 500 million active users. MySpace, with its emphasis on music, is the second most used social networking site.

As is to be expected Bebo is less popular with older teens, who dislike its messy interface and “childish” look and feel. In addition, teens have access to Facebook on their phones via apps. Jack reports that its chat function “is a strong selling point.”

“Bebo now acts as an introduction for younger teens to social networking, who, as they get older, graduate onto Facebook.” Although, it is not uncommon for young teens with older siblings to skip Bebo altogether. Twitter is not largely used by teens, many of whom fail to see the attraction of it.

Twitter also lacks the critical mass of friends that Facebook has; according to Jack, “if all my friends had Bebo or Twitter I would probably be still using them both, but because there friends are all using Facebook everyone they know wants to use Facebook.”



# MOBILE OPERATORS



“Teens are more willing to change operator to avail of these offers. They have little loyalty to one brand of operator over another and are very willing to switch.”



Teens are well served by Irish mobile operators. “O2 and Vodafone would be the most popular, mainly due to the offers they have in stores. Teens are more willing to change operator to avail of these offers. They have little loyalty to one brand of operator over another and are very willing to switch. So as Vodafone are reeling in customers O2 are taking them back.”

Tesco and Eircom mobile are unheard of in the classroom. Their smaller selection of phones and few offers put teens off.

Jack says, “Teenagers will swap phone network whenever they want because they all have the same price plans in the end, whether it’s free texts to all networks or free text and free calls to the network they’re using. The only difference that splits the companies apart is the deals they produce with the customer when selling the product.”

# ADVERTISING



“Interactive advertising is more effective at engaging teens than traditional methods. An intelligently positioned YouTube video can be more effective than a television or Facebook advertisement.”

In spite of their reliance on free apps and free content most teens look past both digital and traditional media advertisements. This blind eye to ads is consistent across all media, including sites, apps, print and broadcast.

Interactive advertising, such as SMS competitions and viral videos, are more effective at engaging teens than traditional methods. An intelligently positioned YouTube video can be more effective at targeting a teen audience than a television or Facebook advertisement.

Teens actively look to discover and share funny or interesting videos or media on social sites such as YouTube on a regular basis. According to Jack, “there’s usually something new on YouTube each night worth sharing.”

If such content has been shared by a friend on Facebook he and his peers will be more inclined to open and discuss it. It is this word-of-mouth which has a wider reach and impact than direct selling via AdWords or similar systems. Cadbury’s recent series of successful online campaigns can be seen as good examples of this methodology of brand promotion. “The Gorilla drumming to Genesis’ In the Air Tonight, the Eyebrow Dance and Spots vs. Stripes are all very effective ad campaigns for Cadburys.”

In line with other studies QR codes are not used by teens, again this is most likely as a result of a lack of access to 3G internet than a lack of interest.

# TRADITIONAL MEDIA



“On demand services like Sky+ and UPC are more suited to teens’ active lifestyles than standard broadcasts and streaming the latest American series from the web is commonplace.”



For teenagers “TV is what they do when they’re bored, tired, sick whenever they feel like relaxing they turn on the TV.” On demand services like Sky+ and UPC are more suited to teens’ active lifestyles than standard broadcasts. Streaming the latest American series from the web is commonplace. As is watching new movies online.

As a result of free access to the latest films some teens are less inclined to head out to the cinema on weekends. “When teens do go out to the cinema it is usually for the social experience. Although even with student pricing the cinema is expensive for teens.

When it comes to standard definition and HD teens are mostly agnostic. “The social status of having a good TV doesn’t make a difference to what people think of each other. Obviously if someone had a massive HD state-of-the-art TV his friends would most likely want to watch a game on that. But nobody looks down on someone for the fact of having an old TV.”

# DIGITAL TEEN SURVIVAL GUIDE

---

## Free Apps

Applications are essential for teenagers with smartphones as they make the phone more interesting and provide it with a longer life. So what are the top ten free apps for teenagers?

---

**01** Facebook

---

**02** YouTube

---

**03** Sky Sports Football

---

**04** Shazam

---

**05** Ireland Cinema Times

---

**06** Bump

---

**07** Google Maps

---

**08** Angry Birds

---

**09** Pac Man

---

**10** Skype

---

## Key Phones

Having the right smartphone is important in the school yard. The top five smartphones are;

---

**01** Apple iPhone 4

---

**02** Samsung Galaxy S

---

**03** Blackberry

---

**04** Sony Experia Play

---

**05** HTC Desire

---

## Key Games

The Xbox 360 and PlayStation 3 are the biggest consoles on the market. These are the games to have.

---

**01** Call of duty : Black ops

---

**02** Fifa 11

---

**03** Guitar hero: warriors of rock

---

**04** Halo Reach

---

**05** Assassins Creed 3

---

# KEY POINTS

---

- Smartphones are significantly changing the traditional notions of commerce and social networking. Often given to teens as presents or hand-me-downs, iPhones, Blackberries and Androids are becoming commonplace in the classroom.
- However, teens are not spendthrifts. Cost and expense subdue teens' use of digital technologies and content. Free trumps expense and paid-for digital content is seen as an unnecessary. The costs of purchasing and maintaining a new mobile phone has an effect on what devices teens choose. Teens are keenly aware of competition in the mobile market and are willing to switch model of phone or manufacturer to avail of the best offers. Teens will move between to whatever network offers the best deal; there is little or no loyalty toward any mobile network. O2 and Vodafone are the largest mobile operators for teens in Ireland.
- Gaming is a ubiquitous part of teenagers' lives. Between hand-held devices, Xbox, PlayStation, Wii consoles, iPod, iPhones and Facebook apps, gaming is a major economy for teens. Social networking is as large as one expects, free chat, the ability to post messages to each other's wall, posting videos and links being the main draws.
- Teenagers don't pay attention to most sources of advertising like billboards, websites, apps, and print. Teens are more likely to notice viral videos on YouTube and SMS competitions. Jack says, "Viral videos are probably the most effective because once there out there and funny enough, teens would be likely to post it to their Facebook for their friends to see."
- Multitasking is a big part of a teen's media consumption; teens divide their attention between more than one activity the same time, such as watching TV and "facebooking" on their laptops or phones. Gaming is a ubiquitous part of teenagers' lives. Between hand-held devices, Xbox, PlayStation, Wii consoles, iPod, iPhones and Facebook apps, gaming is a major economy for teens. Social networking is as large as one expects, free chat, the ability to post messages to each other's wall, posting videos and links being the main draws.

# FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

---



For more information do not  
hesitate to call or email us.

## **Arekibo Communications**

18 Herbert Street  
Dublin 2,  
Ireland

+353 1 661 0170  
enquiry@arekibo.com  
[www.arekibo.com](http://www.arekibo.com)

Arekibo is a digital consultants company that helps public and private organisations to structure, deliver and manage digital content and strategy. Arekibo's strength lies in its ability to create unique intuitive and engaging web design that is supported by robust, smart and tailored applications that are easy to use, last the test of time, and deliver real and tangible benefits to our clients. The company is based in Dublin, Ireland.

## SOURCES

---

<sup>i</sup>Source: <http://media.ft.com/cms/c3852b2e-6f9a-11de-bfc5-00144feabdc0.pdf>