

Press release

Childhood 2017

New CHILDWISE report reveals children read for as long online per day as they read books or magazines

9-16 year olds spend half an hour a day reading online on average, equal to the amount of time children the same age read books for pleasure, according to the latest 2017 CHILDWISE Monitor Report.¹

This year, CHILDWISE questioned children for the first time on how long they spend reading online. Three possible examples were given (blogs, fan fiction, online magazines), but interpretation of what constitutes online reading was left to the child in order to track how long children read on screens, regardless of content type.

The new data shows that a third of children read online for half an hour or less, while one in six read online for an hour or more, including a minority who say they read for three hours or more per day.²

9-12 year olds read offline for twice as long as online, but as those entering their teenage years begin to put their books and magazines down, time spent reading offline halves and 13-16 year olds spend twice as long reading online.

“As children grow older, the number reading online rises sharply and time spent doing so increases rapidly, likely due to higher levels of mobile phone ownership” says CHILDWISE research executive, Helena Dare-Edwards.

“On a mobile, they can access short-form content anytime, anywhere, and links to external sites are continually shared and circulated through social media. Older children are also more likely to have fewer restrictions on the websites they can visit, and more freedom in the amount of time they spend online”

In comparison, time spent reading books, magazines or comics³ for pleasure declines with age and the proportion of non-readers rises. Just 5% of 9-10 year olds claim to never read, climbing to a quarter of children aged 11-16, including a third of 15-16s.

¹ Average hours spent reading per day (9-16 year olds) 0.5 hours: books, comics, magazines and 0.5 hours online content.

² More than two in five children aged 9-10 say they never read online, but this almost halves by age 15-16 when just a quarter claim they never read online. One in five 9-10 year olds read for half an hour or more, rising to half of teenagers aged 15-16.

³ Children were asked how long they spend reading books, magazines or comics, in any format - whether print or digital - in their own time, not for schoolwork. An additional question asked children in what format or on what devices they read books.

“Recent years have seen a steady decline in the number of children reading for pleasure, but it could be argued that online reading is bridging this gap, particularly among teenagers who begin to move away from books and magazines” says Helena Dare-Edwards.

The data reveals children are reading a diverse selection of short-form content, including news articles, blogs, online magazines and wikis, as well as potentially longer form, user-generated content such as fan fiction on websites such as Wattpad.

Children also answered that they read content on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Snapchat and YouTube, suggesting that definitions of reading are widening among the younger generation to include social media updates, direct messages, and subtitled videos.

“We may be witnessing a gradual shift in what is defined as ‘reading,’” says Helena. “It may not be literature or traditional content forms, but children are still flexing their reading muscles, albeit in places unexpected and with bite-size, informal, digital formats”.

The 2017 CHILDWISE Monitor is a comprehensive annual report looking at five to 16-year-olds’ media consumption, purchasing and social habits as well as key behaviour.

Findings of the report also include...

- Three quarters (75%) of children aged 5-16 ever read books for pleasure in their own time, down from 76% last year and a high of 80% in 2013. 28% continue to read every day.
- Girls continue to read slightly more than boys, with half (50%) reading for half an hour or more, compared with 44% of boys. Boys are almost twice as likely to never read (20% vs. 11% of girls).
- E-book readership has dropped among 7-14 year olds, but shows signs of recovery among teenagers aged 15-18. 19% of children have their own e-book reader, down from 23% last year.
- Reading among boys rapidly declines from age 11, such that by age 15-16, just half of boys (50%) ever read for pleasure, although this has increased from only 36% last year.

Around 2000 children in schools across the United Kingdom completed in-depth online surveys for the report.

CHILDWISE is an independent market research agency specialising in children and young people. CHILDWISE has a programme of published independent research and also conducts research for government agencies, charities, broadcasters, publishers and brands www.childwise.co.uk

The Monitor Report 2017 covers... Tablets and technology; websites and applications; gaming, YouTube; mobile phones; TV viewing; video on demand; music; reading ; children’s equipment; money; purchasing; sports & activities; health & wellbeing and social awareness.

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