

PewResearch Internet Project

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Teens, Smartphones & Texting

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Overview

The volume of texting among teens has risen from 50 texts a day in 2009 to 60 texts for the median teen text user. Older teens, boys, and blacks are leading the increase. Texting is the dominant daily mode of communication between teens and all those with whom they communicate.

The typical American teen is sending and receiving a greater number of texts than in 2009. Overall, 75% of all teens text. Here are the key findings about the role of texting in teens' lives:

- The median number of texts (i.e. the midpoint user in our sample) sent on a typical day by teens 12-17 rose from 50 in 2009 to 60 in 2011.
- Much of this increase occurred among older teens ages 14-17, who went from a median of 60 texts a day to a median of 100 two years later. Boys of all ages also increased their texting volume from a median of 30 texts daily in 2009 to 50 texts in 2011. Black teens showed an increase of a median of 60 texts per day to 80.
- Older girls remain the most enthusiastic texters, with a median of 100 texts a day in 2011, compared with 50 for boys the same age.
- 63% of all teens say they exchange text messages every day with people in their lives. This far surpasses the frequency with which they pick other forms of *daily* communication, including phone calling by cell phone (39% do that with others every day), face-to-face socializing outside of school (35%), social network site messaging (29%), instant messaging (22%), talking on landlines (19%) and emailing (6%).

The frequency of teens' phone chatter with friends – on cell phones and landlines – has fallen. But the heaviest texters are also the heaviest talkers with their friends.

Teens' phone conversations with friends are slipping in frequency.

- 14% of all teens say they talk daily with friends on a landline, down from 30% who said so in 2009. Nearly a third (31%) of teens say they never talk on a landline with friends (or report that they cannot do so).
- 26% of all teens (including those with and without cell phones) say they talk daily with friends on their cell phone, down from 38% of teens in 2009.

However, the Pew Internet survey shows that the heaviest texters are also the heaviest talkers. The heaviest texters (those who exchange more than 100 texts a day) are much more likely than lighter texters to say that they talk on their cell phone daily. Some 69% of heavy texters talk daily on their cell phones, compared with 46% of medium texters (those exchanging 21-100 texts a day) and 43% of light texters (those exchanging 0-20 texts a day).

About one in four teens report owning a smartphone.

Smartphones are gaining teenage users. Some 23% of all those ages 12-17 say they have a smartphone and ownership is highest among older teens: 31% of those ages 14-17 have a smartphone, compared with just 8% of youth ages 12-13. There are no differences in ownership of smartphones versus regular cell phones by race, ethnicity, or income. Teens whose parents have a college education are slightly more likely than teens whose parents have a high school diploma or less to have a smartphone (26% vs. 19%).

Smartphone owners are the most likely to have used a tablet computer to go online in the last month.

Overall, 16% of all teens have used a tablet computer to go online in the last 30 days and smartphone owners are also the most likely to be tablet users. Some 30% of smartphone users have used tablets to go online in the past month, while 13% of regular phone users and 9% of those without cell phones have done the same. Fewer smartphone users have used the internet on a desktop or laptop computer in the last month than regular phone users (85% vs. 93%).

Three quarters of teens – 77% – have cell phones. Ownership among younger teens has dropped since 2009.

Overall, 77% of those ages 12-17 have a cell phone. The percentage of younger teens ages 12 and 13 with cell phones has declined slightly since 2009; 57% of younger teens owned cell phones in 2011, compared with 66% in 2009.

6% of all American teens use cell phone-based location services.

Location-based services are applications (like Foursquare or Gowalla) or features on platforms (like Facebook or Twitter) that let a user “check in” to a location or share their location with friends. Overall, 6% of all American teens use location-based services on their cell phones.

- 18% of smartphone owners in the sample had shared their location, compared with 8% of regular phone owners and 2% of all other teens.
- Older teens ages 14 to 17 are more likely to use location-based services (9%) than 12 and 13-year-olds, of whom less than 1% report using a location-based service.