



**Australian Government**

**Australian Communications  
and Media Authority**

Australia's regulator for broadcasting, the internet, radiocommunications and telecommunications

[www.acma.gov.au](http://www.acma.gov.au)

# Internet use and social networking by young people

## No. 1

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Media and Communications  
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# Introduction

*Internet use and social networking by young people* is the first of a series of short reports that provide detailed analysis of particular topics from a major piece of community research commissioned by the Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA). That research, *Media and communications in Australian families* (the MCAF report), was first published by ACMA in December 2007 and provides a rich source of data on:

- the use of electronic media and communications technologies by young people aged 8–17 years
- the level of ownership of those technologies by families with young people aged 8–17 years
- parent concerns about young people’s use of electronic media and communications, family rules and arrangements around media use, and the challenges experienced by parents in supervising young people’s media and communications activities.

Some of the short reports in this series reproduce data from the MCAF report but go into greater analysis of that data. *Internet use and social networking by young people* is one such report. Other reports in the series will provide additional data analyses of young people’s use of media and communications technologies.

This and other short reports in the series are available on ACMA’s website at [www.acma.gov.au/mediareports](http://www.acma.gov.au/mediareports) along with the MCAF report (which also includes an academic literature review regarding media influences on young people and families) and other related material.

## REGULATORY CONTEXT

ACMA is Australia’s regulator for broadcasting, the internet, radiocommunications and telecommunications. ACMA regulates broadcasting services, internet content and mobile content in accordance with a number of pieces of legislation, including the *Broadcasting Services Act 1992*, the *Radiocommunications Act 1992*, the *Australian Communications and Media Authority Act 2005*, the *Telecommunications Act 1997* and the *Telecommunications (Consumer Protection and Service Standards) Act 1999*.

Understanding the ways that young Australians are using electronic media and communications is a core part of ACMA’s regulatory responsibilities. ACMA has an ongoing research program to assist in providing an evidence base for its regulatory and other functions.

ACMA has a role in providing advice and assistance to parents and adults who supervise children’s access to internet content. ACMA conducts and coordinates community education programs, and is also required to research issues relating to internet content.

The research in this report will assist ACMA to:

- understand the contemporary media environment in which young people operate
- understand how young people are using new electronic media and communications technologies
- advise the Minister on technological advances and service trends in the broadcasting and internet industries
- develop community education products and outreach activities to help young people, parents and educators understand and navigate online risks.

## **INTERNET USE AND SOCIAL NETWORKING BY YOUNG PEOPLE**

Engagement with online social networking services is proving to be an increasingly important communication and creative activity globally and in Australia, especially among young people.

Social networking websites such as MySpace, Bebo and Facebook allow users to create and manage their own online profile and build social networks with friends and other users (e.g. by messaging, chatting, emailing, blogging, sharing files and participating in discussion groups). Social networking also occurs on user-generated websites such as YouTube and Flickr where original content (e.g. video, music and other creative material) can be posted and shared online.

This report examines use of the internet, online social networking, other related online communication tools, and the creation of web content by young Australians aged between eight and 17 years.

In examining other related online communication tools, the research in this report covers activities such as messaging or chatting, playing games against other players online, and emailing. These other communication activities may occur either within or outside the context of social networking websites.

This report provides community research data on:

- access and use of the internet by young people
- location and social context of internet use
- level of participation in social networking websites and other online communication activities
- amount of time spent doing social networking and other online communication activities
- favourite leisure activities
- authoring of web content
- gender and age differences
- parental awareness of their child's internet activities.

# Key findings

## INTERNET

Ninety-one per cent of Australian family households with young people aged 8–17 years had the internet and 76 per cent had broadband.

Internet and broadband access was higher in households with 14–17 year olds (96 per cent internet; 84 per cent broadband) than those with 8–13 year olds (88 per cent internet; 73 per cent broadband).

Internet access was low in young people's bedrooms (11 per cent of bedrooms).

Seventy-four per cent of young people used the internet over the three days of the study.

Boys and girls spent an average of one hour and 17 minutes online per day<sup>1</sup>, ranging from an average 30 minutes per day for 8–11 year olds to two hours and 24 minutes for 15–17 year olds.

Eight–11 year olds spent less leisure time online than watching television (an average of 25 minutes and one hour 54 minutes per day respectively), whereas 15–17 year olds spent a similar amount of time doing each of these activities (one hour 59 minutes and one hour 55 minutes).

Seventy-six per cent of time spent online by young people was at home.

Seventy-two per cent of time spent online by young people was when by themselves rather than with other people (28 per cent). This situation was almost the reverse for television and DVD viewing (35 per cent of viewing time was when by themselves, 65 per cent with others).

## SOCIAL NETWORKING AND OTHER RELATED ONLINE COMMUNICATION ACTIVITIES

Social networking and other related online communication activities comprised 64 per cent of young people's total internet time (an average of 49 minutes per day on these activities).

More 15–17 year olds used social networking services and other online communications compared with 8–11 year olds.

Twenty-nine per cent of young people messaged or chatted online over the three days of the study, and this online communication activity attracted highest participation.

More girls than boys messaged or chatted online, visited social networking websites and used email. More boys than girls played games with other players online.

Eight–17 year olds ranked messaging or chatting online as their seventh favourite activity when by themselves, behind other electronic media and leisure activities.

Fifteen–17 year olds ranked messaging or chatting online as their second favourite activity when by themselves, behind listening to recorded music.

Forty-two per cent of 8–17 year olds had their own material online at the time of the study, and 34 per cent had their own online profile.

Eighty per cent of 14–17 year old girls and 65 per cent of boys in this age group had their own material online.

Seventy-two per cent of 14–17 year old girls and 52 per cent of boys in this age group had their own online profile.

The data suggest that many parents were not aware that their child had downloaded or watched video content from the internet (79 per cent of parents whose child said they did this activity), or created their own online content (48 per cent of parents whose child said they did this activity).

Most parents (76 per cent) had rules, understandings or agreements around their child's internet use.

1. Average amount of time spent per day was calculated across all young people in the sample whether or not they used the internet during the survey period.

## The research

Most of the findings in this report are sourced from the major community research study commissioned by ACMA from Urbis, and reported in *Media and Communications in Australian Families 2007* (ACMA 2007). The research was conducted with a representative sample of Australian families with young people aged eight to 17 years between March and June 2007.

The community research design comprised:

- a representative telephone survey of parents from 751 family households across Australia (n=751 parents with young people aged 8–17 years), including an inventory of electronic media and communications equipment in these households;
- three-day time-use diaries completed by young people aged 8–17 years (n=751 one main child from each household; and n=1,003 total young people who completed a diary) during school term, and short questions on the use of communications technologies at the end of each of the three diary days; and
- a short self-complete survey that was filled out by young people on the day after completing the three-day time-use diary (i.e. Day 4 diary questions, n=1,055).

ACMA research findings are complemented with other Australian research from:

- Nielsen Online (2007) *Australian eGeneration Report: Fifth Edition*;
- ABS (2007), *2006–07 Household use of information technology, Australia*; and
- ABS (2006) *Census of Population and Housing* (see References for details).

## ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

The sample of 751 family households from across Australia gives a confidence interval of +/- 3.5 at  $p < 0.05$ . That is, if we asked this sample a yes/no question and half said 'yes', we can be 95 per cent sure that households with 8–17 year olds in Australia would find a 'yes' answer of between 46.5 per cent and 53.5 per cent. As a general rule, when comparing binomial subsets in the parent sample (e.g. households in metropolitan/non-metropolitan locations, parents of boys/girls), differences of five percentage points or more are significant at  $< 0.05$ .

For participation rates, differences between genders and ages of four percentage points or more are significant at  $p < 0.05$ .

# Internet access and use by young people

## INTERNET ACCESS IN FAMILY HOUSEHOLDS

Ninety-one per cent of Australian family households with young people aged 8–17 years<sup>2</sup> in the sample had an internet connection, and 76 per cent had broadband access. This compares to more than 99 per cent of family households in the sample who had at least one television set.

Internet and broadband access was more common in family households with young people aged 8–17 years than in all Australian households. The ABS (2007) reports that 64 per cent of occupied private dwellings had the internet and 43 per cent had broadband. And for families with children 0–14 years of age, 81 per cent had the internet and 57 per cent had broadband access.<sup>3</sup>

The ACMA research found that internet penetration was lowest in households with 8–17 year olds where household income was less than \$35,000 per annum (75 per cent). Fewer of these family homes had broadband access (50 per cent). Internet and broadband penetration was also lower in family households in non-metropolitan locations (Table 1).

**Table 1: Internet and broadband access in households with 8–17 year olds by location and household income, 2007**

The household has:	Total (n=751)	Location		Household income			
		Metro (n=509)	Non-metro (n=242)	<\$35k (n=105)	<\$35k-\$69k (n=192)	\$70k-\$99k (n=192)	\$100k+ (n=190)
Internet	91%	93%	87%	75%	90%	96%	96%
Broadband internet	76%	81%	67%	50%	69%	82%	91%

Source: Parent survey (n=751 households)

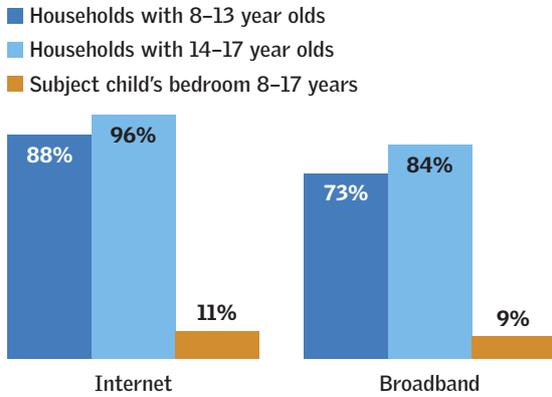
Internet connections were more common in family households with 14–17 year olds (96 per cent) than households with 8–13 year olds (88 per cent). Broadband access followed this same age-related pattern with greater penetration in homes with 14–17 year olds (84 per cent) than those with 8–13 year olds (73 per cent) (Figure 1).

## INTERNET ACCESS IN YOUNG PEOPLE'S BEDROOMS

A relatively small proportion of young people had access to the internet in their bedrooms (11 per cent, and most via a broadband connection, 9 per cent). Fewer of these bedrooms had internet access than televisions (21 per cent). The bedrooms of 15–17 year olds were more than twice as likely to have a television (30 per cent) than internet access (13 per cent—11 per cent broadband).

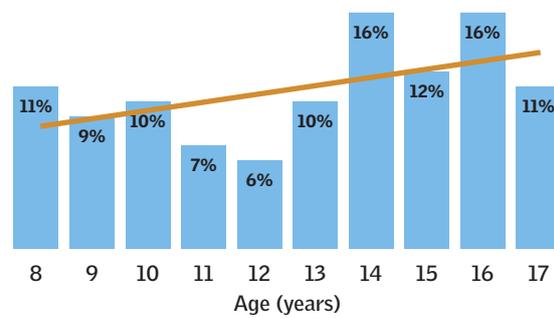
2. Australian family households with young people aged 8–17 years comprised approximately one-quarter of all Australian households (estimated by ACMA from ABS 2006 data).
3. This appears to be consistent with the ACMA penetration figures for the internet (91 per cent) and broadband (76 per cent) in family households with 8–17 year olds because homes with older young people aged 15–17 years had higher internet access than those with children aged less than 15 years.

It was more common for 14, 15 and 16 year olds to access the internet in their bedroom than other age groups, peaking at 16 per cent for 14 and 16 year olds (Figure 2).



**Figure 1: Internet and broadband access in family households and main child's bedroom, 2007**

Source: Parent survey (n=751 households)



**Figure 2: Internet access in main child's bedroom, 2007**

Source: Parent survey (n=751 households)  
Orange line shows linear trendline

A similar proportion of boys and girls accessed the internet from their bedrooms, 11 per cent and 10 per cent respectively (Table 2). There were gender differences though for some other electronic media, where more boys than girls had a television and/or games console in their bedroom.

**Table 2: Presence of devices in main child's bedroom by age and gender, 2007**

Media	Age (in years)										Gender	
	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	Boys n=405	Girls n=346
Television	12%	12%	15%	26%	16%	21%	22%	26%	41%	23%	23%	18%
DVD player	6%	5%	9%	12%	5%	8%	12%	11%	16%	13%	11%	8%
Computer	19%	15%	19%	16%	13%	14%	26%	21%	23%	14%	19%	17%
<b>Internet</b>	<b>11%</b>	<b>9%</b>	<b>10%</b>	<b>7%</b>	<b>6%</b>	<b>10%</b>	<b>16%</b>	<b>12%</b>	<b>16%</b>	<b>11%</b>	<b>11%</b>	<b>10%</b>
Game console	5%	6%	11%	17%	11%	11%	6%	14%	17%	13%	16%	6%

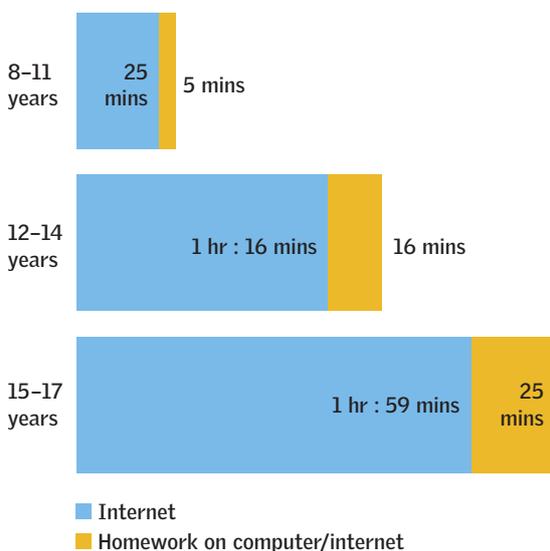
Source: Parent survey (n=751 households)

## INTERNET USE BY YOUNG PEOPLE

Young people spent an average one hour and 17 minutes per day online.<sup>4</sup> This was the same for boys and girls. However, the amount of time spent doing individual internet activities was related to gender. Broadly speaking, internet activities include homework, research, communications (e.g. social networking, messaging, emailing, playing games against other players online) and entertainment activities (e.g. playing games, listening to music, watching television and video).

Internet use was also highest among young people in the older age groups, ranging from 30 minutes for 8–11 year olds to more than two hours for 15–17 year olds (Figure 3).

Nielsen Online (2007) found that most young Australians who use the internet first went online between five and 10 years of age, with nearly 40 per cent starting their online experiences between seven and nine years of age. The average age of first internet use among young Australian internet users was eight years.



Time-use diaries captured detailed information on the activities undertaken by young people. Each young person in the sample recorded their activities in 15 minute time blocks from 6am to 2am for three days during school term. In aggregate, diary data covered every day of the week.

The diaries included 31 activities. About two-thirds were electronic media and communications activities and one-third covered other activities such as attending school, homework, socialising, physical activity, sleep, travel and personal care.

Young people also recorded where they were and who they were with while doing each activity.

**Figure 3: Average amount of time spent per day using the internet by age group, 2007**

Source: Diary (8-11 yrs n=431; 12-14 yrs n=337; 15-17 yrs n=225)

The level of time use shown in Figure 3 represents five per cent of aggregate discretionary time<sup>5</sup> for 8–11 year olds, 13 per cent for 12–14 year olds, and 16 per cent for 15–17 year olds. In total, internet use comprised an average 11 per cent of young people's (8–17 years) aggregate discretionary time as a proportion of time spent on all leisure and homework activities. As a point of comparison, television viewing made up 19 per cent of aggregate discretionary time.

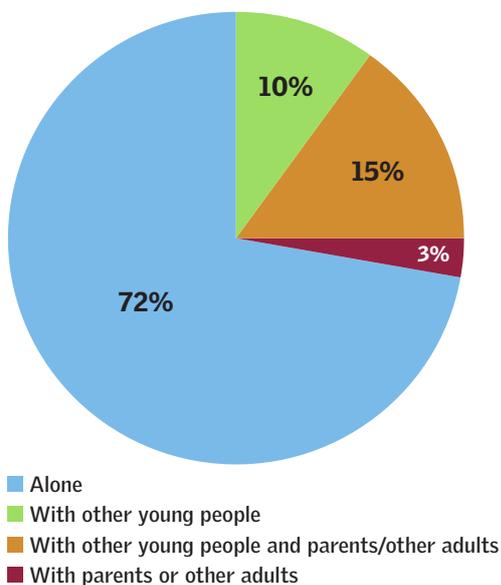
4. Average amount of time spent per day was calculated across all young people in the diary sample whether or not they used the internet over the three-day diary period.

5. Aggregate discretionary time is calculated by adding individual leisure and homework activities together. It can include double or triple counting of time periods during which multiple activities were undertaken.

## LOCATION AND SOCIAL CONTEXT OF INTERNET USE

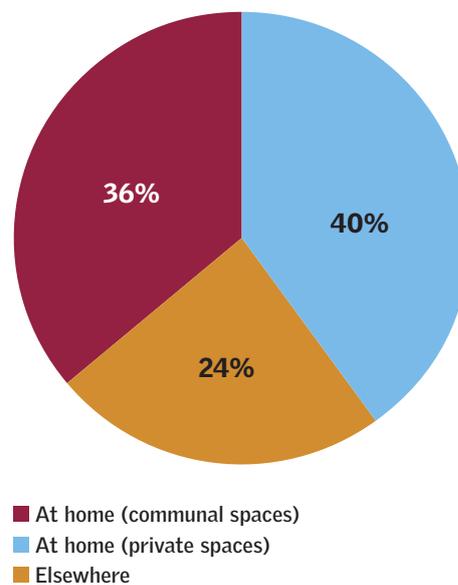
Young people were much more likely to use the internet when by themselves than with other people. They reported that 72 per cent of their internet time was spent alone. This leaves 28 per cent of internet usage as a joint activity—more often with other young people (25 per cent) than with parents or other adults (18 per cent) (Figure 4).

This compares with 34–44 per cent of time spent alone while using most other electronic media and communications devices. For example, 35 per cent of young people’s television and DVD viewing time was spent alone and 65 per cent was with other people, almost the reverse of the social context around internet use.



**Figure 4: Proportion of time spent online alone and with others, 2007**

Note: excludes online gaming against other players  
Source: Diary (n=23,385 minutes)



**Figure 5: Proportion of time spent online at home and elsewhere, 2007**

Note: excludes online gaming against other players  
Source: Diary (n=23,385 minutes)

Internet activities were mostly done at home (Figure 5). Young people reported being at home for about three-quarters of the time they spent online (76 per cent). Within the home, time spent on the internet occurred almost evenly in communal spaces (48 per cent—e.g. a study) and private spaces (52 per cent—a bedroom or another private room).

# Social networking and other online communications activities

## **PARTICIPATION**

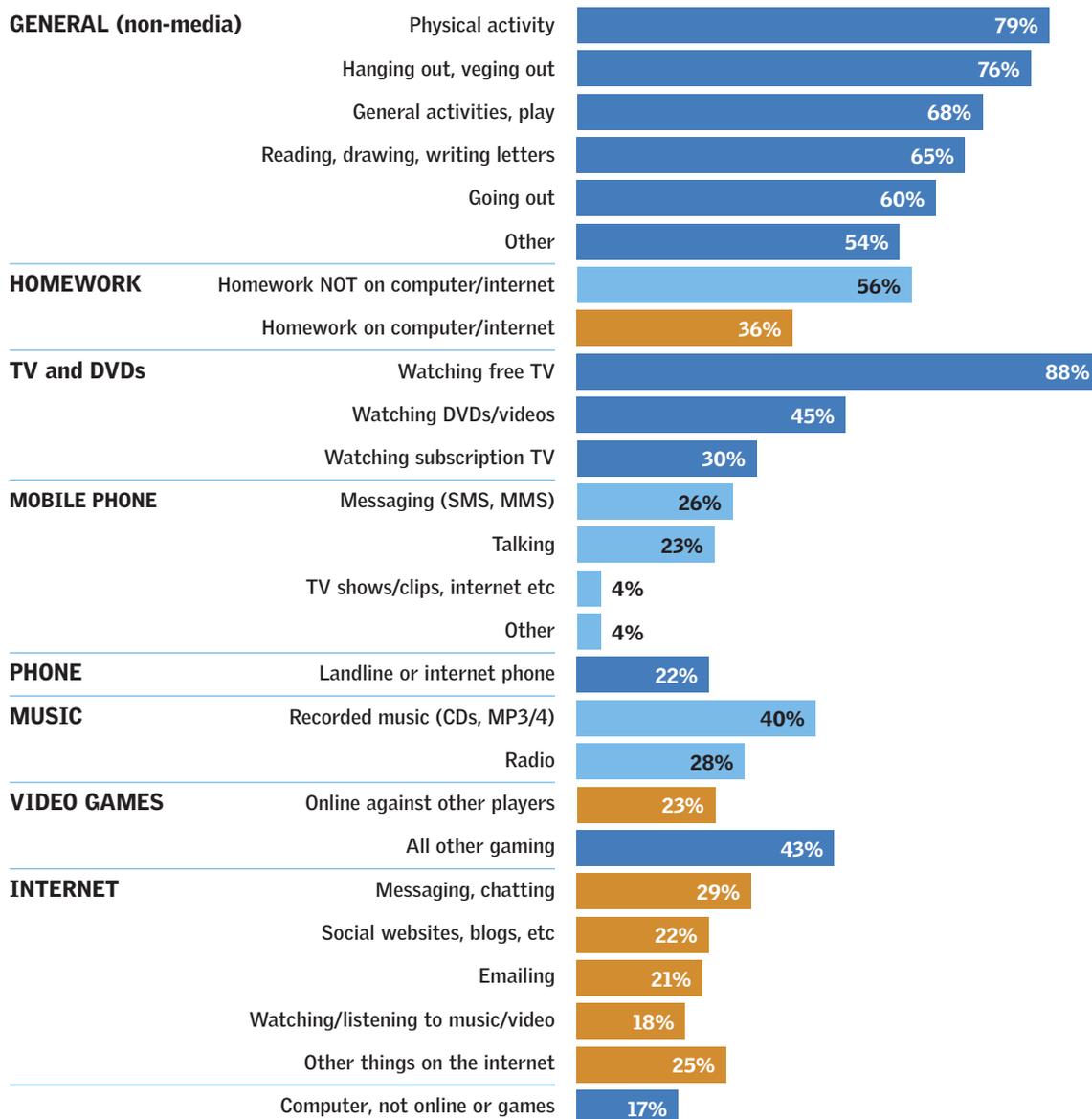
Participation by young people in online activities was generally lower than their participation in television viewing. Seventy-four per cent of 8–17 year olds indicated doing internet activities over the three diary days.<sup>6</sup> Ninety-four per cent of young people watched free or subscription television over the three diary days.

Figure 6 shows the overall proportion of young people who took part in different electronic media and other leisure activities over three diary days. In particular, the proportion of young people who participated in social networking and other online communication activities is as follows:

- messaging or chatting—29 per cent of young people participated in this activity over three diary days
- playing games against other players online—23 per cent of young people
- visiting social websites, blogs, etc (e.g. MySpace)—22 per cent of young people
- emailing—21 per cent of young people.

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6. Includes doing homework on the computer or internet.



**Figure 6: Proportion of young people whose diaries showed each activity, 2007**

Source: Diary (n=1,003 young people). Orange bars show internet activities

Older teenagers in the sample were the highest internet users (Table 3). Almost half of 15–17 year olds messaged or chatted online and/or did their homework on the computer or internet (48 per cent each), followed by visiting social networking websites (44 per cent), emailing (37 per cent) and playing games against other players online (37 per cent).

**Table 3: Participation by young people in individual internet activities over three diary days by gender and age, 2007**

Activity	Total (n=1,003)	Gender		Age group (in years)		
		Boys (n=522)	Girls (n=478)	8-11 (n=431)	12-14 (n=337)	15-17 (n=225)
Emailing	21%	16%	26%	9%	25%	37%
Messaging/chatting	29%	24%	34%	10%	41%	48%
Social websites, blogs etc	22%	19%	25%	7%	28%	44%
Watching/listening to music/clips etc	18%	17%	19%	8%	21%	32%
Homework on internet/computer	36%	34%	38%	23%	45%	48%
Online gaming vs. other players	23%	28%	18%	24%	27%	37%
Other things on the internet	25%	23%	27%	18%	29%	32%

Source: Diary (n=1,003 young people)

According to Nielsen Online (2007), instant messaging or chatting online was mainly used to communicate with school friends (79 per cent of young internet users), followed by chatting to friends not from school (31 per cent), and then communicating with relatives (26 per cent). They also found that emailing by 6–17 year olds had declined between 2005 (71 per cent of young people) and 2007 (60 per cent).

Considerable cross-over between different social networking activities was also evident from the Nielsen Online research. For instance, among young people who created their own blog, journal or website, many also read those of others (83 per cent), commented on them (76 per cent), and created their own online profile (73 per cent). They observed that:

... we are starting to see a real shift in the online behaviours and patterns of usage of young Australians – not necessarily toward a greater amount of time spent online, but in a consolidation of daily online activities into a shorter and more efficient online experience, and increasingly into a single site which caters to the majority of online activities that young people want to conduct on a regular basis. This shift is evidence that online media is now becoming intertwined in young people’s daily lives and playing an increasingly important role in their learning and development, social framework, and the ways in which they entertain themselves. (p6)

## AMOUNT AND PROPORTION OF TIME SPENT

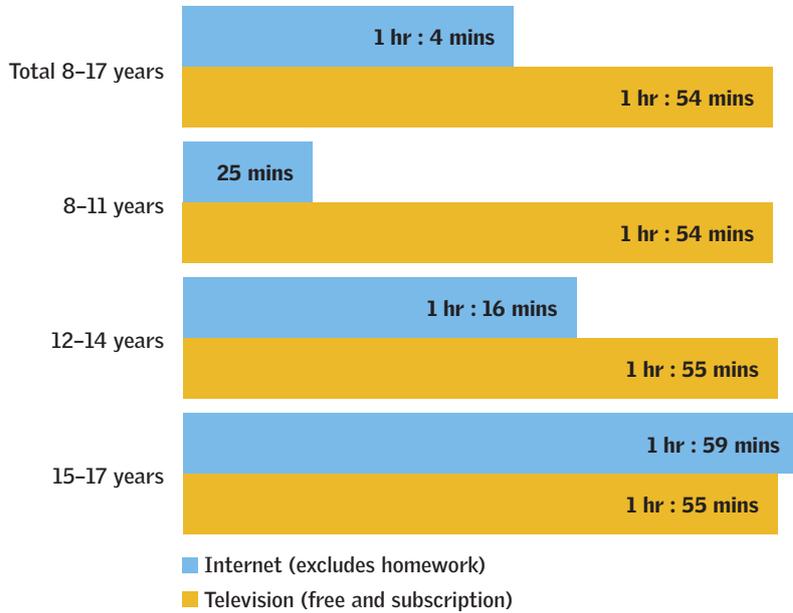
Excluding homework done on the computer or internet<sup>7</sup>, young people aged 8–17 years spent an average of one hour and four minutes per day online. This compares to an average one hour and 54 minutes per day watching television.<sup>8</sup> Thus, young people spent an average of 50 minutes per day (or 44 per cent) less time using the internet than watching television (Figure 7).

The average amount of time spent watching television per day was consistent across the three age groups, whereas time spent online increased with age.

7. Homework is excluded here from total internet activities as it is not considered to be a leisure activity.

8. Includes free and subscription television viewing.

Young people aged 15–17 years spent an average of one hour and 59 minutes per day using the internet, and an average of one hour and 55 minutes per day watching television. About the same amount of time was spent online as watching television by this older age group.



**Figure 7: Comparison of average time spent online and watching television per day by young people, 2007**

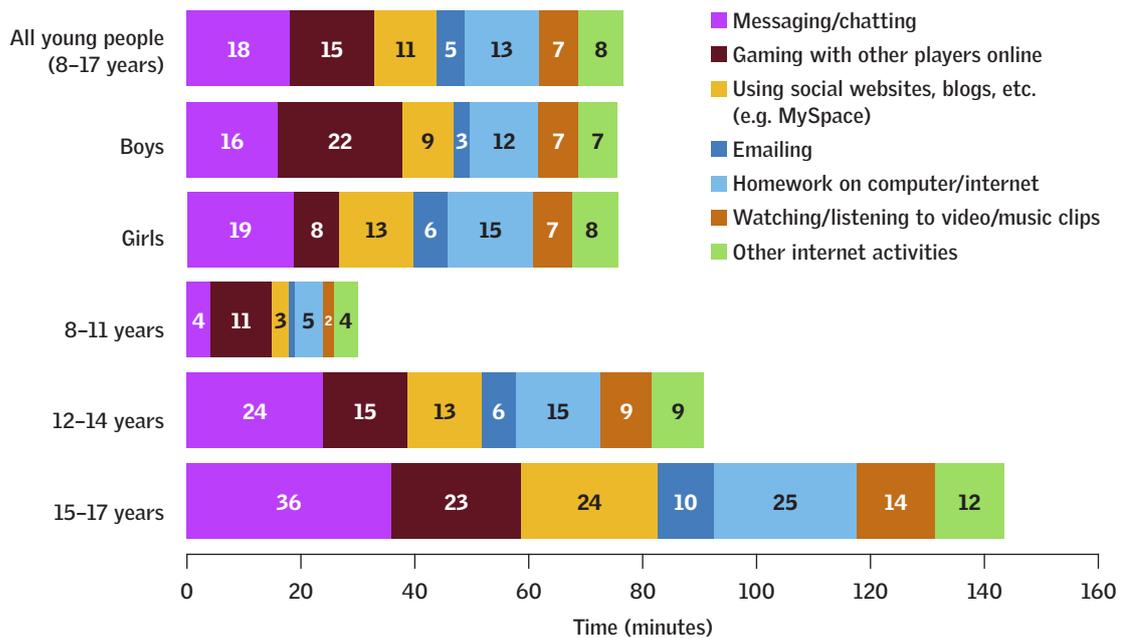
Source: Diary (total n=1,003 young people: 8-11 years n=431; 12-14 years n=337; 15-17 years n=225)

Young people spent their internet time doing a range of different online activities over three diary days, with most time being spent on social networking and other online communication activities as follows.

- an average 49 minutes per day on social networking and other online communications (64 per cent of total time spent online):
  - » messaging or chatting (18 minutes, or 23 per cent of time spent online)
  - » gaming against other players online (15 minutes, or 20 per cent of time spent online)
  - » using social websites, blogs etc (e.g. MySpace) (11 minutes, or 14 per cent of time spent online)
  - » emailing (five minutes, or seven per cent of time spent online).
- 13 minutes per day of homework on the computer or internet (17 per cent of time spent online).
- 15 minutes per day on other internet activities, including watching or listening to music or video clips (seven minutes, or nine per cent of time spent online) and other internet activities (eight minutes, or 10 per cent of time spent online).

Girls had higher participation rates and spent more time than boys using the internet for messaging or chatting online, using social networking sites and emailing. For instance, visiting social websites, blogs, etc (e.g. MySpace) consumed 16 per cent (or an average 13 minutes per day) of girls' internet time, compared with 11 per cent (an average nine minutes) of boys' time (Figure 8).

More boys, on the other hand, played games with other players online and spent more time than girls playing these games. Gaming against other players online took up 28 per cent (or an average 22 minutes per day) of boys' time on the internet compared with 10 per cent (an average of eight minutes) of girls' time.



**Figure 8: Average time spent per day on internet activities by young people, by age and gender, 2007**

Source: Diary (n=1,003 young people)

In general, the average amount of time spent on each individual internet activity increased with the age of young people. However, while 8–11 year olds spent less time doing online activities, some of the activities took up a greater proportion of their total internet time than for the older age groups (Table 4).

- Gaming against other players online took up an average of 11 minutes per day for 8–11 year olds and 23 minutes for 15–17 year olds. Gaming comprised 37 per cent of total internet time among 8–11 year olds compared with 16 per cent for 15–17 year olds.
- Doing ‘other’ internet activities averaged four minutes per day for 8–11 year olds and 12 minutes for 15–17 year olds. This comprised 13 per cent of total internet time for 8–11 year olds compared with eight per cent for 15–17 year olds.

**Table 4: Proportion of total internet time spent doing individual online activities by age, 2007**

Online activity	Total 8-17 years (n=1003)	8-11 years (n=431)	12-14 years (n=337)	15-17 years (n=225)
Messaging/chatting	23%	13%	26%	25%
Gaming against other players online	19%	37%	16%	16%
Visiting social websites, blogs, etc. (e.g. MySpace)	14%	10%	14%	17%
Emailing	7%	3%	7%	7%
Homework on computer/internet	17%	17%	16%	17%
Watching/listening to music/video clips	9%	7%	10%	10%
Other internet activities	10%	13%	10%	8%

Source: Diary (n=1,003 young people)

Note: some columns may not add up to 100 per cent due to rounding.

Other online activities were clearly the domain of older young people.

- Messaging or chatting online comprised 25 per cent of total time spent using the internet by 15–17 year olds and averaged 36 minutes per day. This compares with 13 per cent of internet time for 8–11 year olds who averaged four minutes per day.
- Visiting social websites, blogs, etc (e.g. MySpace) made up 17 per cent of internet time for 15–17 year olds and averaged 24 minutes per day, compared with 10 per cent and three minutes for 8–11 year olds.
- Watching or listening to music, video clips, movies, cartoons or television online comprised 10 per cent of internet time for 15–17 year olds and averaged 14 minutes per day. This compares with seven per cent of internet time for 8–11 year olds and two minutes per day.
- Emailing by 15–17 year olds comprised seven per cent of their internet time and averaged 10 minutes per day, compared to 8–11 year olds (three per cent and one minute per day).

The average amount of time spent doing homework on the computer or internet also increased for the older age groups, but it comprised about the same proportion of time spent online by each of the three age groups.

In addition to the diary data, young users of online messaging and email services provided estimates of their use of those services at the end of each diary day. Users of online messaging services said they spent an average of 25 minutes per day sending and reading messages. Those young people who devoted most time to messaging spent over an hour per day doing this activity.

Email users reported sending or receiving an average of four emails per day. The heaviest emailers said they sent or received more than seven emails a day.

## FAVOURITE ACTIVITIES

On day four, after completing the three-day time-use diary, young people reviewed a list of different leisure activities (replicated from the diary) and then identified the three activities they most liked to do for fun—when by themselves, and with other people.

Question: Of all the things listed in the diary, which three do you most like to do for fun ...

(a) by yourself?

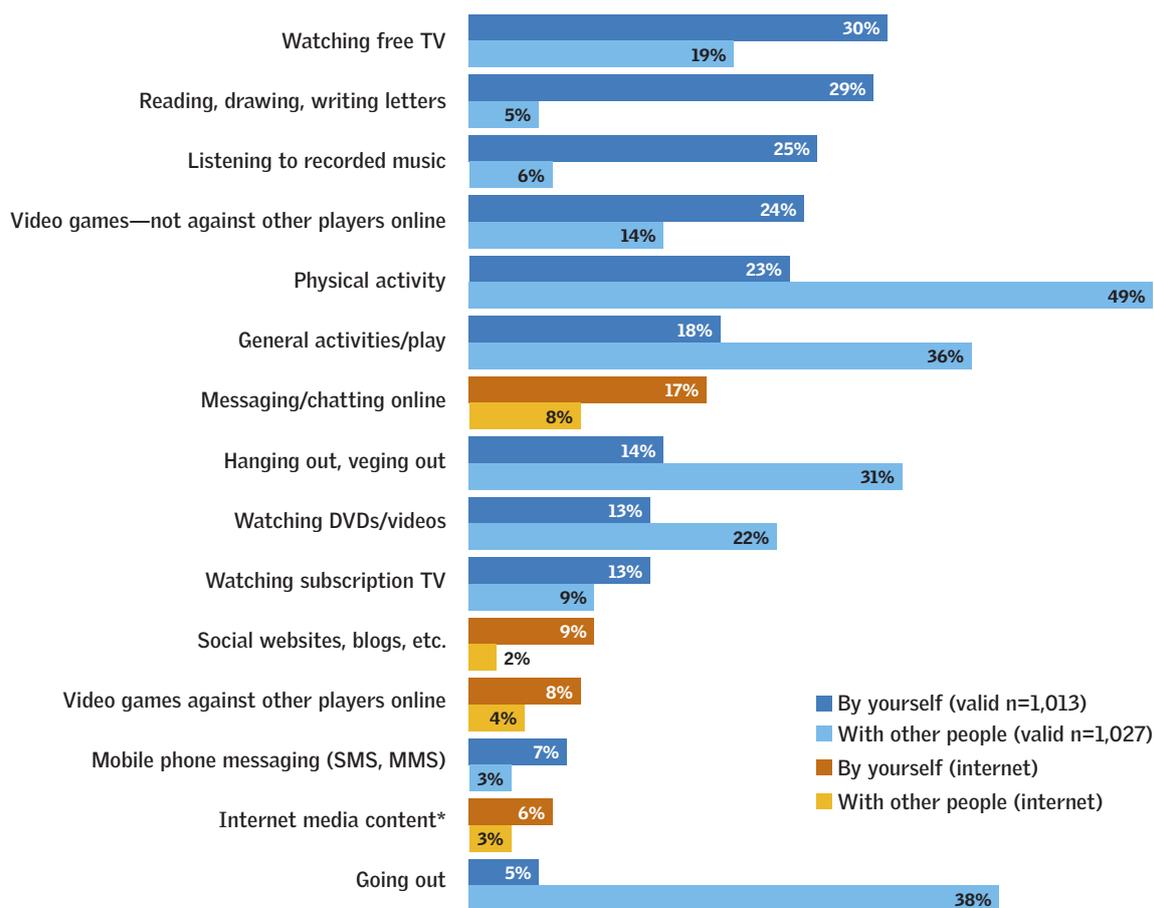
(b) with other people?

Young people identified a number of leisure activities as favourites ahead of internet or social networking activities.

In relation to all the different leisure activities listed (15 in total), messaging or chatting online was ranked seventh as an activity that 8–17 year olds liked to do for fun when they were by themselves. It ranked eleventh as a favourite activity with other people. Social websites, blogs, etc were ranked twelfth as a solitary activity, and last as an activity with others (Figure 9).

Messaging or chatting online was mentioned by 17 per cent of young people as one of the top three activities they liked to do for fun when by themselves, and eight per cent liked doing this with other people. The category visiting ‘social websites, blogs, etc (e.g. MySpace)’ was mentioned by nine per cent who liked doing this activity when by themselves, and two per cent with other people.

Three of the top four activities that young people liked to do for fun when by themselves were electronic media-related: watching free television (30 per cent of young people), listening to recorded music (25 per cent), and playing video or computer games (24 per cent)—not including online games against other players). The second favourite activity category was ‘reading, drawing and writing letters’ (29 per cent).



**Figure 9: Young people's favourite activities when by themselves and with others, 2007**

Q: Of all the things listed in the diary, which three do you most like to do for fun ... (a) by yourself? (b) with other people?

Source: Day 4 diary question (n=1,055 young people)

Orange bars show internet activities

\*Watching/listening to music, video clips, movies, cartoons, TV shows, etc. on the internet

Each electronic media-related activity was more popular as a solitary activity than as a group activity—except for watching DVDs or videos which was liked by more young people when they were with other people.

The top four favourite activities that young people liked doing with others were all non-electronic media and communications activities—physical activity (49 per cent of young people), going out (38 per cent), general play (36 per cent), and hanging out (31 per cent).

Social networking and other online communication activities were more important for 15–17 year olds. Messaging or chatting online was ranked second as an activity that they liked to do for fun when by themselves, behind listening to recorded music. Visiting social websites was given fifth ranking by this older age group.

Compared with 8–11 year olds, 15–17 year olds preferred online messaging or chatting when by themselves (five per cent and 28 per cent respectively) and visiting social websites such as MySpace when alone (three per cent and 18 per cent respectively). More 8–11 year olds liked doing ‘other things on the internet’ when by themselves (10 per cent) compared with 15–17 year olds (five per cent) (Table 5).

**Table 5: Favourite activities that young people liked to do for fun when by themselves and with others, by gender and age, 2007**

	Activity	Gender		Age group (in years)		
		Boys (n=520) (n=521)	Girls (n=493) (n=506)	8-11 (n=429) (n=434)	12-14 (n=342) (n=352)	15-17 (n=242) (n=241)
<b>Activities that young people liked doing BY THEMSELVES</b>	Physical activity	25%	21%	25%	21%	22%
	Going out	6%	5%	6%	5%	5%
	Watching DVD/videos	14%	12%	16%	12%	11%
	Playing video/computer games – NOT online	36%	12%	34%	21%	12%
	Internet (excludes homework and online gaming)	29%	45%	21%	49%	49%
	Messaging, chatting	12%	23%	5%	26%	28%
	Social website, blogs, etc., e.g. MySpace	4%	15%	3%	11%	18%
	Games against other players online	14%	2%	8%	10%	6%
	Watching/listening to music or video clips	7%	5%	3%	9%	7%
	Emailing	2%	3%	1%	4%	2%
	Other things on the internet	10%	7%	10%	8%	5%
<b>Activities that young people liked doing WITH OTHERS</b>	Physical activity	55%	44%	53%	49%	44%
	Going out	30%	46%	24%	42%	59%
	Watching DVD/videos	19%	25%	24%	19%	23%
	Playing video/computer games – NOT online	22%	6%	20%	11%	8%
	Internet (excludes homework and online gaming)	13%	18%	11%	22%	15%
	Messaging, chatting	6%	11%	3%	14%	9%
	Social website, blogs, etc., e.g. MySpace	2%	2%	1%	3%	2%
	Games against other players online	7%	1%	4%	4%	3%
	Watching/listening to music or video clips	3%	3%	3%	3%	2%
	Emailing	1%	1%	1%	1%	2%
	Other things on the internet	2%	2%	3%	2%	0%

Source: Day 4 diary question (n=1,055 young people)

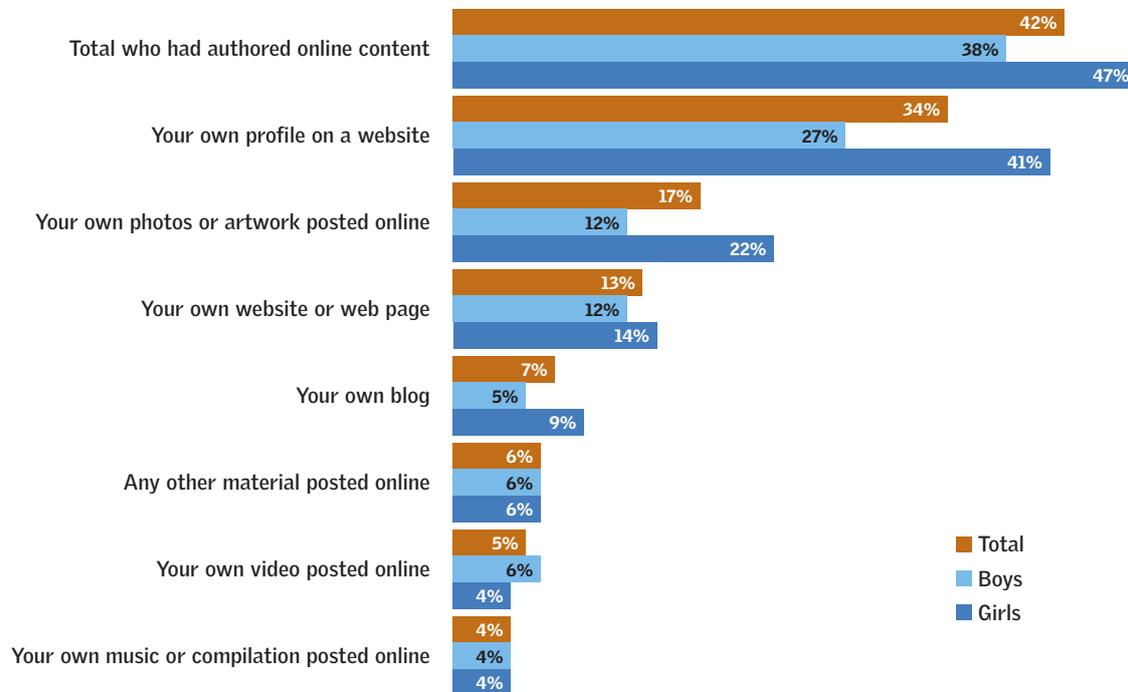
Girls and boys each participated in a range of social activities, with more girls preferring to do socially-oriented activities in their leisure time:

- going out with others (46 per cent girls, 30 per cent boys)
- messaging people on their mobile phone when by themselves (nine per cent girls, four per cent boys)
- messaging or chatting online, either by themselves (23 per cent girls, 12 per cent boys) or with other people (11 per cent girls, six per cent boys)
- spending time on social websites like MySpace when by themselves (15 per cent girls, four per cent boys)
- watching DVDs or videos with other people (25 per cent girls, 19 per cent boys).

However, more boys enjoyed playing games against other players online when by themselves (14 per cent) than girls (two per cent), and with other people (7 per cent boys, one per cent girls). More boys also liked playing video or computer games—not online—with other people for fun (22 per cent) than girls (six per cent). Fewer girls liked doing physical activities with other people (44 per cent) than boys (55 per cent).

## AUTHORING OF WEB CONTENT

Two in five (42 per cent) young people aged 8–17 years reported having their own material on the internet at the time of the study. This included 39 per cent who either had a personal profile on a user-generated website like MySpace (34 per cent), their own website (13 per cent) and/or a stand-alone blog (7 per cent). It was more common for young people to have their own photos or artwork posted on the internet (17 per cent) than their own video (five per cent) or music (four per cent) (Figure 10).



**Figure 10: Participation by young people in authoring of web content, 2007**

Q: Do you currently have ...? (fill in as many circles as you need)

Source: Day 4 diary question (n=1,055 young people)

Note: Care is needed when interpreting gender differences where the total sample size is seven per cent or less, as the total sample comprises less than 80 young people.

Authoring of web content was more commonly reported by girls (47 per cent) than boys (38 per cent). This was particularly evident for personal profiles on a user-generated website (girls 41 per cent, boys 27 per cent) and posting artwork or photos on the internet (girls 22 per cent, boys 12 per cent).

Authoring of web content also increased steadily with age from eight years (three per cent) up to age 14 years (72 per cent), where it then stabilised (Table 6). Combining age and gender:

- 80 per cent of 14–17 year old girls and 65 per cent of 14–17 year old boys had some form of web authorship
- 72 per cent of 14–17 year old girls and 52 per cent of 14–17 year old boys had a profile on a user-generated social networking service.

**Table 6: Participation by young people in authoring of web content by age, 2007**

Web content	Age (in years)									
	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17
Total authored web content	3%	12%	20%	25%	38%	55%	72%	70%	72%	78%
Subtotal – website/profile/blog	2%	11%	17%	22%	36%	51%	66%	67%	68%	71%
Own website or web page	1%	5%	11%	8%	18%	17%	23%	16%	17%	15%
Profile on a website	1%	5%	9%	18%	28%	46%	60%	60%	66%	66%
Own blog (weblog)	0%	1%	2%	3%	6%	7%	15%	15%	15%	14%
Own photos or artwork online	1%	2%	3%	8%	12%	19%	32%	34%	36%	41%
Own video online	0%	0%	0%	1%	3%	5%	12%	13%	5%	20%
Own music/compilation online	0%	0%	3%	1%	5%	6%	6%	12%	6%	8%

Source: Day 4 diary questions (n=1,055 young people)

## Observations by parents

As part of the telephone survey administered to parents of young people aged 8–17 years, parents made a number of observations about their child’s use of the internet and social networking services.

A comparison of the responses from parents and young people is presented in Figure 11. However, when interpreting that figure, the reader needs to be aware of the limitations involved in comparing the responses from the two samples. Limitations include the following:

- Different research methodologies were used to collect information from young people and their parents.
- Different time periods were covered by questions to each of the samples. Parent questions had no time restrictions. Young people recorded their time use in a diary that covered three consecutive days. Questions to young people about web-authorship and their use of downloaded video material had no time restrictions.
- Parents and young people may bring different understandings or meanings to the electronic media and communications activities in question.
- The language used in the questions to describe certain online activities was slightly different between the two groups (see shaded boxes below for details).

Even with these limitations, patterns in the data show that for some online activities parents were aware that their child was doing them (or could be doing them), but for two activities in particular the pattern was reversed and many parents did not recognise that their child was participating.

Figure 11 shows that most parents were aware that their child used the internet to send and receive emails, message or chat online, and visit social networking websites:

- 62 per cent of parents believed their child used the internet to send and receive emails—21 per cent of young people reported doing this activity over the three diary days.
- 57 per cent said their child participated in online chatting or instant messaging—29 per cent of young people reported doing this activity over the three diary days.
- 44 per cent said their child visited user-generated websites—22 per cent of young people reported doing this over three diary days.

In contrast, a number of parents seemed to be unaware that their child was contributing their own self-authored material on the internet, and that their child was downloading and/or watching video content from the web:

- 24 per cent of parents said their child worked on their own website or material to post online—whereas 44 per cent of the main children reported having self-authored material on the internet at the time of the study. From these young people who had material online, 44 per cent of their parents acknowledged that their child had worked on their own online material, 48 per cent did not acknowledge their child's involvement, and eight per cent were not sure. In addition, seven per cent of parents with a child who said they had not done this activity believed their child had done the activity.

**PARENT QUESTION:** As far as you are aware, which of the following does your child do on the internet? For each activity I read out, just say 'yes', 'no' or 'not sure'.

Relevant category: Working on his/her own webpage of material to post online

**CHILD QUESTION:** Do you currently have ... (Fill in as many circles as you need)

- Response categories:
- your own website or webpage
  - your own profile on a website (e.g. MySpace)
  - your own blog (weblog)
  - your own photos or artwork posted online
  - your own video posted online
  - your own music or compilation posted online
  - any other material posted online.

- 13 per cent believed their child had watched or downloaded television programs, cartoons, movies, etc., from the internet—43 per cent of the main children reported having watched video content that was downloaded from the internet at least occasionally. Fewer young people (20 per cent) said they had done this 'not every day but at least once a week', and nine per cent said 'every day/almost every day'.

From the 43 per cent of main children who had downloaded or watched video content from the internet, 20 per cent of their parents acknowledged this, 79 per cent did not acknowledge their child’s involvement, and one per cent were not sure. In addition, seven per cent of parents with a child who said they had not done this activity believed their child had done the activity.

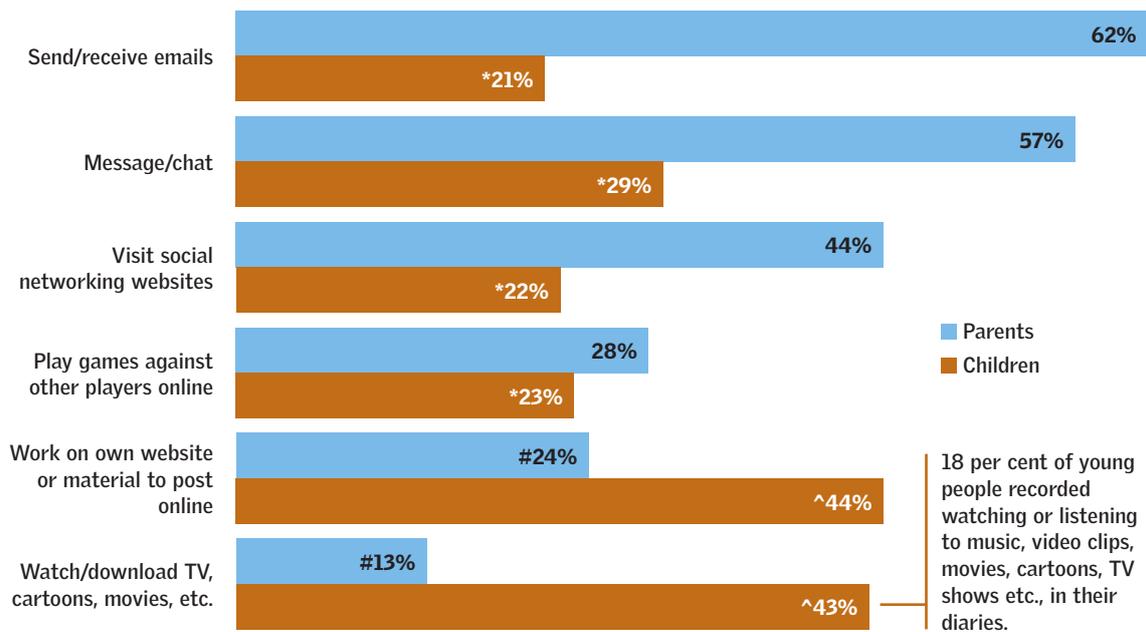
**PARENT QUESTION:** As far as you are aware, which of the following does your child do on the internet? For each activity I read out, just say ‘yes’, ‘no’ or ‘not sure’.

Relevant category: Watching or downloading TV programs, cartoons, movies, etc.

**CHILD QUESTION:** How often (if at all) do you watch TV shows, movies, cartoons, video clips, etc., that have been downloaded from the internet?

Response categories:

- every day/almost every day
- not every day but at least once a week
- not every week but at least once a month
- less than once a month
- not sure
- never



**Figure 11: Comparison of parent and child reports on young people’s participation in various internet activities, 2007**

Parent question: As far as you are aware, which of the following does your child do on the internet? For each activity I read out, just say ‘yes’, ‘no’ or ‘not sure’ (n=751)

- # Parents: n=456 parents matched to a ‘main’ child in each household
- \* Diary: young people who recorded doing these activities over three diary days (n=1,003)
- ^ Day 4 diary questions: young people answered questions about their internet use (n=456 ‘main’ children matched to parents)

Note: the results for the last two internet activities in this figure are from a parent and main child in each family household (n=456 families). The percentages shown above for these matched parents and children are similar for all young people (n=1,055) and all parents (n=751).

Parents may also have under-estimated the extent to which young people played games with other players online. A similar proportion of parents believed their child did this activity at some stage (28 per cent) compared to the 23 per cent of young people who reported the activity over just three days in their diaries. The general pattern for some of the other online activities i.e. emailing, messaging, and visiting social websites was for young people to report lower participation levels over three diary days than parents who were not limited to such a short time period in their responses.

## **SINGLE PARENT FAMILIES**

Young people's use of the internet for social networking and communication was more commonly reported by single parents than couples. This trend was most pronounced for young people posting material online (32 per cent single parent, 23 per cent couple) and emailing (66 per cent single, 61 per cent couple). This is an interesting finding, in that internet access at home was less common in single parent households (81 per cent) than households with couples (93 per cent).

## **FAMILY RULES**

Most parents (76 per cent) had rules, understandings or agreements around their child's use of the internet. For example, 13 per cent of parents did not allow their child to go to websites that were not approved by a parent, and 12 per cent had restrictions around online interaction (e.g. use of chat programs, communicating with strangers, giving out personal details). Reflecting the higher use of social networking services by 13–17 year olds, rules around online interaction were more common (17 per cent) than for 8–12 years olds (nine per cent).

## **Conclusion**

In mid-2007, the internet, social networking services and other online communication activities such as messaging, playing games with other players online and emailing were important for young Australians in the sample. They were especially important for young people aged 15–17 years.

To put this in context, the internet was found to be pervasive in family households with young people aged 8–17 years (91 per cent) and higher in family households with 14–17 year olds (96 per cent).

Participation by young people in online activities was not as widespread or regular as the household internet penetration figures suggest. Almost three-quarters of young people aged 8–17 years reported using the internet over the three diary days of the study.

Interestingly, average time spent online varied significantly according to young people's age compared with television viewing which was consistent across different age groups. Eight to 14 year olds spent less time on average using the internet than watching television, whereas 15–17 year olds spent about the same amount of time using the internet (one hour and 59 minutes per day on average) as watching television (one hour and 55 minutes). This was the case even though average times were calculated from the total diary sample whether or not young people used the internet over three diary days, and not all 15–17 year olds reported using the internet during that period.

Social networking and other online communication activities took up most of the time spent on the internet. For 8–17 year olds these activities comprised 64 per cent of total internet time (or 49 minutes per day on average), and for 15–17 year olds they made up 78 per cent (one hour and 33 minutes per day).

Reinforcing the importance of online communication activities for 15–17 year olds, online messaging or chatting was ranked second as a favourite activity behind listening to music. The same activity was ranked seventh by the wider 8–17 year old sample behind a number of other leisure activities.

Both boys and girls participated in a range of online activities. More boys played games against other players online, whereas more girls were involved in online messaging or chatting, visiting social networking sites, emailing, and authoring various web-materials.

Parents were highly aware that their child used the internet for emailing, messaging or chatting online and visiting user-generated websites, and most parents had rules around their child's internet use. However, many parents did not seem to know that their child contributed their own self-authored material online, or that they downloaded or watched video content from the internet. Further research could examine these differences more closely.

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