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Carrie La Ferle  
*Southern Methodist University, laferle@smu.edu*

Steven M. Edwards  
*Southern Methodist University, steve@smu.edu*

We-na Lee  
*University of Texas at Austin*

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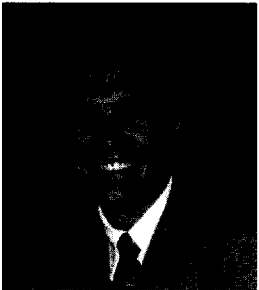
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# Teens' Use of Traditional Media and the Internet



**CARRIE LA FERLE**

Michigan State  
University



**STEVEN M. EDWARDS**

Michigan State  
University



**WEI-NA LEE**

University of Texas  
at Austin

laferle@msu.edu

steve@msu.edu

As the teen market segment expands and spending power increases, advertisers are cognizant of the importance in understanding traditional and emerging media trends in reaching this new generation of consumers. Increasing penetration of the internet at home and at school encouraged the authors to examine teens' relationships with media. Time allocation across media and the needs fulfilled by each medium were investigated. The study further explored how the internet, given its ability for two-way communication, stacks-up against interpersonal communication sources. Influences of gender and home access to the internet were analyzed, as were the methods teens use to learn about websites. Results provide implications for effectively targeting the teen market.

TEENS TODAY, often referred to as the "N-Generation" or "cyber teens," are growing up in a globally interactive world. Jupiter Communications estimates that the segment of more than 4.5 million children in the United States under the age of 18 with internet accounts will more than double to 11 million by 2002 (Aquilina, 1999). According to a recent Simmons Teenage Research Study, nearly 65 percent of teens reported using an online service in the past 12 months (*Business Wire*, 1998). At the same time, the adolescent population of 30 million is rapidly growing in both size and consumption power (Lee, 1998). Teenagers' preferences are also influencing household consumption choices and therefore advertisers must begin to understand and address the unique needs of this younger group of consumers. In 1997 adolescents spent \$122 billion on consumer goods and influenced household purchases of more than \$200 billion (*WWD*, 1998). But relatively little is known about this young group of powerful consumers, who just a decade ago were considered financially unattractive. How do teens spend their time across media, and do media choices vary by activity? Does gender or having access to the internet at home influence internet use? Where do teens find

out about websites, and does the internet affect interpersonal information sources selected?

Adolescence is a time of self-identification and personal growth. During this time, adolescents experience decreases in family influences and increases in peer influences, yet socializing factors typical of adulthood such as college, employment, and marriage are still in the distant future (Arnett, 1995). However, other socializing factors such as the media have been shown to be powerful socializing agents (Arnett, 1995; Atkin, 1982; Moschis and Moore, 1979; O'Guinn and Shrum, 1997). Therefore, examining how adolescents allocate their time among media is the first step toward understanding how media choices may influence their development, self-identification, and subsequent consumption practices.

Adolescent socialization stems from the ability of teens to observe and learn from the media, as well as allowing them to call on the media to satisfy various individual needs. Often, adolescents are described as using media for the purposes of entertainment, identity formation, sensation-seeking, coping, and youth-culture identification. Research has supported the idea that adolescents use media to help define the world around them (Arnett, 1995). Increasingly, that world is becoming interactive. This study attempts to provide a current picture of adolescents' use of media and, more specifically, investigate teens' relationships with the internet.

Understanding the role of traditional media and

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the internet in the lives of teens should yield insights into how advertisers can create added value in their communications with teens on the internet. The internet, with its ability for two-way communication, presents many opportunities previously unavailable through any one medium alone. Therefore, a current account of adolescent media usage is warranted, as well as the exploration of the internet relative to the importance placed by teens on other interpersonal forms of communication.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Adolescent consumers

Since 1992, the adolescent market has been rapidly growing, accompanied by increases in spending power and types of products consumed. Statistics show that these changes are most likely to continue as children of baby boomers enter into their teens. Silverman (1998) believes that companies must focus on the growing teen market segment which already influences spending in a large part of the U.S. consumer market. Since 1993, the teen population grew by more than 3 million adolescents; by the year 2010 the number of teens between the ages of 12 to 19 years of age is expected to increase to 34.9 million, a gain of 14 percent over today (*Los Angeles Times*, 1998).

According to a study by Teen Research Unlimited, adolescents spend \$84 billion dollars a year of their own money and another \$38 billion of their parents' (Colford, 1998). Although teens make far less money than adults, they have relatively more disposable income (Zollo, 1995). Adolescents are not burdened by mortgages, insurance, credit card bills, or utility payments. Unquestionably, the adolescent market is becoming very attractive to advertisers. Therefore, it is crucial to recognize the influences on adolescent con-

**Although teens make far less money than adults, they have relatively more disposable income. Adolescents are not burdened by mortgages, insurance, credit card bills, or utility payments.**

sumption which may also impact teen media selection.

First, teenagers consider shopping more of an experience than a routine (Zollo, 1995). They buy to become more independent and to socialize or express themselves. Teenagers relate who they are by the possessions they have and the products they use (Montemayor and Eisen, 1977). Solomon (1983) suggests that products can often be used to identify the self to others and to the individual him- or herself. And given that teens are less willing to take chances or try new products for fear of becoming social outcasts (Zollo, 1995), the role of advertising in this socialization process takes the form of becoming a mirror image reflecting how teens see themselves (Lantos, 1987).

At the same time, teenagers have become an important part of the household decision-making process (Zollo, 1995). Not only are teens doing some of the daily shopping, but they encourage parents to buy specific preferred brands, add extra items to carts at supermarkets, and often counsel parents on what types of presents to buy. In the last decade, rates of single-parent households and homes with two working parents have been increasing, resulting in more responsibilities being placed on teens (Zollo, 1995). This has further led to an increase in teen household-shopping responsibilities (Beatty and Talpade, 1994), with purchases ranging from food for dinner to laundry soap for clothes.

An outcome of increased teen pur-

chases of household goods has been a more market savvy generation of adolescents. Increased awareness of the market process and advertising techniques can be a blessing for teens but a cautionary flag for marketers. According to Mangleburg and Bristol (1998), marketplace knowledge is positively related to teen skepticism toward advertising. Therefore, marketers must approach this younger generation of consumers cautiously, because they are more adept at recognizing blatant persuasion attempts than were previous generations.

Brand loyalty also influences adolescent consumption, and teenagers have been shown to be more brand loyal than adults. Some researchers believe this finding stems from an unfavorable attitude toward taking risks, especially in terms of their appearance (Zollo, 1995). It has often been said that we are what we consume (Solomon, 1983), and no age group is more conscious of this fact than insecure and developing teenagers. Therefore, attracting this segment at an early age, while preferences are still being formed, increases the opportunity for developing loyal consumers (Guber, 1987; Mergenhausen, 1995).

In terms of gender, Mark Clements found consumption differences between male and female teenagers (Schwarz, 1995). However, the gap between the sexes appears to be narrowing, at least in terms of teenage consumption of sports, computers, entertainment choices, celebrities, and music (Schwarz, 1995). Although

boys have been shown to have more of their own money to spend, girls typically spend more of their parents' income—so overall spending across the sexes also equals out (Teenage Research Unlimited, cited in *WWD*, 1998).

Lastly, music videos have been found to influence teenage consumption. Music Television (MTV) provides an important reference for the adolescent market because it is a part of the generation's culture, presented in a language teenagers are familiar with (Cleland, 1995), and the music choice "helps them to define important social and subcultural boundaries" (Strasburger and Hendron, 1995). In fact, beyond the MTV culture, media sources in general have been shown to act as major socializing agents for adolescents: providing the norms, values, and behaviors about their age group and groups they aspire to join.

#### **Media and socialization**

Bandura's (1977) social-learning theory suggests that people observe the actions of others and learn to model their own behavior when faced with similar situations. According to McLeod and Chaffee (1972), "It is hard for us to realize how little of our information comes from direct experience with the physical environment, and how much of it comes only indirectly, from other people and the mass media." In the case of adolescents, social-learning theory indicates how teens may use media to indirectly obtain knowledge about the world, while avoiding many of the social risks involved from direct experience. In general, researchers have illustrated multiple needs that can be fulfilled by media, such as cognitive, affective, personal, social, entertainment, and escapism (Katz, Gurevitch, and Haas, 1973; Perse and Courtright; 1993; Perse and Dunn, 1998).

Similar to other media, the internet rep-

resents an agent of socialization, as well as providing teens with a new resource for fulfilling various needs. Adolescents are often described as being heavy users of media and greatly influenced by images in the media, and thus comprise an appealing market to advertisers and marketers. However, selection of any particular medium by teens varies as a function of the limitations of each medium and the gratifications that are sought by adolescents.

Adolescents make active choices about the media they use according to their personalities, socialization needs, and personal identification needs (Arnett, 1995). The media selected by adolescents reflects who they are as well as their view on the world (Steele and Brown, 1995). According to Davis and Davis (1995), teens choose media to inform them of life and available opportunities. Adolescents have also been found to discuss media with friends (Davis and Davis, 1995); use it to cope; explore identities (Arnett, 1995); and personify themselves (Steele and Brown, 1995). As the internet rapidly penetrates American culture, it is important to understand how this new medium may affect adolescent allocation of time spent with other media, as well as how the internet can be used to fulfill existing adolescent needs.

#### **The internet as a medium for teens**

The internet is like no other communication medium because of its ability to combine several of the unique qualities of each medium (i.e., print, sound, and visual) into one, while allowing for two-way communication between advertiser and customer. This vast array of attributes makes the internet appealing as the new communication tool of the future and one that seems already to be catching the eyes of teens and marketers alike.

According to Tapscott (1998), "The percentage of teens who say it's in to be online jumped from 50% in 1994 to 88% in 1997." No one knows this as well as parents who often ask their children for help when working on a computer. The internet is a perfect medium to target teens because they "have been encouraged by years of TV channel surfing . . . are active users [of the internet], and prefer to find things out themselves," (Tapscott as cited in Epstein, 1998). Furthermore, teens have already begun to use the internet as a conduit for social stimulation. Many "virtual communities" stimulate social interactions (*ACLU v. Reno-Decision*, 1996), and adolescents are beginning to make global friends and pen pals without ever leaving home (Beckham, 1996). One adolescent in a teen column comments that individuals are building relationships within this new medium based on personality versus looks (Kun-Tae, 1996). Therefore, marketing to teens via the internet seems highly viable.

Interestingly enough and perhaps without consciously being aware of it, people appear at times to be using the internet as an interpersonal source of communication. A staff writer for *The Boston Herald* comments that chat rooms and newsgroups are replacing the traditional conversation between adolescents. Adolescents are even traveling across town or country to meet individuals they met and conversed with over the net. This trend suggests the potential for effectively communicating information previously limited to face-to-face contact.

At this point, many diverse organizations have already begun using the internet for teen-related purposes. For example, there are interactive tutoring sites on the internet. Dr. Math is a group of graduate students that have gone online to answer e-mails about math (<http://forum.swarthmore.edu/dr.math>). They

discuss mathematical problems as well as math facts and trivia. The internet also has a public library for those under 20 (<http://www.ipl.org/teen/>). Information can be found on the internet ranging from topics on music, TV, and movies to issues concerning health, sexuality, and depression (*Chicago Tribune*, 1996). Businesses can also use the internet for a variety of teen-related targeting purposes. Many companies are using the internet to conduct on-line surveys or for other research interests (Borasky, 1998; Nadilo, 1998). Whatever the purpose for using the internet, however, its popularity and use among teens is increasing. Young adults expect to use online services the rest of their lives (*New Straits Times*, 1996).

Overall, the number of U.S. households connected to the internet was 33.3 million in 1998 and is expected to reach 59.8 million by 2003 (Iconocast, 2000). People are tapping into the internet because of its decentralized nature, diverse and fast delivery of information, relatively low cost, and flexible nature. However, research examining teen internet use and the effects on time spent with other media activities, as well as its ability to fulfill interpersonal communication needs, has been scarce. Advertisers therefore are left with a vague picture of how the internet is impacting the relationships teens have with media and how best to reach and communicate effectively with this growing group of adolescent consumers.

## THE STUDY

In the fall of 1997, a survey was conducted of teenagers from a southwestern state high school. The objective of the study was to explore adolescents' uses of the internet among the traditional media landscape. Given that Schwarz (1995) found the consumption gap for various products to be narrowing between male and female

teenagers, a secondary goal of the study was to learn if differences exist between male and female teenagers' usage of the internet. Furthermore, since the majority of leisure activities take place away from school, having internet access at home may yield a different pattern of media use. The study was an initial attempt at examining teenage media use, including the internet. The following research questions were generated to guide the study: (1) How do teenagers allocate their time across media? (2) Do media choices vary by gratification sought? (3) Does gender or having access to the internet at home influence internet use? (4) How do teens most frequently find out about websites? (5) Does the internet affect interpersonal sources selected for information?

## METHOD

### Sampling and data collection

A prototype school for new technology was selected as the sample site for the study. It was thought that this type of a school may simulate the future reality for teens everywhere. This particular high school has extensive computer facilities and programs, as well as Channel One, and it produces its own local television program. Many of the classes are unique in their emphasis on integrating computers into regular high school curriculum. However, a number of classes focus specifically on learning new technology and becoming literate with computers. The school is the first of its kind in the area, and most participants in this high-tech high school enthusiastically embrace the concept of new technology.

After receiving approval from the board of education and the school itself, two researchers delivered copies of the survey and consent forms to the school. Several teachers participated in the study and

handed out parental consent forms and surveys in their classes. After consent forms were signed by the parents, students further signed their own consent form and then completed the self-administered surveys in class under the instruction of their teachers.

## Measures

The questionnaire consisted of two main sections. The first part of the survey focused on how students allocate their time across media and the needs gratified by each medium. Respondents' media allocations were measured by asking, "How much time (in hours and minutes) on an average weekday (i.e., M-F) do you spend with each medium?" Students were also asked to indicate which types of media they would most frequently use to fulfill a given set of needs. The needs included entertainment, research, homework, health education, shopping, leisure, and news/current events.

The second part of the survey focused specifically on internet issues. A series of questions asked about access to the internet at school, at home, and at work. Respondents were also asked how often they surf the internet for a specific purpose and how they usually find the site they are seeking. Subjects chose from a list of needs provided such as surfing the net for fun, making friends, fashion, games, help with homework, music, and health information. A list of methods for obtaining web addresses was also provided and included items such as using search engines, asking friends, looking at TV or billboards, listening to radio, and reading magazines or newspapers. Responses in both cases were measured on a five-point Likert-type scale ranging from "Never" to "Always."

Given the unique and interactive nature of the internet, it was further deemed important to examine the possible similari-

ties in use between the internet and interpersonal communication sources. Therefore, the remaining internet questions assessed how students viewed the internet in its ability to fulfill various needs in comparison to other interpersonal information sources. These questions asked respondents to indicate the source (parents, teachers, counselors, peers, or the internet) that would best satisfy their informational needs based on the following concerns: quantity of information, need for privacy, comfort level, ease of access, confidentiality, and speed. Finally, participants of the survey were asked demographic questions such as age, gender, ethnicity, family income classification, and if they held a part-time or full-time job.

## RESULTS

### Sample demographics

The sample consisted of a total of 189 teenagers ranging in age from 14 to 19 years old. Among them, 46 percent were males while 54 percent were females. The sample was relatively homogeneous and most identified themselves as Caucasian (81.0 percent), followed by Hispanic-Americans (18 percent), African-Americans (4.8 percent), and finally Asian-Americans (2.1 percent). Similarly, most teens identified themselves as middle class, 88.4 percent, followed by upper class and lower class at 5.8 percent and 2.6 percent, respectively. Under half of the students reported earning an income (39.7 percent), with the vast majority of those employed working only part-time (96.3 percent).

### Adolescent use of media

The first research question examined how adolescents allocate their time across media. Teens reported the amount of time

**TABLE 1**

**Adolescent Time Spent with Media (Percent Responding)**

Media	Less than 1 Hour	1 Hour to 3 Hours	More than 3 Hours
Watching TV	24.7	<b>48.9</b>	26.4
Reading	<b>69.3</b>	24.6	6.1
Listening to the Radio	24.7	33.3	<b>41.9</b>
Surfing the Internet (at Home)	<b>72.0</b>	23.8	3.0
Surfing the Internet (at School)	<b>91.7</b>	6.4	1.8

they spent watching television, reading, listening to the radio, and surfing the internet on an average weekday (see Table 1). The results indicate that teens listen to the radio for the longest amount of time followed by watching TV. For the most part, male and female teens were found to use media similarly. However, female teens listened to the radio significantly longer than did male teens on a typical weekday ( $\chi^2 = 13.05, p \leq .01$ ). In terms of the internet, teens self-categorized themselves as users (92.1 percent) or nonusers (7.9 percent) of the internet, but over 99 percent had used the internet in the past. Most teens used the internet at school (98.9 percent), and over half (56.9 percent)

also used the internet at home. However, the vast majority reported using the internet less than an hour at home (72.0 percent) or at school (91.7 percent). These results indicate that teens in this sample were not heavy users of the internet compared to other media.

The second objective of the study was to examine whether media choice in general varied by activity (i.e., the need for) in a significant manner. As can be seen in Table 2, there were significant differences in teens' media choice depending on the need wanting to be gratified. This finding indicates a preference for certain media over others, depending upon the activity or need. The most concentrated use was

**TABLE 2**

**Adolescent Media Used by Activity (Percent Responding)**

Activity	Magazine (%)	Newspaper (%)	Internet (%)	TV (%)	Radio (%)	$\chi^2$
Entertainment	3.7	2.1	7.0	66.8	20.3	275.65*
Research	10.1	7.4	82.4	0.0	0.0	204.27*
Homework	8.1	19.5	65.9	4.3	2.2	260.54*
Health Education	42.0	10.1	33.0	13.8	1.1	107.90*
Shopping	47.6	21.6	3.2	24.3	3.2	124.22*
Leisure	17.4	10.9	6.5	36.4	28.8	56.92*
News/Current Events	3.8	56.5	43.0	32.3	3.2	211.15*

\* $p \leq .001$

for research on the internet (82.4 percent). The internet was also quite heavily used for homework (65.9 percent), finding out about news and current events (43 percent), and health education (33 percent). Television and radio were used most for entertainment (66.8 percent, 20.3 percent) and leisure (36.4 percent, 28.8 percent), while magazines were used most for health education (42.0 percent), and shopping (47.6 percent). The newspaper was found to still be the medium of preference for finding out about news and current events (56.5 percent). Finally, although the internet was being used by teens for active search activities such as research, few teens were using the internet for entertainment (7.0 percent), leisure (6.5 percent), or shopping (3.2 percent). These results may suggest the need for advertisers and marketers to better communicate the possibilities and create incentives for online services.

### The internet

The third research question focused specifically on the frequency of teens using the internet to fulfill various needs and whether the results would differ based on gender or home access to the internet. On the whole, teens most frequently reported using the internet for fun ( $\bar{x} = 3.08$ ), to find out about colleges and universities ( $\bar{x} = 2.81$ ), and to help with homework ( $\bar{x} = 2.66$ ). However, there were significant differences in the reported use of the internet between males and females (see Table 3). Male teens reported using the internet more frequently than female teens for fun ( $t_{(170)} = 2.30, p < .05$ ), games ( $t_{(169)} = 2.53, p < .05$ ), to find out about music ( $t_{(168)} = 2.15, p < .05$ ), and to shop ( $t_{(170)} = 2.14, p < .05$ ); whereas female teens sought out information on colleges and universities ( $t_{(171)} = 2.31, p < .05$ ), and fashion ( $t_{(171)} = 2.49, p < .05$ ) more frequently than their male counterparts. These findings indicate

that male and female teens are seeking out information about different topics and therefore suggests the necessity of targeting male and female teens differently on the internet.

Differences in internet usage for several activities were also found between teens who have internet access at home and those who do not. Teens who use the internet at home were significantly more likely to use the internet for fun ( $\bar{x} = 3.44$ ) and to make friends ( $\bar{x} = 2.17$ ) than teens who do not have access at home ( $\bar{x} = 2.66$  and  $\bar{x} = 1.58$ , respectively). These findings indicate that while the internet has a high penetration among teens, they use the medium for a relatively narrow range of activities. According to the results, the activities the internet is used for narrows even further for those who do not have internet access at home. These teens are restricted to using the internet at school for academic purposes only.

**TABLE 3**

Frequency of Use of the Internet for Activities by Gender (Male vs. Female) and Location of Internet Connection (School vs. Home)

Activity	Gender			Internet Connection		
	Male	Female	t value	School	Home	t value
Fun	3.33	2.88	2.30*	2.66	3.44	4.19**
Making friends	1.83	1.93	.61	1.58	2.17	3.70**
Fashion	1.43	1.79	2.49*	1.53	1.71	1.25
Games	2.79	2.34	2.53*	2.29	2.74	2.55*
Help with homework	2.59	2.73	.84	2.64	2.67	.19
Music	2.49	2.10	2.15*	2.12	2.41	1.57
Health information	1.58	1.83	1.66	1.60	1.83	1.56
College/universities	2.58	3.00	2.31*	2.61	2.99	2.07*
Travel information	1.99	1.81	1.09	1.71	2.04	2.06*
Shopping	1.64	1.37	2.14*	1.41	1.57	1.30

\* $p \leq .05$

\*\* $p \leq .01$

**These findings indicate that male and female teens are seeking out information about different topics and therefore suggests the necessity of targeting male and female teens differently on the internet.**

The fourth research question examined an important issue for advertisers who are trying to drive traffic to their home pages, "Where do teens find web addresses that are of interest to them?" Teens most frequently find out about websites from search engines ( $\bar{x} = 3.05$ ), followed by friends ( $\bar{x} = 2.52$ ), and then advertising media such as: TV ( $\bar{x} = 2.31$ ), magazines ( $\bar{x} = 2.29$ ), radio ( $\bar{x} = 1.85$ ), newspapers ( $\bar{x} = 1.82$ ), and billboards ( $\bar{x} = 1.58$ ). However, there were no significant differences between males and females in where they found out about websites ( $p < .05$ ), yet teens who have internet access at home were significantly more likely to use search engines, ask friends, or look at newspaper advertisements to find websites (see Table 4). These results suggest the potential benefits from engaging in

cross-media promotion of internet web addresses.

**Interpersonal communication sources**

The final objective of the study was to examine if teenagers perceive the internet, an interactive medium, similarly to other interactive or interpersonal communication sources. Respondents were asked to select which interpersonal communication source would be the best in terms of various criteria, to find out information about issues such as alcohol, drugs, or AIDS. The internet was found to fulfill information needs similarly and, in some cases, better than typical interpersonal communication sources. Selection between the different sources varied depending on the adolescents' concerns when they accessed the information. For instance, if teens

were most concerned about confidentiality, they talked to their parents, but if the concern was being comfortable, peers were the most common source of information (see Table 5). To take into account these various facets of seeking information from different sources, an average percent responding was calculated for each source of information. The results indicated that, in general, teens were found to consult their peers most often (42.9 percent), followed by their parents (32.8 percent), the internet (16.3 percent), counselors (6.7 percent), and teachers (1.3 percent). Although relatively new, the internet is a surprisingly trusted source of information for teen users. In fact, when teens need information fast and require confidentiality, the internet is often consulted.

**DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS**

In this paper, a study was undertaken to examine teens' use of traditional and emerging media. A current picture of adolescents' media use was established. Teens were found to spend the most amount of time listening to the radio, while the internet was frequently used for school-

**TABLE 4**  
Where Teens Find out about Websites by Gender (Male vs. Female) and Location of Internet Connection (School vs. Home)

Location	Gender			Internet Connection		
	Male	Female	t value	School	Home	t value
Engine	3.20	2.93	1.27	2.81	3.26	2.10*
Ask friends	2.47	2.56	.55	2.31	2.72	2.50*
TV ads	2.28	2.32	.26	2.25	2.37	.70
Billboards	1.56	1.58	.20	1.58	1.58	.03
Magazine ads	2.19	2.38	1.15	2.19	2.40	1.32
Radio ads	1.73	1.94	1.34	1.82	1.89	.45
Newspaper ads	1.81	1.82	.05	1.66	1.98	2.15*

\* $p \leq .05$



**TABLE 5****The Internet and Interpersonal Sources of Communication (Percent Responding)**

<b>Main Concern</b>	<b>Parents (%)</b>	<b>Teachers (%)</b>	<b>Counselors (%)</b>	<b>Peers (%)</b>	<b>Internet (%)</b>	<b><math>\chi^2</math></b>
For most information	38.4	1.7	4.1	50.6	5.2	178.70*
Concerned about privacy	36.3	0.0	9.4	39.2	15.2	45.73*
Most comfortable	32.6	0.6	4.1	50.6	12.2	153.47*
Easiest	27.9	1.7	3.5	57.6	9.3	188.64*
Confidentiality	31.4	3.6	15.4	26.6	23.1	40.08*
Need information fast	30.4	0.6	3.6	32.7	32.7	90.57*
<b>Mean</b>	<b>32.8</b>	<b>1.3</b>	<b>6.7</b>	<b>42.9</b>	<b>16.3</b>	

\*p ≤ .001

related tasks. In general, teens' media choices were shown to vary by their needs. Overall, male and female uses of media were similar; however, gender differences were found on the needs fulfilled by the internet.

The findings suggest three general areas that, if adopted as part of a communication strategy, should create added value for teens using the internet. Similar to other consumers, teens are looking to the media for relevant information that will impact their lives. Just as advertisements in traditional media have been shown to facilitate teen socialization, advertising in new media is likely to have similar effects. Advertisers must therefore cultivate the teen internet audience by recognizing their desire for socialization and need fulfillment. In doing so, both parties are rewarded. Teens benefit from gaining relevant information and the ability to fulfill a wider variety of needs through one medium. Advertisers benefit because sites that provide for teens' needs are more likely to be visited. Therefore, when speaking to teens on the internet, advertising must create added value by: (1) understanding the needs of teens, (2) learning how to fulfill these needs using the

internet, and finally (3) advertising the benefits of these personally relevant websites through cross-media promotion.

#### **Needs**

Results suggest that teens often select media by activity, on a need-gratification basis. Currently, traditional media are meeting a number of other needs that are not being met on the internet. Television and radio were found to fulfill entertainment and leisure needs most often, while magazines were commonly used for shopping and health-related information. Although, 99 percent of the teens in this study reported having used the internet, the majority were not using it for a wide variety of activities. In comparison to other media, teens' use of the internet focused on research, homework, and news and current events. Yet, the results were distinct between those who have internet access at home and those who have access only at school.

Teens with internet access at home were more likely to participate in activities for fun or to make friends than were teens that used the internet only at school. This finding, coupled with the internet's ability to blur the lines between print and broad-

cast, illustrates the potential that exists for teens to use the internet to fulfill a greater variety of needs. With increasing access to on-line services at home and at school, it is up to advertisers and marketers to attract teens to the web by supplying them with information on the ways the internet can fulfill many of their needs.

#### **Fulfilling teen needs**

Several companies are already attempting to expand teens' internet use toward a wider variety of activities and in the process are providing strong sites for placing advertisements. As an example, media companies offer good advertising opportunities by heavily targeting the teen market as an audience for online newspapers and magazines. Channel One and ABC news, CNN, and Reuters all have news services on the internet targeted at teens (Griffith, 1998) and help to support their sites through advertising. Furthermore, teens are being encouraged to expand their use of the internet to include meeting people (Beckham, 1996), publishing poetry (Henrickson, 1998), playing video games (*PR Newswire*, 1998), and even finding religion (Derk, 1998). In doing so, sites like these provide teens with more rea-

**Advertisers must . . . cultivate the teen internet audience by recognizing their desire for socialization and need fulfillment. In doing so, both parties are rewarded.**

sons to visit the internet, offering greater opportunities for teen exposure to web advertising.

But there is no reason why marketers can't offer similar attractions at their own websites. By providing more than just the product at a company's website, businesses can create opportunities for several positive outcomes. Some of these outcomes include increasing teen interest in the website, enhancing the likeliness of return visits, and creating a chance to build a bond between the company and teens. According to Epstein (1998), offering free trials is one method for attracting the growing teen market. Companies can send free samples of their products, in exchange for consumers visiting the websites and answering questions. Lee (1998) further points out that several companies are also offering teens such online services as chat rooms, advice columns, and ways to communicate with others around the globe. She suggests that these services are building loyalty among the net-generation and bringing them back to specific websites.

**Importance of cross media promotion**

However, a website is only effective to the degree that teens will visit. Advertisers must not forget about promoting their internet sites. Results from the current study reveal that teens most frequently find out about websites online from search engines, from friends, and also from mass media advertising. Similarly, the Simmons Teenage Research Study provides

concurrent evidence that teens find websites via word-of-mouth (25 percent), television advertising (19 percent), and online browsing (17 percent) (*Business Wire*, 1998). Together, these findings indicate both the necessity of having a broad-based media plan in order to drive traffic to websites and the importance of cross-promoting the sites in other media (Coffey and Stipp, 1997; Edwards and La Ferle, 2000). Advertisers must make teens aware of the offerings at their websites and encourage word-of-mouth communication among adolescents.

Leong, Huang, and Stanners (1998) caution advertisers on the need to be aware of internet limitations for achieving certain advertising objectives. According to the authors, the internet is presently ineffective for stimulating emotions, and less effective than other media at incorporating attention-getting devices and changing attitudes. Therefore, it is important to consider the goals of a company before buying space on the internet or creating a website for teens to visit. As the results of this study have illustrated, teens use a variety of media to fulfill different needs. The best course of action is a media mix which optimizes the unique benefits of each medium.

One final implication from the results of this study is the potential of the internet to function similarly to an interpersonal source of communication. This finding is particularly important for social marketers trying to convey messages to teens re-

garding birth control, AIDS, drinking and driving, and so on. The findings suggest that although teens are most likely to gather information from peers and parents, the teens in this study also perceived the internet as adequate in fulfilling these interpersonal communication needs. When speed was an issue, the internet and peers were the number-one choices for information. When confidentiality was important, the internet was mentioned right behind parents and peers. It can be reasoned that teens feel more at ease accessing health-related information from the internet due to the anonymity. These findings highlight the importance of the internet as a communications channel that teens trust, and they lend support to the multitude of social marketers and health educators posting information on the internet, such as Adolescent Directory On-Line (1999).

**CONCLUSION**

This study presents the current state of teen media use, particularly use of the internet, and provides a baseline against which future change may be measured. Contrary to the belief that the internet will cannibalize other forms of media (Internet Advertising Bureau, 1997), especially television, this study illustrates how teens often use various media to fulfill different needs. However, several successful web pioneers have recognized this and are trying to maximize the versatility of the internet by working to fulfill a broader range of teen needs currently being met through traditional media. The present study has highlighted the opportunities available for advertisers in understanding the gratifications teens seek from media and presenting these needs in their websites. It is an exciting time for electronic commerce, and advertisers have many reasons to invest in the newest communication tool for targeting and building re-

relationships with the new generation of teen consumers. **JAR**

**CARRIE LA FERLE** is an assistant professor in the department of advertising at Michigan State University. She received her B.A. in sociology from the University of Western Ontario, her M.A. in advertising from Michigan State University, and her Ph.D. in advertising from the University of Texas at Austin. Dr. La Ferle's research interests include issues related to cross-cultural communication, cross media promotion, role transitions, and the influence of emotion in advertising. Dr. La Ferle's work has been published in journals such as the *Journal of Current Issues and Research in Advertising* and the *International Journal of Advertising*. Prior to her career in academia, Dr. La Ferle obtained industry-related experience in Canada, the United States, and Japan.

**STEVEN M. EDWARDS** is an assistant professor in the department of advertising at Michigan State University. He received his Ph.D. in advertising from the University of Texas at Austin. His research interests include human computer interaction, information processing, and the psychology of new media advertising. Dr. Edwards' research has been published in the *Journal of Current Issues and Research in Advertising* and the *Creativity Research Journal*, among others.

**WEI-NA LEE** received both her Ph.D. in communications and her M.S. in advertising from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. Her M.A. in journalism is from the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Dr. Lee's research is in the area of cross-cultural consumer behavior with special emphasis on acculturation in a multicultural environment. Her research articles have appeared in the *Journal of Advertising*, *Journal of Advertising Research*, *International Journal of Advertising*, *Journal of Business Research*, and *Psychology & Marketing*, among others. Dr. Lee is a Research Fellow of the American Academy of Advertising and the recipient of several research awards. Dr. Lee currently is the Executive Director of the Office of Survey Research at the University of Texas at Austin.

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