

## **Living and Learning with New Media: Summary of Findings from the Digital Youth Project**

Digital media and online communication have become a pervasive part of the everyday lives of youth in the United States. Social network sites, online games, video-sharing sites, and gadgets such as iPods and mobile phones are now well-established fixtures of youth culture; it can be hard to believe that just a decade ago these technologies were barely present in the lives of U.S. children and teens. Today's youth may be engaging in negotiations over developing knowledge and identity, coming of age, and struggling for autonomy as did their predecessors, but they are doing this while the contexts for communication, friendship, play, and self-expression are being reconfigured through their engagement with new media. We are wary of the claims that there is a digital generation that overthrows culture and knowledge as we know it and that its members' practices are radically different from older generations' new media engagements. At the same time, we also believe that current youth adoption of digital media production and social media

are occurring in a unique historical moment, tied to long-term and systemic changes in sociability and culture. While the pace of technological change may seem dizzying, the underlying practices of sociability, learning, play, and self-expression are undergoing a slower evolution, growing out of resilient social structural conditions and cultural categories that youth inhabit in diverse ways in their everyday lives. The goal of the digital youth study was to document a point in this changing ecology by looking carefully at how both the commonalities and diversity in youth new media practice are part of a broader social and cultural ecology.

Our values and norms surrounding education, literacy, and public participation are being challenged by a shifting landscape of media and communications where youth are central actors. Although questions about “kids these days” have a familiar ring to them, the contemporary version is somewhat unusual in how strongly it equates generational identity with technology identity, an equation that is reinforced by telecommunications and digital media corporations that hope to capitalize on this close identification. There is a growing public discourse (both hopeful and fearful) declaring that young people’s use of digital media and communication technologies defines a generational identity distinct from that of their elders. In addition to this generational divide, these new-technology practices are also tied to what David Buckingham (2007, 96) has described as a “‘digital divide’ between in-school and out-of-school use.” He sees this as “symptomatic of a much broader phenomenon—a

widening gap between children's everyday 'life worlds' outside of school and the emphases of many educational systems." Both the generational divide and the divide between in-school and out-of-school learning are part of a resilient set of questions about adult authority in the education and socialization of youth. The discourse of digital generations and digital youth posits that new media empower youth to challenge the social norms and educational agendas of their elders in unique ways. This report, and the corresponding book (see Ito et al., forthcoming), questions and investigates these claims. How are new media being taken up by youth practices and agendas? And how do these practices change the dynamics of youth-adult negotiations over literacy, learning, and authoritative knowledge?

Despite the widespread assumption that new media are tied to fundamental changes in how young people are engaging with culture and knowledge, there is still relatively little research that investigates how these dynamics operate on the ground. This report summarizes a three-year ethnographic investigation of youth new media practices that aims to develop a grounded, qualitative evidence base to inform current debates over the future of learning and education in the digital age. Funded by the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation as part of a broader initiative on digital media and learning, the study represents a \$3.3 million investment to contribute to basic knowledge in this emerging area of research. The project began in early 2005 and was completed in the summer of 2008, with the bulk of fieldwork taking place in 2006 and 2007. This report

represents a summary of a book reporting on the findings from this project, titled *Hanging Out, Messing Around, and Geeking Out: Kids Living and Learning with New Media*. This effort is unique among qualitative studies in the field in the breadth of the research and the number of case studies that it encompasses. Spanning 23 different case studies conducted by 28 researchers and collaborators, this study sampled from a wide range of different youth practices, populations, and online sites, all centered on the United States. We drew from 20 of these case studies to write our collaborative book. This study has a broad descriptive goal of documenting youth practices of engagement with new media and a more targeted goal of analyzing how these practices are part of negotiations between adults and youth over learning and literacy.