

## Regents Argument Essay: Digital Issues

**Directions:** Closely read each of the *four* texts provided and write a source-based argument on the topic below. You may use the margins to take notes as you read and scrap paper to plan your response.

Topic: **Does living in a digital world have a positive or negative effect on human beings?**

**Your Task:** Carefully read each of the *four* texts provided. Then, using evidence from at least *three* of the texts, write a well-developed argument regarding living in a digital world. Clearly establish your claim, distinguish your claim from alternate or opposing claims, and use specific, relevant, and sufficient evidence from at least *three* of the texts to develop your argument. Do *not* simply summarize each text.

### Guidelines:

Be sure to

- Establish your claim regarding
- Distinguish your claim from alternate or opposing claims
- Use specific, relevant, and sufficient evidence from at least *three* of the texts to develop your argument
- Identify each source that you reference by text number and line number(s) or graphic (for example: Text 1, line 4 or Text 2, graphic)
- Organize your ideas in a cohesive and coherent manner
- Maintain a formal style of writing
- Follow the conventions of standard written English

### Texts:

Text 1 – *Monitor on Psychology* interview with Sherry Turkle, author of Alone Together, by Michael Price

Text 2 – *New York Times* article “Brain, Interrupted” by Bob Sullivan and Hugh Thompson

Text 3 – *Living Green Magazine* article “Fahrenheit 451: What Ray Bradbury Already Knew About Our Future

Sustainability” by Mark C. Coleman

Text 4 – Excerpt from Ray Bradbury’s novel, Fahrenheit

Text 5 – *New York Times* article “If Your Kids Are Awake, They’re Probably Online” by Tamar Lewin

## Article 1

### “Alone in the Crowd” by Michael Price

*Sherry Turkle says social networking is eroding our ability to live comfortably offline.*

People today are more connected to one another than ever before in human history, thanks to Internet-based social networking sites and text messaging. But they're also more lonely and distant from one another in their unplugged lives, says Massachusetts Institute of Technology social psychologist Sherry Turkle, PhD. This is not only changing the way we interact online, it's straining our personal relationships, as well.

Turkle's new book, “Alone Together” (Basic Books, 2011), explores the ways online social networks and texting culture are changing how people relate to society, their parents and friends.

The book is based on meta-analyses of individual and family studies and her own interviews with 300 children and 150 adults. Turkle maintains that people who choose to devote large portions of their time to connecting online are more isolated than ever in their non-virtual lives, leading to emotional disconnection, mental fatigue and anxiety.

The *Monitor* spoke to Turkle about her research and what it means for the Facebook generation.

#### **How has social networking through technology changed society the most?**

The most dramatic change is our ability to be “elsewhere” at any point in time, to sidestep what is difficult, what is hard in a personal interaction and go to another place where it does not have to be dealt with. So, it can be as simple as what happens when 15-year-olds gather for a birthday party. As anyone who has ever been 15 knows, there is a moment at such events when everyone wants to leave. Things get awkward. It is, however, very important that everyone stay and learn to get along with each other. These days, however, when this difficult moment comes, each 15-year-old simply retreats onto Facebook. Whether or not they physically leave the birthday party, they have “left.”

When teens tell me that they'd rather text than talk, they are expressing another aspect of the new psychological affordances of the new technology — the possibility of our hiding from each other. They say a phone call reveals too much, that actual conversations don't give them enough control over what they want to say.

#### **Does social technology isolate people from the real world, or augment our personal relationships?**

Both. Some people do use social networks to keep up with real friendships, to keep them lively and up to date. There is, however, another trend in which people “friend” people they don't know or where they are unsure of the nature of their connection. We Facebook-friend people who do not know their commitment to us and similarly, we are unsure of what commitment we have to them. They can, in fact, be more like “fans” than friends. But their presence can sustain us and distract us and make it less likely for us to look beyond them to other social encounters. They can provide the illusion of companionship without the demands of friendship, without the demands of intimacy.

#### **How does that reduced intimacy cause problems in our relationships?**

We are tempted to give precedence to people we are not with over people we are with. People talk to me about their phones and laptops as the “place for hope” in their lives, the “place where sweetness comes from.” We text during dinner with our families. We text as we drive. We text when we are with our children in the playground. Children say they try to make eye contact with their parents and are frustrated because their parents are looking down at their smart phones when they come out of school or after school activities. Young men talk about how only a few years ago, their dads used to watch Sunday sports with them and during the station breaks or between plays, they used to chat. Now their fathers are too often checking their email during games. The young men I interview sometimes call it “the BlackBerry zone” when they speak of their fathers' unavailability. For those who would object that it's the same as reading a Sunday paper while you watch sports, it is not. We give another level of attentional commitment to our devices.

#### **What are some of the benefits of solitude and taking time off from technology?**

It's a great psychological truth that if we don't teach our children how to be alone, they will always be lonely. When they're always connected, children, adolescents and adults become dependent on the presence of others for validation in the most basic ways. When people move from, “I have a feeling, I want to make a call” to “I want to have a feeling, I need to send a text,” something unfortunate happens to their relations with others. They start to need other people to feel

validated and they cannot approach others as full, individual, differentiated people. Rather, other people are used, as what one might think of as part objects — spare parts to support a fragile self.

In a recent *New York Times* article, the founder of an online dating site ([www.datemyschool.com](http://www.datemyschool.com)) summed up the problem of his generation by saying that, “People in the 21st century are alone. We have so many new ways of communicating, yet we are so alone.”

### **For young people who’ve never really known a world without social technology, how can you stress the importance of preserving a non-networked life?**

My guarded optimism about the future comes from the young people I speak with who already complain about having to perform a character on social networks. Living on social networks means performing one’s profile, and indeed multiple profiles, almost all the time. Young people complain of performance anxiety. Between performance exhaustion and the sense that they have never had their parents’ full attention, young people are in fact nostalgic for something they have never had.

One of the case studies in “Alone Together” that most moved me was the case of Sanjay, a 16-year-old whom I met for an interview. During the hour we met, Sanjay had put away his phone and laptop. After the interview was over, he took it out and he had over 100 new messages, most of them texts. He explained that some of these were from a girlfriend “in meltdown,” some of these were from a group of friends with whom he was starting a band.

As he collected his technology in order to begin to respond to these communications, Sanjay was clearly overwhelmed. He said, not particularly to me but more to himself, as a comment on his situation, “How long am I going to have to do this?” As we ratchet up the volume and velocity of our communication, we begin to set up a pace that takes us away from each other.

### **Do men and women use social networking technology differently?**

In my own research, I find that men are more likely to be confrontational on social networking sites and women more likely to “stalk” (obsessively check people’s status updates and learn about them) and less likely to bully or be confrontational.

One gender element that did become apparent is that mothers are now breastfeeding and bottle-feeding their babies as they text. Of course, in feeding an infant, so much more is going on than giving nutrition to a baby. There is the emotional exchange on the most primitive level, the feeling of gratifying someone and being gratified in return. A mother made tense by text messages is going to be experienced as tense by the child. And that child is vulnerable to interpreting that tension as coming from within the relationship with the mother. This is something that needs to be watched very closely. It reminds me of something that has occurred to me often as I have done this research: Technology can make us forget important things we know about life.

### **Do you have any strategies for getting away from technology and nurturing real-life relationships?**

I have some basic rules. I think of them as creating sacred spaces around certain activities. No technology at meals. I used to check email before my daughter came down to breakfast, but then I got into a “just let me finish this one last email before I make you breakfast” mode and she called me on it! So, no technology when I’m with my daughter or out with friends.

When my colleagues bring their phones to dinner and place them on the table, I sometimes tease them about the unlikelihood of “epistemological emergencies.” The idea that we should put each other on pause as though we were machines in order to attend to those who are not present has become commonplace. It needs to be examined. I don’t think that is how we want to treat each other.

Also, no technology when I’m taking time for myself in nature. I have a house on Cape Cod and I notice people walk the dunes with their eyes down, looking at their smart phones. I think it is important to teach the next generation the importance of walking in nature, and in the city, and focusing on those experiences. I am concerned about our losing touch with the realities of our physical surroundings. I am concerned about our losing touch with the kind of solitude that refreshes and restores.

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## Article 2

### “Brain, Interrupted” by Bob Sullivan and Hugh Thompson

**TECHNOLOGY** has given us many gifts, among them dozens of new ways to grab our attention. It’s hard to talk to a friend without your phone buzzing at least once. Odds are high you will check your Twitter feed or Facebook wall while reading this article. Just try to type a memo at work without having an e-mail pop up that ruins your train of thought.

But what constitutes distraction? Does the mere possibility that a phone call or e-mail will soon arrive drain your brain power? And does distraction matter — do interruptions make us dumber? Quite a bit, according to new research by Carnegie Mellon University’s Human-Computer Interaction Lab.

There’s a lot of debate among brain researchers about the impact of gadgets on our brains. Most discussion has focused on the deleterious effect of multitasking. Early results show what most of us know implicitly: if you do two things at once, both efforts suffer.

In fact, multitasking is a misnomer. In most situations, the person juggling e-mail, text messaging, Facebook and a meeting is really doing something called “rapid toggling between tasks,” and is engaged in constant context switching.

As economics students know, switching involves costs. But how much? When a consumer switches banks, or a company switches suppliers, it’s relatively easy to count the added expense of the hassle of change. When your brain is switching tasks, the cost is harder to quantify.

There have been a few efforts to do so: Gloria Mark of the University of California, Irvine, found that a typical office worker gets only 11 minutes between each interruption, while it takes an average of 25 minutes to return to the original task after an interruption. But there has been scant research on the quality of work done during these periods of rapid toggling.

We decided to investigate further, and asked Alessandro Acquisti, a professor of information technology, and the psychologist Eyal Peer at Carnegie Mellon to design an experiment to measure the brain power lost when someone is interrupted.

To simulate the pull of an expected cellphone call or e-mail, we had subjects sit in a lab and perform a standard cognitive skill test. In the experiment, 136 subjects were asked to read a short passage and answer questions about it. There were three groups of subjects; one merely completed the test. The other two were told they “might be contacted for further instructions” at any moment via instant message.

During an initial test, the second and third groups were interrupted twice. Then a second test was administered, but this time, only the second group was interrupted. The third group awaited an interruption that never came. Let’s call the three groups Control, Interrupted and On High Alert.

We expected the Interrupted group to make some mistakes, but the results were truly dismal, especially for those who think of themselves as multitaskers: during this first test, both interrupted groups answered correctly 20 percent less often than members of the control group.

In other words, the distraction of an interruption, combined with the brain drain of preparing for that interruption, made our test takers 20 percent dumber. That’s enough to turn a B-minus student (80 percent) into a failure (62 percent).

But in Part 2 of the experiment, the results were not as bleak. This time, part of the group was told they would be interrupted again, but they were actually left alone to focus on the questions.

Again, the Interrupted group underperformed the control group, but this time they closed the gap significantly, to a respectable 14 percent. Dr. Peer said this suggested that people who experience an interruption, and expect another, can learn to improve how they deal with it.

But among the On High Alert group, there was a twist. Those who were warned of an interruption that never came improved by a whopping 43 percent, and even outperformed the control test takers who were left alone. This unexpected, counterintuitive finding requires further research, but Dr. Peer thinks there's a simple explanation: participants learned from their experience, and their brains adapted.

Somehow, it seems, they marshaled extra brain power to steel themselves against interruption, or perhaps the potential for interruptions served as a kind of deadline that helped them focus even better.

Clifford Nass, a Stanford sociologist who conducted some of the first tests on multitasking, has said that those who can't resist the lure of doing two things at once are "suckers for irrelevancy." There is some evidence that we're not just suckers for that new text message, or addicted to it; it's actually robbing us of brain power, too. Tweet about this at your own risk.

What the Carnegie Mellon study shows, however, is that it is possible to train yourself for distractions, even if you don't know when they'll hit.

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### Article 3

#### **"Fahrenheit 451: What Ray Bradbury Already Knew About Our Future Sustainability"**

**By Mark C. Coleman**

*Fahrenheit 451* presents a future American society where books are outlawed and firemen burn any house that contains them. People are becoming addicted to media, and often watch an interactive soap opera on "parlor walls" that consist of three enormous, floor-to-ceiling television screens. Bradbury said that his novel is not about censorship, but a story about how television destroys interest in reading literature, which leads to a perception of knowledge as being composed of "factoids," partial information devoid of context.

I first read the book Fahrenheit 451 by the late Ray Bradbury when I was in 9th grade. I did a book report on it, and think I got an "A," but I cannot remember.

If the digital age had existed back then, I would be able to download my report from some far away server up in the digital "cloud, and read what I had interpreted from Mr. Bradbury's dystopian view of society which he had first framed in 1953.

I remember thinking (and still do) that Mr. Bradbury was brilliant in capturing what he felt could be the future and fate of society, and further, capturing the essence of how humans might react to that future state. As a 9th grader, Fahrenheit 451 intrigued and frightened me. The idea that society would be captivated by big televisions and that a central state controlled the media and our minds was, in a word, terrifying.

Life can imitate art. The vision, grandeur, and creativity that is stored and breathes in "cloud" of our minds can seep out and realize truth, validity, and actuality in our daily lives. Is the grotesque in science fiction and horror movies portrayed as such because they are real in our society? The interpretation of the world around us, integrated with the idiosyncrasies of creative minds like Ray Bradbury, can create incredible fantasy and fiction.

While our society is not there yet, I for one continue to believe that we will realize a portion of what George Lucas created in Star Wars, if we don't get blown out of the solar system by an asteroid, or destroy civilization through our over consumption of carbonated beverages. The Department of Defense, NASA, and Mayor Bloomberg are helping us ensure these are not our destined doomsday fates. Perhaps we won't have a Chewbacca in our future state, although last I checked the jury is still out on the existence of a Sasquatch, so perhaps there is hope yet for us all to have a large hairy friend named "Chewie" on our Facebook wall.

Yet, the current state of society, all 7 billion and growing of us, seem to have a good knack for making fiction become reality. We have, in many ways, realized a portion of Mr. Bradbury's futuristic state of utopian illusion. Somewhere between seventy and eighty percent of the world's population now uses a mobile phone or has mobile coverage available to them. Of that, more than 1 billion people have a smart phone.

We walk, we talk, we text, we drive, we set three alarms on our phone, then get up and do it again the next day. Our internal clocks are now set not by the sun, but by the digital ones and zeros of coded messages, guiding our day, keeping us on track, and busy. According to the Pew Research Center, approximately 57% of U.S. cell phone users have slept with their phone on or nearby their bed. The younger generation is even more attached with 83% of Millennial Generation sleeping with their phones.

Today, our attachment to mobile devices seems to outpace America's love affair with automobiles. Remember those times you were without your car? You felt confined to an island, and desolate. Now, if you are without your phone, it is more akin to being naked, exposed, vulnerable, and out of touch. The sense of fear and anxiety is ridiculous, but real. Too long without your phone and you leg begins to vibrate as if it is an early warning system that long awaited message has arrived, gingerly needing a response.

Mobile devices represent a mirror of society. We stare at screens and have real (and fictional) conversations with friends, family, and people that we just befriended half way around the world. Further, it can appear as if some social media users have become highly desensitized to the world around them, and believe their digital bubble is their entire world. In many ways it is! With the world so connected it would be ludicrous to pick your head up when crossing the street to say hello to someone when you can simply "like them" with the click of a button. A "like" is way better than a "hello" you know.

It can be comical to take a look at society from an alternative point of view. And while many years ago Fahrenheit 451 may have seemed "extreme" or "way out there in the distance", sixty years later aspects of Mr. Bradbury's fantasy have become reality.

Perhaps we are not burning books in the streets; although we might need to if we don't collectively solve our energy challenge in the next half-century. And while we are not yet ruled by a centralized media, we are fed data, information, sound bites, images, and news stories in very targeted and peculiar ways that have become less independent, and more "point of view" driven. This leaves it up to the "people" to have to think again for ourselves, a skill past down generation by generation, sometimes refined, but often subdued in the face of the hear-and-now news real and attention grabbers like "LOL" and "Ha". Mr. Bradbury's fear that information could become void of context and reasoning is a very legitimate reality in today's pop media craze.

Recently my wife Aileen was searching the web for some historical references to our hometown of Auburn, NY. Aileen stumbled upon many old press clippings from the local and regional newspapers dating back sixty to eighty years ago. She reflected that portions of the paper's stories were like reading Facebook today. There were stories of who was home from War, who recently got hitched, what dress so and so wore to the dance, and other tidbits of local information that seemed like more gossip than news. The reality is that as news outlets consolidated and became more global, the affairs and focus on local interests seemed to have dried up. But, Facebook has brought them back. Now you can get to know your co-workers or neighbors more than you would have ever wanted to know!

There may not be a right or wrong in our adoption of technology. Books are still alive and well, and people still have freedom of speech. But in all of this self-realization of science fiction past, we must remain present and in the moment to be accountable to who we are, what we believe, what we consume, and who we become. We can be tricked and fooled into believing that our reality resides, like a genie in bottle, in our smart phones. The genie may answer some questions, as long as the algorithm has been written and coded. But, ultimately, the character and sense of self that makes up each of us needs to shine through be the voice of reason, resistance, and judgment if we are to maintain our freedom from self-realizing Mr. Bradbury's projected dystopian state.

For the most part, people remain in charge of their fate. And while we sometimes consume our time in the minutia of life, the vortex of social media, and LEDs of the big screen, we have the power to take a step back, check ourselves, and begin anew. There is no shortage of converging economic, social, and environmental challenges. Our generation is operating on "issues overload". With so much going on, it is alright to take a time out, login to your "world", and check-in on who is having a more terrible day than you. If it makes you feel better, check in hourly, if needed. The very technology that can limit "living" also accelerates the sharing of ideas, freedoms of expression, and real-time decision making. We can let issues converge on us, and post our woes for the world to see, or we can choose to collectively address those challenges and converge on the issues of the day. The choice is ours, and that fundamentally is, the power of this generation. In short, we can choose to be a sustainable generation, or not.

And who knows, if this generation can make the right choices, live with a sense of purpose and balance, be accountable to our behaviors and pursue our passions, perhaps we might just sustain ourselves long enough to look back on all of this chatter as we visit a galaxy far, far, away.

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#### Article 4

#### Excerpt from the novel Fahrenheit 451 by Ray Bradbury

*Professor Faber's speech to protagonist Guy Montag about what is missing in his society and why he's not happy:*

Faber examined Montag's thin, blue-jowled face. "How did you get shaken up? What knocked the torch out of your hands?"

"I don't know. We have everything we need to be happy, but we aren't happy. Something's missing. I looked around. The only thing I positively knew was gone was the books I'd burned in ten or twelve years. So I thought books might help."

"You're a hopeless romantic," said Faber. "It would be funny if it were not serious. It's not books you need, it's some of the things that once were in books. The same things could be in the 'parlor families' today. The same infinite detail and awareness could be projected through the radios and televisions, but are not. No, no, it's not books at all you're looking for! Take it where you can find it, in old phonograph records, old motion pictures, and in old friends; look for it in nature and look for it in yourself. Books were only one type of receptacle where we stored a lot of things we were afraid we might forget. There is nothing magical in them at all. The magic is only in what books say, how they stitched the patches of the universe together into one garment for us. Of course you couldn't know this, of course you still can't understand what I mean when I say all this. You are intuitively right, that's what counts. Three things are missing.

"**Number one:** Do you know why books such as this are so important? Because they have quality. And what does the word quality mean? To me it means texture. This book has pores. It has features. This book can go under the microscope. You'd find life under the glass, streaming past in infinite profusion. The more pores, the more truthfully recorded details of life per square inch you can get on a sheet of paper, the more 'literary' you are. That's my definition, anyway. Telling detail. Fresh detail. The good writers touch life often. The mediocre ones run a quick hand over her. The bad ones rape her and leave her for the flies.

"So now do you see why books are hated and feared? They show the pores in the face of life. The comfortable people want only wax moon faces, poreless, hairless, expressionless. We are living in a time when flowers are trying to live on flowers, instead of growing on good rain and black loam. Even fireworks, for all their prettiness, come from the chemistry of the earth. Yet somehow we think we can grow, feeding on flowers and fireworks, without completing the cycle back to reality. Do you know the legend of Hercules and Antaeus, the giant wrestler, whose strength was incredible so long as he stood firmly on the earth. But when he was held, rootless, in mid-air, by Hercules, he perished easily. If there isn't something in that legend for us today, in this city, in our time, then I am completely insane. Well, there we have the first thing I said we needed. Quality, texture of information."

"And the **second**?"

"Leisure."

"Oh, but we've plenty of off-hours."

"Off-hours, yes. But time to think? If you're not driving a hundred miles an hour, at a clip where you can't think of anything else but the danger, then you're playing some game or sitting in some room where you can't argue with the four wall television. Why? The television is 'real.' It is immediate, it has dimension. It tells you what to think and blasts it in. It must be, right. It seems so right. It rushes you on so quickly to its own conclusions your mind hasn't time to protest, 'What nonsense!'"

"Only the 'family' is 'people.'"

"I beg your pardon?"

"My wife says books aren't 'real.'"

"Thank God for that. You can shut them, say, 'Hold on a moment.' You play God to it. But who has ever torn himself from the claw that encloses you when you drop a seed in a TV parlor? It grows you any shape it wishes! It is an environment as real as the world. It becomes and is the truth. Books can be beaten down with reason. But with all my knowledge and skepticism, I have never been able to argue with a one hundred- piece symphony orchestra, full color, three dimensions, and I being in and part of those incredible parlors. As you see, my parlor is nothing but four plaster walls. And here. He held out two small rubber plugs. "For my ears when I ride the subway-jets."

"Denham's Dentifrice; they toil not, neither do they spin," said Montag, eyes shut.

"Where do we go from here? Would books help us?"

"Only if the third necessary thing could be given us. Number one, as I said, quality of information. Number two: leisure to digest it. And **number three**: the right to carry out actions based on what we learn from the inter-action of the first two. And I hardly think a very old man and a fireman turned sour could do much this late in the game..."

"I can get books."

"You're running a risk."

"That's the good part of dying; when you've nothing to lose, you run any risk you want."

"There, you've said an interesting thing," laughed Faber, "without having read it!"

"Are things like that in books. But it came off the top of my mind!"

"All the better. You didn't fancy it up for me or anyone, even yourself."

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## Article 5

### **If Your Kids Are Awake, They're Probably Online by Tamar LeWin**

The average young American now spends practically every waking minute — except for the time in school — using a smart phone, computer, television or other electronic device, according to a new study from the Kaiser Family Foundation.

Those ages 8 to 18 spend more than seven and a half hours a day with such devices, compared with less than six and a half hours five years ago, when the study was last conducted. And that does not count the hour and a half that youths spend texting, or the half-hour they talk on their cellphones.

And because so many of them are multitasking — say, surfing the Internet while listening to music — they pack on average nearly 11 hours of media content into that seven and a half hours.

"I feel like my days would be boring without it," said Francisco Sepulveda, a 14-year-old Bronx eighth grader who uses his smart phone to surf the Web, watch videos, listen to music — and send or receive about 500 texts a day.

The study's findings shocked its authors, who had concluded in 2005 that use could not possibly grow further, and confirmed the fears of many parents whose children are constantly tethered to media devices. It found, moreover, that heavy media use is associated with several negatives, including behavior problems and lower grades.



The third in a series, the study found that young people's media consumption grew far more in the last five years than from 1999 to 2004, as sophisticated mobile technology like iPods and smart phones brought media access into teenagers' pockets and beds.

Dr. Michael Rich, a pediatrician at Children's Hospital Boston who directs the Center on Media and Child Health, said that with media use so ubiquitous, it was time to stop arguing over whether it was good or bad and accept it as part of children's environment, "like the air they breathe, the water they drink and the food they eat."

Contrary to popular wisdom, the heaviest media users reported spending a similar amount of time exercising as the light media users. Nonetheless, other studies have established a link between screen time and obesity.

While most of the young people in the study got good grades, 47 percent of the heaviest media users — those who consumed at least 16 hours a day — had mostly C's or lower, compared with 23 percent of those who typically consumed media three hours a day or less. The heaviest media users were also more likely than the lightest users to report that they were bored or sad, or that they got into trouble, did not get along well with their parents and were not happy at school.

The study could not say whether the media use causes problems, or, rather, whether troubled youths turn to heavy media use.

"This is a stunner," said Donald F. Roberts, a Stanford communications professor emeritus who is one of the authors of the study. "In the second report, I remember writing a paragraph saying we've hit a ceiling on media use, since there just aren't enough hours in the day to increase the time children spend on media. But now it's up an hour."

The report is based on a survey of more than 2,000 students in grades 3 to 12 that was conducted from October 2008 to May 2009.

On average, young people spend about two hours a day consuming media on a mobile device, the study found. They spend almost another hour on "old" content like television or music delivered through newer pathways like the Web site Hulu or iTunes. Youths now spend more time listening to or watching media on their cellphones, or playing games, than talking on them.

"I use it as my alarm clock, because it has an annoying ringtone that doesn't stop until you turn it off," Francisco Sepulveda said of his phone. "At night, I can text or watch something on YouTube until I fall asleep. It lets me talk on the phone and watch a video at the same time, or listen to music while I send text messages." Francisco's mother, Janet Sepulveda, bought his phone, a Sidekick LX, a year ago when the computer was not working, to ensure that he had Internet access for school. But schoolwork has not been the issue.

"I'd say he uses it about 2 percent for homework and 98 percent for other stuff," she said. "At the beginning, I would take the phone at 10 p.m. and tell him he couldn't use it anymore. Now he knows that if he's not complying with what I want, I can suspend his service for a week or two. That's happened."

The Kaiser study found that more than 7 in 10 youths have a TV in their bedroom, and about a third have a computer with Internet access in their bedroom.

"Parents never knew as much as they thought they did about what their kids are doing," Mr. Roberts said, "but now we've created a world where they're removed from us that much more."

The study found that young people used less media in homes with rules like no television during meals or in the bedroom, or with limits on media time.

Victoria Rideout, a Kaiser vice president who is lead author of the study, said that although it has become harder for parents to control what their children do, they can still have an effect.

"I don't think parents should feel totally disempowered," she said. "They can still make rules, and it still makes a difference."

In Kensington, Md., Kim Calinan let her baby son, Trey, watch Baby Einstein videos, and soon moved him on to “Dora the Explorer.”

“By the time he was 4, he had all these math and science DVDs, and he was clicking through by himself, and he learned to read and do math early,” she said. “So if we’d had the conversation then, I would have said they were great educational tools.”

But now that Trey is 9 and wild about video games, Ms. Calinan feels differently.

Last year, she sensed that video games were displacing other interests and narrowing his social interactions. After realizing that Trey did not want to sign up for any after-school activities that might cut into his game time, Ms. Calinan limited his screen time to an hour and half a day on weekends only.

So last Wednesday, Trey came home and read a book — but said he was looking forward to the weekend, when he could play his favorite video game.

Many experts believe that media use is changing youthful attitudes.

“It’s changed young people’s assumptions about how to get an answer to a question,” Mr. Roberts said. “People can put out a problem, whether it’s ‘Where’s a good bar?’ or ‘What if I’m pregnant?’ and information pours in from all kinds of sources.”

The heaviest media users, the study found, are black and Hispanic youths and “tweens,” or those ages 11 to 14. Even during the survey, media use was changing.

“One of the hot topics today is Twitter, but when we first went into the field and began interviewing, Twitter didn’t exist,” Ms. Rideout said.