Middle School Technology Use Study

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What was the purpose of this research? To better understand how personality and relationships with parents influence technology use, such as texting and social media use. We examined the social and problematic texting behaviors of 102 middle schoolers as well as their social media use.

Who Participated?

41 sixth graders   58% female
35 seventh graders   42% male
26 eighth graders

6th, 7th, and 8th graders

Girls in higher grades texted more than those who were in lower grades. On the other hand, boys' texting did not differ among the three grade levels.

Kids' Attachment to Parents

Alienation: Students who felt angry with or alienated from their parents were more likely to text overall, and particularly so for problematic texting. This relationship was more pronounced for students in higher grades.
Communication: Students who reported healthier communication with their parents were more likely to engage in positive social texting behaviors, particularly in the younger age groups. They were also more likely to show their text messages to their parents.
In general, students who texted more tended to more strongly dislike when their parents read their texts.

Boys vs. Girls

Girls tended to text more than boys overall, especially in social contexts. However, boys and girls were roughly equal for interpersonal problematic texting (e.g., to gossip or to break up with someone). This form of problematic texting tended to be low overall.

Social Media

18% had a Facebook account and 59% had an Instagram account. Girls were more likely than boys to have Facebook and Instagram accounts, and they also had more friends or followers than boys. Of those with Facebook accounts and Instagram accounts, 17% and 49% were under the age of 13, respectively.

Personality

Extraversion (being social and outgoing) and Openness to Experience (eagerness to try new experiences) positively related to social texting, particularly for students in lower grades.

Students who were less Conscientious (thoughtful and considerate) were more likely to text as an "escape" from their current situation, or as a distraction.

General Conclusion

By observing texting behaviors, we can discover underlying psychological differences in younger users. These differences could reflect social and developmental changes in middle childhood as well as highlight parental influence on technology use.