

# MEDIA LIFE

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## For Millennials, TV just isn't that important

*Nearly three quarters could imagine life without television*

By **Diego Vasquez**

Dec 1, 2011

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*These days a majority of college students do their TV watching on something other than a TV set. A new study from Ypulse, a youth-focused research firm, finds that only 46 percent of college students watch TV on a television set most of the time. The rest are watching online or via a tablet or mobile device. That's a huge change in a short period of time, considering networks began streaming their shows just five years ago. These new viewing options would seem tailor-made for college kids, who have grown up in households with DVRs and prefer to set their own schedule for the bulk of their TV viewing. But the study also found that college kids don't consider TV as vital as other forms of media. While more than 80 percent said they can't live without music, less than a third said they couldn't live without TV. Melanie Shreffler, editor in chief at Ypulse, talks to Media Life about how college kids watch TV, how viewing patterns change from high school to college, and why music is so important to them.*

### What did you find most interesting or most surprising about this report?

We knew that music matters to young people, but that 83 percent said they could not imagine life without music compared to 28 percent who feel the same way about TV shows just how integral music is to their lives and how secondary TV has become--more on that in a bit.

That's not to say they don't watch TV, but how they're watching is changing. Perhaps the most surprising finding, as much as they enjoy

the freedom of streaming video, is that they're not cord cutters, they're just scaling back their cable services.

They tune in for their favorite shows when they first air because they don't want to be left out of the conversation that's inevitably going on via social media. That's why they're also usually online while watching TV, so they can talk to their friends about the show and other things via Facebook, Twitter and GetGlue.

We found that college students spend an average of 15 hours and 30 minutes a day with media. They devote the greatest part of their day, two hours and 12 minutes, listening to music, compared to one hour and 24 minutes spent watching TV. They spend more time with social media and studying than with TV.

Finally, with all the focus on 3D movies, we also found it interesting that few students — 17 percent of college guys and 14 percent of college girls — say a film being shown in 3D affects their desire to see it.

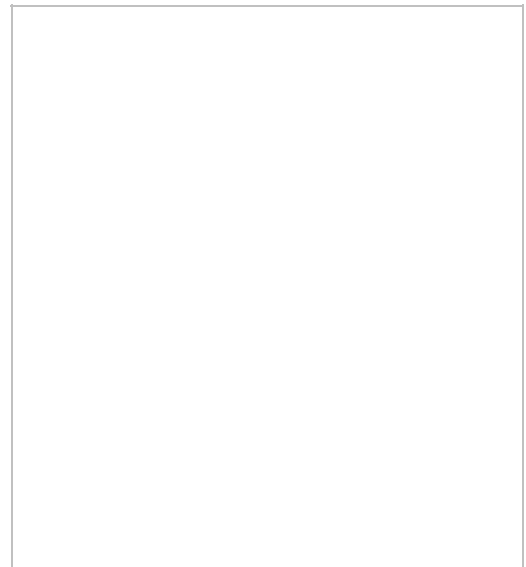


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## What can media buyers and planners take from it?

To reach Millennials, you have to be where they are. Everywhere that they are.

That means that if they're watching streaming video, you have to advertise on streaming video; if they're listening to online radio, you have to be on online radio; if they watch TV, you have to advertise on TV, etc. Hitting them in every medium with messages that are unique but support messages in other media is the most effective.

Young adults are used to picking and choosing how they receive advertising from brands. Some prefer to follow brands via Twitter, some prefer email, some prefer video ads. Advertising in as many appropriate media as possible ensures reaching them in the way they want to be reached.

## Why do such a large percentage of college students watch TV online?

College students have busy schedules — night classes, going out on weeknights, studying for exams and writing papers — which take them away from primetime TV viewing. Their social lives and schoolwork take precedent over catching a TV show because they know they can watch it later online (legally or illegally).

## How much has that percentage grown over the past few years and why?

In 2009, we found that 73 percent of collegians and 60 percent of

high-schoolers watched TV online. In 2011, those proportions had grown to 86 percent of collegians and 67 percent of high-schoolers. Coincidentally, watching TV shows via streaming is growing among older adults, too, according to Pew Research.

More Millennials are watching streaming video because content providers are finally making more shows available legally. Millennial-oriented networks like The CW and ABC Family have recently signed deals to make programming available online via Netflix, Hulu and Amazon.

It's also easier to stream video to a decent screen. For those who don't want to deal with having a special streaming box or to hook a computer into a TV, they can stream shows directly from their videogame consoles. For example, Microsoft Xbox offers a significant amount of programming from a variety of TV networks, including Bravo and Syfy, as well as Netflix.

## Do college students' TV habits change when they get to school - i.e., are they watching TV more on traditional screens at home and then switch to online in college?

College students' viewing habits change by necessity of their more hectic schedules. They're less likely to be home to watch shows — if they are, it's because they've carefully planned their day to accommodate the show, something they're only willing to do for their favorite programs. They most commonly say the reason they watch TV shows online is because they missed it when it originally aired.

High-schoolers living at home are less likely to watch streaming video because their schedules aren't as demanding. They turn to streaming for TV shows they missed, but also when they're not interested in anything else on TV. It's as much about having expanded choices of what to watch as being busy.

## Why is music something more of these young viewers can't live without than TV?

Music plays a key role in self-discovery and defining one's identity

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Digital strategist, social media position in Brooklyn  
Assistant media planner position in New York  
Digital partnerships and sales

Music plays a key role in self-discovery and defining one's identity, which most young people are grappling with in their teens and 20s. They embrace music that they feel reflects their taste and personality. TV isn't as much about exploring self-identity--I don't know too many real-life teen vampires!

Music is also ingrained in their daily lives. Every young person has their own soundtrack [and] they take it with them wherever they go — on their commute, while waiting for class to start, while running errands. They are passionate about it and share and discuss it with friends.

TV is more passive entertainment — they don't pick what shows are on TV, but they have full control of what's on their iPod.

### **How much of college students' viewing habits can be attributed to their financial restraints?**

Financial issues don't come into play as much until students graduate and move into their own apartments. That's when they start paying their own cable bills and realize how expensive it can be to have a package with all the premium channels. While they're in school, cable is often provided in their dorms, or their parents cover the costs. Only 11 percent pay their full cable bill themselves.

When their university provides their cable service, it generally doesn't include DVR, which they have likely become accustomed to at home. That drives their need to find another way to watch shows they missed, and streaming video fills that role nicely.

### **Is there a particular genre that college students favor for television? Do they watch more broadcast or cable?**

We didn't ask whether students watch more broadcast or more cable TV, but we did ask about their favorite channels.

College guys' and girls' favorite networks are cable channels, but broadcast networks aren't far behind. Comedy Central, ESPN, Fox, Discovery Channel and TBS are guys' top channels, and girls name ABC Family, MTV, ABC, Fox and Food Network as their favorites.

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