



THE

# SCREEN

WHAT REALLY  
HAPPENS ON  
A TEEN GIRL'S IPHONE

By **BIANCA BOSKER**



## FOURTEEN-YEAR-OLD CASEY SCHWARTZ

has ditched more social networking services than most people her parents' age have joined. Like many of her friends, Casey has a tendency to embrace social media sites, then suddenly drop them. 📌 Skype, Formspring and WhatsApp: All three have suffered this fate. Casey still uses Snapchat, but less than she did last year, and in the span of three months, she's joined, quit, and rejoined Twitter. She's collected banished apps into a folder on her phone labeled "Stuff Nobody Likes." And she's thought about deleting her Facebook account because she checks it so frequently.

“I’ll wake up in the morning and go on Facebook just ... because,” Casey says. “It’s not like I want to or I don’t. I just go on it. I’m, like, forced to. I don’t know why. I need to. Facebook takes up my whole life.”

Inseparable from her iPhone, but apt to tire of the sites she uses it to access, Casey at once personifies why much of the technology world has become obsessed with capturing the attention of people her age, and why those efforts risk turning into expensive debacles. That teens’ friendships and relationships will play out online is certain. But which site will host that social intrigue is constantly up for grabs.

Two months ago, Yahoo became the latest tech giant to make a major play for younger users, agreeing to pay \$1.1 billion in cash to take ownership of Tumblr, the blogging site that has emerged as a popular and engaging platform with users under the age of 35. They completed the acquisition late last month. Yahoo has in its sights young people with disposable income, still-evolving spending habits and a willingness to devote virtually unlimited amounts of time to staring at a screen.

Casey belongs to the first true generation of digital natives, who have no memory of life before the Internet.

In short, Yahoo is trying to gain access to people like Casey. As social media experts have already suggested, and as a day with Casey makes clear, winning the attention of teenagers and maintaining it are two very different things. Yet seeking that attention is irresistible.

Casey’s habits underscore a new reality for this networked generation: Social networks — and the gadgets they run on — aren’t a distraction from real life, but a crucial extension of it.

Born in 1999, just a few years after the mass adoption of the World Wide Web, Casey belongs to the first true generation of digital natives, who have no memory of life before the Internet. The eighth-grader, who lives in the northern New Jersey town of Millburn, has always been attached to her gadgets. When she was only 18 months old, she received a toy computer



that quickly became her favorite plaything. In second grade, she got her first cell phone (“it could hold two numbers, it was stupid,” she says). Now, at 14, she’s the proud owner of a white iPhone 4S, which she takes with her to school, carries as she wanders around her house, uses at the breakfast table, and keeps beside her pillow when she sleeps at night.

“I bring it everywhere. I have to be holding it,” Casey says. “It’s

like OCD — I have to have it with me. And I check it a lot.”

Casey only parts with her phone during the hours she’s at school, when she leaves it in her locker. The rest of the time, she and seven friends keep up a running conversation over text messages.

Not having an iPhone can be social suicide, notes Casey. One of her friends found herself effectively exiled from their circle for six months because her parents dawdled in upgrading her to an iPhone. Without it, she had no access to the iMessage group chat,

Yahoo CEO Marissa Mayer speaks after her company purchased Tumblr, a blogging platform that’s exceedingly popular with teenagers, in May.

where it seemed all their shared plans were being made.

“She wasn’t in the group chat, so we stopped being friends with her,” Casey says. “Not because we didn’t like her, but we just weren’t in contact with her.”

On a recent Thursday, Casey and her friends are up texting on iMessage until midnight, then they pick up again around 7 a.m., when they wake for school. By 4 p.m. that day, the group has exchanged more than 56 messages, not including those sent in the private, one-on-one chats Casey also kept going during the day.

“That’s not even a lot. That’s small. And we were in school the whole day also,” Casey says.

Early that morning, they kicked off their conversation polling each other on what they’d wear to school.

“Shorts?” someone wrote, followed by, “Should I?”

“I’m not.”

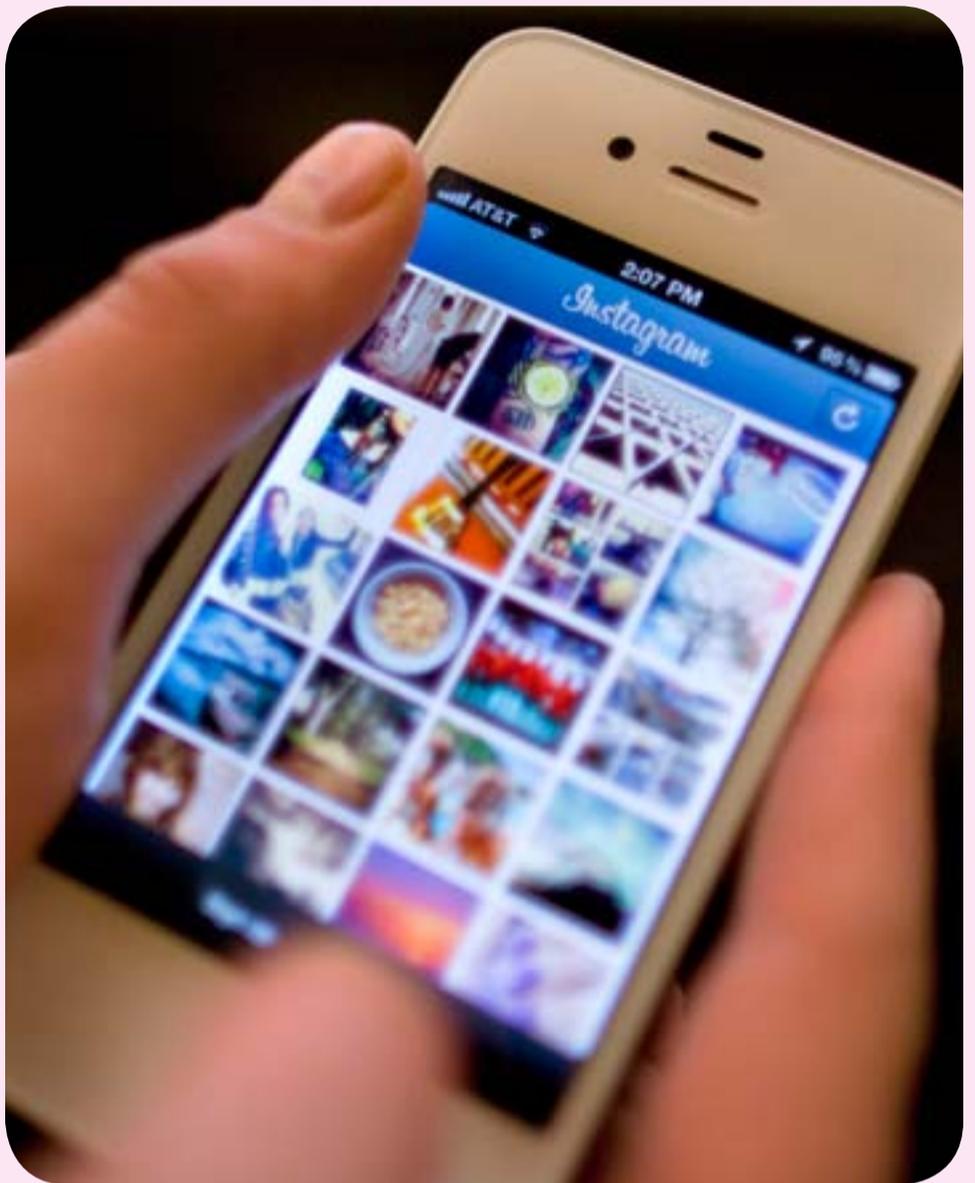
“What are you wearing?”

“Leggings.”

“Would it be weird if I wore my Hunters [rainboots]?”

“Is the bus there?”

Later, the girls cast votes on which picture each should share for “TBT” (short for Throwback Thursday), a weekly Instagram tradition,



“If you don’t get 100 ‘likes,’ you make other people share it so you get 100. Or else you just get upset. Everyone wants to get the most ‘likes.’ It’s like a popularity contest.”

where people post childhood photos. The typical teen girl will send and receive 165 text messages in a day, according to a 2012 report by the Pew Research Center. Casey’s texting continues even when she

and her friends are together.

“We’ll be sitting on a couch next to each other, texting each other,” she notes. “We text in the same room. It’s weird, I don’t know why.”

As we chat in her lime-and-lavender painted room, surrounded by soccer trophies and a framed collage of Justin Bieber photos, Casey alternates between checking her phone, which buzzes incessantly with a steady stream of texts, replying to messages, and refreshing her Instagram and Facebook feeds, where she “likes” people’s posts. Occasionally, she plays a few rounds on Dots, her new favorite iPhone game, or scrolls through fashion accessories on Wanelo, a social shopping site heavy on photos. Later, Casey uses Facebook to get homework help and posts a question in a private group chat set up by her classmates.

Casey’s social networking faces scrutiny from her mother, who has her own Instagram and Facebook accounts from which to monitor what Casey and her friends are doing online. Occasionally, Casey’s mother will insist that a picture her daughter has shared needs to come down — usually because Casey has been “exclusive,” post-

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ing a photo of that could offend friends who weren’t included in that day’s activity. Via Apple’s Find My iPhone app, the Schwartz family can also keep constant tabs on each other’s location.

Thanks to Silicon Valley, there’s no off-switch for one’s social life, and popularity has become instantly quantifiable.

Here are just a few of the things Casey regularly tracks:

- *The number of contacts stored on her iPhone: 187*
- *The number of people following her on Instagram: around 580*
- *The number of people who’ve asked to follow her on Instagram, but she’s refused to accept: more than 100*
- *The number of people following her Tumblr blog: more than 100*
- *Her high score on Dots: almost 400*
- *The number of photos she*

*stores on her phone: 363 (fewer than before because she's maxed out her phone's memory)*

- *The number of photos her friends store on their phones: around 800*
- *The number of people she's friends with on Facebook: 1,110*
- *The number of acquaintances who've quit Facebook: 3 or 4*
- *She also uses the app Insta-Follow to keeps tabs on who's unfollowed her on Instagram (she quickly unfollows those who defect).*

Casey is a novice programmer and has customized the code on her Tumblr blog so it displays how many people are viewing it at one time. She and her friends aspire to becoming “Tumblr famous,” or attracting thousands of followers to their sites. She's wary of what will become of Tumblr under Yahoo's watchful, corporate eye.

“I don't like that they bought it,” she explains, echoing sentiments shared by others who use the media network. “I'd rather it was how it was before because I'm afraid they're going to change it and make it worse.”

The most important and stress-inducing statistic of all is the number of “likes” she gets when



**The typical teen girl will send and receive 165 text messages in a day.**

she posts a new Facebook profile picture — followed closely by how many “likes” her friends' photos receive. Casey's most recent profile photo received 117 “likes” and 56 comments from her friends, 19 of which they posted within a minute of Casey switching her photo, and all of which Casey “liked” personally.

“If you don't get 100 ‘likes,’ you make other people share it so you get 100,” she explains. “Or else you just get upset. Everyone wants to get the most ‘likes.’ It's like a popularity contest.”

Still, she notes with a twinge of regret that a friend received more.

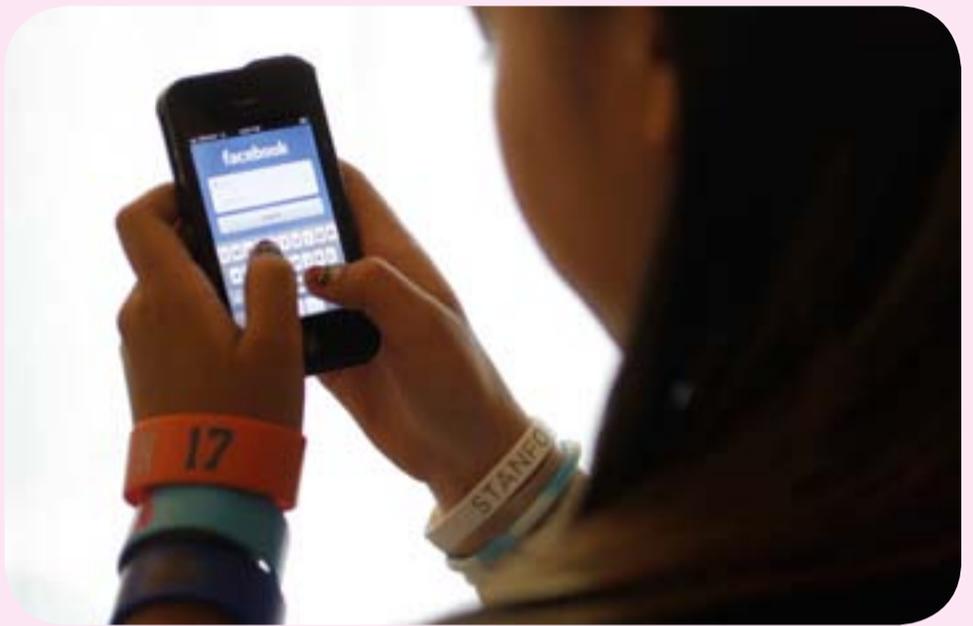
“I changed my profile picture

and then [my friend] changed it right after and she got so many more ‘likes’ than I did,” Casey says. “And I didn’t get mad at her, but I was like, ‘You got so many ‘likes!’” She just gets so many ‘likes’ on everything. She has more followers on Instagram. I have more friends than her.”

For all the time Casey spends online, she predicts that soon she won’t be using her smartphone or social networks as much as she has been. It’s distracting, she says, as her iPhone chimes for perhaps the 12th time that hour. Her phone, be it Facebook, Instagram or iMessage, is constantly pulling her away from her homework, or her sleep, or her conversations with her family.

“If I’m not watching TV, I’m on my phone. If I’m not on my phone, I’m on my computer. If I’m not doing any of those things, what am I supposed to do?” Casey says. “I think that in a few years, technology is going to go back and people won’t use it anymore because it’s getting to be a lot. I mean, I don’t put down my phone. And it makes me wish that I did. It’s addicting.”

But at least for now, her iPhone remains the center of her existence. The friend who was the last



“I’ll wake up in the morning and go on Facebook just ... because. It’s not like I want to or I don’t. I just go on it. I’m, like, forced to. I don’t know why. I need to.”

to buy an iPhone has recently purchased one, regaining her place among the circle.

“Now we start hanging out with her every week because she knows the plans,” says Casey. “She has a smartphone now, so that’s what gets her in. We always loved her and she was always our good friend, but she was excluded — and she knew it, too — because she didn’t have an iPhone.”

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