



# The Digital Generation:

College Students, Brands, and Engagement with Digital Media  
**Summary Report**

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# Executive Summary

College students provide the perspective of one of the most important demographics relating to digital media. They have grown up with online media, they surf the internet and seek out information like no other market segment. They are also more particular about what types of digital media they use...they know what they like and understand what is not worth their time. They will pick up on digital media options quickly, but will discard them if they do not satisfy their interests or needs.

Unlike previous generations of students, college students today rely on digital media for a large share of their identity with brands. Traditional college newspapers continue to be an important avenue for local news and advertisements, but more students depend on online sources to support their needs. Studies are now showing that even viewing television content for college students is more likely to take place on a computer screen as compared to a television screen, providing a further gateway to engaging with digital media.

What is also important to consider is that consumer brands are often establishing affinity with future consumers. The college students rely on peer perceptions more than any previous generation because of tools the digital world has provided. Whether it is product ratings or Facebook "likes," college students pay attention to these signals and so marketers need to as well. Digital media will play a growing role in connecting college students to brands to develop affinity and loyalty.

DigitalMediaIX surveyed more than 2000 college students, from schools in the East, West, South and Midwest to develop the statistics for the report titled: **College Students, Brands, and Engagement with Digital Media**. To find out more information about the full report, please look to the company site [www.digitalmediaix.com](http://www.digitalmediaix.com).

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# Report Highlights

College students are very connected with digital media, whether it is on their phone, computer or media tablet. They actively engage with company websites, social media sites, video streaming sites, and mobile apps, but also passively interact through emails, banner ads, and other forms of advertising.

Digital media is a dynamic. Understanding its value is a challenge, but establishing a baseline for measuring this prime segment of consumers of digital media can provide perspective on the future of these media types.

Here are some highlights from the survey and metrics to consider in evaluating digital media for marketing, advertising, or promotion.

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## Six Social Media Platforms Count for College Students

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While the three largest social media sites (Facebook, Twitter, YouTube) get most of the attention, it is important to understand the other platforms, which demographics they support, and whether they are appropriate to consider for marketing your product, brand, or service.

**Facebook** gets a lot of the attention, especially for college students; it is rare to find a student who does not have a Facebook profile and pays some attention to it. Facebook has evolved from supporting students socially, to connecting people with brands through company pages. These pages offer more visual content, including videos, that offer opportunities to connect fans to the brands. In addition, the information served by the brand pages will be directed at the fan's "news feed," which presumably will get more attention. The big question is whether college students actually pay attention to the brand pages or news served by them.

**YouTube** has provided a different way to connect students to brands and maybe more powerful than Facebook. The advent of channels, which allow companies to consolidate their video content, provides a platform to serve videos that might not fit the standard television advertising format. They can be longer, shorter, adventurous, and educational. Some brands are using their YouTube channel or even videos directly embedded in their websites to connect with a community and develop affinity towards a brand.

**Twitter** fits the college student lifestyle. It is a way to quickly disseminate thoughts, ideas, or opinions; to ask questions and get answers and to receive information that they believe is relevant to their lives. For marketers it is very important. They can send out information on their brands and receive quick feedback and even solicit action. The number of Twitter followers might pale in comparison to the number of Facebook fans, but the influence of the Twitter community is significantly stronger.

**Pinterest** has become the darling of marketers in the social media world. While only 31% of college students use Pinterest, 55% of female students do. Its potential for brands appealing to this demographic is impressive. Pinterest can provide product focus, leverage off influential follower's networks, and add a subtle marketing message that keeps customers engaged. Its potential for e-commerce is significant.

**LinkedIn** is often connected with older students, typically as they are approaching the end of college and preparing for careers. **Google+** might not get as much attention as its social networking peers, but considering that it is not even one year old, it is a factor to consider. It fosters communities, an attractive feature for brand marketers. **Tumblr** might seem to be one of the smaller social networks, but its influence on the college demographic is rapidly growing. It features microblogging and multimedia on a rich platform. Certain market segments might benefit from this platform.

## Social Media Platform Metrics

### DID YOU KNOW...

- ▲ **Facebook**-Used by almost all college students (97%)
- ▲ **YouTube**-Men are more likely to rely on it (75%) than women (68%)
- ▲ **Twitter**-Do you tweet? Women are more likely to (69%) than men are (60%).
- ▲ **Pinterest**-It's a Girl Thing (55% of women, while only 5% of men).
- ▲ **LinkedIn**-I need a job! More than half of users are in their senior year of college.
- ▲ **Google+** Women dominate (60%) because they like the community spirit.

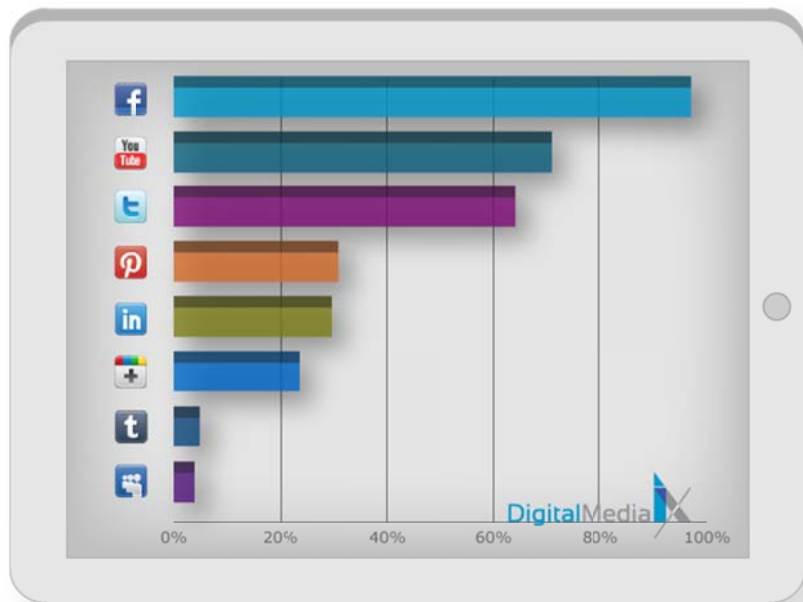


Figure 1—Social Media Platforms Used by College Students

## Brand Categories Most Influenced By Digital Media

The College Student Survey polled students about their digital media use in eleven different product categories. This is different than the social media platforms question, because it provides understanding on how students connect with brands using the various types of digital media. Clearly there was more engagement with higher-value products that students use regularly, like computers and smart phones; clothing also represented an important category. Snacks, soft drinks, and candy did not have the substance to support students connecting as much as other categories. Cars were even lower in student engagement. It is not likely that many of them would be spending much time thinking about cars until after graduation

### Brand Categories and Digital Media Metrics

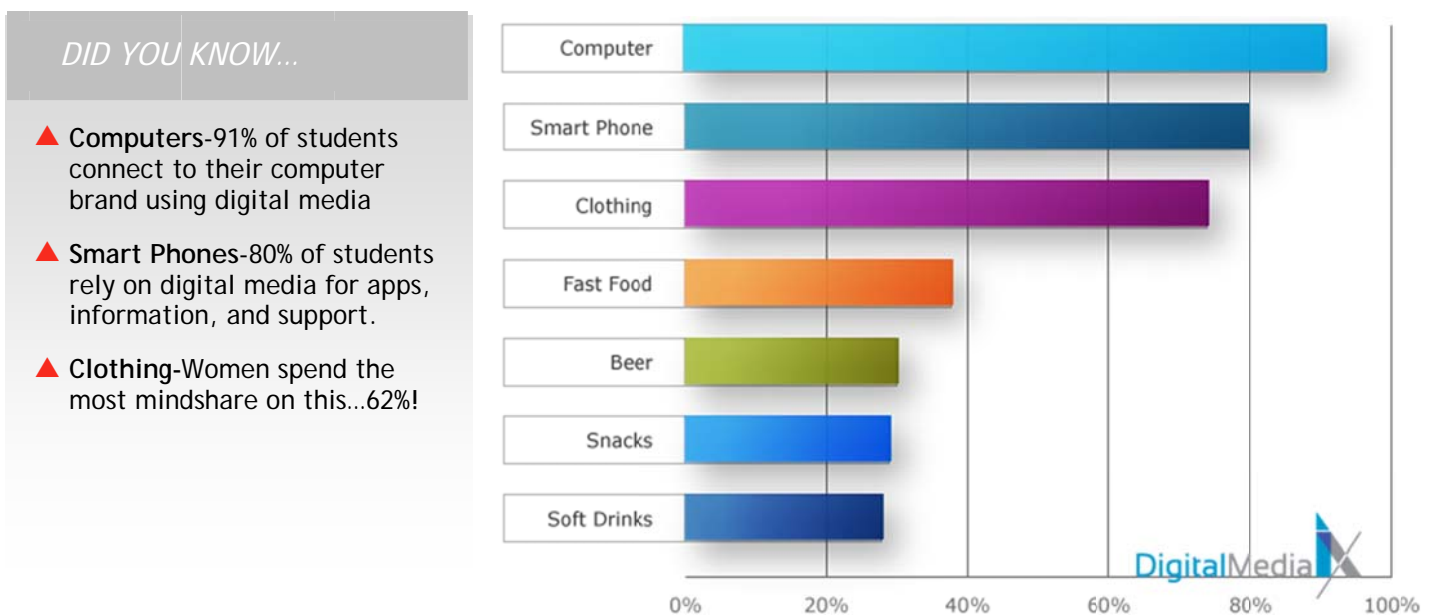


Figure 2—Brand Categories and Digital Media

## College Students and Digital Media Platforms

Digital media comes in many forms, but websites are the most important place for college students to engage with a brand. Students might give a brand a Facebook “like,” but often this is a requirement for entering a contest or incentive and they don’t pay much attention to the subsequent communication from the brand. Considering that people click the Like button pretty casually, it is not clear how much value this has. Over half of college students engage with a brand through videos, mostly through YouTube. More than one-third of students download mobile apps sponsored by a brand, but once again, it is not clear how often they use these apps. Unless there is value to a brand app, it will not be used. Twitter appears to be the least popular of the five for students engage with a brand, but this could be the strongest marketing media of the group. People who “tweet,” typically influence a broad group of friends and have amplified influence.

### Digital Media Platform Metrics

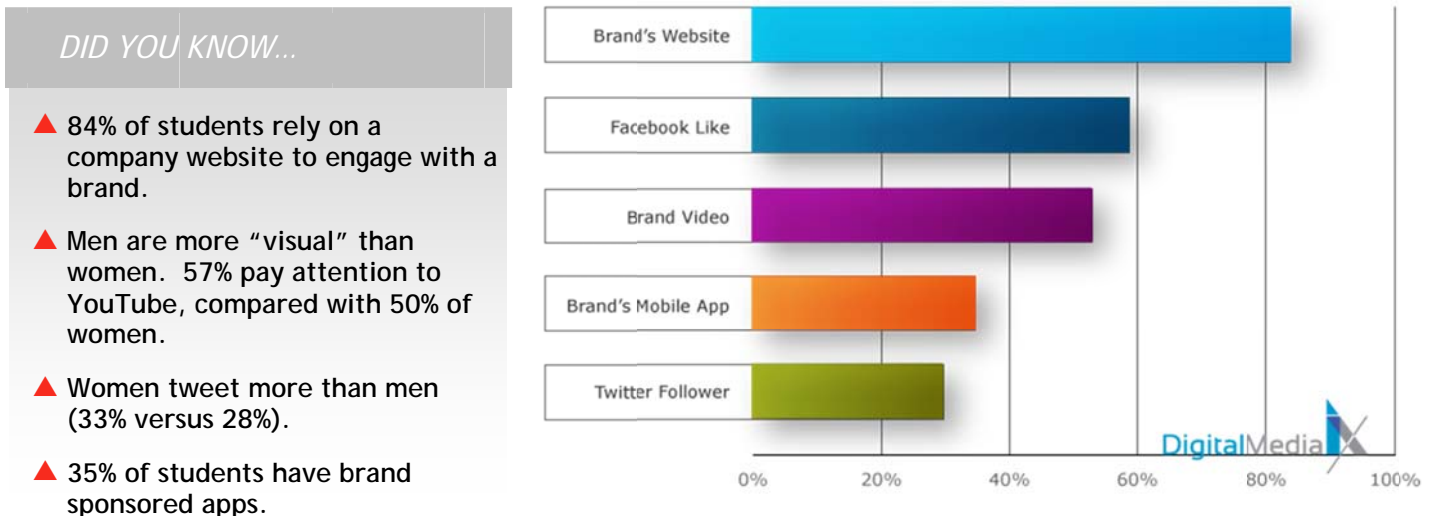


Figure 3—How Students Engage with Brands

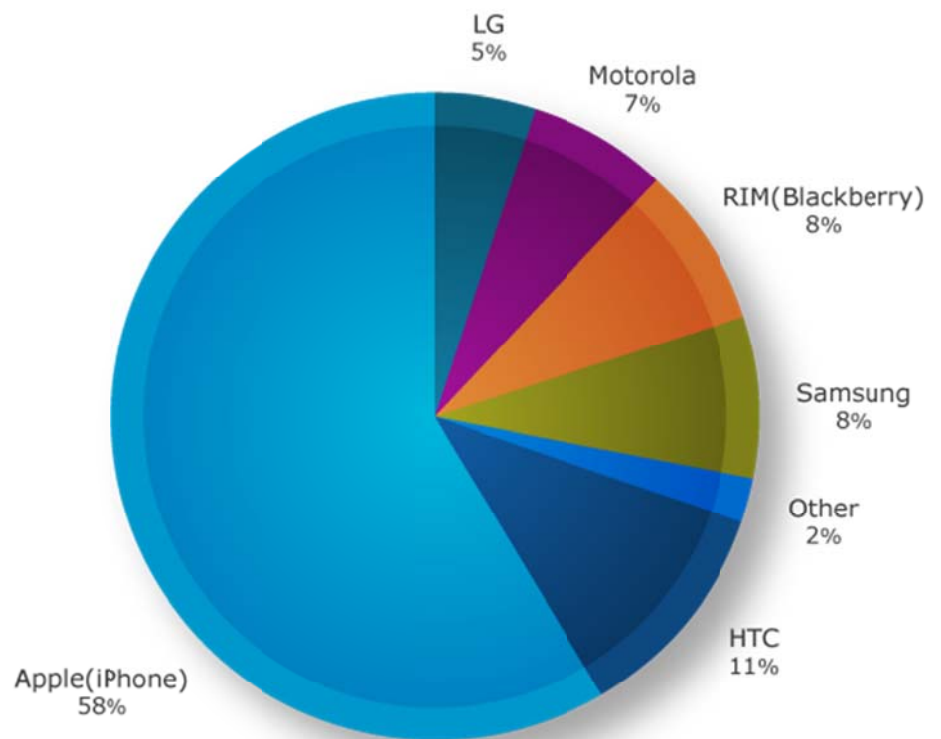
## Smart Phones Go to College

The most important thing for a college student to carry is a mobile phone. And typically these are smart phones; the iPhone dominates the college market, influenced by the halo effect from other Apple products. Students have grown up with iPods and MacBooks, which have further promoted this trend. HTC has emerged as the number two smart phone brand, influenced by the introduction of some premium phones such as the One X. Blackberry's share held up reasonably well, considering the overall trend in the market. Samsung and Motorola are looking for strong growth with new and innovative products.

### Smart Phones on Campus

#### *DID YOU KNOW...*

- ▲ Smart Phones are used by 84% of college students
- ▲ Apple is the dominant brand with 58%
- ▲ HTC is the surprise at #2 with 11%
- ▲ Motorola, Samsung, and Blackberry are the next tier.



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Figure 4—Smart Phone Market Shares on Campus



## Students Love Their Mobile Apps

College students not only have embraced smart phones, but have also built up fairly large collections of mobile apps. When surveyed about the five most popular apps on their smart phones, college students identified more than 800 unique mobile apps. Nine apps represented nearly half of the responses and 10 categories (for example communication and social networks) represented nearly 75% of the app market. The social platforms, such as Facebook and Twitter, are important, but Pandora, Instagram, and various weather apps also factor into the list of apps important to students.

### Leading Apps on College Student's Phones

#### DID YOU KNOW...

- ▲ *Nine apps dominate students' phones.*
- ▲ *Communication and social networking comprises more than 40% of total apps.*
- ▲ *Nearly one-quarter are "other" apps.*
- ▲ *Sports apps are a favorite of men*

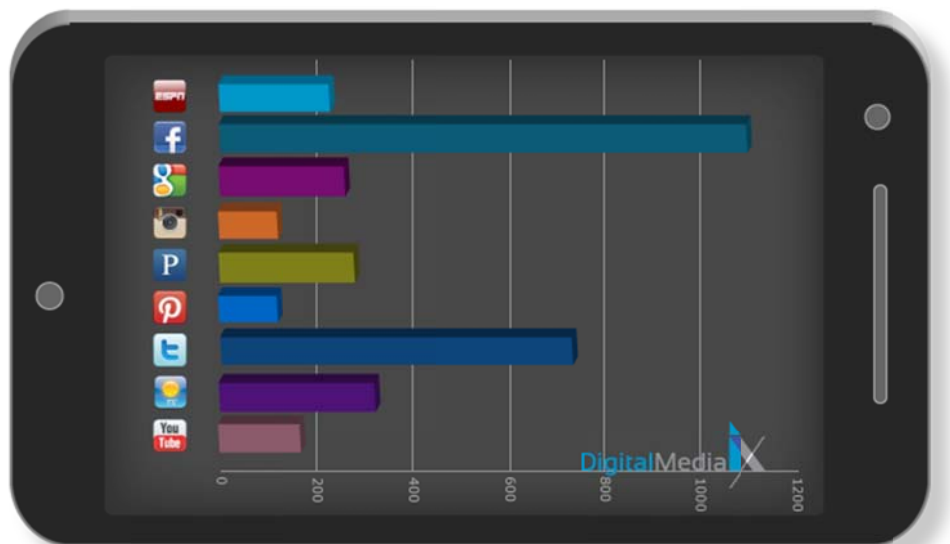


Figure 5—Mobile Apps on Students Phones

## Leading Digital Brands for College Students

DigitalMediaX developed the DMIX ratio (DMIX/R) to provide understanding of brands and how they are influenced by the various forms of digital media. The ratio combines student brand affinity with their reliance on digital media for various product categories. Also factored in are Facebook "likes," Twitter Followers, and YouTube Channel Views, weighted to reflect their relative importance.

### DMIX Top 10 Digital Brands for College Students

#### DID YOU KNOW...

- ▲ Apple products dominate digital brands
- ▲ Smart phones, drinks, and autos take eight of top 10 brands
- ▲ Red Bull beverage company has effectively leveraged digital media in almost all areas
- ▲ HTC emerges as a digital brand in the smart phone category.

#### DMIX Top 10 Digital Brands for College Students

Company	DMIX/R
1. Apple MacBook 	47340
2. Apple iPhone 	43804
3. Red Bull 	33796
4. Apple iPad 	17399
5. Coke 	9239
6. Starbucks 	8324
7. VW 	8040
8. BMW 	7671
9. Diet Coke 	6372
10. HTC 	6045

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## The Survey

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DigitalMediaIX conducted an online survey of college students in February, March, and April of 2012. The primary sample was students representing the 12 Big 10 schools, with more than 2000 surveys completed. In addition, the results were validated by surveying students from colleges in the East, West, and South. While there were some modest regional differences, in general they were not considered statistically significant.

The survey included questions about student's use of digital media; the different platforms; brand preferences in four major categories: packaged goods, restaurants, high technology, and automotive; and 10 sub-categories: candy, energy drinks, snacks, soft drinks, fast food, notebook computers, smart phones, media tablets, grad cars, and luxury cars.

Also included were questions on smart phone usage, specifically asking how students are using their phones for online purchases, which apps are most popular, and whether they are using Quick Response (QR) codes to access information about products and services.

For some of the questions relating to brands, only one response was requested. This included products for which a single preference was typical or the student would already own a particular product. This included energy drinks, notebook computers, smart phones, and media tablets. Other categories allowed three brands to be ranked. This included categories in which people might rely on multiple brands, such as candy, snacks, and soft drinks. Also included were the grad car and luxury car categories which would be a future purchase for the students.

Gender was specified by the respondents, which established some differences in brand categories and digital media usage.

For more information on DigitalMediaIX or the report titled ***College Students, Brands, and Engagement with Digital Media***, go to [www.digitalmediaix.com](http://www.digitalmediaix.com).

