

1843 magazine

Leisure time

American pensioners are watching more television than they used to



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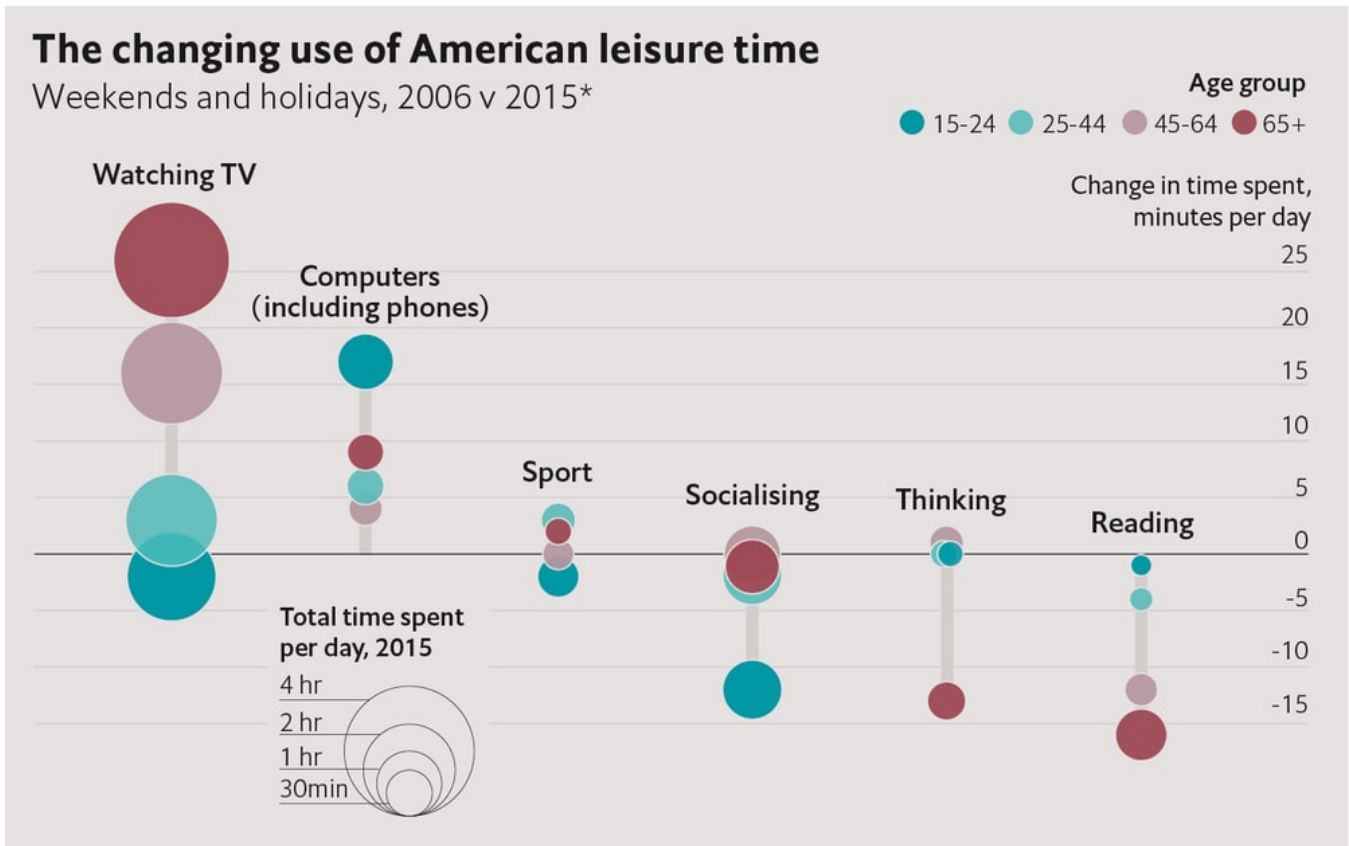
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By James Tozer

Older people are inclined to accuse younger ones of spending all their time in front of screens. Actually, those in their 60s are as guilty as those in their teens – and the amount of time that all age groups spend

cut.

Data from the American Time Use Survey (ATUS), an annual survey run by the Bureau of Labour Statistics, show that 15- to 24-year-olds are spending 15% less time socialising on their weekends and holidays than their equivalents did a decade ago. Meanwhile their usage of computers and mobile phones has increased by nearly 40%.

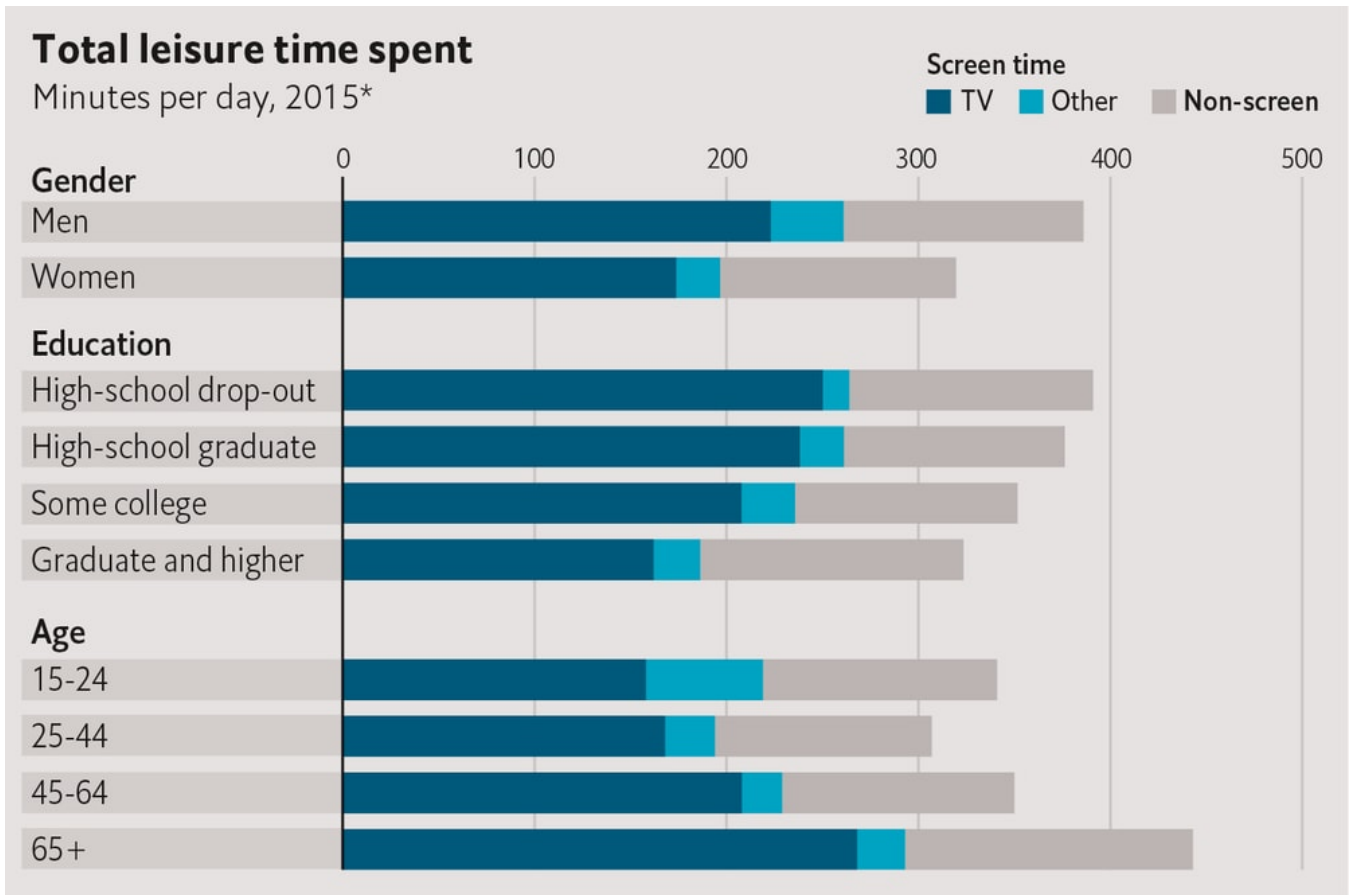


Source: American Time Use Survey, Bureau of Labour Statistics. *Rolling three-year average.

Not all technology is anti-social. Facebook and Twitter did not exist when the first ATUS was conducted in 2003; millennials (the darker blue bubbles on the chart above) have been substituting in-the-flesh encounters for virtual ones. Computers and phones now take up 61 minutes of leisure per day, a 17-minute rise. By 2020 they could overtake socialising, which has fallen from 81 minutes to 69.

Americans aged 65 and over (represented by the dark red bubbles) have also been gravitating towards their screens. They now watch about four and a half hours of television per day: 26 minutes (a full episode of “Judge Judy”) longer than a decade ago, and 50% more than all other activities combined. That has been at the expense of thinking and reading, though pensioners still spend 80 minutes with their books and their thoughts – four times as much as young

adults.



Source: American Time Use Survey, Bureau of Labour Statistics. *Rolling three-year average.

Not all Americans enjoy the same amount of leisure (see bar chart, *above*). Retirees can expect more than seven hours per day; adults between 25 and 44, stretched by professional and family commitments, have to cope with five. Women get an hour less than men, though they still find time to do more socialising and reading. And higher education usually means less downtime. College graduates do twice as much sport and reading as high-school drop-outs and watch a third less TV.

The good news? Most people are getting as much exercise as ever, and (youngsters aside) seeing as much of their friends. The rest of their time, however, is increasingly spent with a keyboard, touchscreen or remote control.

ILLUSTRATION DONOUGH O'MALLEY

GRAPHICS: MATT MCLEAN