2018
PLAY & PLAYTHINGS

an in-depth toy and game trend report

SMARTY PANTS

curious minds. clever solutions.

CONTENTS

OVERVIEW & METHODS

Welcome to the *2018 PLAY & PLAYTHINGS REPORT*, a comprehensive look at the macro- and micro-trends in U.S. kids' play patterns and playthings.

The report—published by SMARTY PANTS® youth and family research firm—is derived from industry news, case studies, primary qualitative research, and quantitative findings from the 2018 BRAND LOVE® study.

BRAND LOVE® is a proprietary study of the lifestyles and behaviors of kids and tweens ages 6-12, including their leisure activities, play patterns, self-perceptions, and brand adoption. The study also covers kids' awareness, affinity, perceptions, and usage of hundreds of family-facing brands. Parents evaluate the same brands as their kids, providing a holistic look at the preferences and behaviors of U.S. families with children.

BRAND LOVE® 2018 is the 10th wave of the annual study. It was fielded online among a nationally-representative sample of over 8,900 kids and tweens ages 6 to 12, and their parents. Data collection took place in June and July 2018 in order to capture both school year and summer learning.

Kids and parents evaluated a total of 379 brands across 19 categories in 2018. Each participant assessed up to 15 brands, providing both closed- and open-ended responses.

- 379 BRANDS
- 19 CATEGORIES
- 8,904 KIDS & TWEENS AGES 6-12
- 8,904 PARENTS OF 6 TO 12-YEAR-OLDS
- 15 BRANDS PER RESPONDENT
- MORE THAN 25,000 VERBATIMS
- BRAND TRACKING SINCE 2009

Closed-ended responses include rating each brand on 30 BRAND ATTRIBUTES & DESCRIPTORS:

- Fun
- Different/unique
- Exciting/adventurous
- Cool/trendy
- Has great varieties/options
- Innovative/always has new things
- Convenient/portable
- Looks good/good design
- Made well/good quality (*High-Quality*)
- Easy to use/do/make
- Good for connecting with others (*Social*)
- I can make it my own/personalize it (*Customization*)
- Been around a long time (*Heritage*)
- Has great commercials/advertisements
- Has a great website
- Has a great app
- My mom/dad let me have/use it (*Allowed*)
- A good value
- I can buy it with my own $ (*Affordable*)
- For the whole family (*All-Family*)
- For kids my age
- For kids younger than me
- For kids older than me
- Challenges/educates me
- Gives me rewards/rewards me
- Hard to get/find (*Elusive*)
- Good for me/healthy/safe
- Does good things for the environment/world
- Tastes great
- Active/physical

Note that "me" is replaced with "my child" for parents

An analysis of these attributes—by category and across categories—yields a deeper understanding of how brands perform and categories behave.

Kids and tweens also rate how POPULAR they perceive each brand to be. The results aid in mapping brand momentum and understanding play trends.

MEASURING SUCCESS

Two proprietary measures are referenced throughout the report:

KIDFINITY is an aggregate measure of kids' brand awareness, love, and popularity perceptions. Composite scores range from 0 to 1000, with most brands scoring between 400 and 900 points.

PARENTFINITY is a similar, independent composite metric that factors in parents' brand awareness and love. Scores also range from 0 to 1000.

Both measures have a .86+ correlation to current and future usage, making them critical indicators of brand success.

Brands can be ranked based on their KIDFINITY and PARENTFINITY scores—across all brands and within category. Note that brand *scores* are a truer indicator of YOY brand performance than brand *rankings*, as rankings can be impacted by the number of brands and the actual brands included in each year's study.

2018 BRAND LOVE STUDY

All brands referenced in the report in CAPITAL LETTERS were evaluated in the 2018 BRAND LOVE® study.

THE STATE OF PLAY

THE BIG PICTURE

Play in 2018 is defined by two, dichotomous macro-trends—rapid, high-tech innovation *and* the desire for traditional social, emotional, and physical experiences. These two forces have given rise to woah-producing, "smart" playthings on one end of the continuum, and a myriad of low/no-tech toys, games, and objects on the other—and countless offerings in between that attempt to marry the two.

As a result, 2018 play and playthings are about the new, the old, and the mash-ups. Video games are better than ever, and AR is taking off. Smart speakers are enhancing traditional games. New apps are being released daily. Co-op gaming is taking place across platforms. And robots, droids, and toys that require coding are making their way into kids' homes.

At the same time, never has there ever been more unicorns, board games, tactile toys, collectibles, or physical surprises than in 2018. Kids are enjoying trading card games, reboots of classic properties, and creating memories in their backyards. Kids are both dependent on digital play *and* enthralled with analog leisure.

Brands that attempt to give kids the best of both worlds are popping up daily. These mash-ups range from furry, robotic pets with heartbeats to better emulate the real-world bond kids have with live pets, to wearables that enhance outdoor play, to app-enabled cars that race around "old-school" tracks.

The opportunities for kids to compete, create, collaborate, expend energy, one-up family and friends, and playfully get smarter are boundless today.

The *2018 PLAY & PLAYTHINGS* report is an analysis of these trends in play among kids ages 6-12. It includes learning from the 2018 BRAND LOVE® study on more than 100 brands in the toy, game, and leisure categories—including apps and digital games. A deeper dive into kids' digital engagement can be found in the *2018 CLICKS, TAPS & SWIPES* report.

BRANDS INCLUDED IN THE 2018 PLAY & PLAYTHINGS ANALYSIS

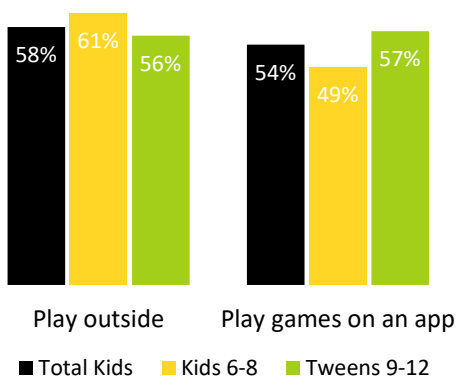
SMARTY PANTS

THE SHIFTING PLAYING FIELD

Many of children's play patterns observed in the past remain true in 2018. In particular, playing outdoors remains kids' top play activity. Given the chance (and a playmate), kids prefer to put down their devices and join in on the opportunity to be active and engage with friends in an open-air environment.

Nevertheless, digital play overall is as strong a contender for kids' attention as ever. Playing games on an app is now the second most frequent play activity among total kids both on a weekly and daily basis—but among tweens, apps beat outdoor play by 1%.

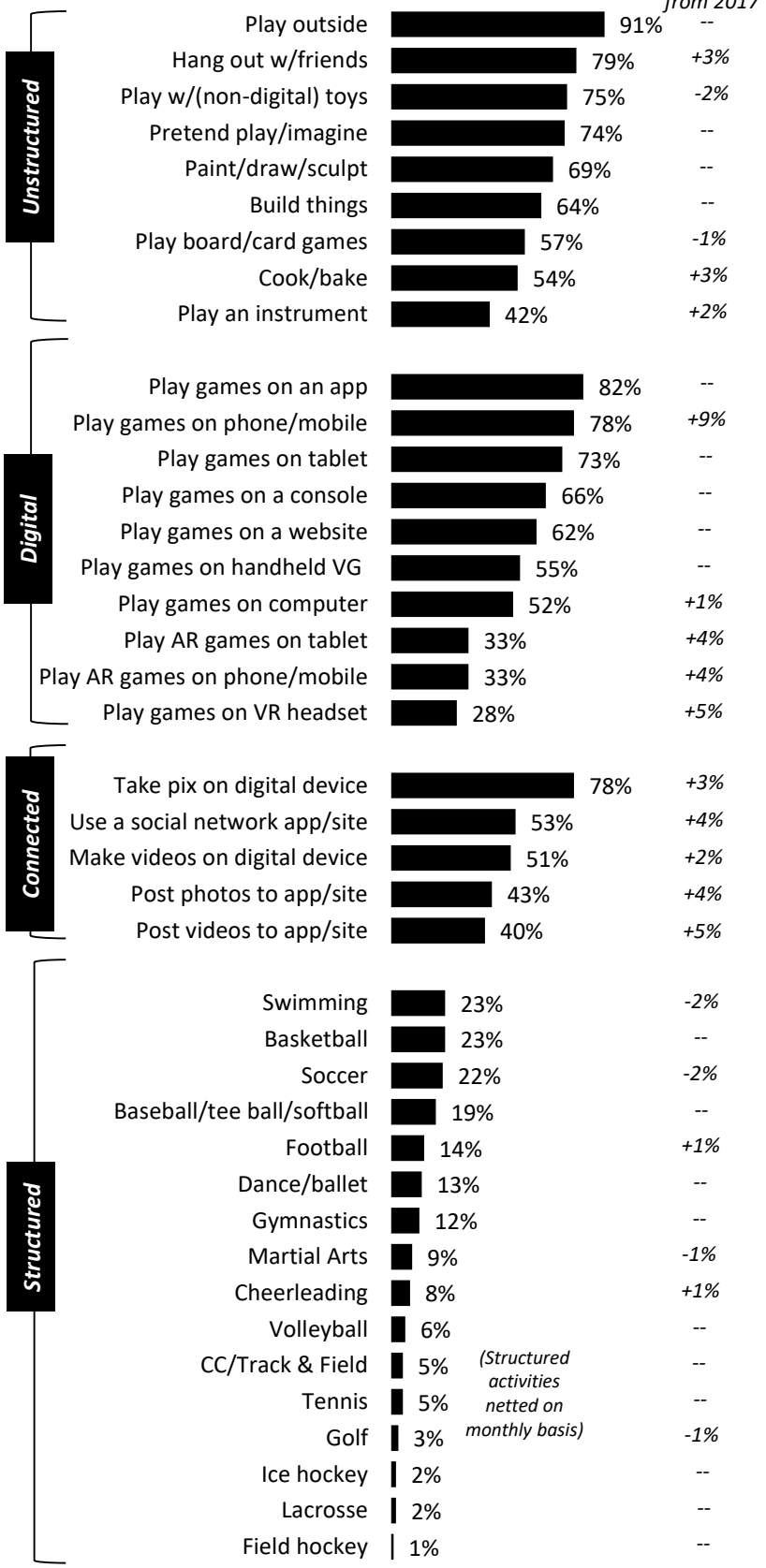
DAILY PARTICIPATION IN SELECT ACTIVITIES, BY AGE GROUP, 2018



Base: Kids 6-12

More importantly, the percentage of kids playing games on a mobile phone has increased from 69% in 2017 to nearly four out of five kids (78%). Kids are now more likely to play games on a mobile phone than play with non-digital toys (which drops slightly from 77% to 75%). Anecdotal evidence supports that digital play is slowly chipping away at analog play.

KIDS' PLAY ACTIVITIES, 2018
(% of Kids Who Do Activity At Least Weekly)

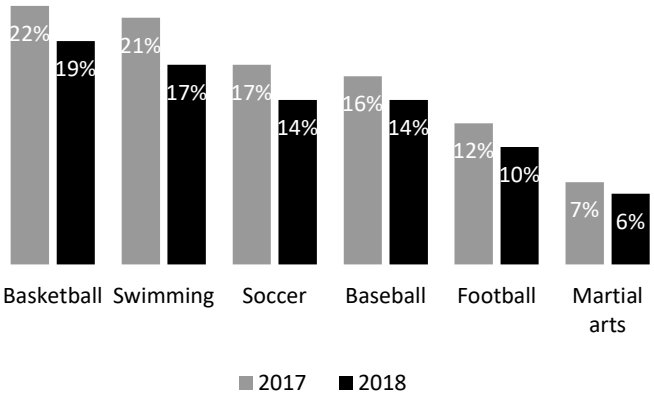


Base: Kids 6-12

The third most popular play pattern among kids 6-12 is "hanging out" with their friends. This has increased somewhat from 76% to 79%, and may be a reflection of the growing social aspect of digital play—be it playing a video game together or exploring SNAPCHAT filters together. Whether in person or remote, more kids are actually being social this year—despite adult concerns that devices isolate kids.

While outdoor play remains the top play activity and hanging out with friends has gained traction, participation in structured activities has not grown. In fact, there have been minor *decreases* in involvement in sports like swimming (-2%), soccer (-2%), martial arts, and golf. This change could reflect shifting interests in sports preferences among kids or a growing lack of interest in organized sports activities. It could also be a function of parents' increasingly limited discretionary income. Among households with annual incomes of less than $40K, the decreases appear in several sports.

KIDS' MONTHLY PARTICIPATION IN SELECT SPORTS, AMONG <$40K HHI, 2017-2018



Base: Kids 6-12

CREATIVE PLAY REMAINS STRONG, EXPANDS

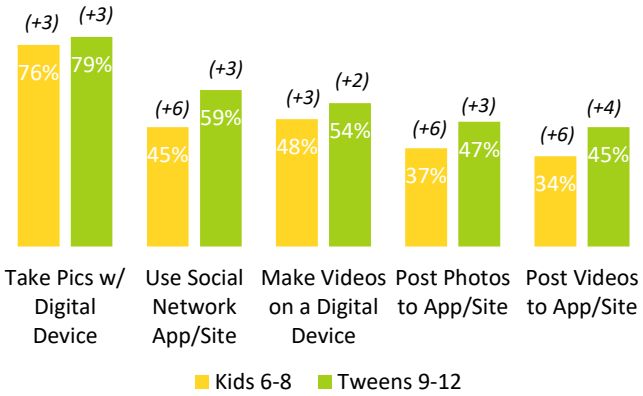
Long considered the standard for creative expression, painting, drawing, and sculpting are still common among two-thirds of kids on a weekly basis. As well, the birth of new shows like Top Chef Jr. and Kids Baking Championship confirms that more kids are interested in cooking in 2018. In fact, over 54% of kids now cook or bake on a weekly basis—up from 51% in 2017. Also in skilled play, playing an instrument weekly is showing a slight uptick from 40% to 42%.

Creative play extends much further than colored markers and kitchen "labs" in 2018. Many traditional brands (think CRAYOLA, LEGO, PLAY-DOH) have expanded their digital creative expression offerings, and dozens of others—from color-by-number apps to ROBLOX—are tapping kids' innate desires to create, build, and embellish. YOUTUBE and social media are giving kids expanded opportunities to share their creations, too.

CONNECTED PLAY CONTINUES TO RISE

Each of the digitally-connected play activities tracked by the BRAND LOVE® study is growing among kids. In 2018, kids are more likely to take digital pictures and videos, use a social network, and post pictures or videos to an app/site. Posting videos to an app or website has the most growth, which makes sense as more kids are on social media and "Audience Play" gains in popularity (*see page 16*).

KIDS' WEEKLY PARTICIPATION IN CONNECTED PLAY ACTIVITIES, BY AGE GROUP, 2018



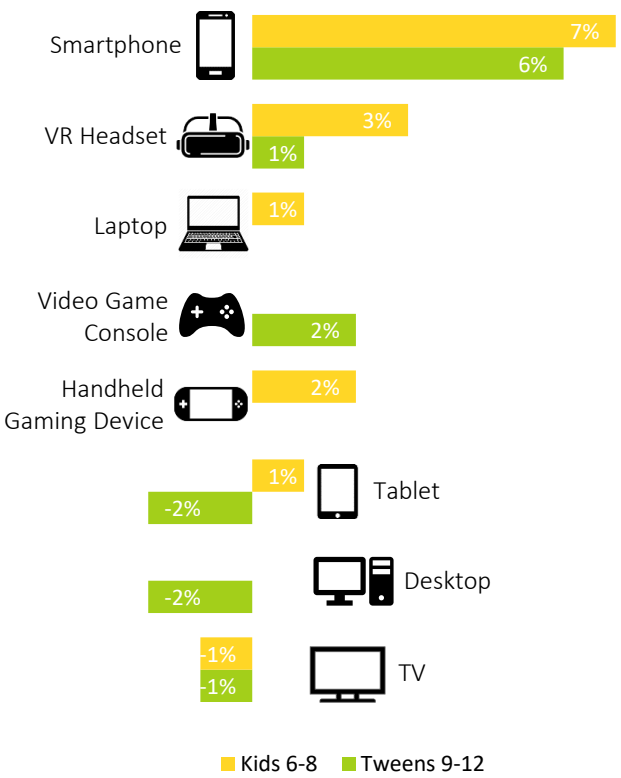
Base: Kids 6-12 *(Top Values) reflect change since 2017*

While tweens ages 9-12 lead on most of these activities, kids 6-8 post the greatest gains in 2018. The kid-tween social media divide is (not so) slowly closing.

DIGITAL PLAY IS PERSONAL

More kids are playing games on mobile phones in 2018—and doing so more frequently. Smartphone usage among kids is growing faster than their usage of tablets, even at the younger ages.

CHANGE IN KIDS' DAILY HARDWARE/DEVICE USAGE, 2017-2018

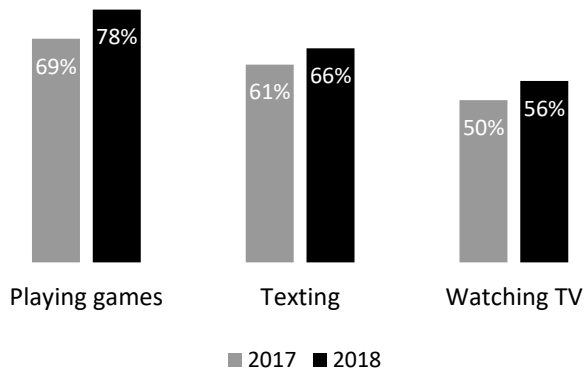


Base: Kids 6-12

But playing games are not the only phone-based activity that is increasing among kids. More are also texting and watching TV shows (and other short-form content) on mobile phones. The smartphone has become a hub for much of kids' entertainment needs.

And with smart speakers and digital assistants entering kids' ecosystem—and catering to their whims via unique content and custom settings—kids are becoming more digitally immersed in the world around them.

KIDS' WEEKLY PARTICIPATION IN SELECT DIGITAL ACTIVITIES ON SMARTPHONES, 2017-2018



Base: Kids 6-12

ARE THE KIDS ALRIGHT?

In response to kids' expanding digital behaviors, parents, educators, and corporations are becoming more and more concerned about kids' "digital wellness." The phrase is being adopted across industries in much the same way concerns over childhood obesity and kids' physical wellness were co-opted more than a decade ago.

Companies like Apple and GOOGLE are integrating screen time and app-monitoring controls into their devices. Several new third-party platforms and services (such as Disney Circle and Qustodio) have been created to ensure screen engagement remains healthy. More schools are offering parents advice on how to monitor their children's screen time as well. And Congress is currently considering the CAMRA Act, a bill that will fund research on the effects of digital engagement on kids.

OVER-ARCHING THEMES

The *2018 PLAY & PLAYTHINGS* report details how kids play today—both their behaviors and the products/brands they use. As you read about the winners (and losers) and the various trends that are driving 2018, notice that:

- Kids' perception of play is changing, as is their understanding of fun
- More products that digitally satisfy kids' real-world needs emerge daily
- Kids' un-plugged experiences are more immersive, multi-sensory and boundary-pushing
- Voice-based services are enhancing traditional child's play
- Kids are embracing over-the-top silliness and mindlessness at a time when being a kid can be intense
- Adult trends and behaviors are trickling down into kids' play and playthings.

Up next are the winning playthings of 2018, and a dozen trends and fads that are driving their success.

Happy reading!

THE PLAYTHINGS OF 2018

OF ALL THE TOYS IN THE WORLD

As the nature of play evolves, so do the playthings that populate kids' playscape. The brands that are thriving (and surviving) are those that are best meeting kids' complex and ever-shifting needs. Today, being a student of timeless kid insights, tech innovations, new product entries, and category shifts is imperative. Understanding V-Bucks yields big bucks.

In 2018, there is no one recipe for brand success; SNAPCHAT is as relevant as BARBIE, and ELMER'S has just as much sticking power (pun intended) as XBOX. What captures a kid's heart, imagination, and attention can vary from one day to the next, and from one room to the next.

This section lists the top brands that are resonating with kids for different reasons. Specifically, it includes the Top 25 play brands by overall KIDFINITY, as well as by kids' perceptions of popularity, fun factor, and coolness. The brands that rise to the top give insight into the what marketers need to know about kids.

CRAYOLA COLORS KIDS' HEARTS

A look at KIDFINITY among total kids 6-12 puts girl-led CRAYOLA as the number one brand in the toy and game category. With universal awareness among kids, and usage both in school and at home, it's a brand that 96% of kids *love* or *like*. CRAYOLA's top three brand associations among kids are *allowed* (72%), *age-appropriate* (72%) and *easy* (71%)—all of which are among the primary drivers of KIDFINITY in the leisure category.

Other leading brands that allow kids to create freely with their hands make the list as well: LEGO, ELMER'S,

TOP 25 PLAY & PLAYTHINGS BRANDS, 2018

Rank	Brand	Total Kids	Boys	Girls
1	Crayola	870	837	903
2	iPad	858	840	875
3	LEGO	853	894	811
4	XBOX	838	887	783
5	PlayStation	826	876	776
6	iPhone	816	819	813
7	Nintendo Switch	804	807	802
8	LEGO MINECRAFT	796	865	726
9	NERF	793	857	727
10	MINECRAFT	785	836	728
11	minions	783	777	790
12	ELMER'S	781	738	821
13	LEGO WORLDS	777	825	722
14	ADDICTIVE FIDGET SPINNERS	776	804	747
15	Play-Doh	776	747	805
16	MARIOKART	774	825	713
17	THE INCREDIBLES	769	800	738
18	NINTENDO 3DS	765	775	756
19	ROBLOX	764	781	747
20	PlayStation VR	763	801	719
21	MARVEL AVENGERS	763	846	674
22	Disney · PIXAR COCO	756	712	799
23	Sharpie	753	724	780
24	UNO	746	730	763
25	LEGO MARVEL SUPER HEROES	744	822	658

Base: Kids 6-12

PLAY-DOH, and SHARPIE. Each confirms that screen-free play is still very much a part of kids' leisure.

IPAD follows CRAYOLA as the #2 plaything, and IPHONE lands in the #6 position—reinforcing the analog vs. digital dichotomy. With more kids playing games weekly on tablets than consoles (73% vs. 66%), it's no wonder KIDFINITY for IPAD is higher than XBOX, PLAYSTATION, NINTENDO SWITCH and NINTENDO 3DS, which also make kids' Top 25 list.

Kids' favorite video games—all of which generate higher KIDFINITY among boys—are among the winners in 2018, too. MINECRAFT, LEGO WORLDS, and ROBLOX are essentially tech iterations of the same needs satisfied by the likes of CRAYOLA and PLAY-DOH.

MARIO KART also wins kids' hearts, but it falls behind hands-on toy brands like NERF and ADDICTIVE FIDGET SPINNERS that don't require a screen. Of the various apps and games, it's not a coincidence that MARIO KART requires a physical steering wheel and movement beyond a finger tap or button press.

Several cross-category IPs also make the Top 25 list of playthings, starting with Universal's MINIONS and followed by several Disney/Marvel brands like THE INCREDIBLES, THE AVENGERS, and COCO. Each has felt the lift of a theatrical release in the past year—a reminder that toys benefit from entertainment support.

The classic UNO card game just makes it into kids' Top 25 play brands. It's a simple, old-school game that creates family fun and connections at a time when parents and kids seek more of each other. Like CRAYOLA, IPAD, MINIONS, ELMER'S, PLAY-DOH, COCO and SHARPIE, the brand fares better among girls.

CRACKING THE CODE

Kids learn to code with Wonder Workshop's Dot, Dash, and Cue robots and apps

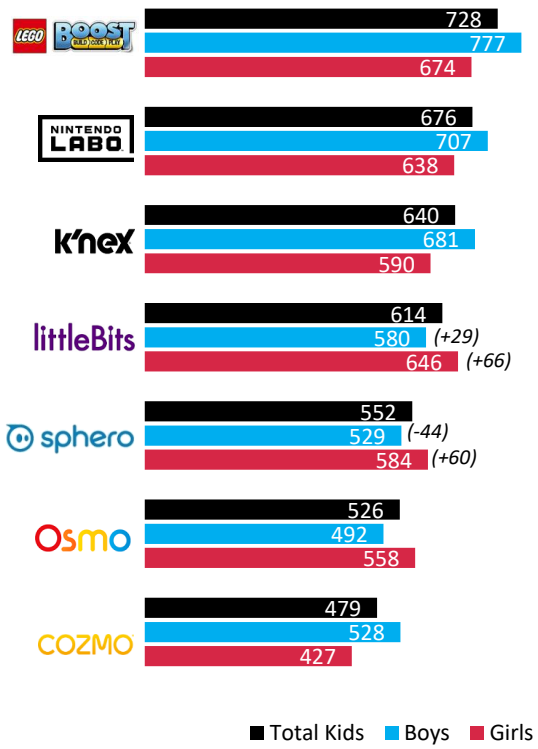
PLAY WITH PURPOSE

Businesses and educators have stressed the importance of kids learning STEM/STEAM skills for more than a decade. In response, toy makers have brought dozens of tech-driven, educational playthings to shelves and to mailboxes. Coding and robotics toys continue to move toward mainstream, STEM toy subscription services have multiplied, and the educational toys market as a whole is expected to grow 10% by 2021.* AMAZON's Holiday Toy List for 2018 is flooded with educational toys—from robots to construction sets to science labs—and many of today's most popular toys are erasing the lines between learning and classic play.

> *"Manufacturers are witnessing a gradual shift in consumer preferences from conventional toys, such as action figures and dolls, to toy robots, drones and circuits."*
>
> -Jhansi Mary, lead analyst at Technavio

**Source: Technavio*

KIDFINITY OF SELECT STEM TOYS, BY GENDER, 2018



Base: Kids 6-12 (Values on right) reflect change since 2017

POO, GOO AND EWWW

36 collectible Poopeez are designed to be flushed so kids can "watch them fly"

A YEAR OF POTTY TALK

Kids have always been curious about the human body. There's a timeless wonder with all its functions, and a giddiness that comes with talking about them. Adults teach kids that "potty talk" and "bathroom words" are taboo and private, so the benign rebellion of mentioning them—and creating play around them—is quite rewarding and thrilling to kids.

It may not be a coincidence that in a year filled with "heavy" adult content and discussions, manufacturers are leveraging kids' timeless fascination with body processes with countless products that offer silly, innocent moments for kids to be kids.

Whether it's poop or pee, boogers or farts, pimples or puke, toy makers and content creators are diving head-first into all things body gross in 2018. Though gross toys have been around for decades, there's a clear spike in the fad across categories this year—and some companies have taken things to a whole new level. Look no further than Mattel's Flushin' Frenzy.

For a kid, the smiling turd from the Flushin' Frenzy game is pretty hilarious

SO POOP-ULAR

Likely building on the popularity of the poop emoji, poo has become a central theme in countless toys and games in 2018. From board games to collectibles to plush toys, loads of "number two"-inspired toys are flying off the shelves.

Hasbro's Don't Step In It! has kids walking blindfolded across a mat as they try to avoid stepping in brown clay molded into the shape of poop. The toyco's Toilet Trouble game fills kids with suspense as they take turns unrolling the toilet paper, flushing the handle and hoping they aren't the one to get sprayed with

toilet water. Flushin' Frenzy supplies players with a toilet and plunger so they can take turns plunging until the smiling poop character flies out of the tank. Alex Brands offers a similar game called Plunge It!. And Cardinal has a hot potato-like tossing game called Pass the Poop.

Bathroom-based play has become more common in 2018 as leading manufacturers roll out more toilet- and poop-inspired games

Beyond games, there are plenty of soft, squishy, sticky, faux fecal matter toys in 2018. Hog Wild's Sticky the Poo is a squishy poop character (which comes in a rainbow unicorn option) that can be squeezed for fun or thrown against any flat surface to land with a splat. Popular slow rising foam squishies come in all shapes and sizes of poop, or of the classic brown emoji-inspired variety. YoYa Toys' colorful DNA Poopy Faces squishies are marketed as playful stress relievers. And for those who want to make their own silly, poop-themed characters? No problem. Kids can opt for the

Poop has made it's way into playthings that kids can squeeze, manipulate and create. Products like DNA Poopy Faces are billed as therapeutic for those with ADHD, anxiety and autism

newly released PLAY-DOH Poop Troop Playset or the Poopsie Slime Surprise for creating glittery unicorn poop.

Two of many DIY poop-creating product offerings at retail

The fad doesn't stop there. Toy makers are leveraging the popularity of collectibles and inspiring kids to pile up the poo this year.

Spin Master offers young collectors the FLUSH FORCE line of figures: mutant characters that emerge from a little plastic toilet when filled with water. Supported by short videos that introduce characters like Crocobiile and Dung Digger, the 150+ collectible Flushies—including rare and super rare—FLUSH FORCE Collect-a-bowls are full of surprises.

The FLUSH FORCE site invites kids to the "potty" with a hook that reads: "Toxic sludge has mutated everything in the sewer! Now the FLUSH FORCE is coming up your toilets to attack! It's up to you to collect them all and Flush them back!"

Basic Fun's collectible POOPEEZ figures are also making a splash. Based on a popular YOUTUBE cartoon series, characters with names like Lil' Squirt, Skid Mark, and Toot Fairy come in toilet paper capsules, multi-packs, and as part of playsets. The squishy tiny turds also double as pencil toppers!

YOUTUBE-supported POOPEEZ reminds kids to "get this potty started" with poop-based collectibles

THANK YOU!

SMARTY PANTS® is an award-winning, Insights Association-certified, market research consultancy. The woman-owned firm provides best-in-class qualitative and quantitative research and strategic consulting to corporations, agencies and not-for-profit organizations around the globe. The Smarty Pants team of research and strategy experts excels at gathering youth and family insights and helping clients translate those insights into smarter products, programs, and communications.

Based in Tennessee, the company has offices in New York, Boston, San Diego, Tampa, Myrtle Beach, London, Prague, Shanghai and Mexico City.

For more information
203.847.5766
www.askSmartyPants.com

SMARTY PANTS
curious minds. clever solutions.