

Sizing the mobile messaging app opportunity for marketers

Article

Mobile messaging app adoption accelerated in 2020, particularly in the early months of the pandemic, as housebound consumers sought out ways to stay connected with friends and family. User growth will be slower in 2021 but is still higher than we anticipated in our pre-pandemic forecast. The introduction of new functionalities, from interactive features and video calling to commerce and payments, continue to entice people to messaging platforms.

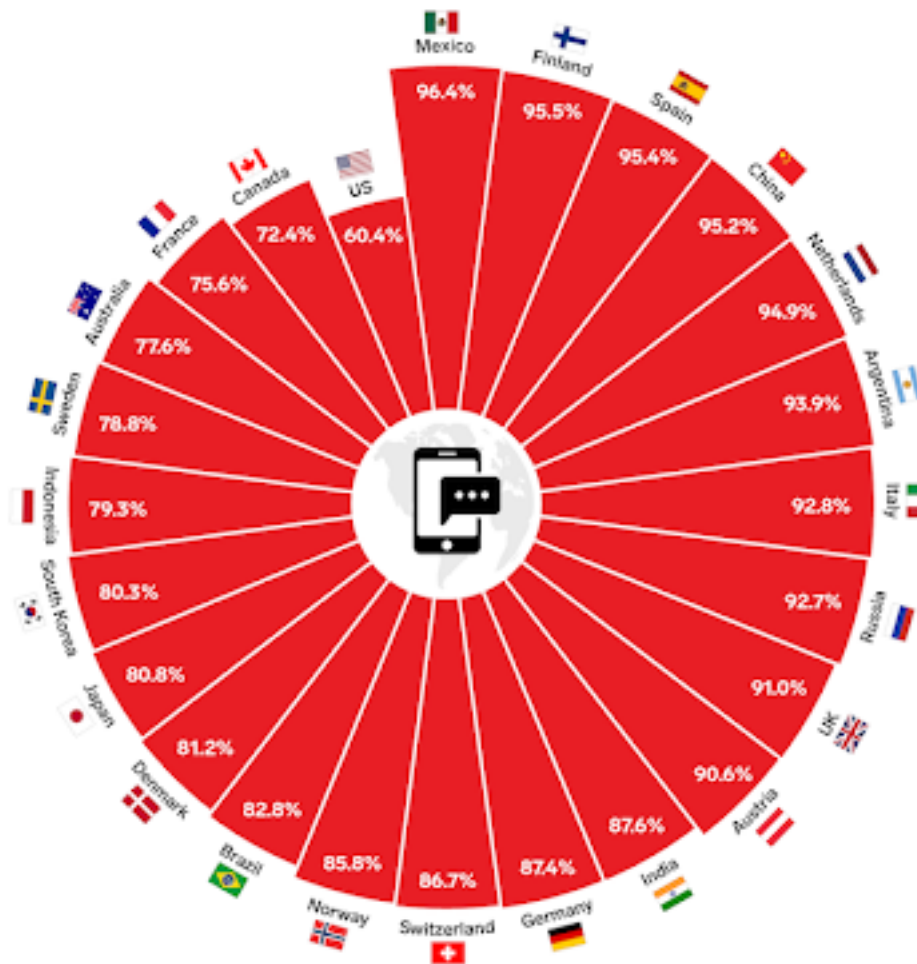
In 2021, the number of monthly messaging app users worldwide will rise by 6.1% to 3.09 billion. That's a deceleration in growth from 2020, when the number of users rose by nearly 14%. But it's an increase from our pre-pandemic estimate, when we expected 5.5% growth in 2021 to 2.9 billion people.

More than three-fourths of internet users worldwide will use a messaging app monthly by 2024. The stronger-than-anticipated growth has led the market to reach that milestone at least five years earlier than we predicted in our pre-pandemic forecast.

Messaging app usage is close to ubiquitous among mobile internet users in every country we track, except the US. In 10 of the countries we track, over 90% of mobile internet users use messaging apps. In another 12 countries, monthly usage averages around 75% or more. Usage is lower (60.4%) among mobile internet users in the US because of the prevalence of free, unlimited SMS messaging and widespread iPhone usage. (Nearly half of US smartphone users have iPhones, according to our forecast.)

Mobile Phone Messaging App Users, by Country, 2021

% of mobile phone internet users



Note: mobile phone users of any age who use an over-the-top (OTT) messaging app via mobile phone (browser or app) at least once per month; examples include Facebook Messenger, Line, Snapchat, WeChat and WhatsApp; excludes anonymous social sharing apps (e.g., Whisper, Yik Yak, etc.), social networking apps that offer private messaging capabilities as a secondary feature (e.g., Instagram, Twitter), and apps that solely provide OTT voice/video calling. Methodology: Estimates are based on the analysis of survey and traffic data from research firms and regulatory agencies, the growth trajectory of major mobile messaging apps, historical trends, internet and mobile adoption trends, and country-specific demographic and socioeconomic factors.

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WhatsApp's user growth is decelerating in most countries we track, and its botched privacy update earlier this year is to blame. When the app pinged users in January to accept its new privacy terms, many interpreted that parent company Facebook would now be able to read users' messages and listen in on calls. While this ultimately didn't cause a mass exodus from WhatsApp, we do predict it'll mean a slowdown in user growth in nearly every country we track in 2021.

In nearly all countries for which we forecast users, Messenger user growth will slow or decline as Facebook's user base contracts. The strongest declines will be in Japan and South Korea, where Facebook has been losing users for the past several years. Even India will experience a decline in 2021, after posting the strongest growth worldwide last year.

For more on messaging, read our Global Messaging Forecast Report.

Report by Jasmine Enberg Sep 13, 2021

Global Mobile Messaging Forecast 2021

