

The Daily: Young people's internet habits, 20-somethings saying 'no' to TikTok, and will a new TikTok ban pass?

Audio



On today's podcast episode, we discuss how young Gen Zers differ from older Gen Zers, the numbers that tell the story of teens' social media use, and how teens and parents approach screen time. "In Other News," we talk about whether 20-somethings saying "no" to TikTok is a big deal and whether a new push to ban TikTok is for real this time. Tune in to the discussion with our analysts Jasmine Enberg and Paola Flores-Marquez.

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Episode Transcript:

Marcus Johnson:

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Jasmine Enberg:

But that really doesn't paint the full picture. It's a really important part of teens digital lives. It's their favorite platform and it really is where they're spending a lot of their time, even if the average age of a user is older than that.

Marcus Johnson:

Hey, gang, it's Monday, March 18th. Paola, Jasmine, and listeners, welcome to Behind the Numbers Daily, an eMarketer podcast made possible by Nielsen. I'm Marcus. Today I'm joined by two folks, one of them is our demographics analyst based in New York, the city version. It's Paola Flores-Marquez.

Paola Flores-Marquez:

Hello.

Marcus Johnson:

Hello there. We're also joined by our principal analyst who covers all things social media based in California, it's Jasmine Enberg.

Jasmine Enberg:

Hey, Marcus. Hey everyone.

Marcus Johnson:

Hello there. Today we're talking about how young people are using the internet, but we start with today's fact. The oldest continuously running hotel in the world started when?

Jasmine Enberg:

I have no idea, but I like this fact already.

Marcus Johnson:

It's a good one. They're all good. Who are we kidding? Some of them are good, most [inaudible 00:01:30]-

Paola Flores-Marquez:

I'm going to guess that it's some tiny little pub with a boarding room somewhere in England. So I'm going to say somewhere in the 1500s, maybe.

Marcus Johnson:

Close. It's not really close. You've got about 800 years further back to go before you get to... Let me say this right, the Nishiyama Onsen Keiunkan, which is a Japanese resort not far from Mount Fuji, which has been in business since 705 AD.

Jasmine Enberg:

Wow.

Marcus Johnson:

According to the Guinness World Records, Andrea Romano of Travel and leisure notes that the hotel has been passed down, this is remarkable, within the same family for 52 generations.

Jasmine Enberg:

That's incredible.

Marcus Johnson:

Yeah.

Paola Flores-Marquez:

Oh, wow.

Marcus Johnson:

So for over 1,300 years, historical Samurai, to A-list celebrities and politicians, to ordinary folks have been going there to stay and visit the natural crystal clear hot water baths. The hotel has 37 rooms priced about 400 a night.

Paola Flores-Marquez:

There's a hotel that's as old as the millennium. That's wild.

Jasmine Enberg:

That is a very reasonable price. I was expecting it to be much more than that.

Marcus Johnson:

Especially with just 37 rooms. That's my vacation sorted. I'm kidding, I can't afford that. Anyway, today's real topic, young people's internet habits. In today's episode, first in the lead, we'll cover how young folks use the internet. Then for another news, we'll discuss whether 20 somethings are maybe leaving TikTok and the likelihood of a TikTok ban as well. And no, you're not listening to an episode from 2020. This is a new potential ban. We start with the lead, and we're talking about young people, mainly Gen Z people, but some kids as well. So we'll kind of flip back and forth. We're talking about how they're using the internet, how the behavior is different from one another because Gen Z is a big age range. I believe... What are we at now, 12 to 27, ballpark? I think that's the age range.

Paola Flores-Marquez:

Yeah, 12 to 26 is the last time I checked, but my math might be old.

Marcus Johnson:

Okay, 12 to 26, so around there. It's a big difference between a 12-year-old and a 26-year-old. So there's a variety within the generation. And then we'll look at their social media use, and then we'll look at how parents, their parents come into the equation. But we start with looking at what's one major way that young Gen Z folks internet habits do differ from older Gen Z folks, Paol.

Paola Flores-Marquez:

Currently we're seeing more younger Gen Z folks on Snapchat than older Gen Z folks. I think Snapchat offers a modicum of privacy with its disappearing messages, particularly when we talk about how closely their parents track their phones and check their phones. So that could be one option. We've also seen in our data that they're more likely to use Snapchat for stories as well in addition to communication. So that's another aspect of that.

Marcus Johnson:

Okay, so Snapchat their preferred platform-

Paola Flores-Marquez:

I wouldn't say it's their preferred, but I'll say they'll use it at higher rates than-

Marcus Johnson:

Oh, interesting.

Paola Flores-Marquez:

... Older Gen Z.

Marcus Johnson:

Good distinction.

Paola Flores-Marquez:

Yes, so they're more likely to use it for communication, whereas older Gen Z will use Instagram.

Marcus Johnson:

Okay. So it might be their third favorite, for argument's sake, with 30% versus older Gen Z, it might be their third favorite, but with like 10%.

Paola Flores-Marquez:

Yes, penetration is higher amongst younger-

Marcus Johnson:

Okay. Jasmine, what about for you? What stands out to you when you look at these younger cohorts and the differences between the younger, younger ones and the younger, slightly older ones?

Jasmine Enberg:

Yeah, so I just wrote a report, it looked more at Gen Alpha versus Gen Z, rather than the differentiation between Gen Z. Although you're really smart to ask that question because, again, you're right that a 12-year-old is going to use social media very differently than a 26-year-old. But so Gen Alpha generally are defined as zero to 11 year olds. And the reason I wrote this report was really because of all of the momentum that we saw in Congress recently, and among consumers about protecting young people online. And so I started researching how are they actually behaving on social media? And the big thing that stood out to me was

just how important YouTube is to young kid's social media lives and digital lives overall. So it's about 97% of zero to 11 year olds who will use YouTube at least once a month this year.

And that is well ahead of any of the other social platforms. Of course, most of them have a 13 plus age limit. Doesn't necessarily mean there aren't any kids who are younger than that on those platforms, but YouTube certainly has a stronghold among zero to 11 year olds. And one of the pieces of research that also really stood out to me was about how frequently those zero to... I think it was zero to 12 year olds or two to 12 year olds are influenced by commercials they see on YouTube versus other platforms. So it's just furthering the argument that YouTube really plays an integral part in their lives.

Marcus Johnson:

Yeah, it was a chasm, wasn't it? Between asking where do you see ads? And YouTube was so far ahead. A second place, I can't even remember it, because it was almost like joint second with everything else, because YouTube was so far out in front.

Paola Flores-Marquez:

I will also say that that chasm is reflected in their tablet use as well. Their adoption of tablets is so much higher, and it goes hand in hand with that.

Jasmine Enberg:

Absolutely. And tablets make it really easy for parents to just give their kids something to do when they're out at a restaurant or need them to be entertained. And YouTube, because it has such a wide library of free children's content. And it also has a kid's version, not saying that all the kids are using it, but it definitely has a kid's version that really makes it a top choice for parents when they're trying to entertain their kids. And interestingly, it's also led some of the streamers to kind of cut back on their kids programming as a result.

Marcus Johnson:

You mentioned more and more voices calling for the protection of kids online. It does seem like the tide is turning. Jasmine, you had a stat in your report which leapt out to me, almost all, 90% of US adults believe social media is extremely, very, or somewhat harmful to children and adolescents. That's from October of last year's civic science survey. Looking at social media use though, focusing more on teens for this question, we're going to play story by numbers, a segment we play in our banking and payment show where we look at a couple of numbers that

help us tell the story of a certain thing. And this is going to be telling the story of teen social media usage. So I'll start with one from you, Jasmine, then we'll go to Paol for her first, and then we'll pivot back. Jasmine, what's your first number in terms of something that tells the story of teen social media usage?

Jasmine Enberg:

So my first one is from Gallup and Institute for Family Studies, and it's cited in my report, and it's that 88% of teens who use social media for more than four hours a day do so for entertainment. And it's also the top choice for teens who use social media less frequently throughout the day as well. And I think this ties in really well to what you just brought up, which is that so many people believe that social media is harmful to children and adolescents, and it certainly can be. There are really traumatic stories about the harm that social media has caused, but it can also do a lot of good. And most teens on there, just like most social users overall, aren't there to engage in combative or inappropriate ways, they really are there to be entertained. And it's also really reflective of the shift that we've seen in social media overall from this idea of it being a place where you network, to a place where you're consuming content.

Marcus Johnson:

Yep, Yep. Absolutely. More social entertainment than anything. Paola, what's your first number?

Paola Flores-Marquez:

So my first number is that almost 30% of US teens spend more than six hours on social media, tying into Jasmine's point.

Marcus Johnson:

Per day, or per year?

Paola Flores-Marquez:

Daily time spent with social media.

Marcus Johnson:

Jesus.

Paola Flores-Marquez:

Yeah, that's a lot of time. Less than 10% spend less than an hour, so everyone else kind of falls in between those two numbers. That's a lot of time spent. So that's my first number. And then my second number...

Marcus Johnson:

Tell me.

Paola Flores-Marquez:

So I did a little bit more digging into that to think about how it worked demographically. And I found that social media usage is higher among teens from lower income households. So 71% on TikTok versus like 61%, which is not... It is a difference, but not as massive of a difference. But I think we can think about going to the movies is expensive, going out to dinner is expensive. So there are a lot of limitations that are being put on teens in addition to the effects of the pandemic creating more social spaces online. So I think that's all compounding to funnel more teens in that economic bracket in that direction.

Marcus Johnson:

All right, Jasmine, what's your second number?

Jasmine Enberg:

My second number is from Piper Sandler, and it's that 38% of us teens consider TikTok to be their favorite platform. And this one stood out to me because during the January 31st senate hearing on protecting children online, TikTok CEO of course argued that TikTok was primarily a place for adults and said that the average age of a TikTok user is over 30. And that certainly could be true, we predict that about 81% of monthly TikTok users here in the US will be 18 or older this year. But that really doesn't paint the full picture. It's a really important part of teens digital lives, it's their favorite platform, and it really is where they're spending a lot of their time, even if the average age of a user is older than that.

Marcus Johnson:

So I've got two numbers quickly. One was looking at YouTube in terms of teens, this is 13 to 17 year old's, favorite platform. So YouTube, 93% of teens use YouTube according to Pew Research, so nearly everyone. And then in this study, TikTok was in a pretty distant second

place. I'm wondering, Jasmine, when Neal Mohan, CEO of YouTube, is going to have to go before the Senate committee hearing.

Jasmine Enberg:

So that was my big question, and it was something that the other executives raised too, because he was notably absent from the hearing as were device makers like Apple, and all of these companies really do play a role in terms of protecting kids and teens online. I think one of the things that has helped allay some lawmaker concerns around YouTube is the fact that, A, it has a kid's version. Again, it's not perfect, but it certainly can help. And I think the overall takeaway for me is that it's not about the size of the audience, it's really about the influence that a platform has and its algorithms and content recommendation systems, as well as other issues like TikTok, of course, and its connection to China. But yeah, it's a big question. And I'm wondering too, when he'll be called to testify in front of Congress.

Marcus Johnson:

Alongside the... Because they had the bosses of Facebook, or let's say Meta, [inaudible 00:12:49] Facebook, Instagram. TikTok, Snap, X, were all there, but head of YouTube notably absent. The second number I had real quick was basically showing that they never switch off, nearly half, 46% of teens say they're online almost constantly, that's nearly half. The other half say they're online several times a day. So it's not like they're offline by any stretch

Jasmine Enberg:

Online overall, or on social media?

Marcus Johnson:

This was online, these numbers were just online, not on social media.

Jasmine Enberg:

Wow.

Marcus Johnson:

All right. Let's look at how parents come into the equation. Pew Research Center just put out a study on how teens and parents approach screen time. As I mentioned, nearly half of these young people say they're online almost constantly. But this new study looks at how young

people are navigating this always on environment. One of the key findings was that around 73% of US teens said they often or sometimes felt happy or peaceful when they don't have their smartphones, versus around 40% who said having their device made them feel anxious, upset, or lonely. But Paola, I'll start with you, what to you is most interesting finding from this research from Pew about how teens and parents approach screen time?

Paola Flores-Marquez:

I think the one that stood out for me is that nearly half of teens, about 48% say that their parent is at least sometimes distracted by their phone when they're trying to talk to them.

Marcus Johnson:

Same, I also wrote that one down, 46%.

Paola Flores-Marquez:

Yeah. I think it's indicative of how addicted all of us are to our phones regardless of age.

Jasmine Enberg:

Absolutely.

Marcus Johnson:

What was staggering about that though is it's more... That was a lot more than parents saying that teens were distracted when trying to talk to them.

Paola Flores-Marquez:

And it noted that they frequently argue in both directions. Parents get on teens and teens get on parents about it.

Marcus Johnson:

Yeah, that's a heartbreaking one.

Paola Flores-Marquez:

And also, as someone of Mexican descent, I thought it was really interesting that Latino families are more likely to argue about it, and that tracks, culturally that tracks.

Marcus Johnson:

[inaudible 00:14:44]. Jasmine, what stood out to you?

Jasmine Enberg:

I got to say, I do frequently have that argument with my mom too. But mine was kind of similar. I noted that one as well, but I'll say the other one that was interesting to me, which was about parental snooping. And half of parents say they have looked through their teen's phone. I'm certainly not a proponent of parents spying on their children or anyone spying on anybody, but it just stood out to me because there really is a role that parents need to play as well, in protecting kids and what they do online. And one of the things I think about is when I first signed up for, and I'm going to age myself now, but MySpace, and a Finnish social network called [foreign language 00:15:22], which no longer exists, that was very similar to Instagram back in the day. My parents just had no idea what it was, what I was doing, or even really how to help me navigate the world of social media and social networking.

And maybe I'm naive, but my hope is that as generations who do understand a little bit more about social media have children, maybe they'll be better equipped to help their kids navigate these waters.

Marcus Johnson:

Are we surprised? I'm surprised there's not some kind of a... Maybe civics is the wrong word, but some kind of a digital usage, wellness, whatever class in schools.

Paola Flores-Marquez:

Yeah. We had computer classes in school, so I'm also very surprised that that's not a component of it.

Marcus Johnson:

What to watch out for, how to use it, what it can do to you.

Jasmine Enberg:

So actually in Finland, they have incorporated that into classrooms.

Marcus Johnson:

Oh, interesting.

Jasmine Enberg:

And a lot of it has to do with understanding how to detect good information and bad information online.

Paola Flores-Marquez:

That's wonderful.

Jasmine Enberg:

And it has to do with media literacy. And I remember a few years ago, I know Facebook tried to... Or did actually put together some media literacy courses, they didn't do very well. But I do think that here too in schools, we should be teaching students how to use social media and technology overall as a tool to build, rather than destroy.

Marcus Johnson:

Trust Finland, there's a reason they're top of the rankings in education every single year. Jasmine's full report is called Youth and Social Media, How US Kids and Teens use Platforms from TikTok to Snapchat to YouTube. And there's a ton in there including implications for marketers and the platforms, which we didn't have time to get to, but there's a bunch in there on that topic as well. Pro plus subscribers can head to [emarketer.com](https://www.emarketer.com). Link is of course in the show notes. We move to the fourth quarter of the show today, in other news, why some 20 somethings are saying no to TikTok, and is the new push to ban TikTok for real?

Story one, why some 20 somethings are saying no to TikTok. "The latest trend: quitting the app to focus more on life and work," writes Julie Jargon of The Journal. She believes that the 20 somethings she interviewed aren't outliers, as they told her many of their friends have also deleted the app or scaled back their use in recent months. Ms. Jargon goes on to cite data.ai numbers supporting her point saying, "TikTok's US average monthly users, between the ages of 18 and 24, fell nearly 9% from 2022 to 2023." But, Paola, 20 somethings are saying no to TikTok, apparently. Is this something or nothing?

Paola Flores-Marquez:

I think it's something, but not enough to really make a major difference. There's some civic science data a while back, last summer, that demonstrated that adult Gen Z'ers, 18 to 24, are the most likely of any generation to take a break from social media, but their breaks are really

short compared to everyone else's. It's like, they do want to take breaks, but I think it speaks to how central a lot of these apps have become to their social lives and how integral they are to organizing and communicating and sharing these moments with their friends. So even if they want to break away, it's logistically difficult for them, I would say.

Marcus Johnson:

Yes, if you take a break from something, you step back for a week, a month, whatever, when you look back where all of your friends are, if they're still in that same forum, you're probably going to go back because to your point, that's where they hang out now. I looked at our numbers, penetration has slowed way down, but it's still very high and it's still technically going up. So our numbers estimate that 78% of smartphone users 18 to 24 years old use TikTok. Next year, 79, then 80, then 81. But it is the second-lowest growth of any age category, around 1.5% each year, but that's mainly because it's basically everyone in that age category. Story two. "Is the new push to ban TikTok for real?" Questions Nicole Narea of Vox. A bill to ban the short form video app was just passed in the US house last week called The Protecting Americans from Foreign Adversary Controlled Applications Act.

Because TikTok is owned by ByteDance, a Chinese company, and some in the US government think the Chinese government could use TikTok data against them. President Biden is on board. He said, "If they pass it, I'll sign it." It should also be noted that the President is currently using TikTok after joining last month to court young voters. TikTok responded by telling its users to call their members of Congress in protest, saying it would infringe on their constitutional right to free expression and harm businesses and creators across the US, Ms. Narea notes. So Jasmine, the likelihood of TikTok getting banned this time around is how much out of 10?

Jasmine Enberg:

It's hard to put a number on it, but I will give it about a three out of 10.

Marcus Johnson:

Okay. So [inaudible 00:20:22]-

Jasmine Enberg:

Really, I would've given it a percentage and I would've given it about 25%.

Marcus Johnson:

Okay. You can give a percentage too, 2.5 out of 10, done. How come?

Jasmine Enberg:

So there is a lot more momentum around this bill, and it's moved really swiftly through the house. It still faces a lot of challenges. It has to make its way through the Senate. And so there's a lot of ifs and a lot of steps it still needs to take in order for this to become a law. And it's also really important to note that this isn't a TikTok ban per se. The bill is trying to force a divestiture of TikTok, and if it doesn't do that, then it would face a ban here in the US. What I think is really interesting is, of course, this isn't TikTok's first rodeo, so it has its game plan down. It mobilized users, it mobilized creators who have been the loudest voices in opposition of this bill. And I'm going to repeat something I said in March 2023, exactly a year ago when we were talking about that potential TikTok ban.

And that is that it's a complicated situation for TikTok, right? Because on the one hand it wants to show how important it is to US consumers and the US economy. But demonstrating that also confirms what a lot of the proponents of the bill are saying, which is that TikTok has massive influence over the American public.

Marcus Johnson:

Yeah. Yes, a fine line to walk. What happens next? As Jasmine pointed out, the bill will now have to get through the Senate and then could also face legal challenges in the courts. If ByteDance is forced to sell TikTok, the Chinese government would have to approve it as well on their side. They would then have a bit of time, maybe six months or so to get the deal done. And by that time, Mr. Trump could be President again. And this time he says he opposes the bill, whereas before he was saying that he would ban it when he was in office. And finally, there are also large US investors in TikTok who are likely to turn on a lobbying offensive.

Jasmine Enberg:

And let's not forget that Trump was the first one, really, to try to force the sale of TikTok back in 2020 and that fell through.

Marcus Johnson:

Yes. Yes, we've definitely been here before. Ms. Narea of Vox also pointing out the federal court recently overturned a Montana law that sought to ban TikTok, so at a state level.

Paola Flores-Marquez:

I agree. I think they're not going to risk angering a vital voting segment in an election year that's already kind of disgruntled over a lack of student loan forgiveness, US involvement in foreign wars. They're not going to exacerbate that by taking away a popular social media platform. The other question of, yeah, they're not going to try to anger those voters, but whether or not those voters go to the polls is a different story.

Marcus Johnson:

Yeah, good point. That's all we've got time for, for this episode. Thank you so much to my guests, thank you to Paola.

Paola Flores-Marquez:

Thanks, Marcus.

Marcus Johnson:

Thank you to Jasmine.

Jasmine Enberg:

Thank you, Marcus. Thanks everyone.

Marcus Johnson:

And thanks to Victoria who edits the show. James, who copy edits it. Stewart runs the team, and Sophie does our social media. Thanks to everyone for listening in. We hope to see you tomorrow for the Behind the Numbers Daily, an E-Marketer podcast made possible by Nielsen.