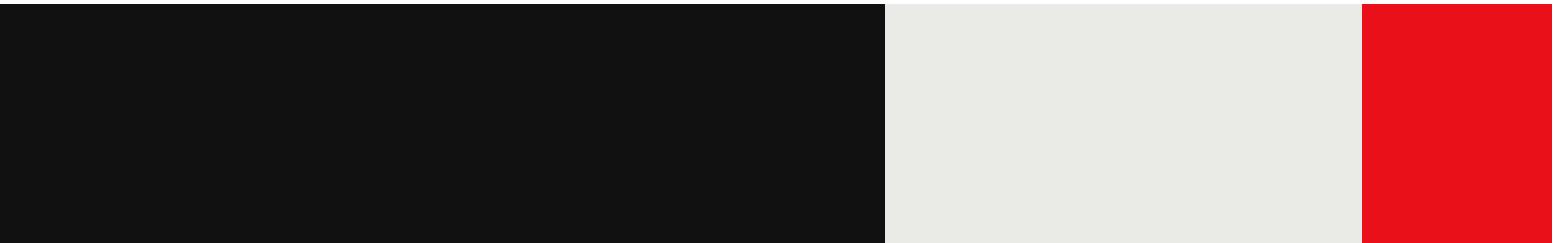


Teens' social media and screen time usage remains an unsolved digital dilemma

Article



The numbers: A staggering 60% of American teenagers spend 4 or more hours every day on social media, with nearly [a third \(29.5%\) logging 6-plus hours daily](#), according to one

study. That means many teens are spending more time on social media than in school classrooms.

- Sapient Labs' study of 27,000 young adults found that 74% of young women who received devices at age 6 faced mental health challenges, versus 46% who waited until age 18.
- Social media adoption accelerates sharply in early adolescence, with **TikTok**, **Snapchat**, and **Instagram** reaching 43%, 33%, and 30% of children ages 11 to 14, respectively. These are all critical developmental years.
- 80% of children and teens have YouTube accounts, 59% use TikTok, and 90% have smartphones, nearly matching adult usage at 98%.

Is this a problem? Most agree that kids' screen usage and social addiction are a problem but disagree on its scope, or who should be responsible for addressing it.

- Parents play a significant role in online safety, with 73.5% claiming primary responsibility while just 8.7% believe social media companies should protect children online. Digital publishers, ISPs, and children themselves rank even lower at under 5% each.
- Adults' perception of social media risks varies significantly by age. CivicScience's October 2023 data shows 14% of Gen Z (18 to 24) view social media as “extremely harmful/dangerous,” versus 36% of Gen X (45 to 54), with 34% of all adults rating it “very harmful.”
- This diffusion of responsibility comes as teens themselves acknowledge the issue. A Pew Research Center study from March 2024 found that 38% of teens admit to spending too much time on their smartphones.

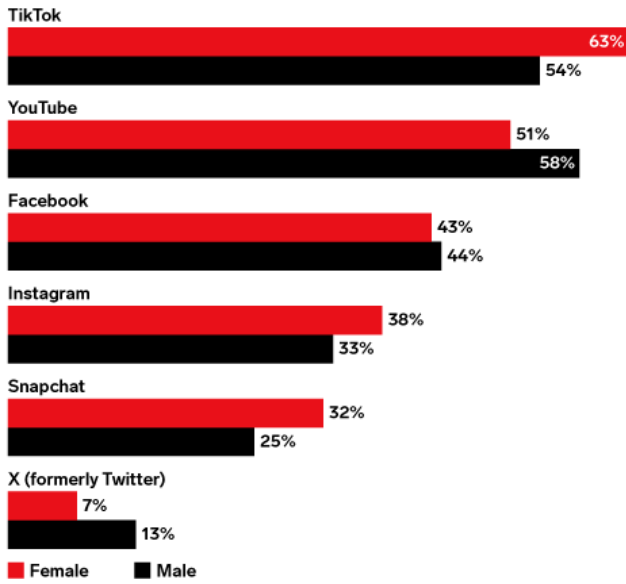
What can be done: Though technology itself isn't the problem, how and when children use it can affect their development. There are viable solutions. The American Academy of Pediatrics **suggests parents wait until age 13 to give children smartphones**, while parents group Wait Until 8th advocates for 8th grade, citing benefits like better sleep and reduced anxiety.

- **Kids themselves seem to want more meaningful digital experiences.** Over half of children ages 9 to 13 prefer games and apps that teach useful skills over purely entertainment-focused content, suggesting young people aren't necessarily seeking endless scrolling and social validation but look for purposeful engagement and learning opportunities.

- **Parents and educators can model better digital habits with their own behavior.** As digital engagement influences younger people, with teens spending the equivalent of a part-time job on social media and evidence linking that exposure to mental health challenges, finding this balance becomes increasingly urgent.

US Teens Favorite Apps, by Gender, June 2024

% of respondents



Note: ages 13-17

Source: Precise TV and Giraffe Insights, "The complete picture of media consumption for US Gen Z Teens," Sep 5, 2024

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