

Instagram needs younger users, but new teen safety controls won't help

Article

The news: Instagram **announced** new tools Tuesday aimed at keeping teenagers on the platform safe, including parental controls and restrictions on public-facing teen accounts.

- The controls include the ability to set time limits on scrolling and a teen-to-parent reporting system.

- Additionally, accounts that a teen doesn't follow aren't allowed to tag them in posts, and there are stricter limits on recommendations for teens in Search, Explore, and other algorithm-driven parts of the site.

How we got here: The tools are likely a response to the scathing “Facebook Files” exposé published by The Wall Street Journal in September, which included a **report** showing Instagram executives were aware of the platform's damaging effects on teen girls' mental health.

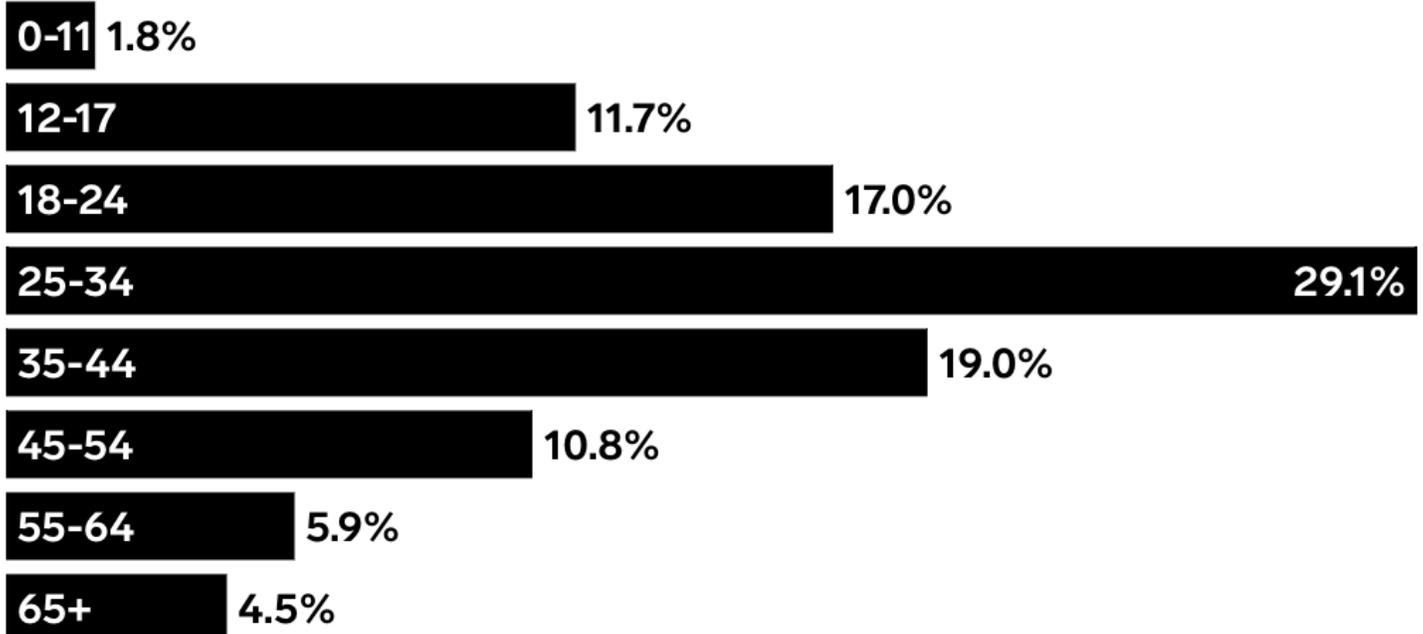
- Since then, Instagram has been in crisis mode. Executives at parent company **Meta** consider teenagers to be its “pipeline,” not just for Instagram itself but also for **Facebook**, per internal documents **seen** by The New York Times.
- The company is afraid of losing its foothold with the group, especially with the rise of competitors like **TikTok** and **Snapchat**.

What this means: Though the tools are a positive step, they will likely do little to reverse reputational damage from the Facebook Files, which was the icing on top of an already-falling growth rate among teen users.

- Facebook has been shedding younger users for years now: Those 12 to 17 years old and 18 to 24 have dropped every year since 2016, **per** our estimates.
- While those age groups haven't begun to decrease on Instagram just yet, growth has **slowed** to a crawl: Users 12 to 17 years of age increased just **0.8% this year**, down from **22.9% five years ago**. By 2025, we expect that rate to drop to **0.2%**.
- After the Facebook Files report came out, Instagram was also pressured into suspending its upcoming “Instagram for Kids” project, which was supposed to help funnel younger users into the app. That suspension could hurt growth even more.

Instagram User Share, by Age

US, 2021, % of total



Source: eMarketer, November 2021

eMarketer | [InsiderIntelligence.com](https://www.insiderintelligence.com)

The catch-22: Parents and lawmakers may feel these tools are needed to protect teens' online privacy and mental health, but adding more limitations could make the platform even less appealing for the very users Instagram wants to attract.

Key takeaway: Instagram's privacy tools for teens are an attempt to claw back some of its reputation—and users—after the disastrous Facebook Files were released. But teen users were already on the way out in favor of younger competitors like Snapchat and TikTok, and the new tools likely won't be enough to reverse that trend.