

UKOM Insights

WhatsApp's UK Audience

Facebook recently revealed* that on New Year's Eve 100 billion messages were sent worldwide on WhatsApp with UK users sending over 900 million of them. After revealing last summer that ads were to be put in WhatsApp statuses, last week the Wall Street Journal** reported that Facebook may have put on hold plans to monetise the service through advertising. The service is also in the news*** this week as from this Saturday, 1st Feb, WhatsApp will stop working on millions of phones running old software. So how has the service been performing in terms of audience numbers? UKOM looks at the popularity and growth of WhatsApp among different demographics in the UK over the last year.

According to UKOM approved Comscore data, in 2019 WhatsApp's monthly adult audience grew by just over 3 million. In December 2018, 23 million unique visitors aged 18+ used the app on a smartphone but this had increased to over 26 million by December 2019, a growth of 13%. WhatsApp's monthly reach among UK online smartphone users is now 67% but it is 25-34year olds (73%) who are most likely to use it. Reach among females 25-34 with children rises to 80% with the service being particularly popular among mums. Although reach may be highest among 25-34s, in 2019 WhatsApp's audience grew fastest among those aged 55+. The growth rate was less than 10% among under 35s but 23% for the over 55s.

WhatsApp Messenger Mobile App					
	Unique Visitors (000s)	% Reach of Smartphone Users	UV % Change Dec 19 v Dec 18	Average Minutes/ Visitor	Ave Minutes % Change Dec 19 v Dec 18
18+	26,059	67	13	225	29
18-24	3,490	66	5	202	37
25-34	6,185	73	9	267	37
35-44	5,372	69	10	246	32
45-54	5,065	66	18	212	12
55+	5,947	63	23	187	29

Source: Comscore Mobile Metrix, Platform: All Smartphones, 18+, Dec 2019, UK.

Comscore does not report number of messages sent but 'time spent' using the app can be used as a proxy for engagement. Average time spent per month is much lower among 55+ WhatsApp users (3hrs 7 mins) compared to 25-34s (4hrs 27 mins). Although reach growth was higher among older audiences in 2019, young users are the ones driving up engagement levels. Average time spent has grown by 37% among WhatsApp users aged under 35 compared to less than 20% for adults over 45.

WhatsApp is now 2nd only to YouTube when looking at smartphone app rankings by reach in Comscore. However, the ranking of WhatsApp differs by age group.

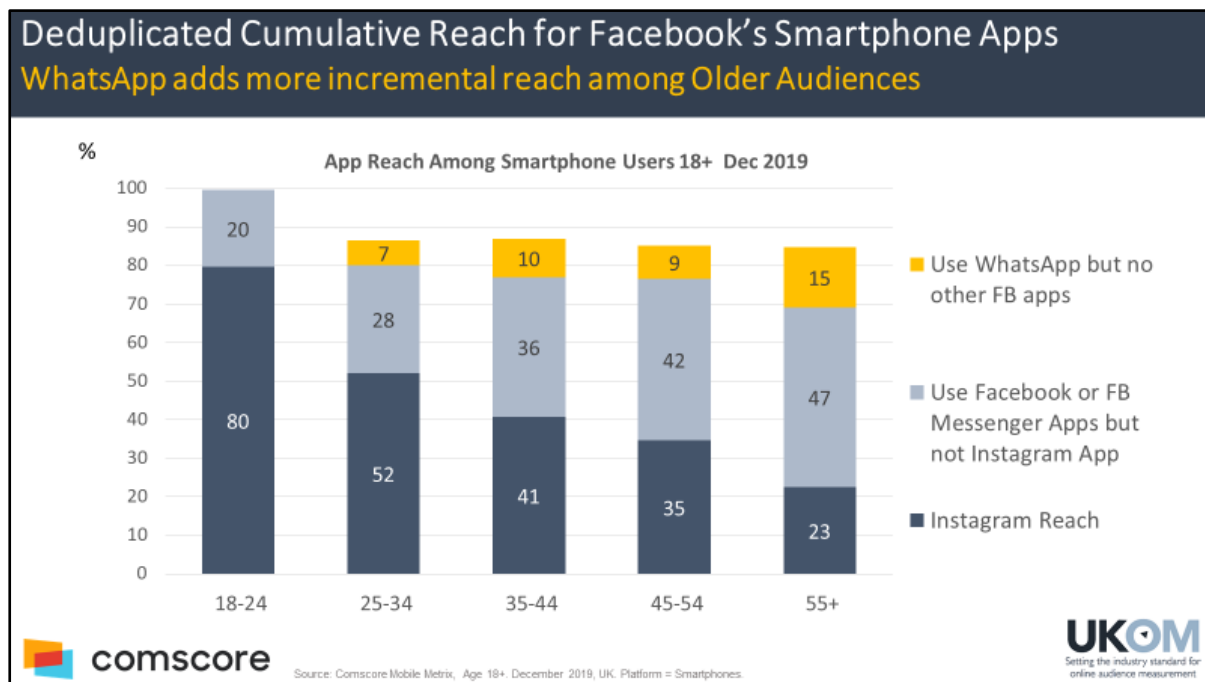
Top 3 Smartphone Apps by Reach by Age : Dec 2019										
	18-24	%	25-34	%	35-44	%	45-54	%	55+	%
1	YouTube	83	YouTube	76	YouTube	70	Facebook	68	WhatsApp	63
2	Instagram	80	WhatsApp	73	WhatsApp	69	WhatsApp	66	Google Search	63
3	Snapchat	71	Facebook	67	Facebook	67	YouTube	62	Facebook	61

Source: Comscore Mobile Metrix, Platform: All Smartphones, 18+, Dec 2019, UK

Among those aged 18-24, WhatsApp doesn't make it into the top three. YouTube, Instagram and Snapchat were most popular smartphone apps among 18-24s in Dec 2019 – reaching 83%, 80% and 71% of monthly smartphone users respectively. Facebook's Instagram app had higher reach among 18-24s than WhatsApp (66%), Facebook (56%) and Facebook Messenger (47%). However, for those aged 55+, WhatsApp is the app with the highest reach (63%), marginally ahead of Google Search (63%) and Facebook (61%). Only 23% of 55+ use the Instagram app on their smartphone and engagement among those that do is low – on average 1 hr 50 mins per month per visitor compared to 5 hrs 14 mins for 18-24s.

Audience duplication analysis in Comscore demonstrates that WhatsApp does add incremental reach to the existing Facebook smartphone apps of Facebook, Facebook Messenger and Instagram, all of which carry advertising. However, the impact varies by audience and is influenced heavily by the reach of Instagram.

Given the popularity of the Instagram app amongst younger audiences, 100% of 18-24s who use a smartphone use either the Facebook, Facebook Messenger or Instagram app so adding WhatsApp does not add reach. However, for older audiences, WhatsApp does add incremental reach – primarily since Instagram reach decreases with increasing age. For those aged 55+ WhatsApp adds 15 incremental reach % points. Nearly 1.5 million adults over 55 use WhatsApp but don't use other Facebook apps on their smartphone – either not using Facebook at all or preferring to access a browsers or tablet device.



Obviously given the large number of minutes spent on WhatsApp, adding ads in the service would have given Facebook an additional platform for increasing frequency and duration metrics for

campaigns across all audiences - assuming adding advertising wouldn't have a negative impact on usage. It remains to be seen whether Facebook have abandoned their plans to monetise the service completely or have just postponed launch.

The decision to stop support for any iPhone running software older than iOS 7 or any Android device with version 2.3.7 installed could also impact usage, particularly among older audiences who tend to be less savvy when it comes to updating software.

UKOM will follow developments and report back on any observed change in usage of the service.

Notes on Data:

All data is based on UKOM industry standard and development level approved Comscore MMX Mobile Metrix data based on Dec 2018 and Dec 2019. All analysis is undertaken on 18+ adults, Platform = All Smartphones. Base = All smartphone mobile users across both Mobile Web and App access methods.

The following mobile brands were selected in this analysis: 'WhatsApp Messenger (Mobile App -C), Facebook (Mobile App - S), Facebook Messenger (Mobile App - S) and Instagram (Mobile App - C)

*Source: <https://www.itv.com/news/2020-01-03/more-than-100-billion-messages-sent-on-whatsapp-on-new-year-s-eve-firm-says/>

**Source: <https://www.wsj.com/articles/whatsapp-backs-off-controversial-plan-to-sell-ads-11579207682>

***Source: <https://metro.co.uk/2020/01/27/whatsapp-will-stop-working-millions-peoples-phones-next-month-12021782/>