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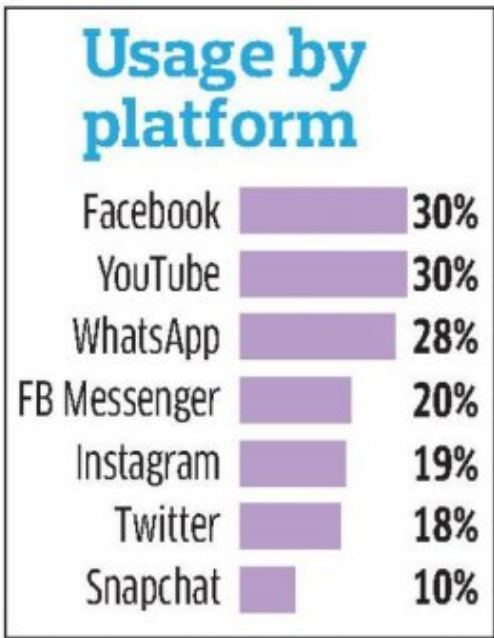
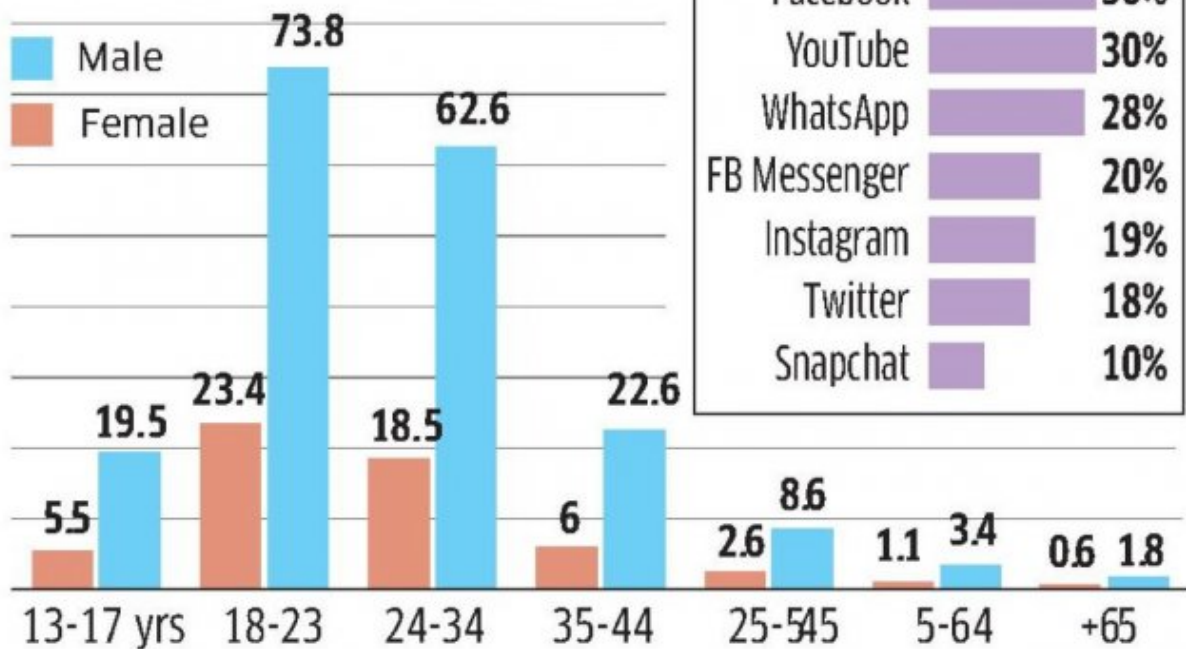
Teens susceptible to biased, opinionated digital milieu

Online addiction



Akhil Kadidal, DHNS, Bengaluru, MAY 06 2019, 10:09AM IST | UPDATED: MAY 06 2019, 10:22AM IST

Facebook users in India by age, gender (in millions)



Source: Statista (Figures from January 2018)



habitual preoccupation with online gaming, he showed no outward signs of a problem.

“He was confident and intelligent, totally convinced that he could balance the tasks of the real world with his online activities,” said Dr Manoj Kumar Sharma, who runs the cell, officially known as the Service for Healthy Use of Technology (SHUT).

Analysis of the boy’s behaviour, however, revealed that when he was not playing PUBG — an online shooter game — he was spending all his free time chatting with friends on Facebook and Instagram. The case, experts in the field said, is emblematic of a growing addiction to technology among young Indians and children.

Dr Roshan Jain, a de-addiction psychiatrist with Apollo Hospitals, who sees 10-20 people daily, said a significant number of his patients are teenagers who show behavioural problems such as aggression amid a refusal to put down devices when asked.

“What we are seeing is that there is nothing inherently wrong with children themselves and that problem has been created by parents because of an unwillingness to spend quality time with the child. Smartphones are increasingly being used as a substitute for parenting,” Dr Jain said.

Part of the negative effects of bingeing on social media or online games, is that extended usage actually reduces cognitive ability, according to Dr Sharma. “Studies have shown that bingeing not only hits cognitive ability but can also cause depression,” he said.

Padmalatha Ravi, a documentary filmmaker who runs anti-bullying programmes, compared the act of giving teens phones to placate them to the actions of parents in earlier generations who would set children in front of television screens.

“Instead of TVs, we are now using smartphones,” she said and added that social media has nevertheless had a positive influence on Indian society for the liberalising effect it has had on the parent-child dynamic.

“I grew up in an era where I, as a 15-year-old, could not even talk to my mother about things like kissing. Now, because of social media, parents in urban areas are having a more open relationship with their children,” she said.

Dr Jain disagrees. “Social media is creating a biased, opinionated environment, which young minds are more susceptible to. I think it is going to be a big problem in the future,” he said.

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