

# Have social platforms reached their peak? Pew survey shows little user growth since last year.

April 7 2021, by Terry Collins, Usa Today

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The striking short-form viral videos and images of Instagram, Snapchat, and TikTok continue to climb in popularity with Gen Z.

According to a Pew Research Center study, about 71% of 18- to 29-year-

olds say they use Instagram, compared to 65% for Snapchat and about 48% who use TikTok. The results released Wednesday are from a recent phone survey of more than 1,500 Americans conducted from Jan. 25 to Feb.8.

One social media expert, Karen North, a professor at the University of Southern California, said these apps' ongoing appeal is users can not only send texts and direct messages but also express themselves through videos and photos. She compares the experience to going to nightclubs.

"In some ways, we expect [young people](#) to find the hot new nightclub," North said. "And right now, the young crowd are going to these apps and will stay there for a little while and party until they find something new."

Another expert, Helen Wang, an associate communication professor at the University of Buffalo, agrees. She said Instagram, Snapchat and TikTok have features better tailored for this demographic. "They grew up immersed in rich media and they are naturally equipped with better digital media literacy skills to navigate across different platforms competently and nimbly," Wang said.

Overall, YouTube (81%) and Facebook (69%) remain the most widely used [social media platforms](#) as YouTube grew in popularity by 8 percent when a similar Pew survey was last conducted in 2019. The survey said Reddit also saw a 7 percentage point growth from two years ago.

Pew's latest social media findings come despite continued calls for more scrutiny and tougher regulation from the U.S. government to make major tech companies enforce moderation on their platforms by curbing hate speech, extremism, misinformation, election interference and other falsehoods.

Last week, a U.S. TODAY exclusive reported that videos pushing

QAnon and COVID vaccine conspiracies were surging on TikTok, which has about 100 million users in the U.S., despite crackdowns by the social media app. Other platforms have experienced similar problems with hoaxes and lies.

"Even though we have seen a rise in [fake news](#), misinformation, and online harassment, we don't see an exodus in people leaving these apps or platforms," said Monica Anderson, one of Pew's lead researchers of the survey.

Overall, about 72% of those surveyed say they use at least one of 11 social networks mentioned in the study. About 40% say they use Instagram, 31% use Pinterest and 28% use LinkedIn.

Meanwhile, about a quarter of the respondents say they use either Twitter, WhatsApp or TikTok. And except for Reddit, TikTok and Nextdoor, most platforms showed little growth compared to the last Pew survey conducted in 2019.

North, the USC professor, said some platforms might have reached their peak. But, she points out that Reddit's recent growth coincides with a group of small investors who joined forces on Reddit under the subreddit r/WallStreetBets, and caused the stock of struggling video game retailer GameStop to surge to nearly \$500 a share in late January.

The professor called Reddit's sudden impact "remarkable," and made her take a different perspective about the [platform](#).

"In Reddit's early days, I was a bit worried it was sketchy," North said. "But it has evolved into a really powerful set of communities where important conversations are happening, despite some questionable groups also thriving in it."

Wang, the University of Buffalo professor, said she now has a class of college freshmen volunteering to organize a "gc" (group chat) on Snapchat for classmates to help each other navigate online learning through the COVID-19 pandemic.

"So even though they might have started on these social [media](#) for fun, these [social media](#) channels can also be part of their digital toolbox and help with other purposes when needed," Wang said.

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Citation: Have social platforms reached their peak? Pew survey shows little user growth since last year. (2021, April 7) retrieved 26 April 2024 from <https://techxplore.com/news/2021-04-social-platforms-peak-pew-survey.html>

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