

'Parents killed it': why Facebook is losing its teenage users

This year more than 3 million under-25s in the UK and US are expected to leave the site

[Mark Sweney](#) and Ana De Liz Fri 16 Feb 2018 11.08 EST Last modified on Fri 16 Feb 2018 18.30 EST

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About 44% of Snapchat's users are aged 18 to 24, compared with 20% of Facebook's. Photograph: Alamy Stock Photo

When Mark Zuckerberg [launched Facebook he was a 19-year-old](#) living in a dorm in his second year at university. Fast-forward 14 years and it is [the young people he was so successful in luring to Facebook to propel it to become the world's biggest social networking site that are now his biggest problem.](#)

This year more than 3 million under-25s in the UK and US [will either quit Facebook or stop using it regularly](#), and they are pretty vocal about why.

["As soon as parents got in they killed it,"](#) says 24-year-old Jordan Ranford, a now minimal [Facebook](#) user who ditched his mum as a friend because she was "just jarring".

Georgia Davey, 21, predicts a bleak future for the increasingly uncool Facebook. ["I don't know if I should say this, but I think Facebook might shut down one day,"](#) she says. ["There will be a new thing soon and no one will be on it any more."](#)

With 2 billion registered users it is impossible to see Facebook closing. But her comment highlights an inherent truth of internet life: impermanence. Digital businesses age in dog years,

meaning today's new thing can rapidly become yesterday's news. Anyone remember [MySpace](#) or Second Life?

Facebook is managing to keep a proportion of disaffected youngsters: many have moved to Instagram, [which it bought in 2012 for \\$1bn](#), but **the big winner is increasingly Snapchat.**

About 44% of Snapchat users are aged 18 to 24, while just 20% of Facebook's are now in that key age range, according to Ampere Analysis.

The youth exodus is being balanced by older users joining, and the first users of Facebook are moving into their 30s and 40s. As a result there will be an increase of about 3.6m over-35s in the US and UK this year, according to eMarketer. But the mass departure of younger users has prompted questions about whether **the world might now be at peak Facebook.**

"I don't know about calling peak Facebook globally but one of Facebook's biggest challenges is that it is saturating core markets, western markets, where it has really slowed down," says Richard Broughton, an analyst at Ampere. "Most of the population likely to go on it are on it."

Facebook has become a vast money-making machine. Its revenues rocketed 47% to nearly \$41bn last year and its profits soared 56% to nearly \$16bn. But its advertising-based business model is also proving to be its Achilles heel.

Flooding users' timelines with more and more commercial messages may please investors – [Facebook's advertising dominance](#) has pushed the company's stockmarket value past \$522bn – but it is being unfriended by its user base.

Last month, Zuckerberg responded by [cleaning up its news feed algorithm to prioritise what friends and family share](#), and reducing the amount of non-advertising content from publishers and brands, which he said were "crowding out the personal moments". He said the company was focused on "making sure the time we all spend on Facebook is time well spent".

"The fundamental confusion with Facebook is that it increasingly talks about itself as a community platform, but that is not the reality," says Benji Vaughan, chief executive at Disciple Media. "Do users feel part of a community when they are there? I have reservations about whether they do. **Facebook's core purpose is to sell targeted content to individuals. All its issues begin there.**"

Zuckerberg admitted recently that 2017 was a ["hard one"](#), with the company taking a beating on all sides.

Politicians have [attacked Facebook over its role in disseminating fake news](#). Earlier this month UK MPs grilled the company's executives in an evidence session in its own backyard in the US. Concerns continue to be raised over Facebook's use as a platform for Russian meddling in the US elections.

This week Unilever, maker of brands from Marmite to Magnum and the world's second-biggest advertiser, threatened to withdraw its advertising from Facebook and YouTube unless they cleaned up the "swamp" of opaque business practices and dodgy content.

Zuckerberg has his work cut out attempting to navigate Facebook through its awkward teenage years. Still just 33, with 60% voting power, he is far from ready to throw in the towel.

"They are in an innovator's dilemma, seen as the monolithic rigid media company," says Fergus Hay, chief executive of the ad agency Leagas Delaney.

"No one would bet against Zuckerberg, but Facebook needs to grow out of [relying on advertising] or the hipster will be dad on the dancefloor."

Georgia Davey, 21

"I'm still on Facebook to keep in touch with old friends, to plan meet-ups and just ... to be nosey," says Georgia. But she thinks it is becoming a platform "for the old generation to sort of keep an eye on the younger generation – that's why I don't really post many things there".

For her, "Instagram is much more interesting because it's more visual and I relate more to photos than words".

Facebook, she says, now seems to be a platform for advertisements, "but it's also an easier way to find news and articles from magazines, as opposed to having to look through their websites. I don't know if I should say this, but I think Facebook might shut down one day. There will be a new thing soon and no one will be on it any more."

Viktoria Valchanova, 17, and Alina Postelnicu, 16



Viktoria Valchanova and Alina Postelnicu. Photograph: Ana de Liz

“I don’t use Facebook any more because none of my friends use it, so there’s no point,” says Viktoria. Alina says she uses Snapchat rather than Facebook but doesn’t think Facebook is full of old people, just “more middle-aged people, like in their 30s and 40s”. The two girls mainly use Snapchat “for everything, messaging, pictures ... and WhatsApp for groups from school, to talk about topics we did and projects”.

Emily McClymont, 17, and Cameron Cavens, 18



Emily McClymont and Cameron Cavens. Photograph: Ana de Liz

Cameron says he tries not to use Facebook because he finds it too intrusive. Emily is also using it less: “I find it a bit boring now. It deals too much with people’s lives.” However, she says: “I don’t think I’d delete it because it’s a way of speaking to my family. That’s the only reason I keep it.” She says Facebook is good if you lose touch with people because you can find them again.

“If all my friends stop using it, I might delete it,” says Cameron. He uses Twitter a lot: “I just hate the amount of ads on Facebook. It’s become unusable. Twitter is not as bad.” Emily also uses Twitter, and that’s where she gets most of her news. They also use Instagram and WhatsApp.

Jordan Ranford, 24

“As soon as the parents got in, they killed it,” Jordan says. He no longer has the Facebook app. “I mainly pay attention to what my older sisters are doing or keeping track of things that are funny ... I deleted my mum as a friend on Facebook because she was just jarring.”

Most people he knows have had Facebook for eight or nine years. Back then it was a way for everyone to upload photos to show what they had been up to, “like WhatsApp but on a bigger scale ... and after the parents started getting involved it kind of lost the fun-ness of it, so it

started to be a bit sad when you realised: ‘Hold up, my mum is posting more than me, like, why?’” Jordan thinks the purpose of Facebook is to feed egos, occasionally to post something with a nice message and for businesses: “It’s not what it used to be. There’s just so many more advertisements now. It’s losing the appeal it used to have.” He says he deleted Snapchat when Instagram launched its Stories feature. He mainly uses Instagram, and Twitter is “quite good for political items, which you don’t really get on Facebook”.

As told to Ana De Liz