

Social media research shows WhatsApp used by 10.6m South Africans

In an update of the SA Social Media Landscape 2014 report, released this week, it is revealed that at least 10.6 million South African adults use the WhatsApp instant messaging app on their phones.

This is the key finding of research conducted by World Wide Worx and Fuseware into the use of social media and instant messaging (IM) on cellphones in South Africa. The survey was conducted among a nationally representative sample of adult cellphone users living in cities and towns. The sample frame represents approximately 20 million adults.

The findings come as Facebook announces its acquisition of WhatsApp for \$19 billion - a move that will consolidate its domination of both social media and IM.



Dominant social network

The survey showed that Facebook remains the dominant social network on phones, with 45% - or 9 million South Africans - using it on their mobile devices at the end of 2013. Total Facebook use in South Africa was at about 11 million at the end of 2013, putting it marginally ahead of WhatsApp - for now.

Future expectations expressed by respondents indicate that WhatsApp will rise to 63% penetration in the next 12-18 months; while Facebook's mobile penetration will rise more moderately, to 53%.

The previous darling of the local IM market, Mxit, remains stable and is used by 25% of adults, with the figure expected to rise to 29% in the next 12-18 months.

BlackBerry Messenger (BBM) also continues to grow, and is now used by 21% of adults, with the figure potentially reaching 28% if BlackBerry is able to maintain its handset sales momentum in South Africa.

Twitter has reached 20% of the adult market, with expectations of it rising to 30% in the next 12-18 months. The dark horse is Google+, which was shown last year to have low usage in terms of users posting content - fewer than half-a-million users had done so - but has an exceptionally high user base: 32% of adults say they use it on their phones. However, many respondents confuse the Google search app with the Google+ social networking app.

New social apps

Two up-and-coming social apps also appear in the survey: Cape Town-based 2Go now has 8% penetration, expected to rise to 14%, while Chinese service WeChat, launched in South Africa in mid-2013, has reached

5% of the market, and is expected to rise to 13%.

The social and IM market is characterized by a strong urban-rural divide, with WhatsApp used by 61% of urban dwellers, compared to 37% outside urban areas. The survey does not include "deep rural" users living outside cities and towns.

Age is also a major differentiator, especially among Facebook and Mxit users. Facebook has 58% penetration among under-25s, 45% among those aged 26-45 and 25% among the over-45s. Mxit penetration drops dramatically through the age groups, from 43% to 21% to only 8%. WhatsApp is more spread out, with 58% and 56% penetration, respectively, among the under-25s and 26-45s. It drops to 38% among over-45s. For both Facebook and WhatsApp, penetration among over-45s is now higher than over-45s penetration had been a year previously.

The report also shows significant differences in social media and IM use according to educational levels, but other demographic factors, like gender and income, have less impact.

For more information, go to www.worldwideworx.com and <http://www.fuseware.net>.

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