

# Are Americans Addicted to Facebook?

Research by Honest Data, Inc.  
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# Research Background: What is an Addiction?

Merriam-Webster defines “addiction” as “a compulsive, chronic, physiological or psychological need for a habit-forming **substance, behavior, or activity** having harmful physical, psychological, or social effects and typically causing well-defined symptoms (such as anxiety, irritability, tremors, or nausea) upon withdrawal or abstinence.”

In other words, people can become addicted to **substances** (such as alcohol, tobacco, cocaine, opioids, etc.) but they can also become addicted to **behaviors** (such as gambling). In both cases, the substance or the behavior creates a powerful chemical reaction in the brain that can lead to a dependency over time.

So, can people become addicted to using Facebook? Unfortunately, it will take **decades** of research in the fields of psychiatry and neuroscience to officially answer that question. For example, the American Psychiatric Association first recognized “pathological gambling” as a disorder in 1980 but did not classify it as an addiction until 2013.

This research study is designed to explore the common “warning signs” of a behavioral addiction. In other words, do Americans have a healthy relationship with Facebook... or do they feel powerful urges to use the platform, anxiety when they are not using the platform, and an inability to quit the platform?

If there are “warning signs” Americans could be developing a behavioral addiction to Facebook, that might affect how parents let their children use the platform and how governments regulate the social media company.

# Research Hypotheses: 18 Warning Signs of a “Facebook Addiction”

Our team reviewed the “Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders” (or DSM) to identify the common characteristics of an addiction to a substance or a behavior. In both cases, there are powerful urges to use, anxiety when not using, pre-occupation with thoughts about using, damage to one’s personal life, and an inability to quit. For our research, we developed a list of 18 “warning signs” a person might be forming an addiction to Facebook.

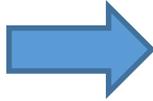
1. Loses track of time while using Facebook.
2. Feels powerful urges to check Facebook regularly.
3. Feels anxious without Facebook for a couple hours.
4. Checks Facebook first thing in the morning.
5. Checks Facebook right before going to sleep.
6. Finds Facebook notifications hard to ignore.
7. Loses sleep because of Facebook.
8. Is distracted during the day because of Facebook.
9. Would have difficulty quitting Facebook.

10. Feels relief after checking Facebook notifications.
11. Feels “addicted” to Facebook.
12. Has tried unsuccessfully to quit Facebook.
13. Has checked Facebook while driving.
14. Has checked Facebook while making love.
15. Has checked Facebook while crossing the street.
16. Has checked Facebook on the toilet.
17. Has checked Facebook during a church sermon.
18. Loved ones have complained about FB usage.

# Research Methodology: Online Survey of 2,133 Facebook Users

After developing a list of 18 warning signs for a potential “Facebook Addiction,” we used an online survey of Facebook users in the United States to measure the prevalence of each warning sign. The survey, conducted in Feb 2020, contained a representative sample of 2,870 American adults and a subset of 2,133 Facebook users.

Sample Sizes



**2,870 American Adults**



**2,133 Facebook Users**



Responses were collected using one of the largest online panels in the United States: Dynata. Survey participants received an incentive in exchange for providing feedback. Responses were collected from February 17<sup>th</sup> – 26<sup>th</sup>, 2020. Demographic quotas and sampling weights were used to ensure that all survey participants (2,870 people) were representative of American adults in terms of age and gender so that the Facebook users within the survey (2,133 people) could be assumed to be representative by extension. Quality control measures were used to remove dishonest or distracted responses.

# Research Findings

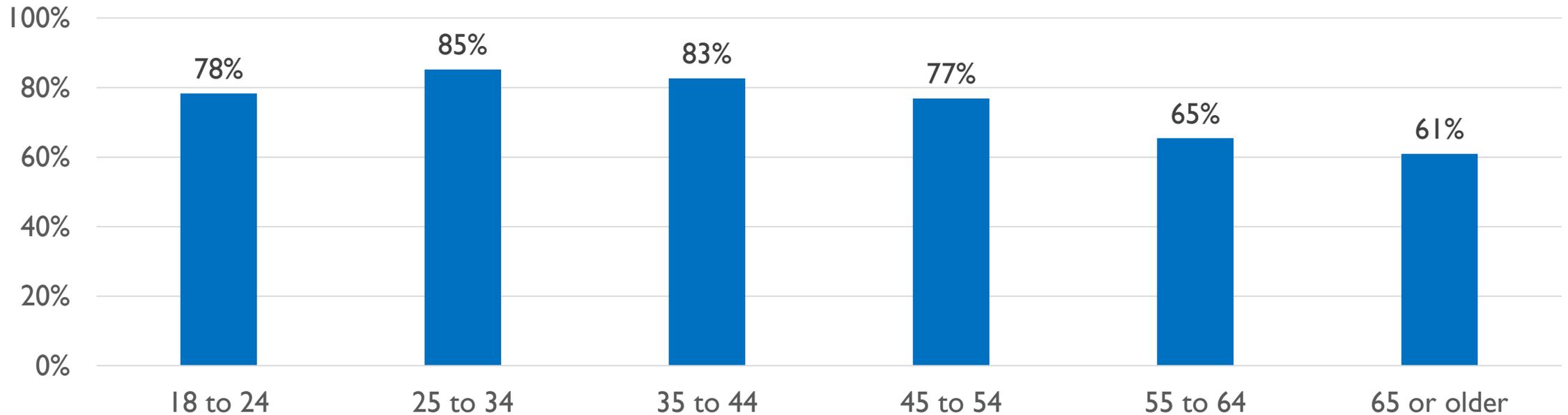
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All Americans

# Three out of Four Americans Have a Facebook Account

Our research suggests that around 160 million American **adults** have a Facebook account. This estimate does not include the millions of younger American teenagers (ages 13-17) who also have a Facebook account. For reference, Facebook started letting high school students sign up for the social network in 2005.

## Percent of Americans in Each Age Group with a Facebook Account



# 37 Million Americans Deleted the Facebook App Last Year

Around 17% of American adults deleted the Facebook app from their phone in the past year. That equates to around 37 million people. Deleting the app could indicate a temporary break or an attempt to stop using the app altogether.



# Research Findings

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**All Facebook Users**

# Most Facebook Users are Passively Using the Platform

Prior research has suggested there are two ways to use Facebook: actively (interacting with friends) and passively (mindlessly scrolling through posts). Research suggests that passive usage of Facebook can increase depression. Unfortunately, two-thirds of Facebook users report that most of the time they spend on Facebook is just browsing.



# 66%

**of Facebook users say most of the time they spend on Facebook is “just browsing”**

# Most Facebook Users Do NOT Want False Political Ads

Facebook recently announced it would accept money from politicians to show ads on the Facebook network with **false statements**. This policy goes against the wishes of most American Facebook users. In addition, most Facebook users would like to have the option to opt-out of political advertising on Facebook altogether. False political ads and/or aggressive political ads could emotionally agitate users and increase the risk of a behavioral addiction.

81%

of Facebook users say  
Facebook should not let  
politicians run ads with false  
statements

82%

of Facebook users want the  
option to “opt out” of political  
ads on Facebook

Survey Questions: 1. Should Facebook let politicians run ads with false statements?  
2. Should Facebook users be allowed to “opt out” of political ads on Facebook?

Audience: Facebook users in the United States, ages 18+

# Almost Half of Facebook Users Want an Alternative to Facebook

Healthy competition is an important part of the American economy. It gives consumers options so they can pick the product that best aligns with their needs and the company that best aligns with their values. Americans have very few options in the social media space and 42% of **Facebook users** believe our society needs an alternative to Facebook.

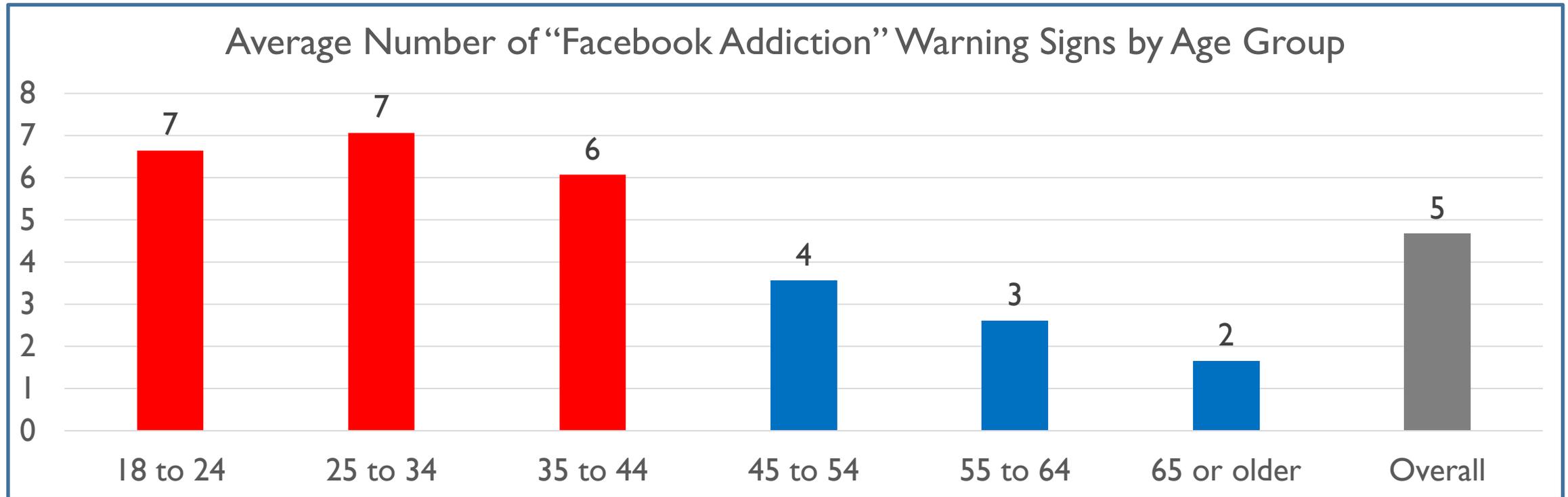


# 42%

**of Facebook users believe  
our society needs an  
alternative to Facebook**

# Younger Facebook Users Show More “Warning Signs” of Addiction

As mentioned previously, we created a list of 18 warning signs a person might be developing a behavioral addiction to Facebook. The average Facebook user – across age groups – has five of these “warning signs.” Younger Facebook users (people under age 44) are much more likely to show warning signs of a potential addiction to Facebook.



# Research Findings

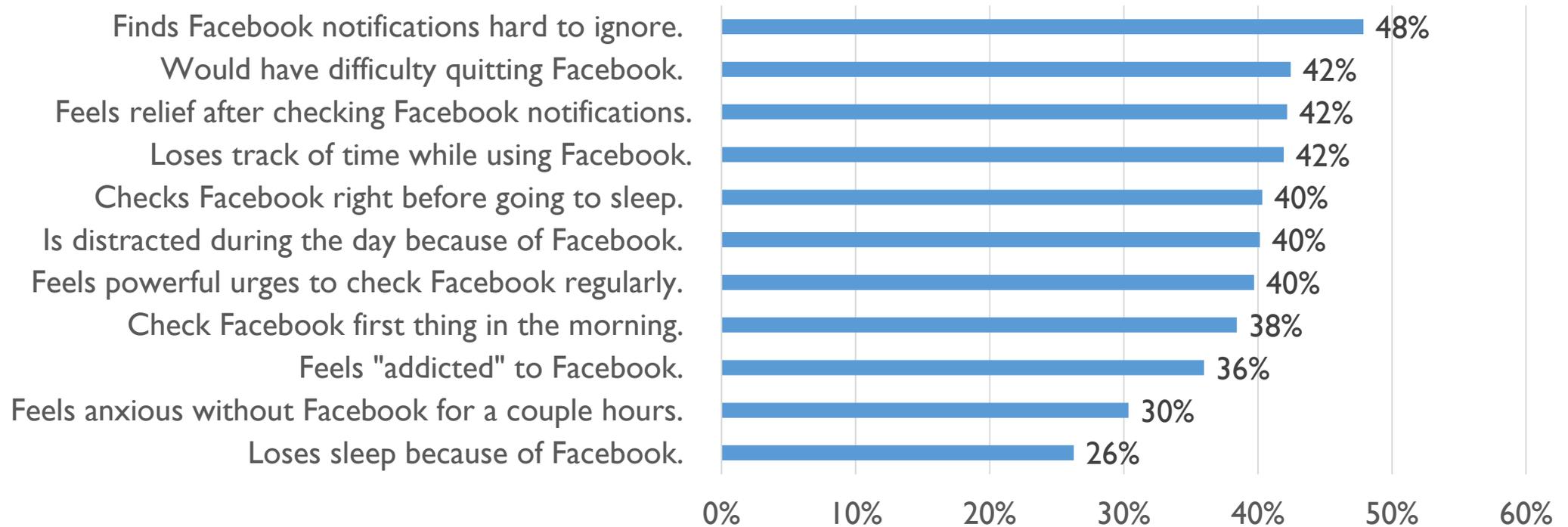
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**Facebook Users Ages 18-44**

# What are the “Warning Signs” for Facebook Users Ages 18-44?

Over one-third of Facebook users ages 18-44 feel powerful urges to check Facebook regularly, feel distracted during the day because of Facebook, feel a sense of relief after checking Facebook, lose track of time while using Facebook, use Facebook immediately when they wake up, and/or use Facebook right before they go to bed.

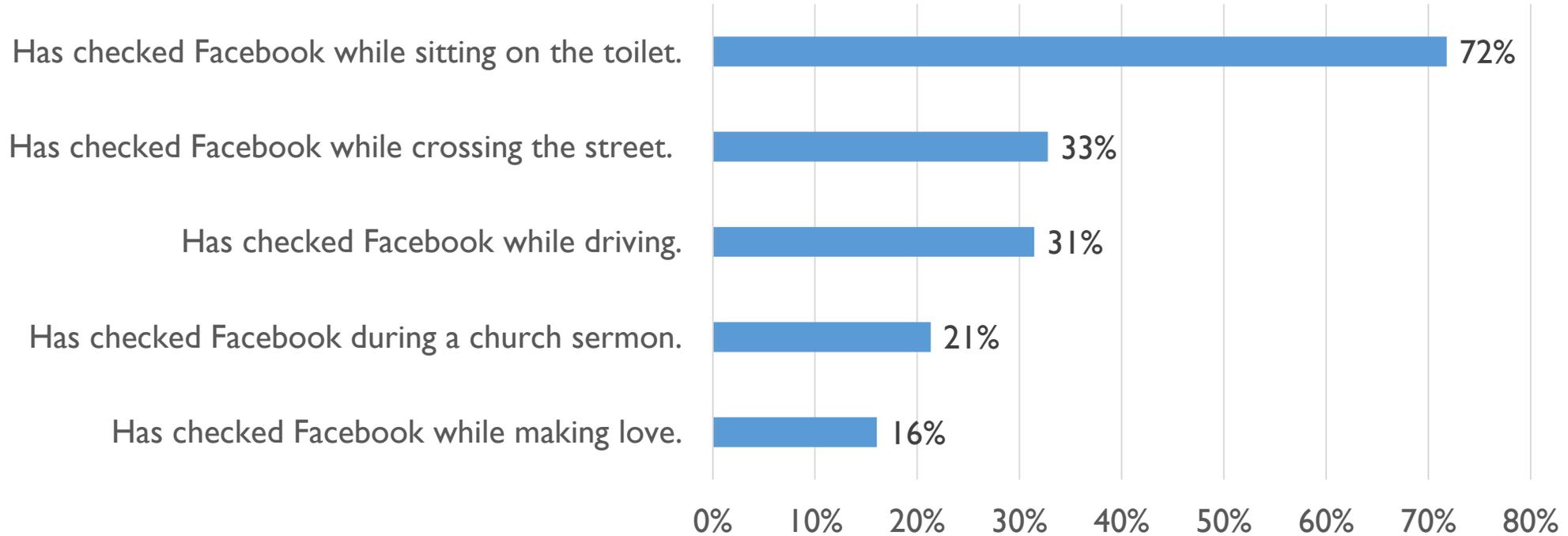
Percent of Facebook Users Ages 18-44 Who Experience Each “Warning Sign”



# Facebook Users Ages 18-44 Use Facebook at Inappropriate Times

Another warning sign for a behavioral addiction is that the user prioritizes the behavior over other parts of their life such as their relationships, their health, their safety, and their responsibilities. As shown below, a significant number of Facebook users ages 18-44 have used Facebook when their attention probably should have been elsewhere.

Percent of Facebook Users Ages 18-44 Who Have Engaged in Behavior



# One-Third of Facebook Users Ages 18-44 Have Tried to Quit

Another warning sign of an addiction is when the user feels like the substance or the behavior is negatively affecting their life and so they try to quit but are ultimately unsuccessful. A whopping one in three Facebook users ages 18-44 has tried to quit Facebook unsuccessfully. Similarly, about one in four Facebook users ages 18-44 say loved ones (friends or family members) have complained about their Facebook usage.

**33%**

of Facebook users ages 18-44  
have tried to quit Facebook

**29%**

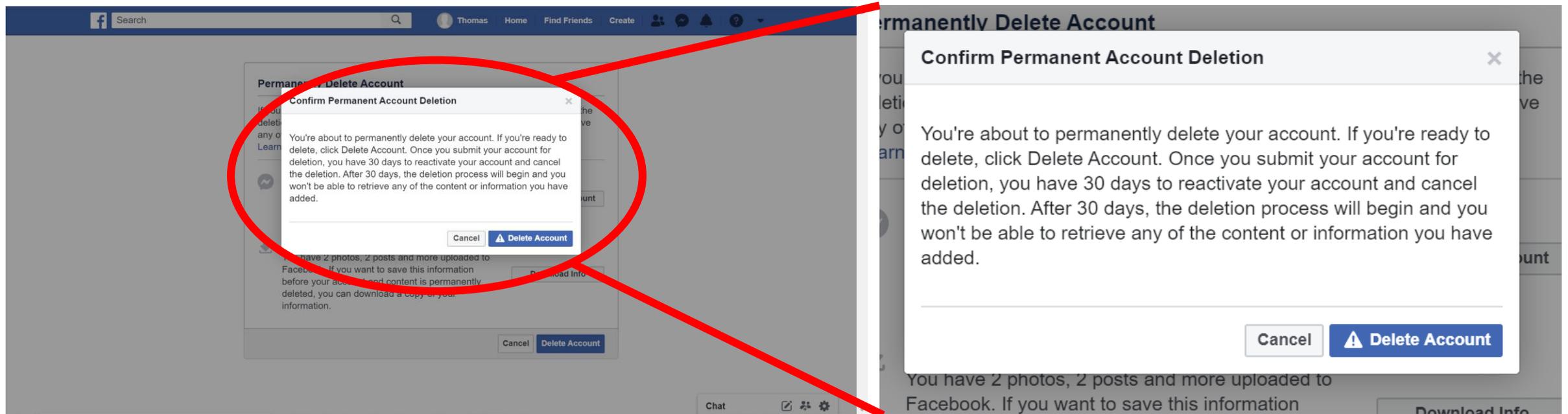
of Facebook users ages 18-44  
say a friend or family member  
has complained about their  
Facebook usage

Survey Questions: 1. Have you ever tried to quit Facebook? 2. Have any of your friends or family members ever complained that you use Facebook at inappropriate times? (Such as during meals, at social events, etc.)

Audience: Facebook users in the United States, ages 18-44. // Percentages shown are people who said “yes.”

# Facebook Makes Users Wait 30 Days to Delete Their Account

It is important to note that Facebook users cannot immediately delete their account. Instead, Facebook users submit a request online and Facebook will “begin” to delete their account 30 days later. Forcing users to wait at least 30 days could have two potential benefits for Facebook. First, it could give Facebook additional time to monetize user data. Second, it could increase the likelihood that “addicted” users will “relapse” and return to using the platform.



# • Questions About This Research?

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