

Free Speech or Free Fall? Half in Canada say Musk buying Twitter will lead to more misinformation on the platform

Half say social media use has increased in recent years, though some have logged off for mental health

June 6, 2022 – As billionaire Elon Musk [appears to waffle](#) over his purchase of Twitter, and now [faces a lawsuit](#) from the company's shareholders, many Canadians appear to believe it would be for the best if the sale didn't go through.

New data from the non-profit Angus Reid Institute finds half (53%) of Canadians say Musk's purchase of the social media platform would lead to an increased spread of hate speech and misinformation.

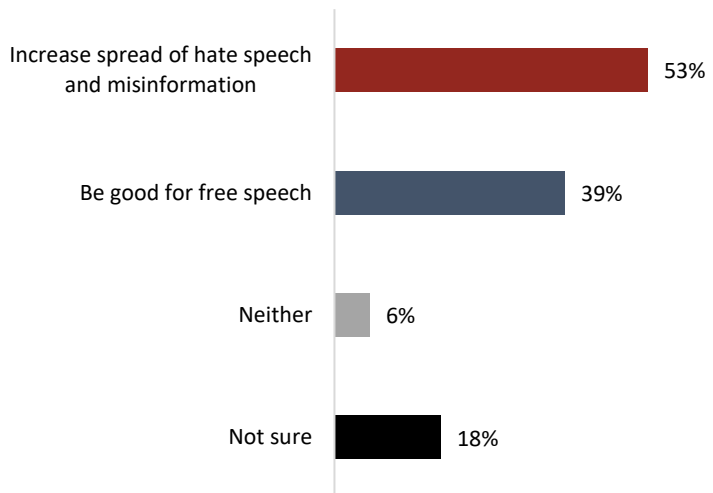
A self-proclaimed "[free speech absolutist](#)", Musk has taken issue with Twitter's content moderation, which he believes stifles free speech and "[fundamentally undermines democracy](#)". Two-in-five (39%) believe it would be good for free speech if Twitter was owned by the SpaceX and Tesla CEO.

There are sharp political divides on perceptions of this matter. As in the United States, where right-of-centre politicians cheered Musk's potential acquisition, a majority (63%) of past Conservative Party voters on this side of the border believe it will be beneficial to free speech were the sale to go through. Three-quarters (74%) of past Liberal voters and seven-in-ten (70%) who voted NDP worry about the proliferation of abusive speech.

All this comes as Canadians' use of social media climbs, but perceptions of the platforms themselves decline. Indeed, half (47%) say their use of social media has increased in the last few years – possibly as a substitute for the lack of in-person contact during periods of pandemic social distancing.

This represents more than double the number who say they have used social media less in recent years (20%). For the most popular platforms – Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Reddit, TikTok – perceptions are more likely to have worsened than improved. Facebook suffers most on that front, with half (51%) of Canadians saying their opinion of that platform has worsened in recent years.

Will Musk's takeover of Twitter be good for free speech or increase spread of hate speech and misinformation? (All respondents, n=1,992)



METHODOLOGY:

The Angus Reid Institute conducted an online survey from May 4-6, 2022 among a representative randomized sample of 1,992 Canadian adults who are members of [Angus Reid Forum](#). For comparison purposes only, a probability sample of this size would carry a margin of error of +/- 2.5 percentage points, 19 times out of 20. Discrepancies in or between totals are due to rounding. The survey was self-commissioned and paid for by ARI. Detailed tables are found at the end of this release.

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More Key Findings:

- Men (16%) are nearly three times as likely as women (6%) to say they will use Twitter more if Musk takes it over. Women (13%) are much more likely than men (6%) to say they will instead delete their account.
- Of those who have quit using at least one social media app in recent years (32% of Canadians), one-quarter (25%) say it was to protect their mental health. Most say they just lost interest (55%)
- Past CPC voters (20%) are much more likely than other partisans to say they'll be Tweeting more in the event of a Musk takeover.
- Overall, nine-in-ten (90%) Canadians surveyed say they use Facebook regularly, including two-thirds (67%) who use it daily. Self-reported daily use rises for older respondents, ranging from a low of 35 per cent of 18- to 24-year-olds, to a high of 77 per cent of those over the age of 64.
- Among popular social media platforms, Canadians are most likely to have abandoned their Twitter account. One-in-five (23%) of Canadians who used Twitter at previously have left the platform.

About ARI

*The **Angus Reid Institute (ARI)** was founded in October 2014 by pollster and sociologist, Dr. Angus Reid. ARI is a national, not-for-profit, non-partisan public opinion research foundation established to advance education by commissioning, conducting and disseminating to the public accessible and impartial statistical data, research and policy analysis on economics, political science, philanthropy, public administration, domestic and international affairs and other socio-economic issues of importance to Canada and its world.*

INDEX

Part One: Musk and Twitter

- **Half say Musk's Twitter takeover will lead to more hate speech, misinformation**
- **Women more likely to say they'll delete account post-takeover**
- **One-in-five past CPC voters say they'll use Twitter more if Musk buys it**

Part Two: Canadian social media use

- **At least two-in-five of all demographics report daily Facebook usage**
- **Half of Canadians say their social media use has increased in recent years**
- **Canadians more likely to have abandoned Twitter than other platforms**
- **Younger Canadians more likely to say they've left a platform for mental health reasons**

Part Three: Opinions of social media platforms

- **Canadians' views divided on Facebook, Twitter; more negative of TikTok**

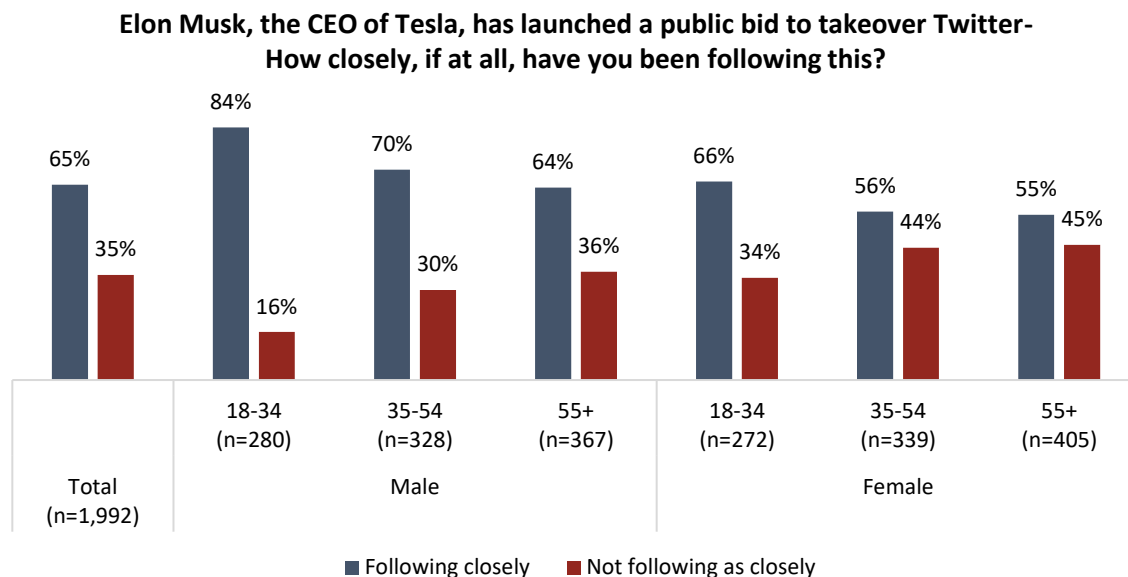
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Part One: Musk and Twitter

The months-long saga of Elon Musk’s attempt to buy Twitter started at the end of January, when he first began ramping up his ownership stake in the social media company. His goal, if successful, is to make it [a platform for free speech](#), which he says is currently impinged by Twitter’s content moderation policies. While there’s been [some speculation](#) that Musk started his pursuit after he was unable to shut down a teen’s account which tracked the movements of his private jet, his belief that Tweets and free speech go hand-in-hand date back to [battles he’s had with the U.S’s Securities and Exchange Commission](#) over market-affecting tweets. Indeed, in a [recently filed](#) class action lawsuit, Twitter shareholders have accused Musk of market manipulation in his bid to purchase the company.

Two-thirds (65%) of Canadians say they have been following the takeover and having conversations about it, while one-third (35%) are either scanning headlines or not reading about it at all. Men are much more likely than women to be following this story, and young men especially – 84 per cent of men aged 18- to 34-years-old have been discussing Musk’s Twitter takeover with friends and family:



Half say Musk’s Twitter takeover will lead to more hate speech, misinformation

Human rights groups have [expressed concern](#) that if Musk’s purchase of Twitter goes through, hate speech may proliferate on Twitter. Amnesty International expressed concern that a Musk-owned Twitter would roll back content moderation of [violent and abusive speech](#) by users on its platform. While free speech is [of importance to the company](#), the tension between allowing personal expression and mitigating harmful hate speech and misinformation has been a challenge for all social media platforms in recent years.

Canadians are more likely to believe a Musk-owned Twitter would lead to an increase in volumes of hate speech and misinformation than be good for free speech. Half (53%) of Canadians expect more hate speech and misinformation on the platform if Musk’s takeover succeeds. Two-in-five (39%) believe it would be good for free speech.

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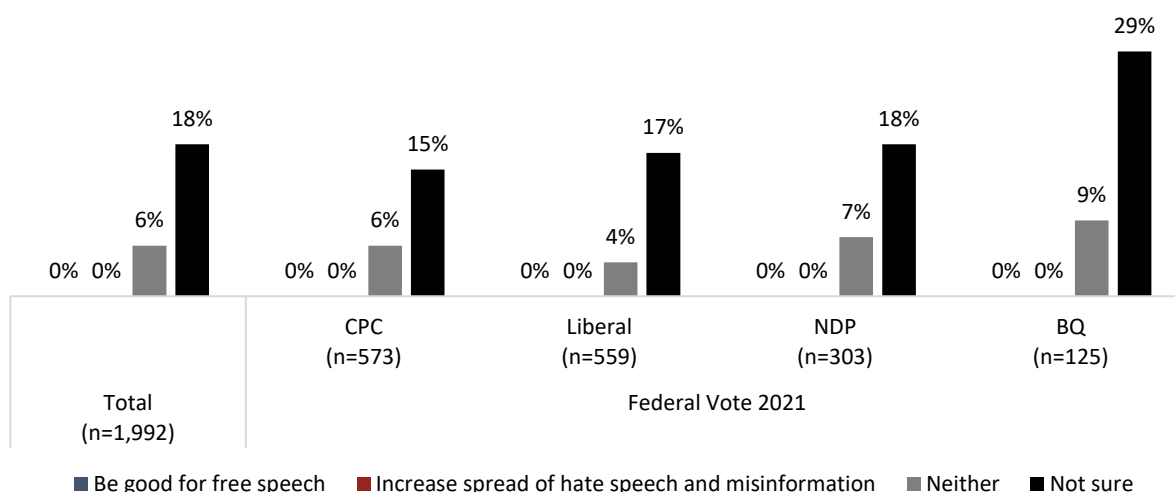
Men and women are likely to be on opposite sides of this matter. More than half of men under the age of 55 believe Musk owning Twitter will be good for free speech. Meanwhile, at least three-in-five of women of all ages believe there will be a proliferation of abusive Tweets ([see detailed tables](#)).

Previous Angus Reid Institute research finds that women are particularly at risk for abuse online in the form of sexual harassment, insults on their appearance, and stalking.

Trolls and tribulations: One-in-four Canadians say they're being harassed on social media

In the United States, Republicans were quick to cheer Musk's potential acquisition of Twitter, believing it would be good for free speech. In Canada, past Conservative party voters, too, are more likely than not to believe a Musk-owned Twitter would be good for free speech, three-in-five (61%) say so. Significant majorities of those who voted Liberal (74%) and NDP (70%) in the fall federal election believe Musk taking over Twitter will increase the spread of hate speech and misinformation:

Will Musk's takeover of Twitter be good for free speech or increase spread of hate speech and misinformation? (Those who said it will result in both more hate speech and more free speech had their totals added to each response)



Women more likely to say they'll delete account post-takeover

When news of Musk's attempt to acquire Twitter first broke, many prominent users [said they would delete their account](#) rather than continuing to use the platform if Musk owned it. Few Canadians, (9%) would take that step if Musk's purchase was successful. Equal numbers would Tweet more (11%), Tweet less (8%) and Tweet as much as they have been (10%). For half, Elon Musk buying Twitter would not impact them at all.

Men under the age 55 are three times as likely as women to say they will be using Twitter more if Musk takes it over. Women, on the other hand, are twice as likely as men to say they will delete their account:

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If Musk does succeed in buying Twitter, what impact will it have on you? Will you...?							
	Total (n=1,992)	Male			Female		
		18-34 (n=280)	35-54 (n=328)	55+ (n=367)	18-34 (n=272)	35-54 (n=339)	55+ (n=405)
Use the platform more	11%	20%	18%	12%	6%	6%	6%
Use the platform the same amount	10%	14%	17%	8%	9%	9%	6%
Use the platform less	8%	9%	8%	6%	10%	8%	8%
Leave Twitter/delete account	9%	5%	5%	6%	13%	13%	12%
No impact	50%	41%	42%	56%	54%	51%	52%
Not sure yet	12%	11%	10%	12%	8%	14%	16%

One-in-five past CPC voters say they'll use Twitter more if Musk buys it

Across the political spectrum, at least half say Musk buying Twitter will have no impact on themselves. However, those who voted Conservative in the fall federal election are much more likely to say they will use the platform more than past Liberal, NDP or Bloc voters. As well, past CPC voters are one-third as likely as other past voters to say they will be leaving the platform post-Musk acquisitions:

If Musk does succeed in buying Twitter, what impact will it have on you? Will you...?					
	Total (n=1,992)	2021 Federal Vote			
		CPC (n=573)	Liberal (n=559)	NDP (n=303)	BQ (n=125)
Use the platform more	11%	20%	3%	1%	9%
Use the platform the same amount	10%	13%	11%	8%	7%

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Use the platform less	8%	3%	13%	14%	9%
Leave Twitter/ delete account	9%	4%	13%	15%	12%
No impact	50%	50%	46%	47%	55%
Not sure yet	12%	9%	15%	15%	9%

Part Two: Canadian social media use

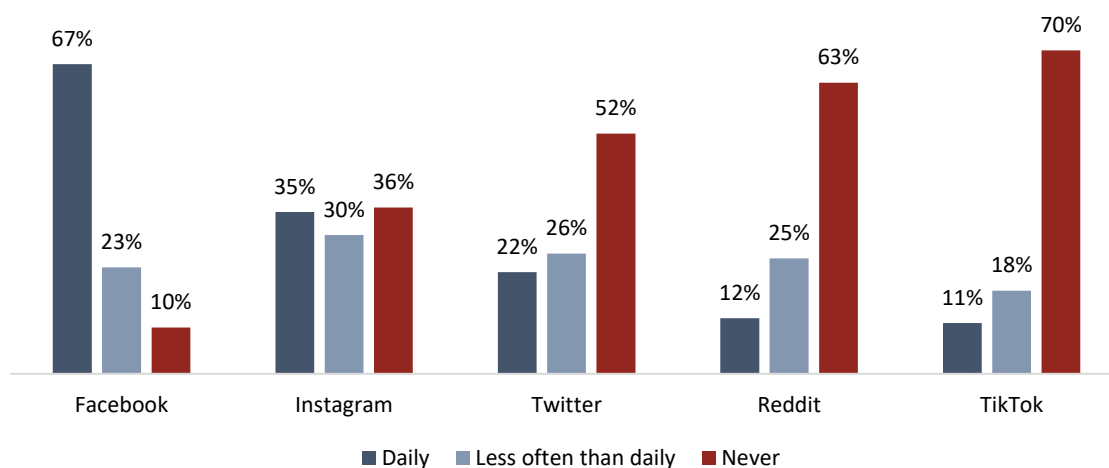
Social media use has become a daily habit for millions of Canadians. Facebook is the most popular social media platform; two-thirds (67%) of Canadians say they check their feed every day. Canadians are less likely to say the same of Instagram (35%), Twitter (22%), Reddit (12%) and TikTok (11%).

For Facebook, more Canadians report using it daily than they did four years ago. At the height of the Cambridge Analytica scandal, which revealed the U.K. data company had accessed millions of Facebook users' information without their permission, one-quarter (23%) of Canadians said they would be using the platform less in the future. However, at that time, three-in-five (57%) said they used Facebook daily, a figure that has in fact since grown.

Related: [Un-liking Facebook: 3-in-4 Canadian users say data mining scandal will change how they use the platform](#)

Overall, 90 per cent of Canadians say they use Facebook. Indeed, [Statista reports](#) there are approximately 30.61 million Facebook users in the country.

How often do you use these social media platforms? (All respondents, n=1,992)



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At least two-in-five of all demographics report daily Facebook usage

When Facebook initially launched, it was restricted to university and college students. Since then, it has become popular among older demographics. However, there has been [many reports of declining usage](#) among younger adults as their parents have joined the platform.

Among Canadians, younger adults are less likely to report daily use. But at least two-in-five of all demographics say they use Facebook daily. The highest usage is among women aged 55 and older, among whom four-in-five (79%) say they sign into Facebook every day.

For other social media platforms, there are significant demographic splits. Women, and especially those under the age of 35, are much more likely to say they use Instagram daily than men. Twitter is most popular among men under the age of 55. Canadian men 18- to 34-years old are much more likely to sign into Reddit every day than other demographic groups. At least two-thirds of all age-gender groups say they've never used TikTok, except for women aged 18 to 34. For that demographic, half have used the platform at some point:

How often do you use these social media platforms?								
		Total (n=1,992)	Male			Female		
			18-34 (n=280)	35-54 (n=328)	55+ (n=367)	18-34 (n=272)	35-54 (n=339)	55+ (n=405)
Facebook	Daily	67%	44%	66%	73%	56%	74%	79%
	Never	10%	15%	14%	7%	12%	8%	3%
Instagram	Daily	35%	41%	36%	17%	62%	40%	22%
	Never	36%	27%	35%	54%	13%	30%	47%
Twitter	Daily	22%	33%	32%	16%	18%	20%	14%
	Never	52%	38%	37%	60%	51%	55%	63%
Reddit	Daily	12%	32%	15%	3%	20%	7%	3%
	Never	63%	28%	54%	85%	39%	69%	86%
TikTok	Daily	11%	16%	12%	5%	20%	12%	4%

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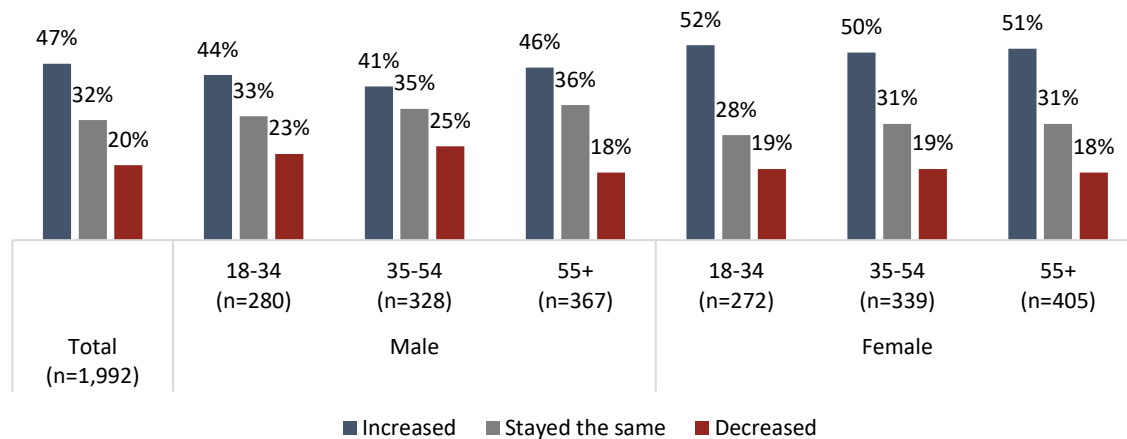
	Never	70%	71%	67%	82%	50%	66%	80%
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Half of Canadians say their social media use has increased in recent years

Half of Canadians say their social media use has increased over the last few years, more than double the number who say they're on the "socials" less. Non-online social contact was restricted at times since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, which may go some way to explaining why Canadians turned to social media to stay in touch.

Women are more likely than men to say their use has increased, while men under the age of 55 are the most likely to report they've been signing onto social media apps less over the last few years:

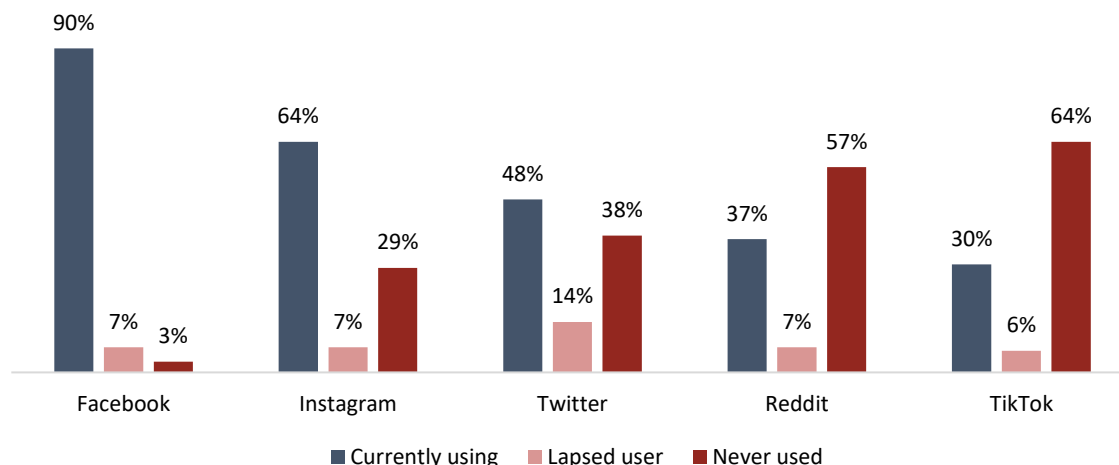
What about your time spent using these platforms over the last few years, has it increased, decreased or stayed the same?



Canadians more likely to have abandoned Twitter than other platforms

Among the most popular social media platforms, Twitter has the highest percentage of Canadians who say they are lapsed users of the service. Twice as many (14%) say they were users of Twitter and are no longer as say the same of Facebook (7%), Instagram (7%), Reddit (7%) or TikTok (6%):

**Social media use among Canadians
(All respondents, n=1,992)**



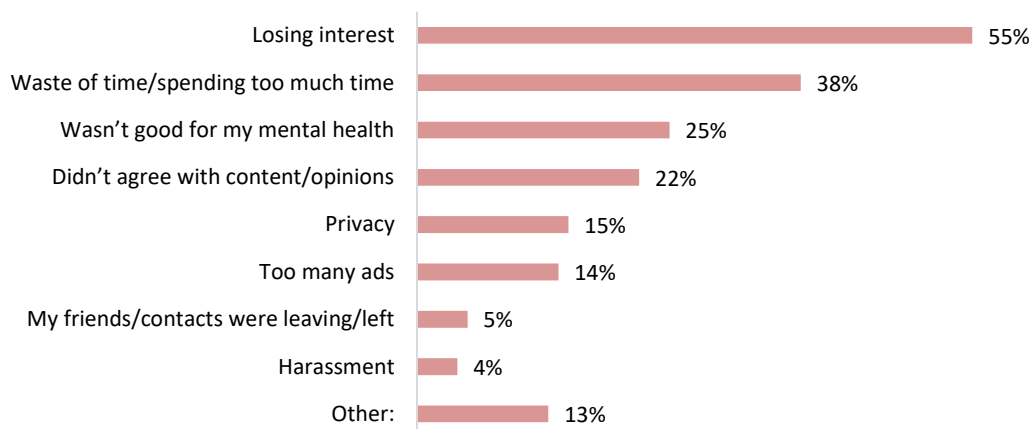
Indeed, when looking at lapsed users as a percentage of total self-reported users of the most popular social media platforms, one-in-five (23%) Canadians who used Twitter at some point are lapsed users. This figure is higher among women than men.

Canadians under the age of 55, and men especially, are much more likely to have abandoned their Facebook account than older users. Meanwhile, older Canadian Reddit users are more likely to have stopped using the site than younger ones:

Lapsed users as a percentage of total users							
	Total	Male			Female		
		18-34	35-54	55+	18-34	35-54	55+
Facebook	7%	13%	11%	3%	9%	6%	2%
Instagram	10%	10%	13%	12%	7%	9%	12%
Twitter	23%	19%	14%	22%	31%	25%	24%
Reddit	16%	10%	13%	33%	9%	21%	22%
TikTok	17%	17%	20%	22%	12%	15%	23%

Those who quit a social media platform are most likely to cite losing interest as the reason they stopped using the platform. Two-in-five (38%) say they found the platform a waste of time, while one-quarter (25%) say they did it for their mental health.

**You've indicated you've quit at least one of the social media platforms we asked about, can you tell us why?
(Quit at least one platform, n=623)**



Younger Canadians more likely to say they've left a platform for mental health reasons

Social media can have a negative impact on mental health, [according to psychology research](#). Among teens, [the negative effect is greater for girls](#).

Two-in-five (38%) women under the age of 35 say the negative impacts of social media on their mental health is why they quit a platform. Three-in-ten (31%) men that age say the same. However, for young men, more (37%) are likely to say they didn't agree with the content or opinions on the platform and that's why they left:

You've indicated you've quit at least one of the social media platforms we asked about, can you tell us why? (Among those who quit at least one platform)							
	Total (n=623)	Male			Female		
		18-34 (n=104)	35-54 (n=109)	55+ (n=86*)	18-34 (n=106)	35-54 (n=110)	55+ (n=108)
Losing interest	55%	61%	47%	48%	59%	66%	46%
Waste of time/ spending too much time	38%	51%	40%	46%	38%	30%	27%
Wasn't good for my mental health	25%	31%	27%	21%	38%	25%	6%

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Didn't agree with content/ opinions	22%	37%	24%	21%	21%	14%	15%
Privacy	15%	25%	19%	8%	19%	14%	5%
Too many ads	14%	25%	14%	12%	17%	7%	9%
My friends/ contacts were leaving/ left	5%	8%	2%	1%	10%	3%	4%
Harassment	4%	1%	5%	5%	3%	6%	2%
Other	13%	20%	14%	7%	7%	15%	17%

**Smaller sample size, interpret with caution*

Part Three: Opinions of social media platforms

Views split on Facebook, Twitter; more negative of TikTok

Of the commonly used social media platforms, Facebook is viewed the most positively, with two-in-five (41%) holding favourable views. However, nearly as many (37%) say the opposite. That is also the case for Twitter (29% favourable, 32% unfavourable). Positive views outweigh negatives one for Instagram (36%, 24%) and Reddit (25%, 20%), but in both those cases a plurality view the platforms neither favourably nor unfavourably. In the case of TikTok, as many hold negative views (40%) as view the social media app in a neutral light (41%).

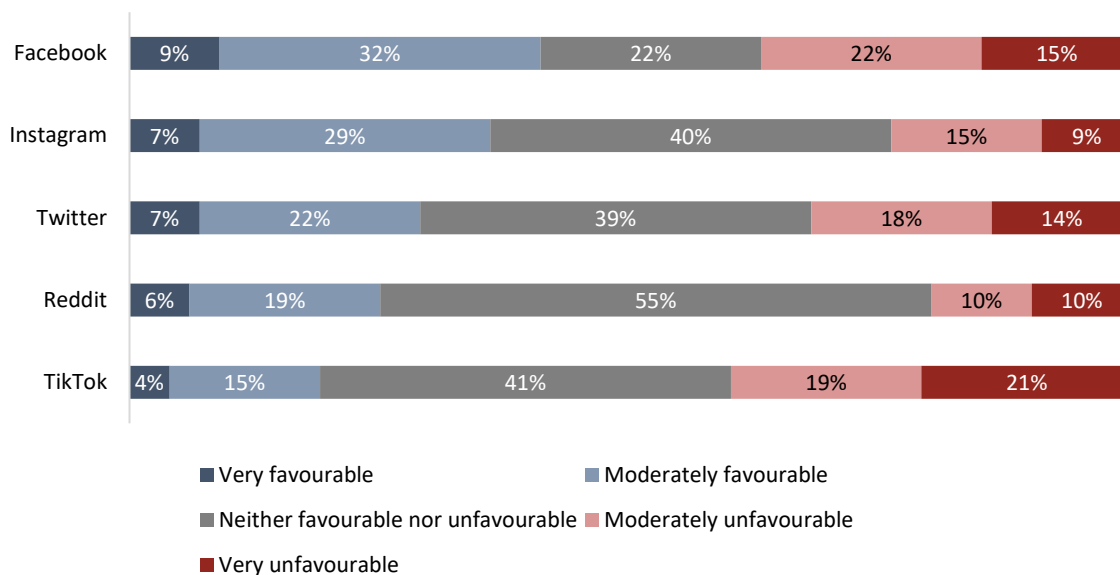
Four years ago, [in the midst of the Cambridge Analytica scandal](#), one-third of Canadians said they had unfavourable views of Facebook while two-in-five (41%) said the opposite. The former figure has climbed while the latter has remained the same.

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**Opinion of social media platforms
(All respondents, n=1,992)**



Canadians over the age of 54 are more likely to view Facebook positively than negatively than other demographics. For men under the age of 35, only for Reddit do favourable views outweigh unfavourable ones. On Twitter, only men aged 35- to 54-years old hold net positive opinions.

As for TikTok, the opinions of men under the age of 55 are much more likely to be negative than positive:

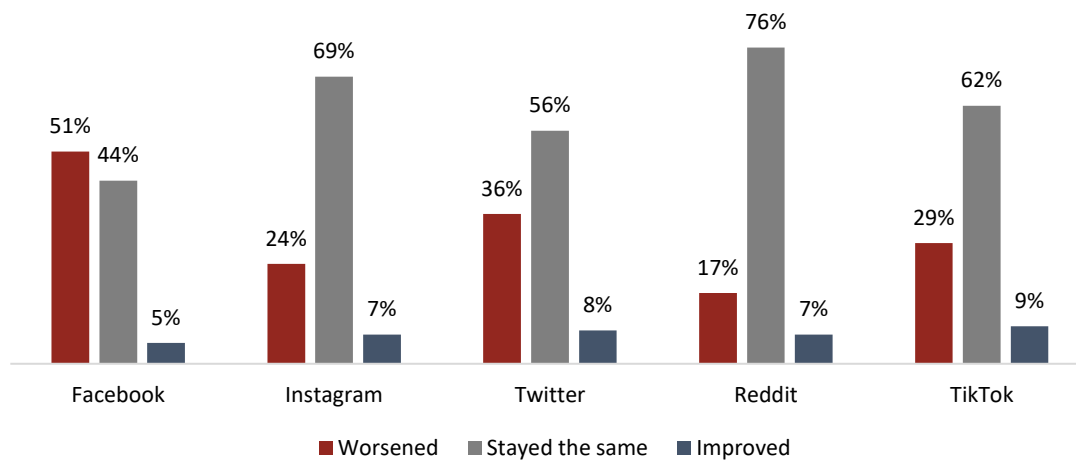
Opinion of social media platforms (Net: Favourable shown)							
	Total (n=1,992)	Male			Female		
		18-34 (n=280)	35-54 (n=328)	55+ (n=367)	18-34 (n=272)	35-54 (n=339)	55+ (n=405)
Facebook	3%	-48%	-14%	31%	-22%	8%	37%
Instagram	13%	-16%	4%	14%	22%	24%	24%
Twitter	-4%	-10%	11%	0%	-14%	-9%	-3%
Reddit	5%	19%	11%	-10%	29%	4%	-9%
TikTok	-22%	-47%	-29%	-19%	-8%	-18%	-13%

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In recent years, there has been a brighter spotlight shone on the negative impacts of social media – including [radicalization](#), [proliferation of hate speech and abuse](#), [the effect on mental health](#). Indeed, Canadians are more likely to say their opinion of the most popular social media platforms has worsened than improved in the last few years. Half (51%) say their opinion of Facebook has declined, ten times as many who say the opposite (5%). The ratio is smaller, but the direction of Canadian opinion is more negative than positive for Instagram (24% vs 7%), Twitter (36% vs 8%), Reddit (17% vs 7%) and TikTok (29% vs. 9%). However, only for Facebook does declining appraisal outweigh those instead say their opinion of the platform has stayed the same:

**And, in the last few years or so, has your opinion of each social media platform improved, worsened, or stayed the same?
(All respondents, n=1,992)**



For detailed results by age, gender, region, education, and other demographics, [click here](#).

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