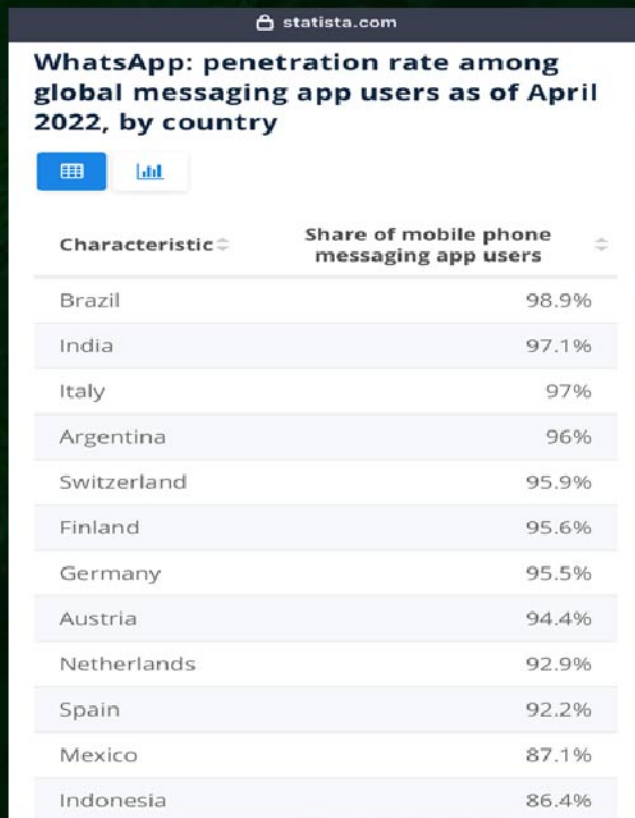


Whatsapp Advisory

For Young People



WhatsApp by Meta is one of the world's most popular and widely used mobile app. It is a free service and comes without any of the pesky advertisements one can see on free games and other such apps. It truly is ubiquitous; in that, it is used by individuals and businesses alike to stay connected, everywhere and all the time. It offers a way to instantaneously stay in touch with people around the world. Brazil has the maximum number of WhatsApp users in the world as of April 2022. India is at number 2, with more than 400 million users.



The image is a screenshot of a Statista webpage. At the top, the URL 'statista.com' is visible. The main heading reads 'WhatsApp: penetration rate among global messaging app users as of April 2022, by country'. Below the heading are two tabs: a table icon (selected) and a bar chart icon. The table has two columns: 'Characteristic' and 'Share of mobile phone messaging app users'. It lists 13 countries with their respective penetration rates, sorted in descending order. Brazil is at the top with 98.9%, and Indonesia is at the bottom with 86.4%.

Characteristic	Share of mobile phone messaging app users
Brazil	98.9%
India	97.1%
Italy	97%
Argentina	96%
Switzerland	95.9%
Finland	95.6%
Germany	95.5%
Austria	94.4%
Netherlands	92.9%
Spain	92.2%
Mexico	87.1%
Indonesia	86.4%

WhatsApp users by country
(Source: Statista)

The Evolution Of Whatsapp

The app was launched in 2009 and started primarily as a texting/chatting app that allowed users to send text messages. WhatsApp now lets users voice/video call with people around the world without having to pay exorbitant fees for doing so. It also allows the sharing of pictures, videos, voice recordings and documents, and is "end-to-end encrypted". There is also an application called WhatsApp Web that can be used with a personal computer/laptop and it mirrors the usage with the phone. Chats are backed up, no matter which platform one uses.

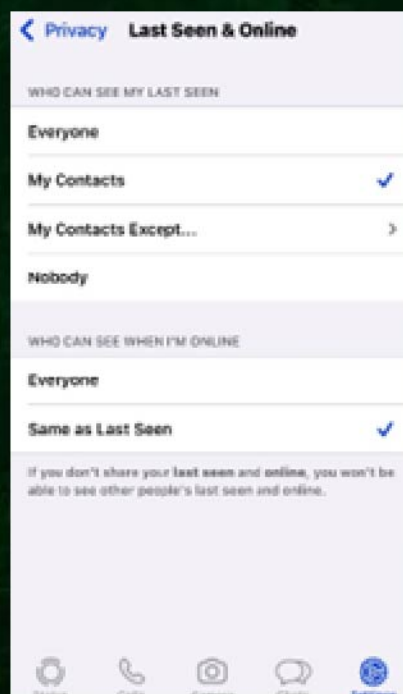
WhatsApp has had issues with privacy and malware in the past, and these have led to certain changes in the privacy settings as also with updates to 'patch' vulnerabilities, with users now being able to choose/not choose certain settings to stay safe and keep their data secure. But as more young people have started using WhatsApp, it is now more important than ever that they are acquainted with some good practices that will keep them safe on the platform.

Settings

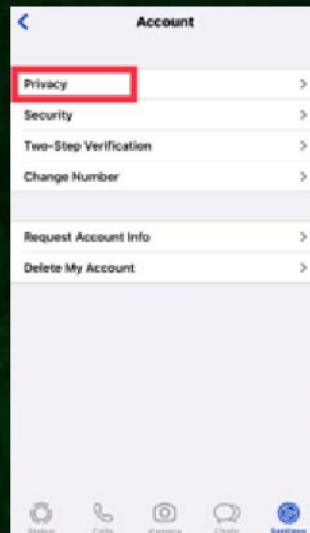
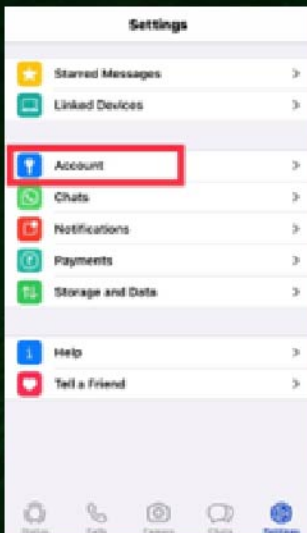
WhatsApp's default settings for privacy are set so that anyone using WhatsApp can see details like user descriptions, profile pictures, statuses, and also when WhatsApp was last used. These can be changed by going to Settings:

Settings → Account → Privacy

- WhatsApp gives every user a QR code that is unique to them. If shared with someone, they can scan it with their WhatsApp camera and add the user to their WhatsApp as a contact. Hence, this is private and should be kept as such until it needs to be shared.
- For 'Last Seen', this setting is coupled with who can see when you are online and the options are Everyone, My Contacts, My Contacts Except..., and Nobody. So WhatsApp now allows users to be online without letting others know.

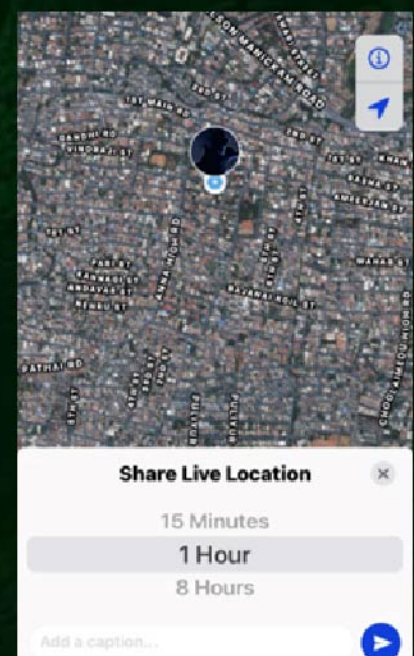


- 'Profile Photo', and 'About' there are four options for each of these settings: Everyone, My Contacts, My Contacts Except, and Nobody. One can choose their level of visibility. It is best to keep Last Seen set to Nobody. Profile Photo and About should be set to My Contacts/My Contacts Except.



- For Groups, which allows one to set their preference relating to who can add them to a group, the options are Everyone, My Contacts, and My Contacts Except. It is best to change from Everyone to My Contacts/My Contacts Except.
- Lastly, for Status the options are My Contacts, My Contacts Except, and Only Share With. Again, these can be changed for every individual status, but it is important to remember that the change to the audience of the Status has to be made before the Status is added on WhatsApp for the settings to take effect.

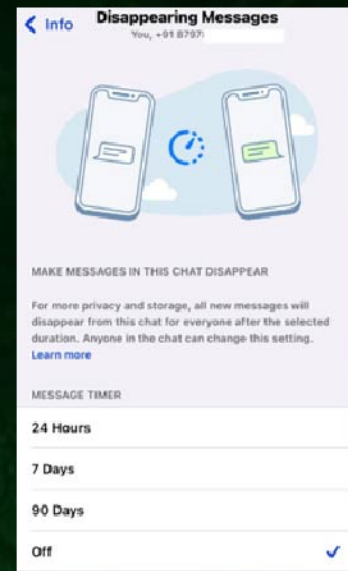
- WhatsApp allows location sharing. Users can also share their Live Location, which allows the person it is being shared with to track movements. Users are given options for how long they want to share their location. This feature is now end-to-end encrypted.



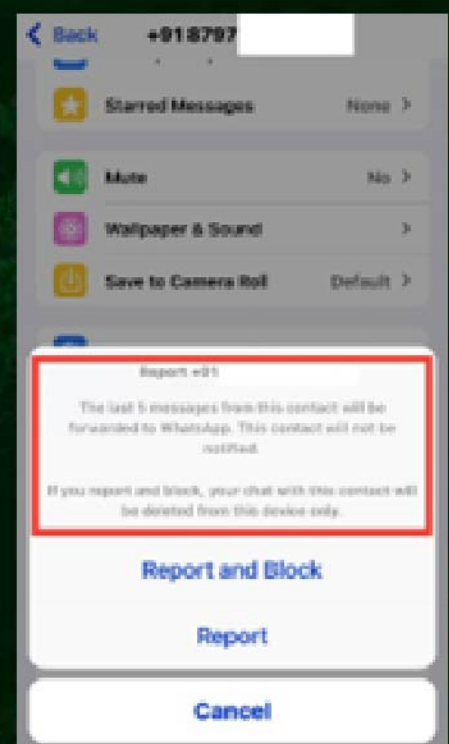
- Users can also start new chats with Disappearing Messages. These messages will automatically disappear after a certain amount of time. Users can set the time period for the same, and the options are 24 hours, 7 days, and 90 days.



- One can block other users, which will stop them from getting in touch through the app, or getting any updates. However, it is important to note that even if a user has been blocked, if they are in a common group they will still be unblocked in the group.



- Reporting a user – When a number is reported, WhatsApp registers the report and adds the number to a 'Watchlist', which means that the number will be monitored, and also investigated. It is at WhatsApp's discretion, however, whether the number is to be banned from the platform. If a user selects 'Report', then they will still be able to receive messages and media from the number. If 'Report and Block' is selected, then they will not receive any more messages from the number, and previous chats will be deleted also.



- Reporting Groups works much the same way. When WhatsApp receives a report about a group, it investigates the activities of that group. If WhatsApp receives multiple reports and finds the group to be spamming users, it may very well deactivate the group.
- WhatsApp has a zero-tolerance policy for child sexual abuse and exploitation and bans users when it becomes aware that they are sharing content that endangers children and/or is exploitative.

General Guidelines

Like any other utility available in the cyber world, WhatsApp is a double-edged sword. It can be used for both good and bad. It is important that users know how to keep themselves safe because while WhatsApp is generally safe, it can be used for nefarious purposes by bad actors who are only out to harm. Instances of cyberbullying and sexting are very common and group chats can go astray very easily and quickly. Spreading rumors and inappropriate content is very easy and it is important to know how users can be blocked and reported.

For parents, one of the ways that they can keep track of their children's WhatsApp usage is by using WhatsApp Web. It is also best to have conversations with them about what they may have viewed or experienced so that they know whom to go to should the need arise.

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