

Young People & Loneliness in the Digital Age

Tackling Loneliness Hub
October 14th Webinar

Neighbourly Lab



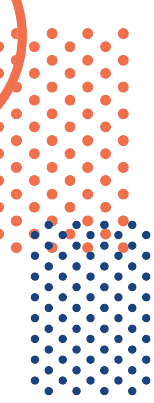
Young people and loneliness

- We know that young people report higher-than-average levels of loneliness
- 10% of 16-29s said “often or always” lonely vs 6% genpop (ONS Aug 25).

Intersects with other phenomena:

- rise in diagnosed anxiety and depression
- alienation, disassociation, pessimism. eg More in Common polling: 33% of 18-24- year-olds believe “most people can be trusted”, compared to nearly half of all adults and 71% of those aged 75 and over.

This age-group is a increasing focus for Government and VCFO’S in targetting attention and resources around loneliness. (eg NL work with schools and universities)



Reminder of correlations with underlying factors

Eg Young Londoners (aged 16-24) 12% are severely lonely.
Why: not because of being young, because of these 3 factors:

Associative Factor for severe loneliness	% of all Londoners	% of young Londoners	% of low-income Londoners	% of LGBTQ+ Londoners	% of minority ethnic Londoners	% of single-parent Londoners	% of disabled Londoners
Acute poverty	18	30	36	22	26	44	31
Being single	38	74	49	47	39	100	51
Limiting long-term disabled	18	12	25	21	16	19	100
Transition	2	8	3	6	2	1	1
Facing prejudice or "feeling different"	34	48	41	57	39	41	45

Source: Reconceptualising Loneliness in London, based on Survey of Londoners 2019

The debate about young people being online

- Gaining lots of attention from government and policy around limiting online use for young people
- Attention from media and culture (eg politicians responses to TV show Adolescence) on potential dangers
- Young people spend lots of time online across mobiles, computers, laptops and tablets:
 - 18 - 24 year olds spend average of 6 hours online (1)
 - 8 - 14 year olds spent 3 hours online (2)
- On their phone, using Snapchat, Tiktok, Instagram, Whatsapp, Youtube, Facebook, iMessage, Twitter/X

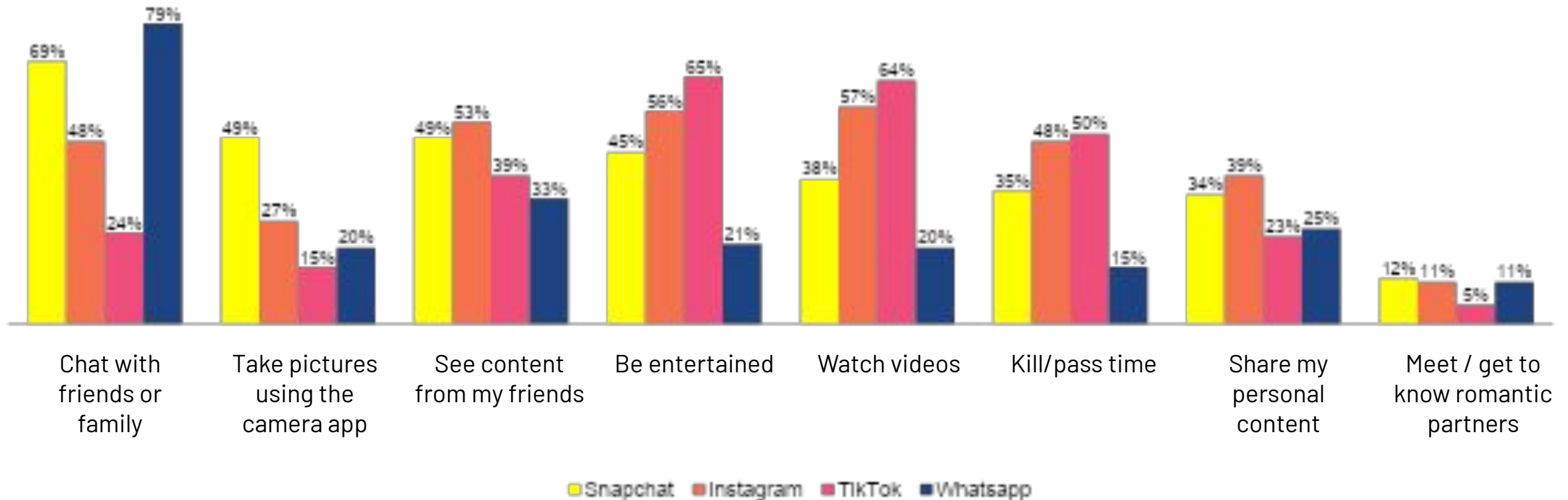


Ofcom 2024 data- hours per day spent online

Figure 1: Average daily time spent online by adults only, by device and age (hours:minutes): May 2024

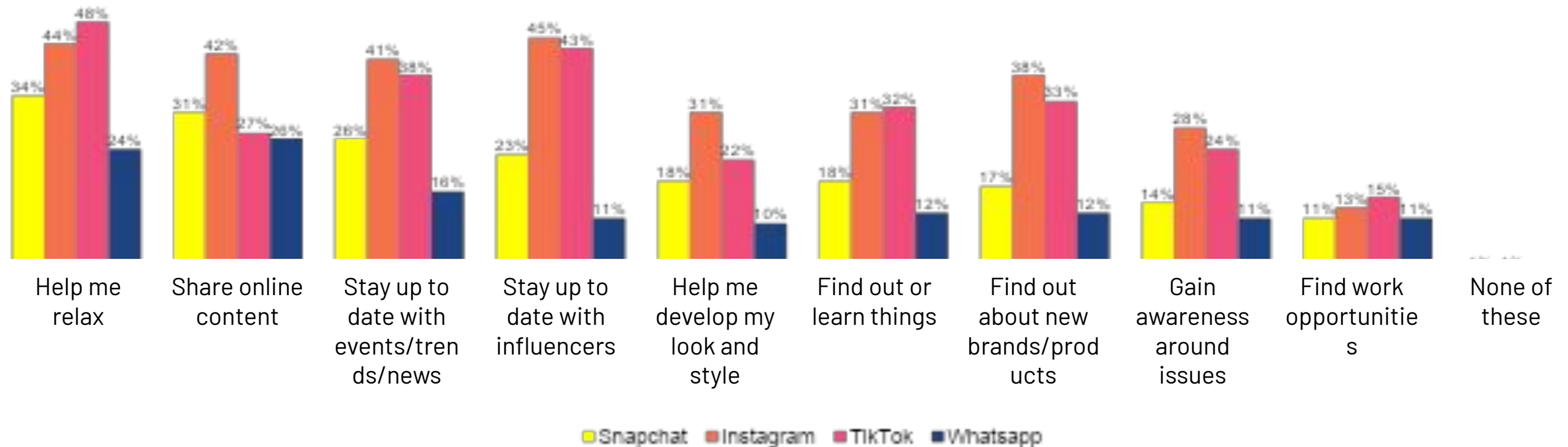


How are they spending their time online? (1 of 2 slides)



Source: KMC Neighbourly Lab quant polling, n=1200 young people, July 2025

How are they spending their time online? (2 of 2 slides)



What we learned about different platforms: Snapchat

Our survey shows that Snapchat is among the most popular apps for 13–24-year-olds, playing a central role in helping them build and maintain close social connections.

Main uses:

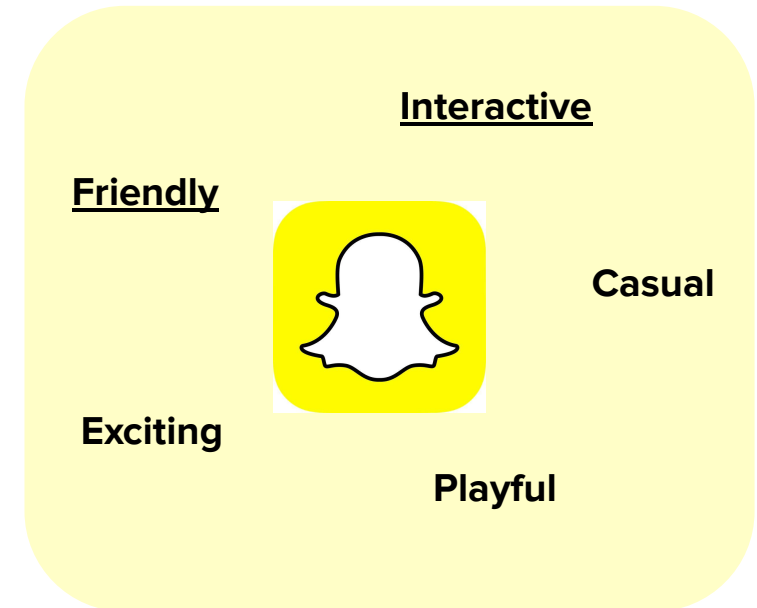
- Staying connected with friends via chats and group chats
- Sharing regular updates of what you're doing and how your feeling with close friends
- Wider friends group reflects real-life contacts and enables you to broaden your network

Most useful for:

- Chatting with friends or family (69%)
- Take pictures using the app camera (49%)
- See content from my friends (49%)

Staying in touch with:

- Close friends that I see often in real life (78%)
- Close friends that I don't see often in real life (54%)
- People who I know but aren't close to (school, college, work) (34%)



What we learned about different platforms: Instagram

Main uses:

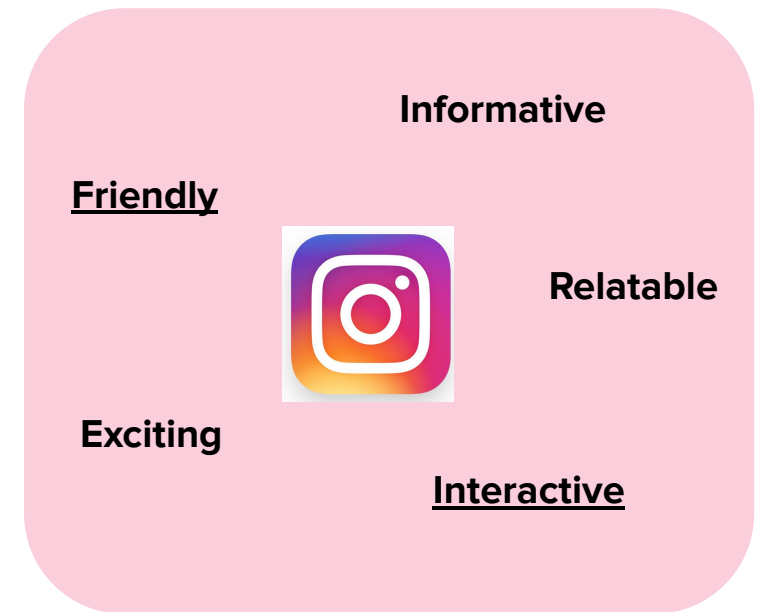
- Seeing friends' life updates via their posts and stories, and sometimes posting own.
- Seeing latest news from favourite celebrities, people, teams and brands you follow/like.
- Viewing and sharing entertainment reels with friends

Most used for:

- Be entertained (56%)
- Watch videos (57%)
- See content from friends (53%)
- Kill / pass time (48%)

Staying in touch with:

- Close friends that I see often in real life (75%)
- Close friends that I don't see often in real life (63%)
- People who I know but aren't close to (school, college, work) (38%)



What we learned about different platforms: TikTok

Main uses:

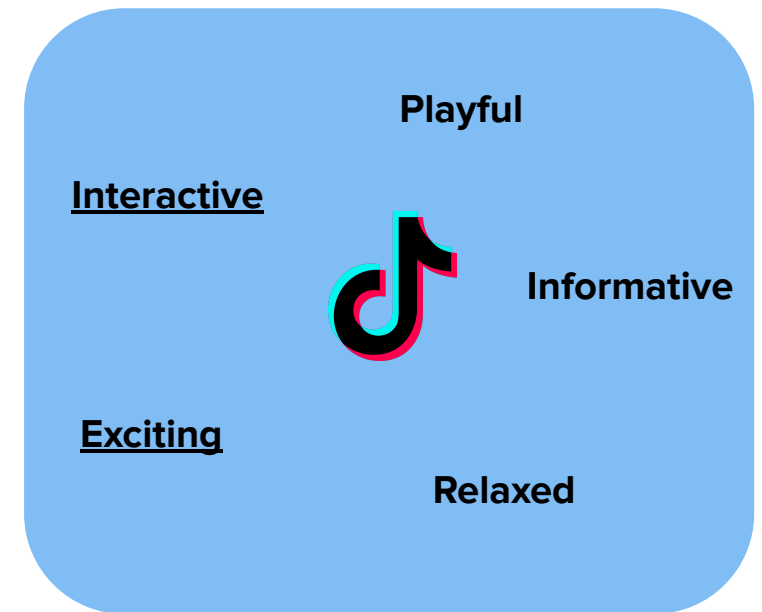
- Watching short-form videos that resonate with personal interests and sharing with others.
- For entertainment, inspiration, motivation, information and following trends.
- Some creating own content and are aspiring 'influencers'.

Most useful for...

- Be entertained (65%)
- Watch videos (64%)
- Kill / pass time (50%)

Use for communication with...

- Close friends that I see often in real life (63%)
- Close friends that I don't see often in real life (37%)
- Friends I met online (27%)



What we learned about different platforms: Whatsapp

Main uses:

- A safe, private, and dependable space for staying connected with close friends, family, and trusted groups
- Used for everyday conversations, planning, and support.

Most useful for...

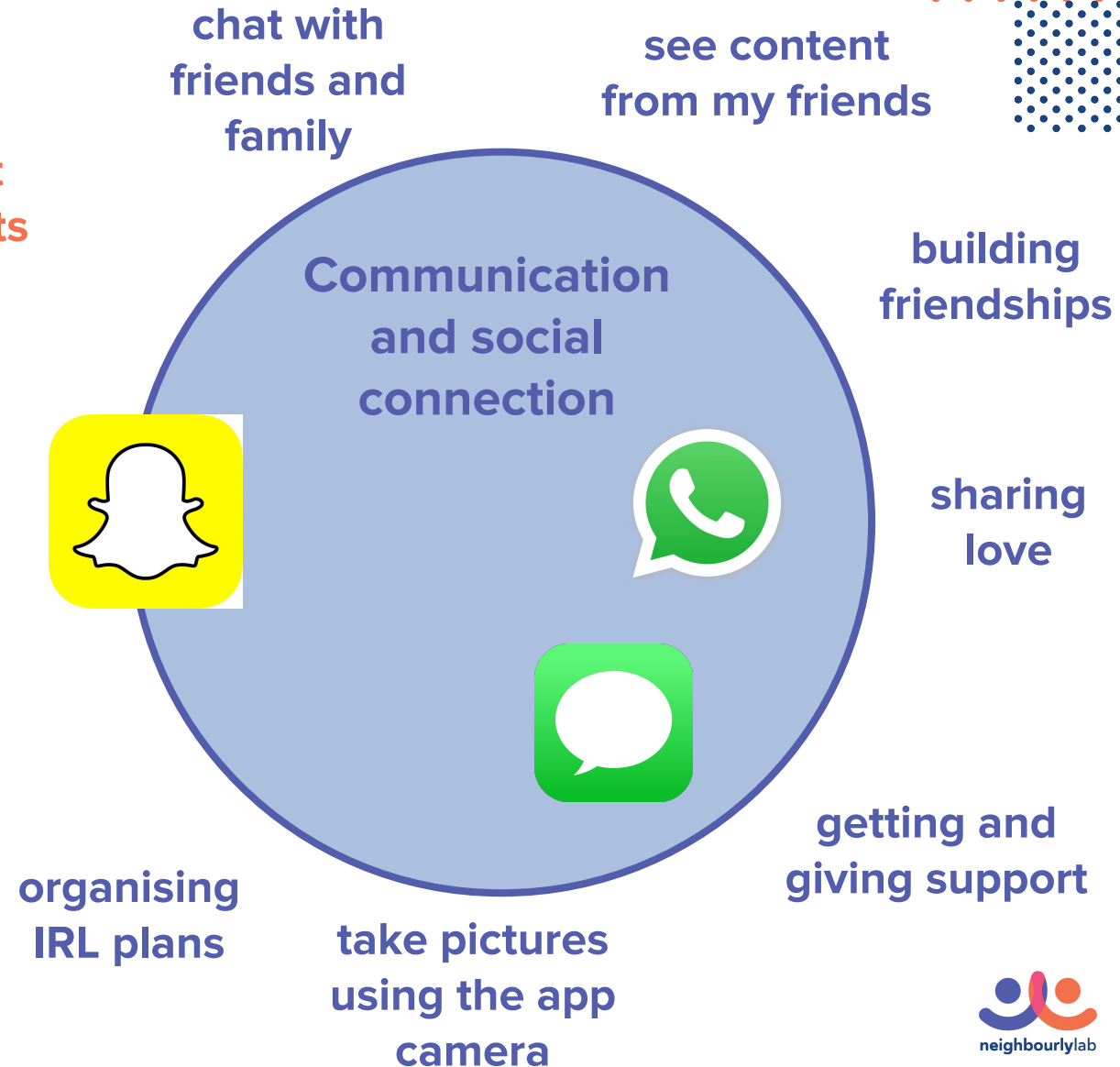
- Chatting with friends or family (79%)
- Seeing online content from my friends (33%)
- Sharing online content (26%)

Staying in touch with:

- Close friends that I see often in real life (81%)
- Parents (68%)
- Other family members (55%)



Disaggregate between social media and comms



Young people use Snapchat in 5 key ways



Building Friendship Networks

Snapchat helps users to start and build new friendships



Keeping on Top of Friendships

Snapchat helps its users to maintain their wider and weaker-tie relationships



Share the love with your closest people

Snapchat helps its users feel attached with their most important relationships



Your joined-up social life, across phone and IRL

Snapchat helps its users flow between online and IRL interactions



Your safety net for big life changes

Snapchat boosts its users sense of social-competence and supports them to go out into the world

Building Friendship Networks



"...We saw each other in school quite a lot and started messaging on Snapchat which is really what brought us together"

Jessica had never had a boyfriend and wasn't confident to make the first move with people she liked. Snapchat gave her the opportunity to connect online first and build the relationship there, before meeting in person and becoming official.

Jessica, 14, Manchester

Keeping on Top of Friendships



"I hadn't seen her in about 3 years, but I thought she might be lonely. She posted something about her not doing anything during her annual leave and I just popped up to say we could do something"

Ella was prompted to reach out to an old friend after seeing her post on Snapchat and suspecting she might be lonely. Snapchat enabled her to see how her friend was doing and offer connection when she needed it.

Ella, 22, London

Share the love with
your closest people



**"Thank God that I've got
Snapchat... we all message on
there. It's very good to stay in touch
because we don't see them much
and we miss them..."**

Ali values his family but many of them live abroad. He uses Snapchat everyday to message and speak to his family that live in Pakistan, Turkey and the USA. Despite the physical distance, Snapchat enables him to stay close with people he cares about.

Ali, 15, Manchester

**Your joined-up social life,
across phone and IRL**

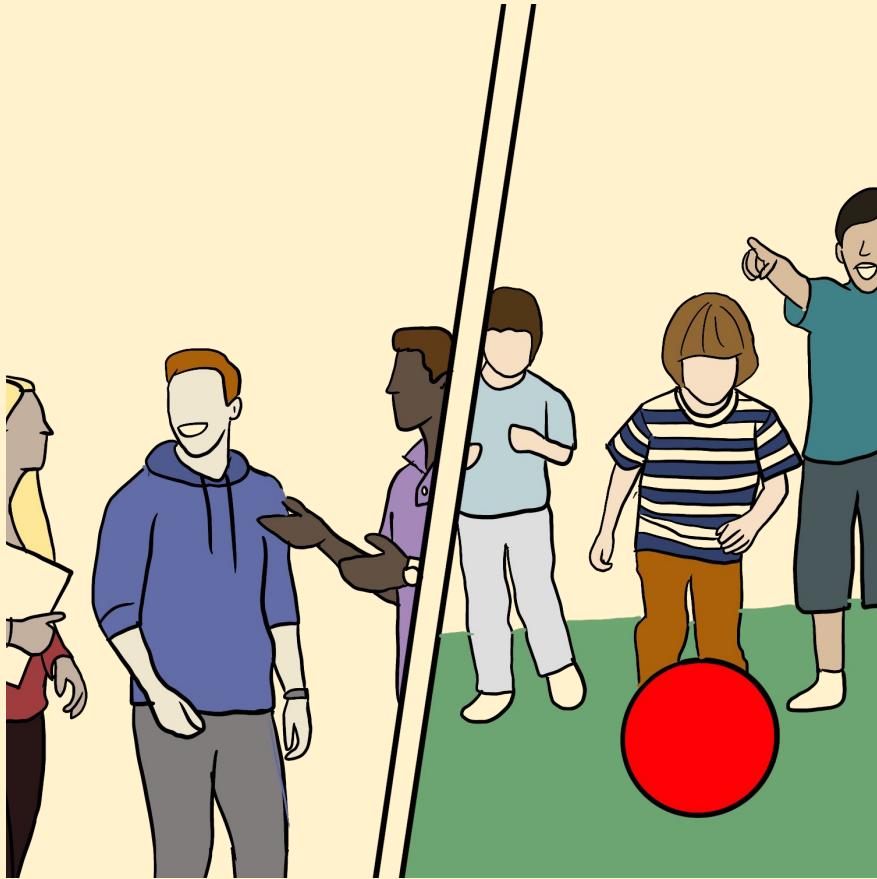


"Snapchat is the one thing that everyone uses... On the day, I'd just message the group chat and ask if anyone wants to go out and play football"

James is in a different part of his school year than most of his good friends, so he uses Snapchat to stay in touch and makes plans. He uses their group chat to easily arrange meet ups to go outside, play football or go on bike rides together.

James, 14, Manchester

Your safety net for big life changes

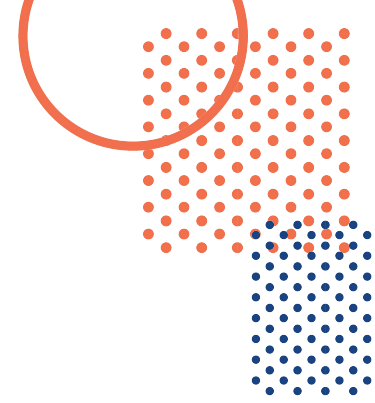


"Our group chat is still the same from like Year 7... some of us stayed at home, some of us went to uni. But we're still close... it's like you've got two different sets of friendship groups"

When he moved to university in Leeds, Charlie stayed close with his group of friends from home that he's known since they were in primary school. Having a group chat on Snapchat kept him close to old school friends, providing comfort for more challenging times at university.

Charlie, 22, Manchester

The role of technology shifting across age



Building friendship networks



Keep on top of friendships



Share the love with your closest people



Joined up social life across phone and IRL



Safety net for big life changes

13

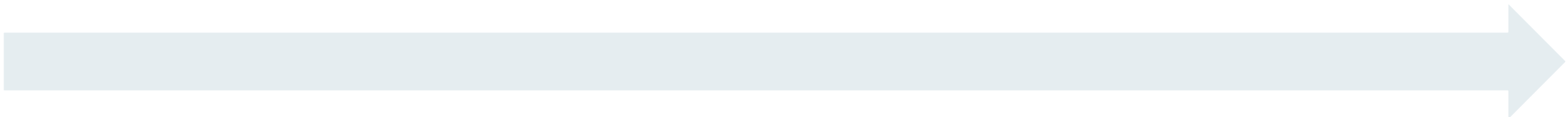
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18

20

24



Qualities of being online that prevents loneliness



Promotes social connection



Prioritising real relationships



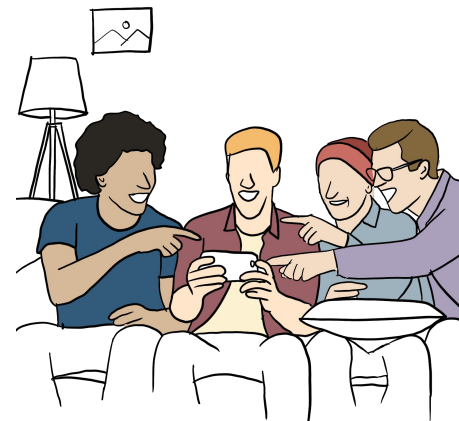
Friendly and authentic



Encourages real-world engagement



Offers emotional reassurance



Playful and fun



Makes time feel meaningful

Discussion questions

- *Does it work for us to say:*
 - *that time-online is essential to teenagers' sociality and development?*
 - *But: there's online-activities that are good and others that are not-so-good?*
- *In the heated debate about online time and risks, how can we protect the important role online platforms play in supporting social connect? How can we differentiate comms platforms (like Snapchat or Whatsapp) from social media and content platforms?*

Is it a question of quantum? is there a “right amount” or “maximum dose”? is it possible to suggest this, or is it feasible to enforce it?

What might we want/ask from tech-companies, when it comes to CYP and loneliness/

Thank you!



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