Research into gamification on Snapchat

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1. ABSTRACT

Our research focused on the *gamification features* used by *(Very Large Online Platform)* Snapchat to determine the impact of those features on users in terms of experience and screen time. We held an online survey among 300 young people (12– 21 years) that contained a variety of statements about:

- Screen time on Snapchat;
- Their experiences with Snapstreaks;
- Friend emojis;
- The Snapscore;
- and Games in chat conversations.

We also asked the respondents about the choices they would make if they could choose which features they would or would not use. In addition, we held eight interviews with young people (aged 14-21) to gain insight into how important those gamification features were to them, and the impact those features had on their day-to-day lives.

The results showed that some respondents feel that the Snapstreak affects their screen time. For them the Snapstreak is the reason to start a session on the app. Young people want to maintain Sanpstreaks mostly with their best friends. They do so because they feel it would be a waste to break the streak, or because they feel pressured by others. In the eyes of those young people the other gamification features have little effect on their screen time. It is apparent, however, that to some respondents Friend emojis and the Snapscore are causes for comparing and judging themselves and others. A substantial share of the respondents would turn off the gamification features if they could.

Some respondents spend more time on their phones than they actually want because of Snapchat's gamification features. We recommend that the Digital Fairness Act include rules on gamification features on social media. This will increase the control users have over what they pay attention to, on what they spend time, and what they see and show on social media.

2. REASON FOR RESEARCH

Over the past years a great deal of attention has been directed towards the impact of social media and smartphones on young people. The media frequently publish on the subject, politicians debate about age limits, and some schools have introduced a (partial) ban on smartphones. Concerns have been raised about the amount of time young people spend on their phones and the content they consume. In Australia this has even led to national guidelines, launching a social media ban [1] for young people under 16. In Europe, too, there is a lot going on in terms of legislation on major online platforms, as those platforms are a big part of our daily information supply and communication. Examples are the Digital Services Act (which took effect in February 2024, further on called 'DSA') and the development of the Digital Fairness Act (further on called 'DFA').

The various laws should help create safe online environments in which the users' rights and freedoms are protected. Platforms using tactics to influence the choices of users, or to make users addicted to their platforms, have no place in a healthy and safe online environment. More research is necessary to ensure appropriate responses by the law. Bits of Freedom contributes by investigating the (possibly negative) effect of design choices of online platforms on their users. We will use our findings for input and policy recommendations on the upcoming DFA, which will include rules on manipulative and addictive design.

In this report we present the research we did into one of those online platforms: **Snapchat**. -We have focused specifically on **the impact of gamification features**. These are design choices by which users **are rewarded for opening the app more frequently**, using the app more and/or interacting with others within the app. Rewards can take the form of points (sometimes exchangeable for something else), scores or status. Sometimes the points are visible to other users, which creates a competitive component.

Our research shows **how the gamification features of Snapchat influence young people** and their **experiences** with those features.

2.1 WHAT IS THE OBJECTIVE OF OUR RESEARCH?

With our research we want to create **more insight** into **how important** Snapchat's gamification features are for **young people**, **the role** they play in their social lives and **the impact** those features have on their own estimated **screen time**. This will help us gain better insight into the impact of the mechanisms.

All of this will help us devise policy recommendations and support our position on the DFA. It is our position that mechanisms directed at constantly pulling and

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[1]Comprising a selection of ten platforms: Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, Threads, TikTok, X, You-Tube, Reddit, Kick and Twitch https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cwyp9d3ddqyo

holding attention undermine the autonomy of users. That is why one of our arguments is that users should have freedom of choice in whether or not to use those features.

2.2 WHY DO WE RESEARCH GAMIFICATION ON SNAPCHAT?

We research Snapchat because this app is used by young people **on a massive scale** to send messages. Many young people use Snapchat as an alternative to WhatsApp.[2] In addition to chatting, Snapchat offers many other features, including gamification features, to which young people may be **especially sensitive**. Puberty is when they develop their identity and form significant friendships. Peer pressure and 'wanting to belong' are key factors driving what they do and do not do. Puberty is also the time when the activity in the brain's reward system increases, which makes young people more sensitive to (short-term) rewards. [3]

2.3 WHAT GAMIFICATION FEATURES OF SNAPCHAT DO WE RESEARCH AND WHY?

Previous studies show that some online platforms contain attention capturing damaging patterns [4]. These are harmful design choices exploiting users' attention and making them spend much more time on platforms than they want. This involves a loss of track of time and feelings of regret. Moreover, such patterns can facilitate or even reward excessive smartphone use. The rewarding of app usage and interactions is called gamification. In their study of *attention capturing damaging patterns*, Monge Rofarello et al. (2023) defined two forms of such patterns in which gamification plays a part:

- *Playing-by-appointment*: users have to complete tasks at specific times or at specific frequencies to avoid losing scores or rewards. Examples on Snapchat are **Snapstreaks** and **Friend emojis**.
- *Grinding*: users can collect points by repeating specific tasks. The more often a task is repeated the more points users collect. An example on Snapchat is the **Snapscore**.

Our research, therefore, focuses on Snapstreaks, Friend emojis and Snapscore, which are discussed in more detail below.

Snapstreak

The **Snapstreak** counts the successive days two users send each other Snaps [5]. That number is indicated by a fire emoji in their chat (see figure 1).

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[2]Digiwijzer: Snapchat minstens net zo populair als WhatsApp, Nationale Sociale Media Onderzoek 2026
[3]Schreuders et al. (2018)
[4]Monge Rofarello et al. (2023)
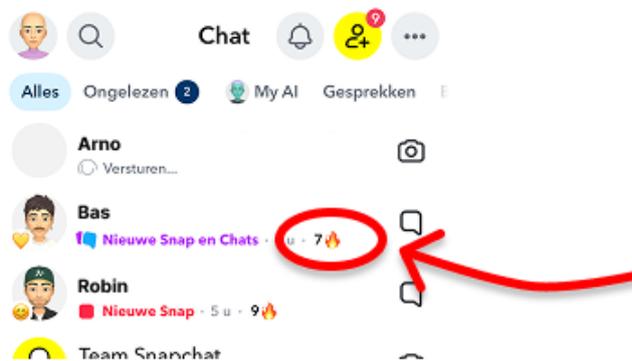[5]A Snap is a photo or video taken and sent by users in real time via the Snapchat app. In chats this

Figure 1: Snapstreak

By opening the app and sending each other Snaps every day, users are rewarded by higher Snapstreaks. They are punished if they skip a day; they lose their Snapstreak, which falls back to 0. These Snapstreaks can get so high that it feels like a waste to break them: a classic example of the sunk-cost fallacy. After all, it will take forever to get back to the same score. That is why users feel it is important to keep the streak going. So important even that users bend over backwards to maintain their Snapstreak:

In September 2025 we investigated the notifications sent by Snapchat [6]. In our interviews the Snapstreak came up and it turned out that some respondents, if they had nothing to share, just sent Snaps in which they had covered the camera, or had taken a picture of the ceiling, just to keep the streak going. Respondents also mentioned friends who gave others access to their Snapchat accounts to keep their Snapstreaks going if they themselves could not be online that day.[7]

Friend emojis

Another gamification feature offered by Snapchat are **Friend emojis**. Just like the Snapstreak, a Friend emoji appears in a chat with friends. This emoji is awarded based on the interactions between these friends. If one user sends most Snaps to another user and vice versa, they are 'Besties'[8], indicated by a yellow heart emoji (see figure 2).

If this goes on for at least two weeks, they become 'BFFs', indicated by a red heart emoji. After two months they turn into 'Super BFFs', indicated by a pink heart emoji. See figure 3 for more examples.

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is done with the camera icon. Recipients can view the Snap just 1 time, unless users have adjusted this setting in their chat. Snapstreaks can be maintained only by sending Snaps. In their chats users can add photos from the photo libraries on their phones, but this does not count as a Snap. Chat messages do not count towards the Snapstreak.

[6] Research into Snapchat's manipulative notifications

[7] The magazine Linda.meiden interviewed Amber (23) and Fee (23) who have been maintaining a Snapstreak for nine years. In the interview these examples came up, too.

[8] 'Bestie' stands for 'Best Friend', as does 'BF', while 'BFF' stands for 'Best Friend Forever'
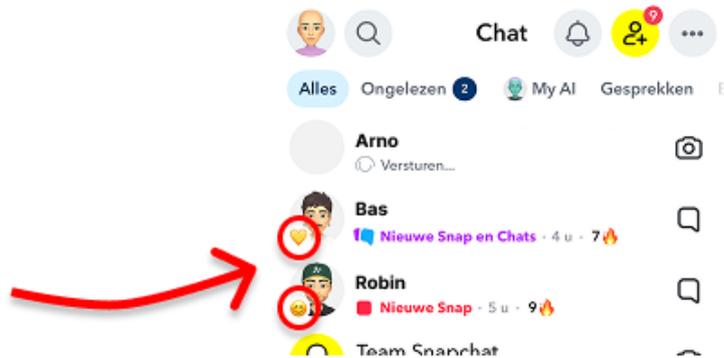
Figure 2: Friend-emoji

Friend Emoji Guide

💕 **Super BFF**
Pink hearts mean you have been each other's #1 Best Friend for two months in a row.

❤️ **BFF**
A red heart means you have been each other's #1 Best Friend for two weeks in a row.

💛 **Besties**
A yellow heart means you are each other's #1 Best Friend. You sent the most Snaps to this Snapchatter, and they sent the most Snaps to you, too.

😊 **BFs**
A smiley face emoji means they're one of your Best Friends! You send a lot of Snaps to this Snapchatter, but they're not your #1 Best Friend.

😬 **Mutual Besties**
A grimacing face emoji means your #1 Best Friend is also their #1 Best Friend.

😎 **Mutual BFs**
An emoji with sunglasses on means one of your Best Friends is also one of this Snapchatter's Best Friends!

🔥 **Streak!**
A fire emoji means you're on a Streak! This appears next to the number of days that you and a friend have continually Snapped each other.

⏳ **Streak is ending**
An hourglass emoji means your Streak is going to end soon! You and your friends each need to send a Snap to each other within 24 hours, or you'll lose your Streak.

🎂 **Birthday**
A birthday cake means it's your friend's birthday! This appears next to your friend's name on the date they entered as their birthday on Snapchat.

> ⚠️ If your Friend Emojis changed recently, including BFF and Super BFF, Snapchat Support won't be able to add, restore, or replace them for you.

Figure 3: Friend-emojis

To keep either the Snapstreak or Friend emojis alive, you need a friend. The desire to keep the Snapstreak or Friend emojis going, could be prompted by social pressure, therefore. Users do not want to let others down. Sometimes the other user reminds them actively to maintain this 'reward'.

Snapscore

Then there is the Snapscore. This score is shown on the user's profile and is visible to friends (see figure 4). The score is based on the user's activity. The more active the user is, the higher their score. Snapchat is not transparent about how exactly this score is calculated. Definite contributors to the score are the number of Snaps sent and received by users, and the number of Stories [9] posted. [10]. Online blogs [11] speculate that there are other factors, too, like viewing public Stories in the Discover feed on the Discover page and videos on the Spotlight page.

Figure 4: Snapscore

Other gamification features

We also briefly discussed the experiences of users with playing games in chat conversations [12]. When making a Snap, users choose a lens with a built-in game.[13] (see figure 5). Users can operate the game by different gestures. This is not a gamification of social contact, but two users literally playing a videogame together.

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[9]Users can send Snaps not only in chat messages, but they can also post Snaps in their 'Stories'. That way their Snaps will be visible to a larger group of people (to be determined by the user). Stories can be viewed on the special Stories page. If friends, or accounts followed by the user, have posted new stories, this will be indicated on the Stories page as a round thumbnail with a purple circle plus user name.

[10]Yahoo Tech: How does Snapscore work? Here's how the number is calculated and how to increase yours

[11]Wikihow: How does Snapchat score work?

[12]When recording a Snap (photo or video) users can choose to add a 'lens'. This is like a filter that adds a virtual layer over the image. Lenses can distort the original image or add elements.

[13]An example is the minigolf game: users see a virtual minigolf course, including a ball with a moving arrow. By tapping the screen, users launch the ball towards the arrow, following a route on the course. Once the Snap is sent, the recipient can see the sender's turn and send a Snap in return using the same filter. The user to sink the ball into the hole first wins.
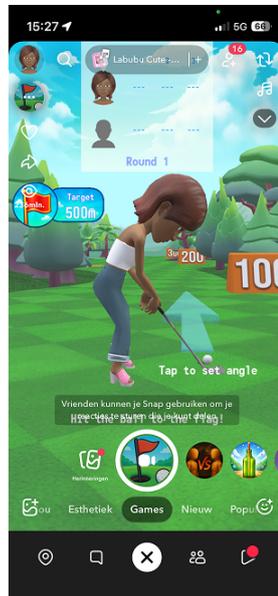
Figure 5: Games in chat conversations

3. APPROACH AND ACCOUNTABILITY

To gain insight into the impact of Snapchat's gamification elements on young people' lives, we carried out both **quantitative** and **qualitative studies**. In the quantitative study young people filled out an online survey containing several statements. In the qualitative study we held interviews to go into underlying reasons, driving factors, pain points and motives. That allowed us to make observations about the percentages of the target group with specific experiences, while at the same time provide more in-depth explanations. Both studies contained questions on the respondents' **screen time on Snapchat, their experiences with Snapstreaks, Friend emojis, the Snapscore, games on Snapchat and the choice of freedom of those features.**

To select respondents we used an external respondent agency that had a research panel. This is a large international panel where people can sign up if they wish to take part in (market) research. The use of an external panel and not our own network minimised the risk that respondents were prejudiced, for instance because they are interested in digital rights. Based on our briefing[14] the agency selected respondents for the survey. Respondents got paid for taking part. Minors needed the permission of their parents to take part.

1.Quantitative study:

We designed an online survey [15] with 26 questions, that were answered by 300 users of Snapchat aged between 13 and 21. This sample size for this population, means that with a confidence level of 95%, there is a 6% margin of error. This means that if 60% chooses the answer 'yes' for example, the chance is 95% that between 54% and 66% of the population will answer with 'yes'.

Figure 6 shows the distribution by age and gender. A side note is that it's not completely representative for the population of Snapchat-users between 13-21 years old. With a representative sample, selection should be random, which means every person from a population has the same chance of being selected. However, this was not feasible because the external research panel that we used, contained very few minors.

The average age of respondents is 19. The group aged 18-21 turned out to be much bigger (80%) than the group aged 13-17 (minors, 20%). The findings are thus more representative of the adult group. The survey mainly contained closed questions and statements that could be answered on a 5-point Likert scale.[16] There were three open-ended questions, where respondents were asked to elaborate on their scores on a specific scale.

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[14]See Appendix I: Briefing on selection for qualitative study
[15]See Appendix II: Online survey quantitative study
[16]An example is: 'strongly disagree', 'disagree', 'neither agree nor disagree', 'agree' and 'strongly agree'. For some questions a 'don't know' option was added.
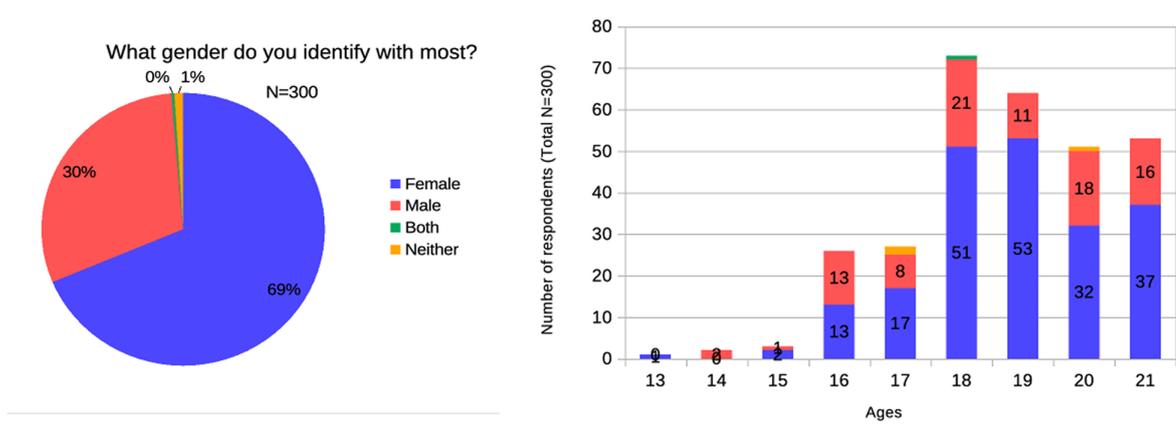
Figure 6: Age and gender

2.Qualitative study:

We held N=8 semi-structured interviews of 30 minutes with young people aged between 14 and 21 who used Snapchat. This means that the questions were not asked verbatim, but that we used an interview **guide** [17], covering all key questions and relevant subjects while leaving room for questions following up on the answers of respondents. We primarily asked open-ended questions.

We invited young people who frequently use Snapchat and have had a great deal of experience with its different features. This allowed us to ask follow-up questions about their experiences. See the appendix for the detailed selection briefing [18]. The table below shows the distribution by age and gender:

Respondent	Age	Gender
1	14	Female
2	16	Male
3	21	Male
4	18	Female
5	18	Female
6	20	Male
7	15	Female
8	17	Male

The interviews were held using the online-videocall-tool Jitsi and were recorded and transcribed.

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[17] See Appendix III: Interview guide qualitative study
[18] see Appendix I: Selection briefing qualitative study

4. KEY INSIGHTS, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Key findings

- This study shows that the **time spent** on Snapchat is affected in particular by the **need to communicate** with friends. Most respondents feel that is a useful way to spend their time, and are satsified with their screen time on Snapchat. Snapchat is **seen as an app that is less addictive** than TikTok and Instagram, the other popular social media apps used by young people. Still, a quarter (26%) of the respondents thinks their screen time on Snapchat is too high, primarily because of the many messages they receive from friends that they want to view, and the pressure they feel from friends to **reply quickly.**

- If young people could check which features they want to use, **more than half would turn off** the Friend emojis, the Snapscore and games in chat conversations. A substantial portion (42%) would not turn on the Snapstreak either.

- Meanwhile most young people (40%) take a neutral stance towards the idea to get greater choice of freedom as regards the gamification features of Snapchat, for instance the option to turn on or turn off those features. Part of the respondents said that if you do not like or do not want to use those features, you simply **don't have to pay them attention**. Many users also feel that these features make Snapchat fun, unlike other message services such as WhatsApp. Still there are some respondents who feel that an option to turn off the gamification features would be a good thing for more susceptible young people, explaining that the same applied to them when they were younger.

> **"Perhaps I would turn off those elements too. My relationships would get less complicated. It would stop people saying that I should reply because they need to get points."**

- 86% of the respondents actively maintain **Snapstreaks**. One third (33%) of the young people with Snapstreaks had noticed that the streak affects how much they use the app because they have to open the platform every day and send Snaps to the people with whom they want to keep up streaks. Moreover, young people attach most value to the **Snapstreak** compared to the other gamification elements.

> **"Because I feel pressured to respond within a day, and for that reason open Snapchat more often."**

- The Snapstreaks of many respondents grow automatically because they exchange Snaps with their friends every day. But to some increasing their Snapstreaks is actually **a reason to open Snapchat**. They also maintain streaks with people to whom they would not send chat messages otherwise. To them it is just about increasing (or rather not losing) their streaks, and not about wanting to share something with those persons. They might take a quick picture while covering the camera. They actually think it is a bit lame because there is no actual meaning behind the picture. They are also distracted by other elements of the app or other applications on their phones. This means that **the Snapstreak** can work as an actual **trigger** to have users spend **more time on their phones** without any added value. To get an impression: among the respondents we interviewed (N=8) the highest Snapstreak was 1507 days. Others mentioned streaks varying between 200 and 600.

> **"With some people I have such a high streak, it's really stupid when I lose them because it's a lot of days."**

- Reasons to maintain Snapstreaks include:
  – It feels like a **waste** to break a long streak because it takes a lot of time to get back to the same number.
  – They feel **pressure** to keep the streak going, are afraid to disappoint others or are actively reminded by others.
  – The streak is a nice representation of **how long they have been friends** already. They think it is fun to see (they do not compare to others).
  – It requires **low effort** to keep the streak going.

> **"I also have Snapstreaks with people that I keep alive because I am afraid they will get mad because it's such a long streak."**

- Moreover, 51% of the respondents with Snapstreaks would hate it if others would break the Snapstreak, and 25% of the respondents have paid to restore a broken Snapstreak (at EUR 0.99 per streak).
- Young people place not so much value on the other gamification features within Snapchat (Friend emojis, Snapscore and games in chat conversations). They feel these features have **minimal impact** on their screen time. However, those elements cause some users to **compare themselves to others and to judge others**. Many studies show that social media make it easier for users to compare themselves to others, and this can lead to a negative self-image [19]. Whether this is caused specifically by the gamification elements we researched is not known and was not mentioned explicitly in the experiences of the respondents in the survey.

[19]Verduyn et al. (2020)

- **Friend emojis**: Some respondents who have a #1 best friend on Snapchat try to preserve that status by sending each other most Snaps. If it turns out they are no longer each other's #1 best friend, it may feel like a waste, or that they are not as important to the other person as they are to them. Sometimes they are curious with whom the other person then exchanges the most Snaps. They suspect that it is someone in whom the other person has a romantic interest.
- **Snapscore**: Although young people are not actively working on their Snapscores, having a very low or very high Snapscore causes a stigma. A low Snapscore indicates a fake account, while a high score points to a user who flirts with many different people. For women especially this is associated with a negative image; users with high Snapscores are considered 'sluts'.

"A friend and I have been each other's number 1 best friend for 2 months. If she would suddenly Snap more with her sister, I would be sad. Because then we would have lost those 2 months."
"It's a little trashy to have a very high Snapscore. Like, she talks to a lot of boys."

Conclusion

The experiences of the respondents indicate that **in some cases** the gamification features of Snapchat as researched[20] could have a negative impact on the autonomy of users. In some young people those features create a feeling of pressure and make them spend more time on their screens than they want. Moreover, users have **no control** over those features. Meanwhile more than half of the users would not turn on Friend emojis, Snapscore and Games in chat conversations if they had that option, and just a little less than half (42%) would not turn on Snapstreaks.

That the experiences of young people show that the individual gamification features do not have a major effect on their screen time, is in line with previous research into addictive design. This illustrates that the development of an addiction is highly person-specific and that not one specific design technique can be labelled 'addictive' [21]. Instead it is all about the facilitating complex of design techniques that contributes to excessive smartphone usage.[22]

Although thus the majority of the respondents does not experience an immediate negative impact of the gamification features, it remains critical to remember the group that is affected, and is susceptible to these mechanisms. Legislation

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[20]The Snapstreak, Friend emojis, Snapscore and games in chat conversations.
[21]Montag et al. (2019)
[22]Researching the effect of individual design techniques is not easy because apps always contain a combination of design techniques. The data that can provide insight are usually visible only to app developers and are not made available to independent researchers.

should protect vulnerable groups. Their experience and behaviour are essential sources when developing new policies on online platforms. The forthcoming European **'Digital Fairness Act'** offers an excellent opportunity.

Directed at safeguarding a free and fair online environment, this act addresses (addictive) design techniques that take away users' freedom of choice and autonomy, design techniques that make users spend more time on online platforms than they want and steer them towards choices they would normally not make.

Recommendations

Based on this survey we have drawn up the following policy and legislative recommendations:

- **In legislation, use the following definitions for gamification features on social media platforms:**
  - Mechanisms by which a higher rate of usage or interaction with the app causes users to get higher scores or rewards.
  - Mechanisms by which users can keep specific scores, levels/status or rewards only if they use the app regularly.
  - Mechanisms by which two users have jointly reached a level or score and both users have to take action to keep that level or score.
- **Make gamification features on social media optional:** The impact of gamification features on the extent of app usage and the extent to which young people compare themselves online is greatly determined by how the gamification feature works exactly, which reward is attached to the feature, and how susceptible young people are. For susceptible users it would help if they **had a choice** whether or not to use those features. Moreover, this would also help users who have zero interest in those features (and mainly want to use a specific social media platform to stay in touch with friends). They mentioned they would turn off those features if they had that option. **This is why gamification features should be optional when using social media platforms**. This will enable users to get more grip on the time they spend on social media and more control over what they see and what they want others to see. In Snapchat's case, examples are:
  - Having the option to hide your Snapscore from others and yourself.
  - Having the option to hide your Snapstreaks in chat conversations from others and yourself.
  - Having the option to hide Friend emojis in chat conversations from others and yourself.
- **Provide transparent information to users** about how gamification elements work, for instance how exactly certain scores can be obtained, and about the choices users have in that respect.

5. RESEARCH RESULTS

5.1 CONTEXT

How do young people use Snapchat?

Young people use Snapchat because their peers use it to communicate. They mostly use Snapchat to chat and send each other Snaps.

> **"I found that it took a long time for people to reply via WhatsApp. That's why I got Snap, and now they respond within 5 seconds."**
> **"I use Snapchat to keep in touch with my friends, and WhatsApp is simply essential for work and my parents."**
> **"Everyone is on Snapchat, so you just have to have it if you want to get together with people."**
> **"Everyone has it, so it's like peer pressure."**

Unlike WhatsApp, Snapchat does not store chats and Snaps (unless you change the settings accordingly). You get a notification if someone makes a screenshot of your Snap. The push notification alerting you to new messages does not allow you to read that message. This gives young people the feeling that Snapchat offers more privacy than WhatsApp. Others find it annoying; they want to read their friends' messages immediately in the push notification, without having to open the message, which would show the sender that you have read their message.

5.2 SCREEN TIME ON SNAPCHAT

What does a session on Snapchat usually look like?

The respondents said they open Snapchat when they have received one or more messages. They also open the app when they want to send a message or a Snap. They close the app again once they are done chatting with friends. Several respondents also check whether friends have posted new Stories. The Spotlight page is not viewed often; users sometimes take a quick look but never spend much time on that page. Other reasons mentioned to open Snapchat are boredom or to keep the Snapstreak alive.

> **"I usually read the first three chats, reply, check if people have added something to their Stories and then I close the app again."**

What do young people think of their screen time on Snapchat?

Snapchat is often in their top 3 of apps in terms of screen time. Most respondents (53%) indicated that they spend between 31 minutes to 2 hours a day on Snapchat. See figure 7.
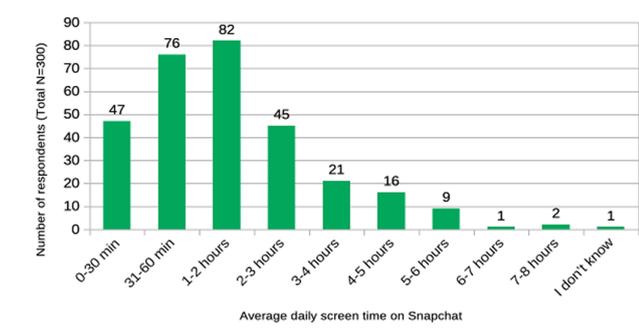

Figure 7: Screen time on Snapchat

Most (59%) are satisfied with the time they spend on Snapchat, only 10% are not. When asked whether they find their screen time too little, too much or exactly right, the numbers are different, however. A large percentage (72%) think their screen time on Snapchat is exactly right, and 26% feel it is too much (25% said too much, and 1% said way too much). See figures 8 and 9.

That most respondents were satisfied with their screen time and think it is exactly right, is due to the fact that the app is used mostly to communicate with friends in chat conversations and by sending Snaps. Young people feel this is a fun and useful way to spend their time. Most of them (63%) think that if Snapchat did not exist, their social lives would not be worse or better: they would use another app to communicate with each other. 27% thought their social lives would get worse (24% thought worse and 3% much worse). Only 10% thought their social lives would get better (8% said better and 2% much better). See figure 10.
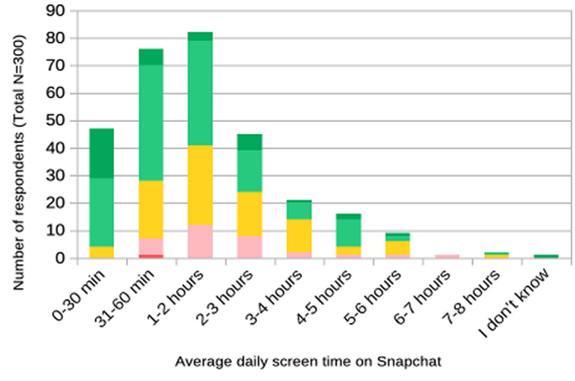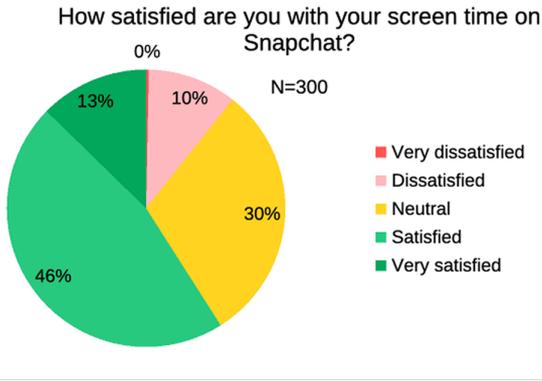
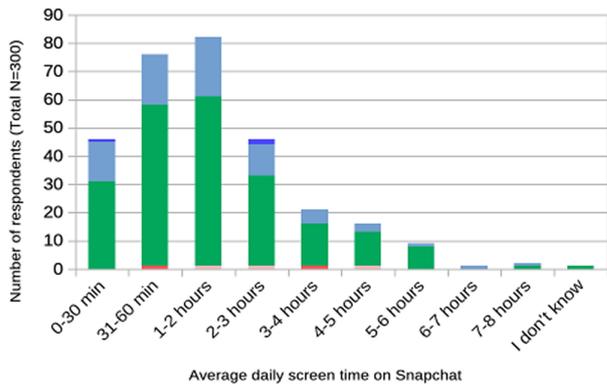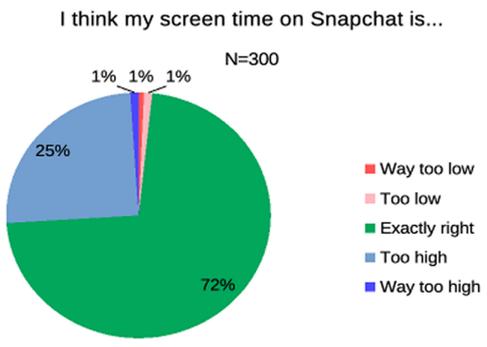Figure 8: Satisfaction with screen time
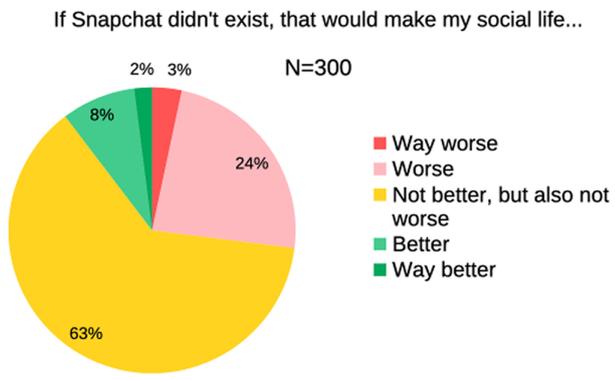

Figure 9: Opinion on screen time

Figure 10: Influence on social lives of young people

"I personally don't think Snapchat is a very addictive app. I just check it quickly and then close it again."
"I think that talking to my friends is a real good way to spend my time."

Why do some respondents think their screen time on Snapchat is too high and what role do gamification features play?

Some said that a lot of chatting with friends (and the push notifications alerting them to chats) have an addictive effect (or at least that is how they experience it). This is also the reason most stated by the 26% who felt their screen time on Snapchat is excessive. Only a few spontaneously mentioned Snapstreaks as a reason.

"When I get a message, I want to view it right away."
"Those apps interest me much more than my current school assignment, obviously."
"Because I always have to send a streak and because I am waiting for messages."
"Sometimes I am on Snapchat in the middle of the night because a friend sent me a message."
"Because I app and Snap with friends and you don't want to miss anything."
"Because of the group app with friends where we share funny videos."
"I check too often for notifications and call my friends too often."
"Easily distracted from what I'm doing, and responding immediately."
"I often get distracted by Snapchat notifications. And then I spend a lot of time sending apps or vlogs to friends."

Figure 11 shows to what extent young people think that the gamification features we researched affect their screen time. This shows clearly that only with regard to the Snapstreak a considerable percentage (33% of the respondents maintaining Snapstreaks) thinks they would spend less time on their phones if the Snapstreak did not exist.

What do young people think of their screen time on Snapchat compared to other apps?

Young people also spend a lot of time on TikTok and Instagram, but they are less happy about that. These are apps that invite scrolling, and sometimes they think that is a waste of time. Some even said that they had removed TikTok because they spent too much time scrolling.
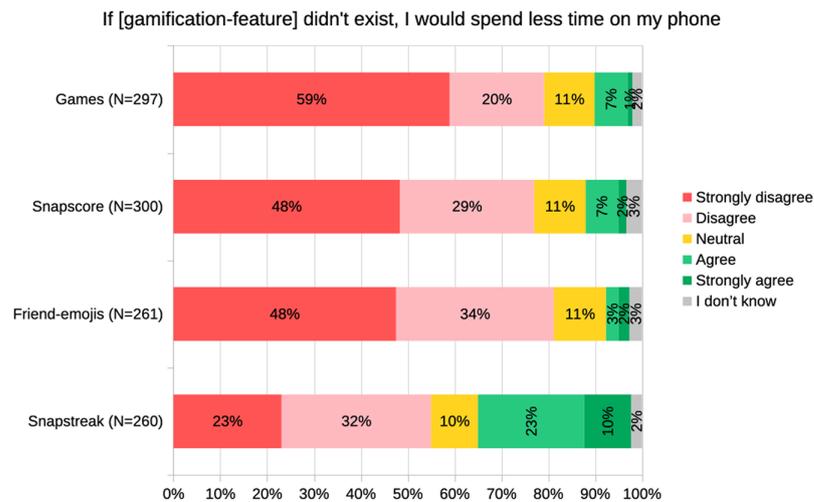
If [gamification-feature] didn't exist, I would spend less time on my phone

Feature	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree	I don't know
Games (N=297)	59%	20%	11%	7%	1%	2%
Snapscore (N=300)	48%	29%	11%	7%	2%	3%
Friend-emojis (N=261)	48%	34%	11%	3%	2%	3%
Snapstreak (N=260)	23%	32%	10%	23%	10%	2%

Figure 11: Influence on social lives of young people

"At some point, you just keep watching those short movies."
"There's always something new to see."
"Accessible, a dopamine hit every time."
"Snapchat is not like TikTok, where you keep scrolling for two hours."

Still, Snapchat features the Spotlight page, which works exactly like TikTok and Instagram Reels: a page infinitely showing reels recommended by an algorithm of users. But young people find this feature much less interesting than on TikTok or Instagram. Out of the 300 respondents 3 said that the Spotlight page is the reason why their screen time is too high.

If respondents could choose which Snapchat features they would like to use, only 14% of them would check off the Spotlight page.[23]

"It's a bit unnecessary to use 4 different apps to scroll."
"Those reels on Snapchat are just not funny. And in the beginning they were really sexual. I'd rather go to Instagram."
"Reels are often posted by ten-year old kids."
"It increases the risk of addiction for it's yet another app that lets you scroll."

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[23] Also see figure 25 in Chapter 5.7 Freedom of choice.

5.3 SNAPSTREAKS

How much time do young people spend on Snapstreaks?

The majority of Snapchat users is actively engaged in keeping Snapstreaks alive. Of the 300 young people who took part in the survey 260 have at least one Snapstreak. 257 (86% of 300) are actively engaged in maintaining one or more Snapstreaks. That means: consciously trying to keep it going. The number of Snapstreaks they are keeping alive varies between 1 and 25. See figure 12 [24]
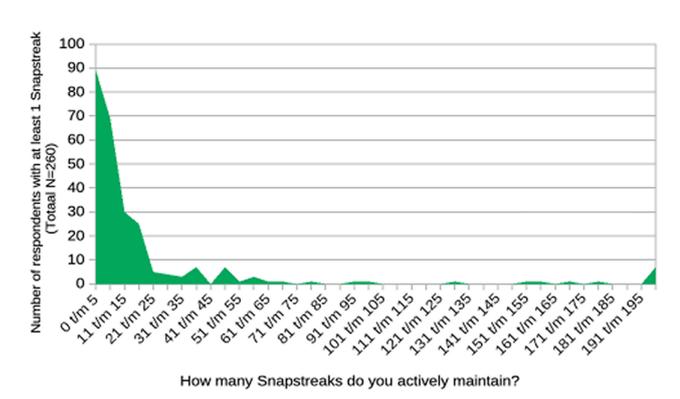

Figure 12: Number of actively maintained Snapstreaks

Although many respondents try to keep their high streaks alive, most feel **paying** for restoring lost Snapstreaks goes **too far**. Snapchat lets you restore a lost Snapstreak for EUR 0.99. Users with a paid Snapchat+ subscription get a couple of 'free' restores. If a Snapstreak is lost, users get to see an orange 'restore' button in their chats for two days. If they click on this button, the app offers them a choice to get a subscription by pre-selecting this option via a prominent orange button (see figure 13). This makes the restore once option much less prominent.

68% of the respondents said they never paid for restoring lost streaks. 25% occasionally do (this is the added sum of the categories: 'rarely', 'sometimes', 'often' and 'always'). See figure 14.

> **"I lost my 250-day streak. I felt a little stupid. Then I paid 1 Euro to get it restored. Also stupid, as it is not a real streak anymore."**
> **"Waste of money."**
> **"I think it is ridiculous to pay for restoring."**

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[24]Side note: some respondents gave an extreme high number in response to this question, which makes it likely that they did not report the number of Snapstreaks but rather how high one of their streaks is. All data considered, this results in an average of 21 streaks per user. Not considering outliers from 100 upward, the resulting average is 13 streaks per user.
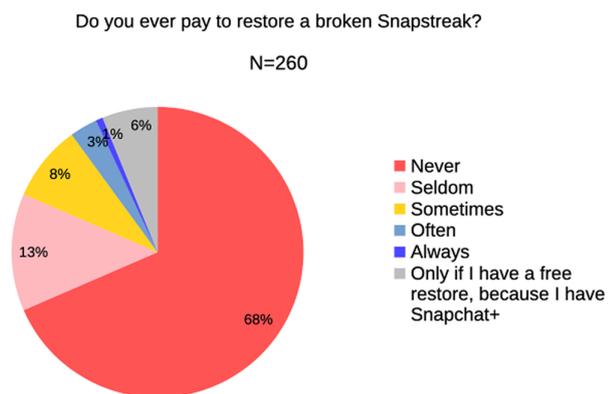
Figure 13: Restore Snapstreaks

Figure 14: Paying for restoring Snapstreaks

Of those interviewed (N=8) the participant with the highest Snapstreak had a streak of 1507 days. Others mentioned streaks between 200 and 600. The participants consider Snapstreaks high if they are over 500, over 1000 or even over 2000 days.

If respondents could choose which features of Snapchat they would like to use, 57% checked 'Snapstreak'. The remaining percentage (43%), therefore, does not necessarily want to use that feature.[25]

What are the reasons for maintaing Snapstreaks?

In the interviews we delved into the underlying reasons why young people are eager to keep their Snapstreaks. The reasons mentioned include:

- Many young people think it is a waste if a high Snapstreak is lost, and try to keep it going every day. After all, it would take a long time before they would reach the same number if they had to start over. Some of them even give their login details or phones to someone else if they are not able to maintain their streak.

> **"I would seriously be upset if it was a really high streak. But if it's like 50 or so I wouldn't really care."**
> **"With some people I have such a high streak, it would be stupid if we lost that, because that's a lot of days."**
> **"One of my friends has to go to a bootcamp and can't use his phone. So he will give his phone to someone who can keep the streak for him."**
> **"I think it is something you do without thinking. It's something you've worked hard for."**
> **"If you reply one hour too late, you lose everything and have to redo a whole year."**

- It requires little effort to maintain the Snapstreak.

> **"Some people use one of those shortcuts to send snaps to everyone at once, so it takes little effort really."**
> **"It is not much trouble to send something."**
> **"I open everyone's snap twice a day, send a photo to everyone, and everything is up to date again."**

- They see it as a validation of their friendships.

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[25] Also see figure 23 in Chapter 5.7 Freedom of Choice.

> **"Nice that you can see when you started with someone and for how long it has been going on."**
> **"With close friends I keep a Snapstreak anyway."**
> **"It shows that we have been chatting every day and sending Snap photos for such a long time, for as many days as we are friends really."**
> **"With others I don't try to keep a streak but that I have streaks with my best friends means something, it means that we want to share something every day."**

- They do not want to let others down or are encouraged by their friends to send Snaps. A little over half (51%) of the respondents keeping Snapstreaks would mind if the other person would break the streak. See figure 15.
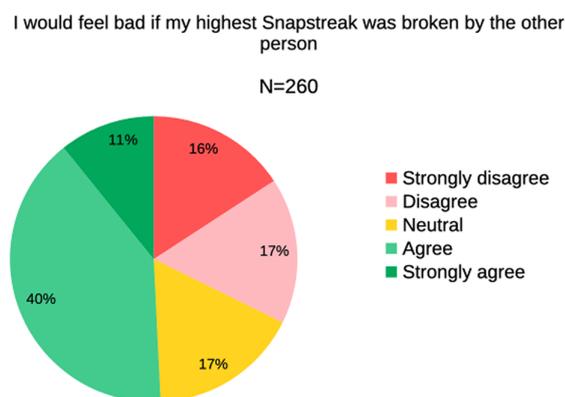

Figure 15: Would breaking the Snapreaks make them feel bad?

> **"It's not such a big deal to me, but it is to some people I keep a streak with."**
> **"I have one friend that I have to send a reminders, otherwise he would forget."**
> **"I often forget but then my friends remind me."**
> **"My niece would call me if there was a chance we would lose our streak."**

But not everyone thinks it is important to keep the Snapstreak going:

> **"I am not really focused on it, I got two streaks and that's it."**
> **"It would be fine to me if there was no Snapstreak."**
> **"If people would harass me like "you got to send a Snap for the streak", I'd immediately delete them."**
> **"If the streak would be lost, I wouldn't worry about it too much, maybe they were just busy."**

What do young people like less about Snapstreaks?

There are some contradictory feelings about keeping Snapstreaks alive. As mentioned earlier, many young people think it is a waste if they would lose their high Snapstreaks, and they like seeing the Snapstreaks. But they also feel some pressure to maintain the Snapstreaks, and actually feel that they really have no meaning:

> **"Actually I think it is kind of stupid, because in some way you really care about sending something every day."**
> **"When you see an hourglass you think "oh I have to send something again", and in reality it's just a bunch of numbers."**
> **"I was sad when it was lost, but in fact it makes no sense at all."**

The content of the Snaps they send each other does not add any value to the conversation or has little meaning.

> **"Chats that mean something are more fun compared to a silly Snap that you send just to keep your streak."**
> **"If I get a notification of a chat, I open it faster than a Snap, for that could be just some stupid photo."**
> **"Usually, if I have no time, I just quickly take a photo of the ceiling or of my shoulder."**
> **"Sometimes I get a black screen instead of a cute picture. That's so lame, you only do that to keep your streak."**

What do young people think about the effect of Snapstreaks on their screen time?

Maintaining Snapstreaks is often the reason for opening the app, but the main reason is to chat with friends. A little over half of the young people with Snapstreaks, therefore, think that the Snapstreak has no effect on their screen time. 32% disagree and 23% strongly disagree with the statement 'If the Snapstreak did not exist, I would spend less time on my phone" (together 55%). See figure 16.

They give the reasons listed below:

- Despite the Snapstreak they would still communicate just as much with their friends.

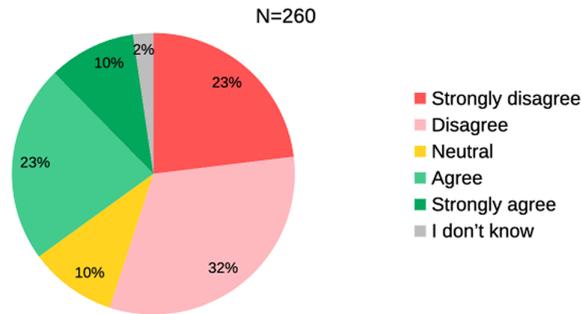**If the Snapstreak didn't exist, I would spend less time on my phone**

N=260

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Neutral
- Agree
- Strongly agree
- I don't know

Figure 16: Influence of Snapstreak on screen time

> **"Because I would still stay in touch."**
> **"If Snapstreak did not exist, I would still send a Snap."**
> **"It's nice to do a streak but that is definitely not why I spend so much time on Snapchat."**
> **"I just use the app a lot, and then you get a streak. But it doesn't have any effect on me."**

- They do not think Snapstreaks are that important.

> **"It does not give me any satisfaction or something like that, so I don't care much."**
> **"Snapstreak doesn't interest me much, I care more about sending a picture now and then, and about staying in touch."**
> **"Because the streaks are not really something I pay attention to, it goes automatically."**

- It does not take much time to keep a Snapstreak.

> **"Sending a photo for your streak takes 30 seconds."**
> **"I always do multi-snap and there's not much more I do."**

A smaller percentage (33% of the respondents with a Snapstreak) thinks it does have an impact. 23% agree and 10% agree strongly with the statement 'If Snapstreaks did not exist I would spend less time on my phone'. See figure 16.

The reasons listed are the following:

- They feel they have to respond every day because of the Snapstreak.

"You don't have to send a Snap every day and have no pressure."
"It makes me feel less obligated to others."
"You don't have to log in to keep daily contact with someone."

- They want to keep the Snapstreak and find they waste time that way.

"Sometimes when I haven't been on my phone for a long time (12 hours) I worry that I will lose some streaks and that's when I take out my phone and often I then stay on my phone."
"Because I want to keep the Snapstreak and if I didn't have that I would probably spend less time on Snapchat."
"I open Snapchat 7/10 times to send a picture to keep my Snapstreak with people.' 'With some people I have a streak but I hardly talk to them."

- Visual cues like the fire emoji and the hourglass emoji that appear in the chats trigger them to send more Snaps and thus to spend more time on Snapchat. The fire emoji indicates that they have a streak going with another user while the hourglass emoji shows that the streak might be lost if the users do not send each other a Snap quickly.

"I think that the hourglass (emoji) that pops up forces you to send something. It distracts me and then I keep doing it."
"Seeing that fire (emoji) is just addictive."
"Because I don't have to send as many Snaps to my friends and don't have to check all the time if I have an hourglass."

- For some respondents Snapstreaks are the only reason why they still use Snapchat.

"About the only reason why I open Snapchat is because I have to send someone a Snap to keep the streak. So if there were no streaks, I would no longer be on Snapchat, I think.". "Because there is not much else for me on the app."
"I use Snapchat every day but only because I have 300-day streak with a friend."
"I think Snapchat really stinks but I still have it on my phone for those Snapstreaks (and to send vlogs to friends)."

5.4 FRIEND EMOJIS

To what extent are young people interested in Friend emojis?

261 (87%) of the online respondents have one or more Friend emojis in their chat conversations. But young people are less interested in keeping their Friend emojis than in keeping their Snapstreaks. In many cases Friend emojis just happen to be there, respondents do not make any effort to get them. 30% of the respondents with Friend emojis strongly disagree and 29% disagree with the statement 'I try my best to maintain this/these Friend emoji(s) (together 59%). A smaller percentage agrees with the statement: 2% 'agree strongly' and 16% 'agree' (together 18%). See figure 17.
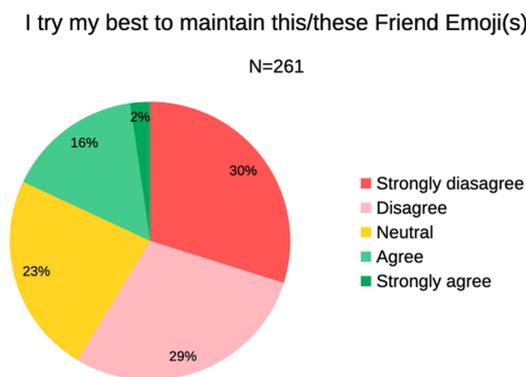

Figure 17: Maintaining Friend Emjois

> **"If it did not exist, I wouldn't miss it."**
> **"I don't really need to see what spot I am on in my list of best friends."**
> **"Most of the people in my best friend list I don't even know. I just try to keep my partner on 1, but I don't always succeed."**
> **"They are fun but I won't go through any extra trouble or so."**
> **"I would like to keep the best friend emoji with my friend, but we stay in touch anyway."**

If the respondents could choose which Snapchat features they would like to use, 38% of the respondents checked 'Friend emojis'.[26] This means most of them do not see the need for this feature.

What are reasons to maintain Friend emojis?

Although most people are not actively maintaining Friend emojis, some still think it is a fun feature.

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[26] Also see figure 25 in Chapter 5.7 Freedom of choice.

> **"It is fun, unique, cute to see if you are in someone's top ten."**
> **"It is fun to see that you are each other's number 1, it's a nice extra."**
> **"It's kind of proof that you interact with each other a lot. It makes you realise, oh I actually really like her."**
> **"It is a nice extra and something typical of Snapchat, if Snapchat would not offer that, a big effect of Snap would be gone."**
> **"I think it is a nice little extra to do with my boyfriend."**
> **"The only thing that matters to me is that my best friend tops my BF list."**

Some would be a little hurt if suddenly they would no longer be best friends (according to Snapchat's Friend emojis) with someone with whom they Snap. 15% of the respondents with Friend emojis agree with the statement 'I would if I lost a Friend Emoji on a chat with a best friend, because they send me less Snaps.' (2% agrees strongly and 13% agrees). See figure 18.
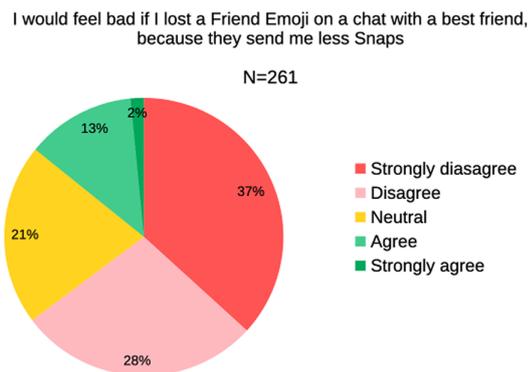

Figure 18: Losing Friend Emjois

> **"If you are in love with someone, and you are no longer his number 1, you immediately assume that another girl is his number 1 now."**
> **"It's stupid that you can see that the person who is your number 1, no longer has you in 1st place: it gives you the feeling that someone is important to you but you not to them."**
> **"Not that I really care, but if it changes I am curious, like how is that possible."**

A larger portion (65% of the respondents with Friend emojis) would not mind if they lost a Friend emoji because someone else exchanges fewer Snaps with them: 37% strongly disagree with the statement, while 28% disagree.

"Because it doesn't say who your real friends are."
"Those emojis do not affect my friendship with my friends."
"It has no value."

What do young people think about the impact of Friend emojis on their screen time?

In line with the result that the majority does not feel it is important to keep Friend emojis, the majority does not think that Friend emojis impact their screen time. 48% of the respondents with Friend emojis strongly disagree with the statement "If Friend emojis didn't exist I would spend less time on my phone', and 34% disagree (together 82%). See figure 19.

If Friend Emojis didn't exist I would spend less time on my phone

N=261

Legend:
- Strongly diasagree
- Disagree
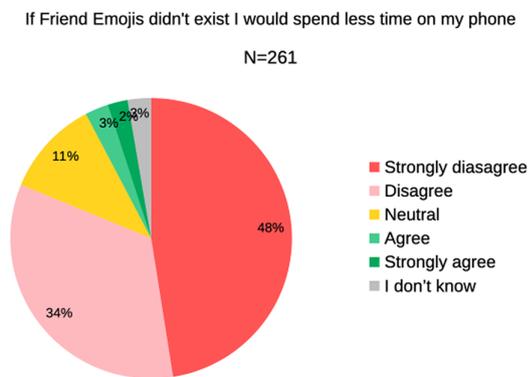- Neutral
- Agree
- Strongly agree
- I don't know

Figure 19: Influence of Friend Emojis on screen time

The reasons stated are comparable to the reasons given about the effect of Snapstreaks on their screen time.

- Regardless of the Friend emojis they would still communicate just as much with their friends.

  "I don't care much what it says, I just like being able to stay in touch with people that way."
  "I use Snapchat to stay in touch with friends, so I just use it all the time, but it is not necessarily the emoji that makes me keep using the app."
  "The contact and the memories of Snap are worth more than a Friend emoji."

- They do not think Friend emojis are that important.

  "I don't care at all about those emojis."
  "In my opinion they're just emojis."
  "It's fun but I don't feel any pressure to Snap more just to keep that emoji."

- The emojis do not stand out.

"I don't pay any attention to them."
"I hardly notice them."
"I never look at them."

Only 5% of the respondents with Friend emojis agree with the statement that they would spend less time on their phones if Friend emojis did not exist (2% strongly agree, and 3% agree). The reason they give is that they try to keep a Friend emoji with at least 1 person, and for that reason send a lot of Snaps to that person and spend more time on Snapchat.

"If I suddenly Snap more with another friend, I make sure that I also send a lot of Snaps to the person who is listed as my best friend, so she doesn't lose that spot."
"Because you don't want to lose them, you spend more time on Snapchat."
"I want to be her number 1, and she mine, so we send each other frequent Snaps."
"It gives you some sort of status that you would like to keep."

5.5 SNAPSCORE

To what extent are young people interested in their Snapscores?

The young people we interviewed (N=8) who had been on Snapchat for a longer period of time, are not actively working on raising their Snapscores. They mentioned that they did not think it was very important and did not check their Snapscores regularly.

> **"Not important, I don't really check it."**
> **"I've never cared much."**
> **"Fine if it didn't exist."**

Some of them check their Snapscore occasionally. They think it is a nice addition to Snapchat and that it is interesting to check their own Snapscores and those of others.

> **"I sometimes check my Snapscore to see how high it is now.".**
> **"It's funny to check the scores of other people."**
> **"You get like a little smug: so many people want to Snap with me, and I get and I send so many Snaps."**

If online respondents had a choice what Snapchat features they would like to use, 36% checked 'Snapscore'.[27] This means that most of them don't see the need to use it.

What do young people think of their Snapscores?

The online survey shows that a little over half (51%) is satisfied with their Snapscores (39% satisfied, and 12% very satisfied). A large portion (35%) is neither satisfied nor dissatisfied. Only 8% is dissatisfied (6% dissatisfied and 2% very dissatisfied).

Still, 10% of them think their Snapscores are too low (1% says much too low, and 9% low) and 15% that their Snapscore is too high (11% too high and 4% way too high). See figure 20.

In the interviews (N=8) we followed up with more in-depth questions. One reason why some find their Snapscores too low is that they see that their friends have higher Snapscores. The score is determined also by when they started Snapchat. Some said that they wanted to increase their Snapscores mainly when they had just started using Snapchat and had a score of 0. Their friends who had been on Snapchat longer, already had high scores. Moreover, accounts with low Snapscores are often seen as fake accounts.

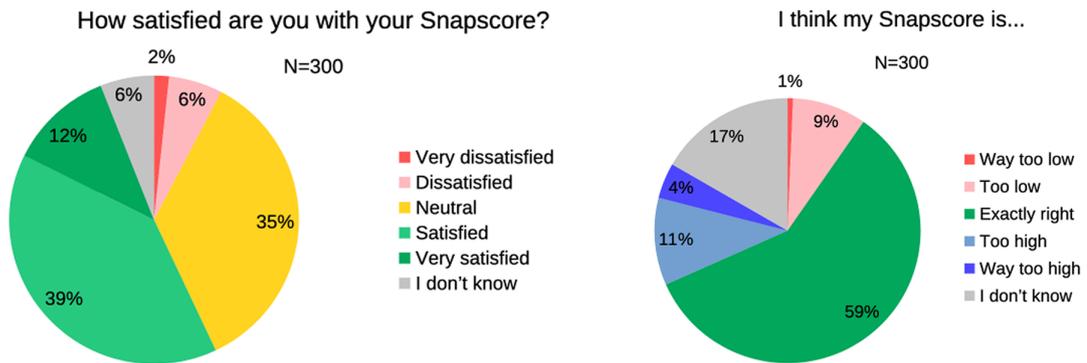[27] Also see figure 25 in Chapter 5.7 Freedom of choice.

Figure 20: Satisfaction with Snapscore

> **"When I was younger I was in a group app where all of us intentionally sent and opened Snaps just to raise our Snapscores."**
> **"If you see that someone has a high Snapscore, you want the same."**
> **"If a Snapscore is less than 7000, you know almost for sure that it's a bot."**
> **"When people have a low Snapscore you think: they have no social lives."**

That some people find their Snapscores too high is explained by the fact that an 'extremely' high Snapscore is seen as negative. It says something about how much time those people spend on their phones, but there is also the idea that those people flirt a lot or send content or chats with sexual overtones. The connotation with women is more negative than with men because of misogynous beliefs.

> **"Most people will say you're a player."**
> **"It's a little trashy to have a very high score. Like, she's talking to a lot of boys."**
> **"People with scores over 1 million are considered 'whores' or 'hoes'."**
> **"When you date someone and you suddenly see that her Snapscore is like 2 million, it is like her body count, but one that everyone can see."**
> **"If you're a young girl and you have a high Snapscore, it usually means that you're easy."**
> **"It shows that that person is addicted to the app."**

What do young people think of the effect of Snapscores on their screen time?

As with the Friend emojis the major part thinks that their Snapscores do not affect their screen time. 48% strongly disagrees with the statement 'If the Snapscore didn't exist, I would spend less time on my phone.', while 29% disagrees (together 77%). Only 9% agrees with the statement (7% agrees, and 2% strongly agrees). See figure 21. The reason is that most people are not actively raising their Snapscores (or keeping their Snapscores low).
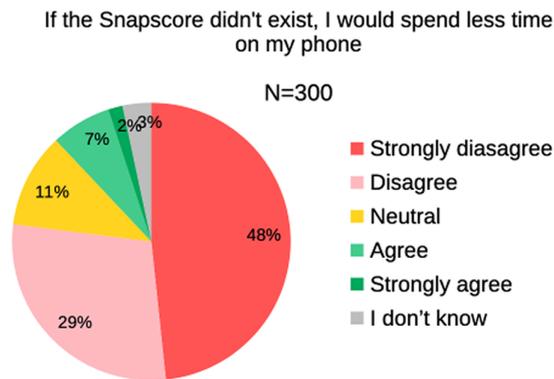
If the Snapscore didn't exist, I would spend less time on my phone

N=300

- Strongly diasagree
- Disagree
- Neutral
- Agree
- Strongly agree
- I don't know

Figure 21: Influence of Snapscore on screen time

5.6 GAMES IN CHAT CONVERSATIONS

To what extent are young people engaged in playing games in chat conversations? Young people do not really use the feature to play games in chat conversations. A large percentage (44%) said they never used it. See figure 22.
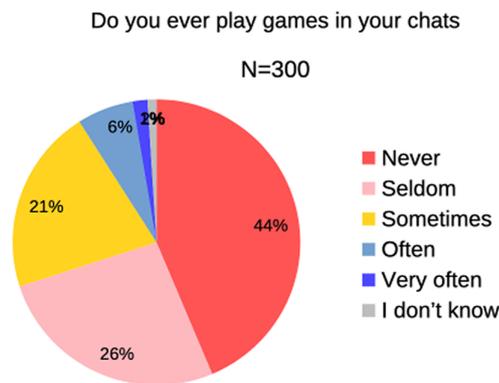

Figure 22: Games in chat conversations

If respondents could choose which feature of Snapchat they would use, 30% of them checked 'games in chat conversations'.[28] This means that most of them do not see the need to use it.

Those respondents who occasionally play games in chat conversations like it but would not miss it. The feature is not very important to them.

What do young people think of the effect of games on their screen time?

A large percentage (79%) of the respondents who know what games in chat conversations are thinks that the games have no effect on their screen time. 59% strongly disagree and 20% agree with the statement 'If games in chat conversations didn't exist, I would spend less time on my phone.'. See figure 23. The reason is that a large portion never plays games in chat conversations. Others tend to take part in games if the other person starts the game. But they say that they are done playing after a few minutes already.

> **"Sometimes when I am bored I will start playing. That makes me spend more time on Snap. Trying to break each other's scores."**
> **"A friend sends me that five times a day, so I do it, just to show him that I'm better."**

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[28] Also see figure 25 in Chapter 5.7 Freedom of choice.

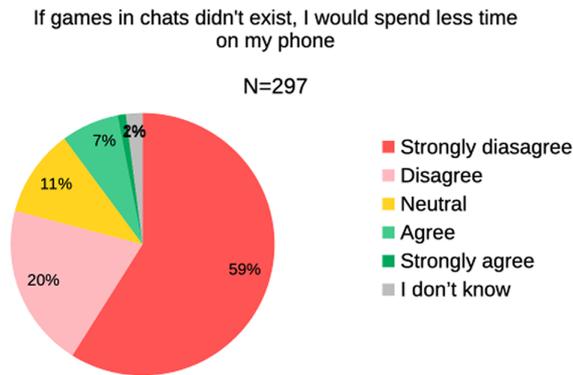If games in chats didn't exist, I would spend less time on my phone

N=297

Figure 23: Influence of games on screen time

5.7 FREEDOM OF CHOICE OF FEATURES

What would young people think if they could choose which gamification features they wanted and which not?

Most respondents (40%) take a neutral position on this. There are also young people who are positive: 26% agree and 3% strongly agree (together 29%) with the statement 'I would like to be able to choose whether or not I want to use features like the Snapstreak, Snapscore or Friend emojis'. Just about the same percentage is negative: 18% disagree and 9% strongly disagree (together 27%). See figure 24.

I would like to be able to choose whether or not I want to use features like the Snapstreak, Snapscore or Friend Emojis

N=300
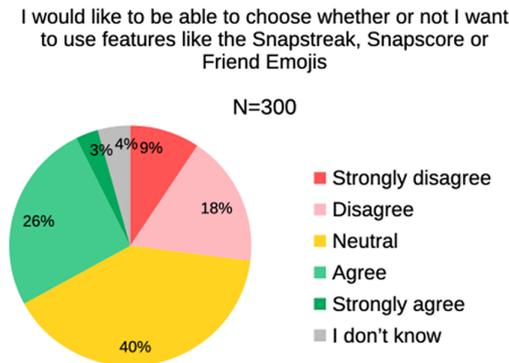
Figure 24: What do young people think about choice freedom?

In the interviews (N=8) we asked some follow-up questions. One reason that some respondents are positive about freedom of choice is that they worry about the youngest users of the app. They mentioned that when they were younger they found the game elements and social comparisons more important than today.

> **"Could be nice for people who are sensitive to that kind of thing."**
> **"Perhaps good when they are very young, as it could be addictive for them."**

"For some people who are really into that it might be good if they could turn it off."

It would be nice also to get control over what others can see of your activity on the app. Examples are when people can see when someone is online, read receipts, someone's Snapscore, etcetera.

"Maybe I would also turn off those elements. My relationships would be less complicated. I wouldn't have to deal with people who say I have to reply because they need points."
"People can see a lot of what you do on Snapchat. Would be nice if you could turn that off, like the blue ticks on WhatsApp."
"The people who take a negative position on freedom of choice feel that users are capable of deciding for themselves what they spend time on. It is not necessary to be given explicit choices in the app."
"There's no need to check it out if you're not interested."

A few people said that the choices made by users might be determined also by the pressure from other people:

"If I turned off the streak, would that mean that others cannot see the streak with me? Friends might comment, like why are your streaks not on?"

What choices would young people make if they had the chance?

See figure 25: Of the list of features 'Reminders' are most popular, and 'My AI' (Snapchat's chatbot) least popular. Of the gamification elements, which are the focus of this research (Snapstreak, Friend emojis, Snapscore and games in chat conversations) the Snapstreak is most popular, and games in chat conversations the least. This is in line with the results discussed in previous chapters, which shows that compared to other gamification elements the Snapstreak has the biggest impact on the screen time of young people.

As regards Friend emojis, the Snapscore and games in chat conversations it is remarkable that more than half of the respondents chooses not to use those features. Also there is a substantial percentage that does not have to use the Snapstreak (43%).

Online respondents who said they did not use Snapstreak, Friend emojis, Snapscore and games in chat conversations, listed the following reasons:
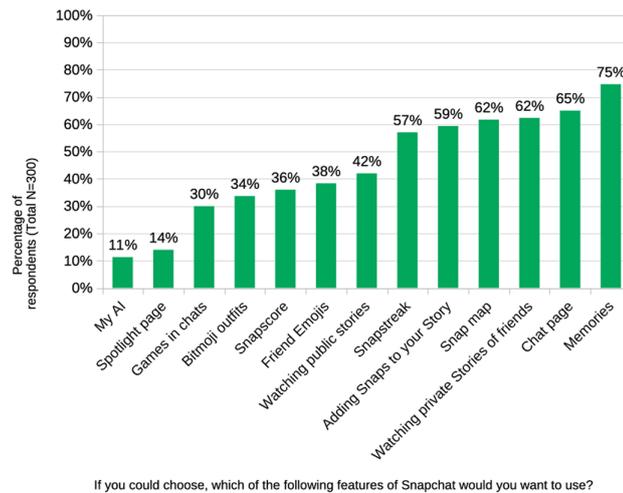
Figure 25: Which features would young people choose to use

- They were not (no longer) interested in this feature.

  "They don't add anything to my experience."
  "Because they don't really interest me."
  "I think Snapscore is rubbish and Snapstreak is completely useless, because it's just sending pictures of shoulders without saying anything."
  "I don't really care about Snapscore, just like the AI and the Spotlight page. They don't interest me, and never look at them."
  "Friend emojis: I couldn't care less."
  "Because I don't look at it, I wouldn't mind if they would remove it."
  "Games are boring."
  "Because they are useless features. Spotlights are cringe, streaks are for little kids, in my opinion. I don't even look at Friend emojis."
  "That's all for younger users."

- The features cause stress or pressure.

  "I often stress out for no reason because of streaks and I think Snapscore is nonsense." "Snapstreak can cause some pressure, so I would not mind if it would be gone."
  "I use Snapscore mostly to keep an eye on people, to see if they respond to other people. Sometimes it ruins my mood. If it would be gone, it would be better for me."

> **"I use the app only to communicate with friends; I feel that those features turn friendships into something like a competition."**
> **"My Snapscore is too high."**
> **"You get the feeling that you have to send snaps every day and it feels wrong if you miss a day."**

- The features cause them to spend more time on their phones.

> **"They only have those features to make you spend more time on your phone; they don't add anything to the intrinsic values of your life or your phone."**
> **"Snapstreak: that's the reason I spend more time on Snapchat than necessary."**
> **"It makes you use your phone more, which is not a good thing."**

What do young people think of a timer that you could set when you open the app? To make sure you get a grip on your time?

The reactions of the respondents we interviewed (N=8) differed. Because they communicate a lot with friends and sometimes call via Snapchat, they felt a timer would be annoying. Others thought it could be effective.

> **"We could get back to doing something else instead of staying indoors all the time on Snapchat."**
> **"It would be good if the app would really close when the timer runs out. It should not be too easy to extend your time."**
> **"Perhaps there could be a setting to make sure that you can watch only 3 stories every day."**

What would young people think if there would be legal rules specifically about gamification elements to make apps less addictive?

The respondents we interviewed (N=8) found it difficult to come up with potential rules, and did not feel such rules were necessary. This is also because they feel Snapchat is less addictive than other apps (TikTok and Instagram).

> **"I don't think if would help against addiction if that Snapstreak (and also the Friend emojis and Snapscore) would be banned."**
> **"Maybe a little, to stop the comparing. Because that can make you feel less self-confident. You get the idea that others are**

much more sociable than you are, or you think, it's because I am not as pretty."
"On TikTok you can also keep a streak in the dm (direct message). It is more addictive because you have all those videos on TikTok and you get stuck in that loop faster."

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7. APPENDICES

7.1 APPENDIX I: SELECTION BRIEFING QUALITATIVE STUDY

1.SUMMARY

Project: Gamification on social media Type of research: N=8 Single interviews of 30 minutes Dates: 6 January 2025 (and possibly 5 and 7 January) Location: Online videocalls Target group: Young people using Snapchat Remuneration: EUR 40

2.DATES, TIMES, LOCATION

N=8 online video calls of 30 minutes

These can be scheduled on Tuesday, 6 January between 10:00 am and 8:00 pm. Preferably within office hours where possible. If not, additional possibilities are Monday, 5 January and Wednesday, 7 January in the evening (5:00 pm – 8:00 pm).

3.SELECTION CRITERIA

- Young people aged between 14 and 21.
- Age distribution.
- Gender distribution.
- Distribution in terms of educational level.
- Did not participate in our Snapchat notification study in September 2025.
- Use Snapchat on their smartphones in the following ways:
  - Every day they send snaps and chats to their friends
  - They have at least 3 Snapstreaks of 30 days minimum.
  - They occasionally post Stories (at least 1x a month).
  - They occasionally view the Spotlight page (at least 1x a week).
  - They sometimes share their location via Snapchat (at least 1x a week).

4.CONSENT

Participants must agree to the following:

- Voice recording equipment is present. The recordings are for internal use only, will not be published and will not be linked to their personal data. We delete recordings after three months.
- Before the interview, we ask participants to sign a consent form for the processing of their data. We store only the data provided by the selection agency (based on this screening) and delete it three months after the interviews. These data will never be published or linked to the research findings. This means that research findings can never be traced back to the individual.

5.REMUNERATION

EUR 40 to be paid by the selection agency

6.RECRUITMENT TEXT

We conduct research into social media platforms and the game elements they use. Examples are collecting points, maintaining streaks, scores and levels. We want to know how users experience this and how this impacts their app usage. This way we can consider user perspective in our policy recommendations for legislation on online platforms.

7.2 APPENDIX II: ONLINE SURVEY QUANTITATIVE STUDY

Target group: Young people between 12 and 21 years who use Snapchat

1. **What is your age?**
   [numeric value]

2. What gender do you identify with most?
   ☐ female
   ☐ male
   ☐ both
   ☐ neither

3. What is your average daily screen time on Snapchat? It's okay if you don't know exactly, give an estimation
   ☐ 0 - 30 min
   ☐ 31 min - 60 min
   ☐ 1 - 2 hour
   ☐ 2 - 3 hours
   ☐ 3 - 4 hours
   ☐ 4 - 5 hours
   ☐ 5 - 6 hours
   ☐ 6 - 7 hours
   ☐ 7 - 8 hours
   ☐ 8 - 9 hours
   ☐ 9 - 10 hours
   ☐ More than 10 hours
   ☐ I don't know

4. How satisfied are you with your screen time on Snapchat?
   ☐ Very dissatisfied
   ☐ Dissatisfied
   ☐ Neutral
   ☐ Satisfied
   ☐ Very satisfied

5. I think my screen time on Snapchat is… Complete the sentence
   ☐ … way too low
   ☐ … too low
   ☐ … exactly right
   ☐ … too high
   ☐ … way too high

6. [If answer question 5 = 'too high' or 'way too high'] Why do you think your screen time on Snapchat is too high? [free input]

7. Do you have a Snapstreak with one or multiple people?
   ☐ No
   ☐ Yes

☐ I don't know

8. [If answer question 7 = 'yes'] How many Snapstreaks do you actively maintain currently? It's okay if you don't know exactly, give an estimation [numeric value]

9. [If answer question 7 = 'yes'] Statement: If the Snapstreak didn't exist, I would spend less time on my phone
☐ Strongly disagree
☐ Disagree
☐ Neutral
☐ Agree
☐ Strongly agree
☐ I don't know

10. [If answer question 7 = 'yes'] Why? Explain your answer to the question above [free input]

11. [If answer question 7 = 'yes'] Statement: I would feel bad if my highest Snapstreak was broken by the other person
☐ Strongly disagree
☐ Disagree
☐ Neutral
☐ Agree
☐ Strongly agree

12. [If answer question 7 = 'yes'] Do you ever pay to restore a broken Snapstreak?
☐ Never
☐ Seldom
☐ Sometimes
☐ Often
☐ Always
☐ I only restore Snapstreaks if I have a free restore, because I have Snapchat+

13. Is there a Friend Emoji at 1 or multiple of your chats on Snapchat? These are emojis that indicate if you're best friends with someone. These can be the following emojis: pink hearts, a red heart, a yellow heart, a smiling face, a grinning face, a face with sunglasses.
☐ No
☐ Yes
☐ I don't know

14. [If answer question 13 = 'yes'] Statement: I try my best to maintain this/these Friend Emoji(s)
☐ Strongly disagree
☐ Disagree
☐ Neutral
☐ Agree
☐ Strongly agree

15. [If answer question 13 = 'yes'] Statement: If Friend Emojis didn't exist, I would spend less time on my phone
    ☐ Strongly disagree
    ☐ Disagree
    ☐ Neutral
    ☐ Agree
    ☐ Strongly agree
    ☐ I don't know

16. [If answer question 13 = 'yes'] Why? Explain your answer to the question above [free input]

17. [If answer question 13 = 'yes'] Statement: I would feel bad if I lost a Friend Emoji on a chat with a best friend, because they send me less Snaps
    ☐ Strongly disagree
    ☐ Disagree
    ☐ Neutral
    ☐ Agree
    ☐ Strongly agree

18. How satisfied are you with your Snapscore? This is the score that's at the top of your Snapchat profile, indicated by a shiny Snapchat icon.
    ☐ Very dissatisfied
    ☐ Dissatisfied
    ☐ Neutral
    ☐ Satisfied
    ☐ Very satisfied
    ☐ I don't know

19. I think my Snapscore is… Complete the sentence
    ☐ …. way too low
    ☐ … too low
    ☐ … exactly right
    ☐ … too high
    ☐ … way too high
    ☐ I don't know

20. Statement: If the Snapscore didn't exist, I would spend less time on my phone
    ☐ Strongly disagree
    ☐ Disagree
    ☐ Neutral
    ☐ Agree
    ☐ Strongly agree
    ☐ I don't know

21. Do you ever play games in your chats?
    ☐ Never
    ☐ Seldom
    ☐ Sometimes

☐ Often
☐ Very often
☐ I don't know

22. [If answer question 21 = 'never', 'seldom', 'sometimes', 'often' or 'very often']
Statement: If games in chats didn't exist, I would spend less time on my phone
☐ Strongly disagree
☐ Disagree
☐ Neutral
☐ Agree
☐ Strongly agree
☐ I don't know

23. If Snapchat didn't exist, that would make my social life... Complete the sentence
☐ ...way better
☐ ...better
☐ ...not better, but also not worse
☐ ...worse
☐ ...way worse

24. Statement: I would like to be able to choose whether or not I want to use features like the Snapstreak, Snapscore or Friend Emojis For example: you could turn these features off and on via your settings.

☐ Strongly disagree
☐ Disagree
☐ Neutral
☐ Agree
☐ Strongly agree
☐ I don't know

25. If you could choose, which of the following features of Snapchat would you want to use? Check the boxes of the features that you want to use and leave the box empty of the features that you don't want to use.
☐ Snapscore
☐ Snapstreak
☐ Friend Emojis
☐ Games in chats
☐ Spotlight page
☐ Adding Snaps to your Story
☐ Watching public Stories
☐ Watching private Stories of friends
☐ Chat page
☐ Memories
☐ Snap map
☐ Bitmoji outfits
☐ My AI

26.Take a look at the features of which you DIDN'T check the box. Why don't you want to use those?

[free input]

7.3 APPENDIX III: INTERVIEW GUIDE QUALITATIVE STUDY

Interview guide Duration: 30 minutes Target group: Snapchat users aged 14-21

1. Introduction and social media usage 5 min

- Explanation: purpose of interviews, no right or wrong answers, voice recording, anonymized findings.
- Introduction of moderator and participant.
- How much do you use your phone? Screen time?
- What do you think of your screen time?
- What social media do you use? For what purpose?
- Favourite social media and why?
- What don't you like about social media?

2.Snapchat usage 5 min

- Why/for what purpose do you use Snapchat?
- How do you experience the use of Snapchat? What do you experience as positive and what as negative?
- What are your favourite features of Snapchat? Why?
- What features don't you use (or hardly)? Why?
- Which Snapchat features could be removed?
- What does a session on Snapchat usually look like for you?
- What are the most common reasons to open Snapchat? How do you usually start a session?
  - If not mentioned: do you also open Snapchat because you want to keep a Snapstreak going?
  - Are there features on Snapchat that you always check?
  - When do you close the app?
- Do you think that Snapchat has major impact on your screen time?
  - If so: do you have examples? Why is that?
  - Are you happy with your screen time? Do you have the feeling that you have a grip on the time you spend on Snaptime?

3. Gamification 10 min

Snapstreak (we show an example)

- With how many people do you have a Snapstreak?
- What do you think of the Snapstreak?
- What does it mean to you if you have a Snapstreak with many people?
- What do you consider a high Snapstreak?
- What does it mean to you if you have a high Snapstreak? Or a low one?
- Do you think it is important to keep the Streaks alive? How do you do that?
- Did you ever pay to have a Snapstreak restored? Why/why not?
- What would you do/feel if your friends would break the Snapstreak?
- What does the Snapstreak mean for your friendships?

- What if Snapchat did not have Snapstreaks?

Snapscore (we show an example)

- What do you think of the Snapscore?
- Do you ever look at your Snapscore?
- Do you ever look at the Snapscore of others?
- What do you consider a high Snapscore?
- What does a high Snapscore mean? Or a low one?
- Do you think it is important to get a higher Snapscore? How do you do that?
- What if Snapchat did not have a Snapscore?

Friend emojis (we show an example)

- Do you have a Friend emoji in some chats with friends? Which one?
- What do you think of Friend emojis?
- What does it mean to you if you have a Friend emoji in many chats?
- Do you think it is important to keep the Friend emojis going? How do you do that?
- What would you do/feel if your friends would 'break' the Friend emojis?
- What do Friend emojis mean for your friendships?
- What if Snapchat did not have Friend emojis?

Games in chat conversations

- Do you ever play games in chat conversations?
- If so, when?
- How do you feel about those games?
- What if Snapchat did not have games in chat conversations?

4. Rules and conclusion 5 min

- How would you feel if you could choose to use or not use the Snapstreak, Friend emojis or the Snapscore? What would you choose and why?
- How would you feel if you could use a timer for your Snapchat usage?
- How would you feel if these features would be regulated to make sure that young people get more grip on the time they spend on social media?
- Do you have any ideas for such regulations, or initiatives?
- Any questions or comments?
- Thank you and goodbye

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