



Life in 'Likes'

Social media use among 8-12 year olds:

Executive Summary

Most social media platforms have a minimum age limit of 13, but research shows a growing number of children aged under 13 are using social media, with 3 in 4 children aged 10-12 having their own accounts.

While much is known about how teenagers use social media, this research provides the missing piece to the story, exploring the social media lives of children before they reach the teenage years. In October and November 2017, we conducted 8 focus groups with 32 children aged 8-12 to understand the impact of social media on the wellbeing of this age group. The findings of this research are summarised below.

How I use social media

My social media:

Across all ages, the most popular social media were Snapchat, Instagram, Musical.ly and WhatsApp. Younger children had less routine around when they accessed social media, while older children started to get into the habit of using all their social media apps multiple times a day, and for some, it had come to dominate their day.

Social media makes me feel happy

Children knew how to cheer themselves up or calm themselves down using social media, from getting funny Snapchats from a friend to watching slime videos

on Instagram. It allowed children to be creative and play games, two things that appealed to children from a very young age.

How I stay safe online:

Parents and schools had successfully ingrained messages in children about online safety from known risks such as predators and strangers. Yet children were less aware of how to protect themselves from other online situations that could affect their mood and emotions.

My friends and family

'Following' my family:

Younger children were particularly influenced by their family's views and usage of social media, and parents may be unaware of how their use of social media affects their child.

Going on my mum's phone

Parents sometimes gave children contradictory safety messages when they let children use their social media accounts, and unknowingly exposed them to unsuitable content.

Sharenting

Many children felt uncomfortable and bothered by their parents posting pictures of them on social media, yet felt they could do little to stop it.

My sister showed me Snapstreaks

Children learned how to do new things on social media from their older siblings, but were also put off by things that their siblings had experienced. In some cases, children worried about their siblings' behaviour online, such as excessive use and ignoring safety

messages.

My online friends:

Social media was important for maintaining relationships, but this got trickier to manage at secondary school, where friendships could break down online.

Keeping in touch

Children used social media as a tool to maintain friendships, and they recognised the value of face-to-face interactions for more serious conversations, like discussing worries and resolving arguments.

Falling out online

Younger children were more likely to see mean comments from strangers on apps like Roblox, whereas older children, who were communicating with a greater number of people on group chats, faced issues and confusion around the blurring of 'jokes' that were posted publicly.

I need to reply now

Maintaining online friendships could be stressful for some and a source of distraction from other offline activities.

Growing up on social media

Who should I be?

Children are conscious of keeping up appearances on social media, particularly when they start secondary school, and identity and seeking peer approval become more important.

Do I look okay?

Despite talking about the importance of 'staying true to yourself' and being authentic on social media, girls were worried about looking 'pretty' and boys

were more concerned with looking 'cool' and having the right clothing.

Can we all look like celebrities?

When children started to follow celebrities and people outside their close family and friends, many became aware of how they looked compared to other people on social media, and felt that comparisons were unattainable.

Will my picture get any likes?

Children felt good when they got 'likes' and 'comments' from friends, and some Year 7 children were starting to become dependent on them, using techniques to guarantee they would get a high number of 'likes'.

Is this shareable?

Children started to see offline activities through a 'shareable lens' based on what would look the best on social media.

The world and my future:

Social media could inspire children and help them learn about new things.

I want to be a YouTuber when I am older

Some children developed new aspirations about what they wanted their future to be like and copied things they saw on social media.

Learning about the world

Some children actively gathered information on social media platforms like YouTube and Instagram, and were exposed to 'news' via celebrities and 'explore/discover' pages.
