Digital friendships:

the role of technology in young people's relationships

Executive Summary

For Safer Internet Day 2018, the UK Safer Internet Centre commissioned an online survey of 2000 young people aged 8-17 years, which was conducted by Censuswide.

The findings reveal how central technology is to young people's relationship and the many different platforms they are using to interact with each other. It also highlights both the positive and negative role that technology can play in young people's relationships and that whilst they are proactively helping to build a better internet, they also want support from the adults in their lives to do so.

Technology's role in young people's friendships

The most popular platforms 8-17 year olds are using to chat to their friends on a daily basis are YouTube (41%), WhatsApp (32%), Snapchat (29%), Instagram (27%) and Facebook or Facebook Messenger (26%).

Being online is key for many young people's relationships:

- Over half (54%) of respondents aged 8-17 said they would feel isolated if they couldn't talk to their friends via technology
- Almost two in five (39%) said they have made friends online that they wouldn't have met otherwise

Changing friendships in a digital world

Young people aged 8-17 are using a variety of methods to express themselves online with emojis being the most popular (84%) followed by slang terms (72%), facial expressions in selfies (70%) and images (63%).
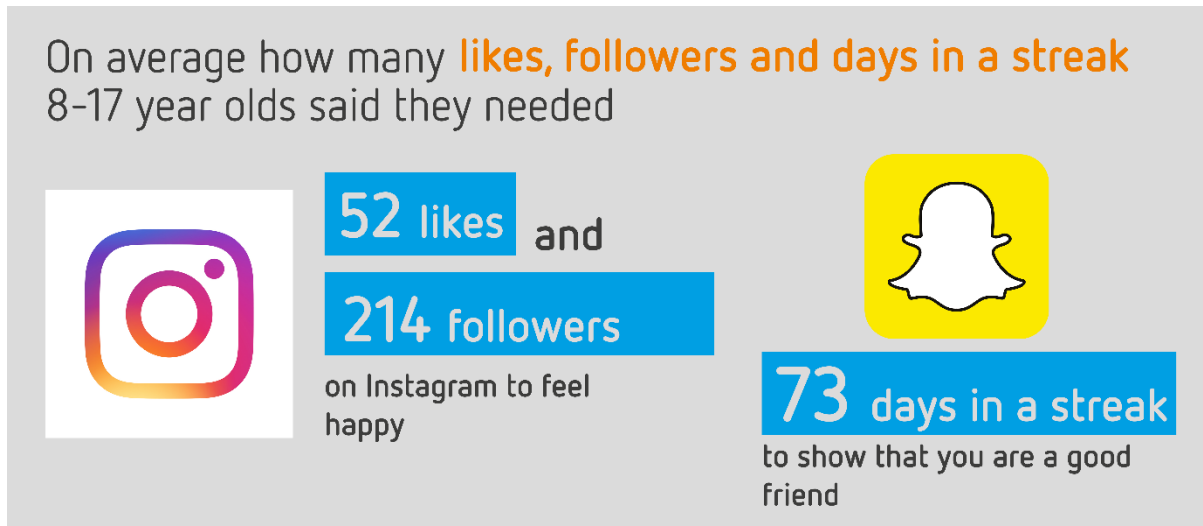
There are also certain expectations being formed in young people's online relationships:

- Over seven in ten (73%) think it's important for their friends to **reply to their messages** once they've seen them
- 60% of young people think it's important to be **included in group chats** by their friends
- Over half (51%) of respondents aged 8-17 think it's important that their friends **like their status updates or posts**
- More than two in five (43%) think it's important for their friends to **ignore people that they don't like**

Popularity, status and self-esteem can play a role in how young people interact with each other:

- Two in five (40%) respondents say they **feel left out** when people post things they haven't been included in

- Over a third (36%) of young people think that other people's lives **look more exciting** than theirs on social media, with girls more likely to feel this (40%) in comparison to boys (33%)

On average how many **likes, followers and days in a streak** 8-17 year olds said they needed

52 likes and

214 followers

on Instagram to feel happy

73 days in a streak

to show that you are a good friend

Navigating friendships: the positives and negatives

The majority of young people are having positive experiences and interactions online:

- In the last year, more than four in five (83%) of 8-17s have experienced people being **kind** to them online
- 68% of young people said that **chatting to their friends** online cheers them up
- In the last week, young people aged 8-17 say that because of something online they had felt **happy** (89%), **excited** (82%) and **inspired** (74%)

However many young people are having negative experiences online:

- In the last year, almost half (49%) of 8-17s have experienced people being **mean** to them online
- 47% of young people say that in the last year, people have **excluded** them online
- In the last week, young people aged 8-17 say that because of something online they have felt **sad** (56%), **angry** (52%) and **worried or anxious** (42%)

Strategies and support in a digital world

Young people are managing their online lives in a number of ways:

When asked what they would be most likely do if someone upset them online, young people aged 8-17 said:

1. Do something else offline that I enjoy (65%)
2. Do something else online that I enjoy (63%)

3. Speak to a parent or carer (62%)
4. Speak to friends (60%)
5. Report it or block the person (58%)

They are supporting each other and want to build a better internet:

- In the last year, 88% respondents said they had sent a kind message online to a friend who was feeling upset
- Four in five (80%) of those surveyed said they have stood up for their friend online when other people were being mean
- Almost four in five (78%) young people aged 8-17 believe that every person on the internet has a responsibility to be respectful
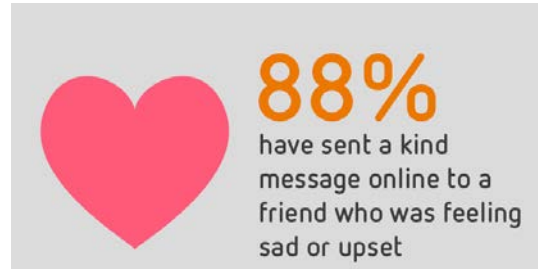
Young people want support from the adults in their lives but can face barriers:
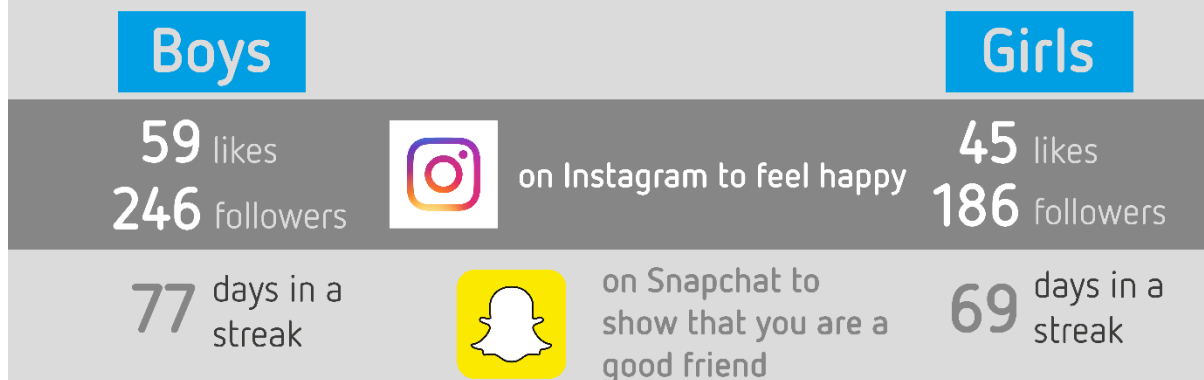
- Over three-quarters (77%) of respondents aged 8-17 say that they want their parents and carers to be there for them if something worries online
- More than seven in ten (72%) of those surveyed want their school to teach them about cyberbullying and how to manage friendships online
- However, almost three in five (58%) respondents aged 8-17 say that they feel that teachers don't always understand their online lives and 28% don't feel like their parents or carers do
- A third (33%) of young people report that they sometimes don't speak up about online worries as they are scared that they will get into trouble.

Conclusions

This report shines a light on both the positive and negative role that technology can play in young people's relationships. It demonstrates how digital technology is embedded throughout young people's friendships, across a range of platforms and diverse communication methods. It shows how young people want support from their friends, family and school to help them navigate the complexities of digital friendship and the risks and pressures that may arise.

It is essential that we collectively take action to help young people harness the positive opportunities offered by technology for connection, self-expression and support, while empowering them with strategies to cope with any negatives, and help to create an online environment that seeks to promote young people's wellbeing.

On average boys said they need more **likes, followers and days in a streak** than girls said they needed:

Boys		Girls
59 likes **246** followers	on Instagram to feel happy	**45** likes **186** followers
77 days in a streak	on Snapchat to show that you are a good friend	**69** days in a streak

However whilst there are clearly many pressures on young people online, encouragingly over a third (35%) of respondents aged 8-17 said that they didn't feel that they had to use social media to be popular or liked, with 8-12s slightly more likely to feel this way (38%) than 13-17s (32%).

In comparison 32% of all respondents aged 8-17 reported that they did need to use social media to be popular or liked, with this rising from 30% of 8-12s to 35% of 13-17s.

35% of young people say that they don't need to use social media to feel popular or liked

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