

2023

Teens and Mental Health:

# How Girls Really Feel About Social Media

COMMON SENSE IS GRATEFUL FOR THE GENEROUS SUPPORT AND  
UNDERWRITING THAT FUNDED THIS RESEARCH REPORT:

**Bezos Family Foundation**

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# A Letter from Our Founder



Founder and CEO  
James P. Steyer

The U.S. surgeon general and the American Academy of Pediatrics have declared a youth mental health crisis in this country. And research from the CDC released in February 2023 highlighted that girls specifically are feeling this crisis at higher levels than any other group.

At Common Sense, our years of research into the connection between technology and mental health has put social media in the crosshairs of this discussion. But to get a better understanding of how specific platforms impact the lives of today's teen girls, we need to ask them directly. Where do they spend their time online, and what do they come across while they are there? And do they believe any platforms are worse offenders than others when it comes to their mental health?

This new report gives us an up-to-date, comprehensive road map to teen girls' online lives—as they see and experience them. The findings reinforce what we've found over and over as we've undertaken this research: Teens who are already at risk or experiencing mental health challenges are also more likely to have negative experiences with social media. But those same teens are also more likely to find the benefits of social media, like finding resources, community, or support.

The report also reveals that while some platforms present more pitfalls than others, it is the features that are often universal across platforms—like location sharing or photo filters—that seem to have a bigger influence on girls' experiences with social media in both good and bad ways. In other words, no platform is truly worse than another. Instead, experiences depend on who is using the platform, and how they're spending that time.

Those features, and girls' responses to them, provide a road map for the industry to use to make some simple but important changes to their platforms. These crucial steps could minimize harmful impacts on teens' mental health and maximize social media's benefits—especially for those teens who are already dealing with depression or other social vulnerabilities. Putting kids at the center of how platforms are designed may allow them to continue to use social media for all of its benefits and important social development needs.

The reality is, teens' relationships with social media are complicated. They know that it isn't always the best for them, but it plays a huge role in how they experience the world and build and support their relationships. They aren't likely to stop using it, but we have a chance to make it work better for them.

Most importantly, it's time to center youth voices when we discuss the connections between social media and mental health. Hearing from young people helps us all understand what's actually happening online, not just what we think could happen. This research is a great first step, and at Common Sense, we're committed to bringing youth voices forward as we work with industry leaders, policymakers, and the federal government to address the youth mental health crisis and help make social media a place where mental health is cultivated and supported.

## Credits

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# Introduction

Social media is a central component of adolescents' lives. Whether social media has a negative effect on young people's mental health has been the source of considerable controversy, and its effects on adolescent girls have been a specific focus of public concern. Studies that have examined associations between the time that girls spend on social media and negative indices of mental health have produced mixed findings, with research generally suggesting a small but statistically significant relationship between social media use and negative mental health (Valkenburg et al., 2022).

Though research is ongoing as to how, why, and for whom social media use results in positive or negative outcomes, it is clear that social media plays a critical role in girls' mental health—both for better and for worse. Benefits of social media for girls' mental health include access to information and resources, social connection, self-expression, and identity affirmation. At the same time, there are many risks of social media, including exposure to harmful content, bullying and drama, unwanted contact by strangers, negative social comparisons, and interference with sleep (Rideout & Robb, 2018; Rideout et al., 2021).

The degree to which adolescents encounter these risks and benefits likely differs across platforms and is strongly tied to girls' existing strengths and vulnerabilities, whether based on their identities, social characteristics, or existing mental health diagnoses. Importantly, the specific design features of various platforms may amplify both their risks and benefits; some adolescents will prove more vulnerable to their influence, and others more resilient.

There has been much debate about the mental health ramifications of major social media platforms, but rarely have girls themselves been part of these discussions. This report gives voice directly to girls' perceptions of social media platforms and their features, offering an important window into how we can best support them online.

## The current study

This report documents the results of a demographically representative national survey, conducted in November and December 2022, of more than 1,300 adolescent girls (age 11 to 15) in the United States. This report does not aim to explore whether girls' use of social media causes positive or negative mental health outcomes. Rather, the purpose of this report is to explore girls' *perceptions* of how popular social media platforms and their design features affect their well-being, to understand the frequency with which they report positive and negative experiences on these platforms, and to highlight the experiences of groups who may be more vulnerable (e.g., girls experiencing depressive symptoms, LGBTQ+ adolescents).

We asked girls whether they have ever used a series of social media platforms, but we focused the majority of our questions and analysis on five popular platforms: YouTube, TikTok, Instagram, Snapchat, and messaging apps (e.g., iMessage, WhatsApp, GroupMe). For the majority of our findings, we relied on quantitative survey data, but in some cases, we also asked girls to share opinions in their own words.

Our survey is one of the first to ask girls directly about their perceptions of how certain design features affect their overall well-being. Separately, among girls who currently use each platform (i.e., have used in the past month), we also asked about how frequently they had a range of positive and negative experiences on those platforms. Our research does not aim to test whether these design features cause certain positive or negative experiences on each platform. However, it is important to consider how these design features may play a role in shaping adolescents' online lives.

## What are design features?

Design features are key components of social media platforms. These features may play a role in creating a range of both positive and negative experiences for adolescents online.

Design feature and definition	Potential negative experiences	Potential positive experiences
<b>Comments sections.</b> Space where users can comment on posts and videos.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Negative social interactions (e.g., cyberbullying, drama)</li> <li>Exposure to harmful language or hate speech</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Positive social interactions (e.g., getting/receiving support, humor)</li> </ul>
<b>Disappearing posts.</b> Posts, stories, or messages “disappear” after a certain amount of time.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Negative social interactions (e.g., cyberbullying, drama)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Positive social interactions (e.g., getting/receiving support, humor)</li> </ul>
<b>Endless scrolling.</b> No clear end point to the “feed” of videos or posts.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Feelings of “addiction” or overuse</li> <li>Interference with sleep</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Discovery of content relevant to interests</li> <li>Discovery of identity-affirming content</li> </ul>
<b>Filters.</b> Effects that change the appearance of photos or videos.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Body image and appearance concerns</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Fun and entertainment</li> <li>Self-expression</li> </ul>
<b>Location sharing.</b> Automatic sharing of users’ locations.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Concerns about safety</li> <li>Fear of missing out (“FOMO”) or social exclusion</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Social connection</li> </ul>
<b>Metrics.</b> Number of “likes” or “views” on posts or videos.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Social comparison</li> <li>Pressure to show “best version” of self</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Discovery of content relevant to interests</li> <li>Discovery of identity-affirming content</li> </ul>
<b>Notifications.</b> Phone alerts when something happens on a social media app.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Availability stress (e.g., pressure to be responsive to peers)</li> <li>Feelings of “addiction” or overuse</li> <li>Interference with sleep</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Social connection</li> </ul>
<b>Private messaging.</b> Users can send or receive direct messages, photos, videos.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Unwanted contact by strangers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Social connection</li> </ul>
<b>Public accounts.</b> All users can see one’s posts or contact them, even if not a “friend” or “follower.”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Unwanted contact by strangers</li> <li>Reputational concerns or social comparison</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Social connection</li> <li>Activism</li> </ul>
<b>Read receipts.</b> Indications that a message has been opened, delivered, or read.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Negative social interactions (e.g., cyberbullying, drama)</li> <li>Availability stress (e.g., pressure to be responsive to peers)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Positive social interactions (e.g., getting/receiving support)</li> </ul>
<b>Recommended videos.</b> An algorithm recommends videos to watch.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Feelings of “addiction” or overuse</li> <li>Exposure to negative content (e.g., harmful suicide or eating disorder content, racist content)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Exposure to positive content (e.g., helpful mental health resources, identity-affirming content)</li> </ul>
<b>Video autoplay.</b> After one video ends, another starts playing automatically.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Feelings of “addiction” or overuse</li> <li>Interference with sleep</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Discovery of content relevant to interests</li> <li>Discovery of identity-affirming content</li> </ul>



In addition to asking about positive and negative experiences on social media platforms, we also asked about how frequently girls have some of these experiences in “real life” or “in person, NOT on social media.” (The term *real life* was used as a reference point for girls to think about their lives outside of social media, not as an indication that social media experiences are somehow not “real.”)

The findings of this study should be interpreted with a few considerations in mind. In most cases, girls were asked to answer questions about a platform only if they currently use that platform. Thus, we cannot be sure whether differences across platforms are due to the platforms themselves, or to specific characteristics of the subsample of girls who choose to use each platform. However, platform differences generally remained consistent when limiting the sample to girls who use *all* the platforms we asked about. In addition, when examining differences in the frequency of experiences across platforms, responses are inherently influenced by the frequency with which girls use each platform. Finally, though our survey focuses on girls, future work is needed to explore the unique experiences of boys and adolescents of other genders on social media.

We hope this report sheds light on adolescent girls’ perceptions of and experiences with popular social media platforms, and in doing so, offers new insight into how platform design can better support girls’ mental health.

**TABLE A. Use of social media platforms**

Platform	Ever used		Used in past month	
	n	%	n	%
YouTube	1,187	85%	1,168	84%
TikTok	1,014	73%	968	69%
Messaging apps	835	60%	785	56%
Instagram	821	59%	769	55%
Snapchat	802	57%	726	52%
Facebook	688	49%	--	--
Twitter	301	22%	--	--
Discord	278	20%	--	--
Reddit	129	9%	--	--
Other platforms	43	3%		--
<b>Any social media</b>	<b>1,365</b>	<b>98%</b>	<b>1,208</b>	<b>86%</b>
<b>No social media</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>2%</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>

Note: Unless otherwise specified, platform-specific questions in this survey were asked only of girls who actively use each platform, which we defined as having used each platform in the past month.

**TABLE B. Demographic profile of survey sample**

Subgroup	Unweighted		Weighted	
	n	%	n	%
<b>Age</b>				
11	258	18%	278	20%
12	265	19%	285	20%
13	322	23%	278	20%
14	289	21%	280	20%
15	263	19%	275	20%
<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>				
White	496	36%	695	50%
Hispanic	164	12%	176	13%
Black	248	18%	181	13%
Asian	138	10%	73	5%
Other*	42	3%	29	2%
Two or more races	301	22%	228	16%
<b>Family income<sup>†</sup></b>				
<\$50,000	484	36%	463	34%
\$50,000 to \$100,000	454	33%	472	35%
>\$100,000	423	31%	415	31%
<b>LGBTQ+</b>				
No	1,103	79%	1,123	80%
Yes	216	15%	189	14%
<b>Depressive symptoms</b>				
None	883	63%	868	62%
Mild	260	19%	290	21%
Moderate to severe	254	18%	238	17%

\*Pacific Islander, MENA, Native American, and other.

†Parent reported.

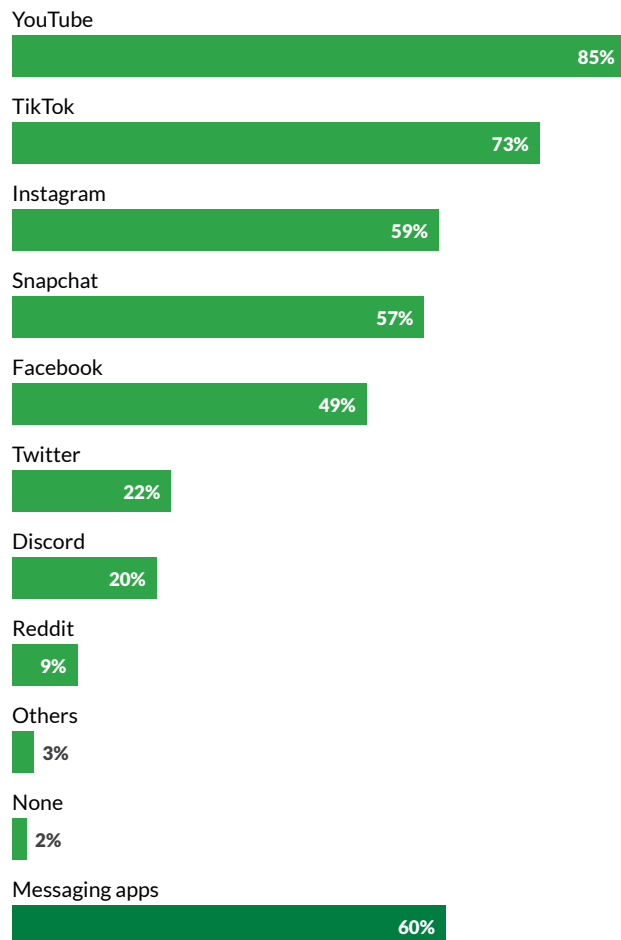
Notes: Percentages do not always add up to 100 due to rounding or missing data. For LGBTQ+ subgroups, participants who responded “Questioning/not sure” or “Prefer not to say” were excluded from subgroup comparisons.



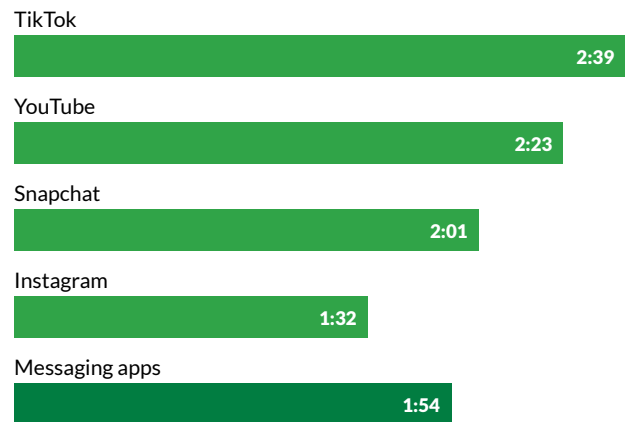
## 1. Adolescent girls spend over two hours per day on TikTok, YouTube, and Snapchat, and more than 90 minutes on Instagram and messaging apps, but they have mixed opinions about how these platforms affect their lives.

Social media use is nearly universal among adolescent girls, with 98% of our sample having ever used at least one platform. The vast majority (85%) of girls have used YouTube, and 73% have used TikTok, 59% Instagram, 57% Snapchat, and 60% messaging apps, like iMessage, GroupMe, or WhatsApp.

**FIGURE A. Girls who report having ever used each platform**



**FIGURE B. Daily time spent on platforms (hours:minutes)**



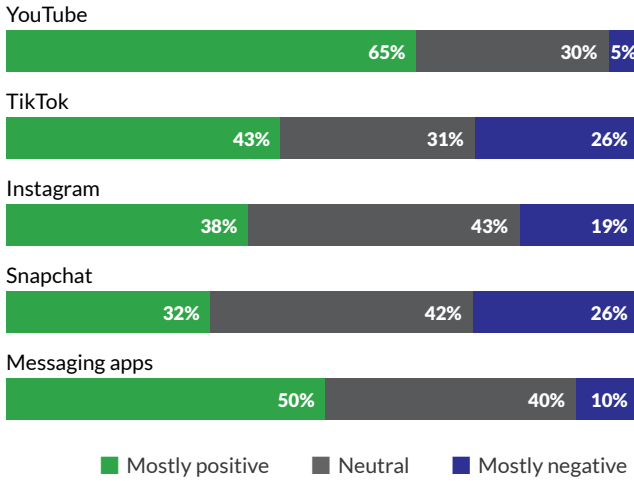
FIGURES A and B:  
Note: Among adolescent girls who use each platform (i.e., have used in the past month).

Girls are using these platforms with striking frequency. On average, girls who use TikTok, YouTube, or Snapchat say they are spending over two hours per day on these platforms, and those who use Instagram or messaging apps are spending over 90 minutes on them (see Figure B).

Yet girls have mixed opinions about the platforms that occupy so much of their time. When asked about the impact that popular social media platforms have on people their age, girls' answers were divided about whether the effects were mostly positive, negative, or neither. In general, girls were more likely to cite mostly positive versus mostly negative impacts for all platforms, and they were more likely to say that YouTube (65%) and messaging apps (50%) have had a mostly positive effect, compared to other platforms (see Figure C). TikTok (26%), Snapchat (26%), and Instagram (19%) were more frequently cited as having a mostly negative impact compared to other platforms.

**FIGURE C. Effects of social media**

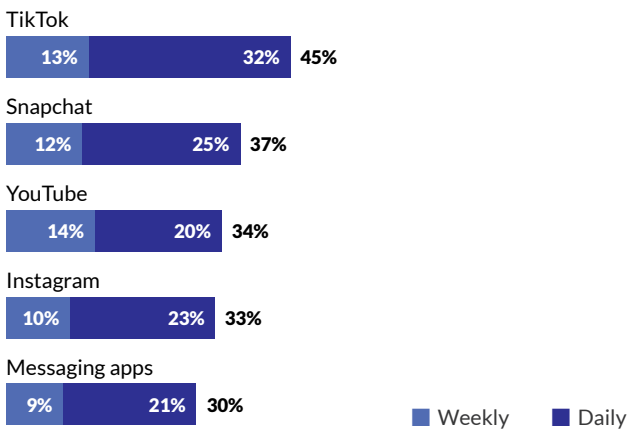
Think the platform has had a ... effect on people their age.



Note: Among all adolescent girls surveyed.

**FIGURE D. Overuse of social media, by frequency**

Say they feel “addicted” or end up using the platform for a longer period of time than originally wanted.



Note: Among adolescent girls who use each platform.

## 2. Despite these positive perceptions, girls also feel the pull of social media: Nearly half (45%) of girls who use TikTok say they feel “addicted” to the platform or use it more than intended at least weekly, and almost one in three girls (30%) who use Snapchat say they feel daily pressure to be available or responsive to peers.

Although social media “addiction” is not a formal psychiatric diagnosis, this phrase is used colloquially to describe feelings of difficulty controlling social media use, so we used this term in our survey. A higher proportion of girls who use TikTok (45%) reported feeling “addicted” to the platform or using it more than intended at least weekly, compared to the proportion of other platform users who feel this way about Snapchat (37%), YouTube (34%), and Instagram (33%) (Figure D). Girls were also more likely to say that TikTok use (versus other platforms) interferes with their sleep, with four in 10 girls (41%) who use TikTok saying it interferes with their sleep at least weekly, and one in four (24%) saying it interferes daily.

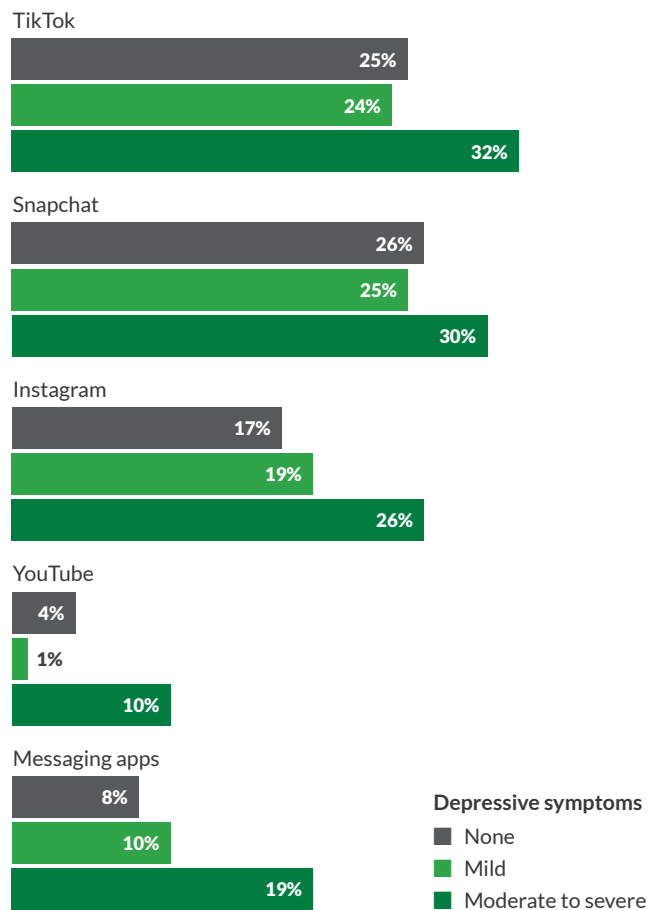
Girls may also feel compelled to use social media more frequently due to social pressures. Girls were especially likely to report pressure to be available or responsive to peers on messaging apps and Snapchat, with 30% of girls who use Snapchat and 28% who use messaging apps reporting having this experience daily on these platforms (compared to 23% for Instagram, 21% for TikTok, and 11% for YouTube).

### 3. Among all girls surveyed, nearly four in 10 (38%) report symptoms of depression, and among these girls, social media has an outsize impact—for better and for worse.

Nearly four in 10 girls in our sample (38%) reported symptoms of depression, with 21% indicating mild symptoms and 17% indicating moderate to severe symptoms. Girls with moderate to severe depressive symptoms were more likely than girls without depressive symptoms to say that YouTube (10% vs. 4%), Instagram (26% vs. 17%), and messaging apps (19% vs. 8%) have had a mostly negative impact on people their age (see Figure E). They were also more likely to say that their lives would be “better” without each social media platform (see Table C on page 8). Interestingly, though, girls with mild depressive symptoms were also more likely than those without depressive symptoms to say their lives would be worse without YouTube (53% vs. 38%), TikTok (41% vs. 33%), Snapchat (38% vs. 26%), and messaging apps (52% vs. 42%).

Social media platforms may play a more significant role, whether positive or negative, in the lives of adolescent girls with depressive symptoms (see Table C). As such, designing these platforms in ways that support girls’ well-being while minimizing potential harms may be especially important for this group.

**FIGURE E. Negative perceptions of platforms, by depressive symptoms**  
Report platform has had a mostly negative effect on people their age.



Note: Among adolescent girls who use each platform.

TABLE C. Girls imagine life without platforms, by depressive symptoms

Would your life be ... if you didn't have this platform?		TOTAL	Depressive symptoms			
			None	Mild	Moderate to severe	Any symptom
<b>YouTube</b>	Better	<b>11%</b>	7% <sup>a</sup>	10% <sup>a</sup>	24% <sup>b</sup>	16% <sup>b</sup>
	Worse	<b>41%</b>	38% <sup>a</sup>	53% <sup>b</sup>	37% <sup>a</sup>	46% <sup>b</sup>
	Same	<b>48%</b>	55% <sup>a</sup>	37% <sup>b</sup>	38% <sup>b</sup>	37% <sup>b</sup>
<b>TikTok</b>	Better	<b>16%</b>	10% <sup>a</sup>	17% <sup>b</sup>	34% <sup>c</sup>	25% <sup>b</sup>
	Worse	<b>34%</b>	33% <sup>a</sup>	41% <sup>b</sup>	29% <sup>a</sup>	36% <sup>a</sup>
	Same	<b>50%</b>	57% <sup>a</sup>	41% <sup>b</sup>	37% <sup>b</sup>	39% <sup>b</sup>
<b>Instagram</b>	Better	<b>12%</b>	7% <sup>a</sup>	11% <sup>a</sup>	29% <sup>b</sup>	19% <sup>b</sup>
	Worse	<b>21%</b>	20% <sup>a</sup>	20% <sup>a</sup>	23% <sup>a</sup>	21% <sup>a</sup>
	Same	<b>67%</b>	72% <sup>a</sup>	70% <sup>a</sup>	48% <sup>b</sup>	60% <sup>b</sup>
<b>Snapchat</b>	Better	<b>13%</b>	10% <sup>a</sup>	11% <sup>a</sup>	26% <sup>b</sup>	18% <sup>b</sup>
	Worse	<b>28%</b>	26% <sup>a</sup>	38% <sup>b</sup>	22% <sup>a</sup>	31% <sup>a</sup>
	Same	<b>59%</b>	64% <sup>a</sup>	51% <sup>b</sup>	53% <sup>b</sup>	52% <sup>b</sup>
<b>Messaging apps</b>	Better	<b>9%</b>	5% <sup>a</sup>	6% <sup>a</sup>	27% <sup>b</sup>	15% <sup>b</sup>
	Worse	<b>43%</b>	42% <sup>a</sup>	52% <sup>b</sup>	35% <sup>a</sup>	44% <sup>a</sup>
	Same	<b>48%</b>	53% <sup>a</sup>	42% <sup>b</sup>	39% <sup>b</sup>	41% <sup>b</sup>

Note: Among adolescent girls who use each platform. Items with different superscripts differ significantly across rows ( $p < .05$ ).

## 4. Girls who are struggling socially offline are three to four times as likely as other girls to report daily negative social experiences online, but they're also more likely to reap the benefits of the digital world.

We asked girls about a range of social experiences and pressures, both online and in person. Roughly one in five girls in our sample (18%) reported daily experiences of bullying, drama, or feeling left out in their in-person lives, outside of social media. These girls, who we classified as “socially vulnerable” based on their offline experiences, were more likely to report both more positive and negative experiences on social media (see Table D), highlighting the amplified risks and benefits of these platforms for vulnerable girls.

TABLE D. Social experiences on platforms, by offline social vulnerability

Report positive and negative experiences at least daily on ...	Socially vulnerable	
	No	Yes
<b>YouTube</b>		
Negative social experiences	7% <sup>a</sup>	30% <sup>b</sup>
Positive social experiences	25% <sup>a</sup>	39% <sup>b</sup>
<b>TikTok</b>		
Negative social experiences	15% <sup>a</sup>	48% <sup>b</sup>
Positive social experiences	34% <sup>a</sup>	57% <sup>b</sup>
<b>Instagram</b>		
Negative social experiences	9% <sup>a</sup>	41% <sup>b</sup>
Positive social experiences	33% <sup>a</sup>	56% <sup>b</sup>
<b>Snapchat</b>		
Negative social experiences	12% <sup>a</sup>	46% <sup>b</sup>
Positive social experiences	34% <sup>a</sup>	48% <sup>b</sup>
<b>Messaging apps</b>		
Negative social experiences	10% <sup>a</sup>	39% <sup>b</sup>
Positive social experiences	36% <sup>a</sup>	51% <sup>b</sup>

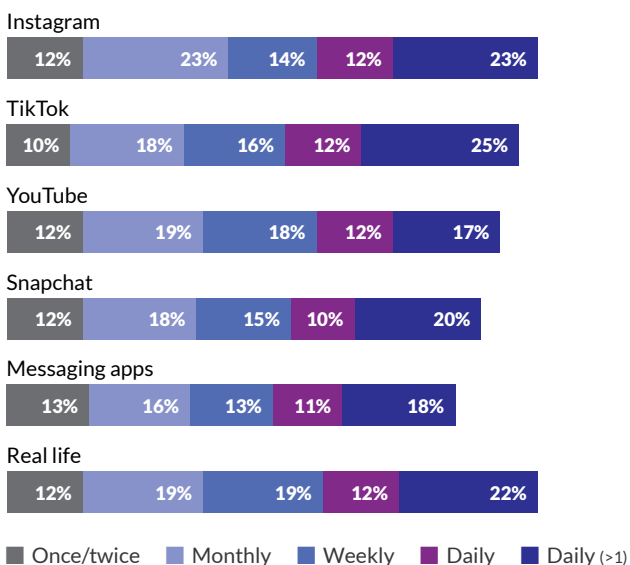
Notes: Among adolescent girls who use each platform. *Negative social experiences*: “Something happens with my friends or peers that makes me feel bad (like drama, bullying, mean comments, fighting, or feeling left out).” *Positive social experiences*: “Something happens with my friends or peers that makes me feel good (like staying connected to friends, getting support, or meeting new friends).” Items with different superscripts differ significantly across rows ( $p < .05$ ).

## 5. Seven out of 10 adolescent girls of color who use TikTok (71%) or Instagram (72%) report encountering positive or identity-affirming content related to race at least monthly on these platforms, but nearly half report exposure to racist content or language on TikTok (48%) or Instagram (48%) at least monthly.

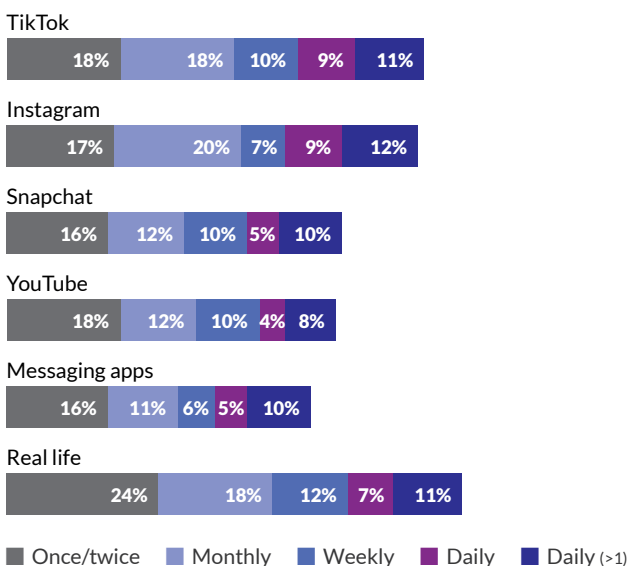
The majority of adolescent girls of color reported coming across positive or identity-affirming content related to race across platforms (see Figure F). More than one in three girls of color who use TikTok (37%) and Instagram (35%) say they come across positive race-based content on these platforms daily, with 30% of Snapchat users and 29% of YouTube users saying the same.

These platforms may represent an important means of identity development and validation for girls of color, but exposure to racism remains an unfortunate reality for girls of color across social media platforms and in their lives offline. Roughly two-thirds of girls of color who use TikTok (66%) and Instagram (65%) report having ever come across racist content on these platforms, with one in five saying they come across it daily or more (20% on TikTok; 21% on Instagram) (Figure G).

**FIGURE F. Report exposure to positive racial language on social media and in “real life” among girls of color, by frequency**



**FIGURE G. Report exposure to racism on social media and in “real life” among girls of color, by frequency**



**FIGURES F and G:**  
 Notes: Among adolescent girls of color who use each platform. *Real life* among all girls of color surveyed. *Girls of color* include all non-White girls in the sample, including girls who are Black, Hispanic, Asian, more than one race, or other races. *Positive racial language*: “People say positive or uplifting things about people of my same race or ethnicity.” *Racism*: “People say mean or rude things about people of my same race or ethnicity.”



## 6. Across platforms, LGBTQ+ adolescents are roughly twice as likely as non-LGBTQ+ adolescents to encounter hate speech related to sexual or gender identity, but they are also more likely to find connection.

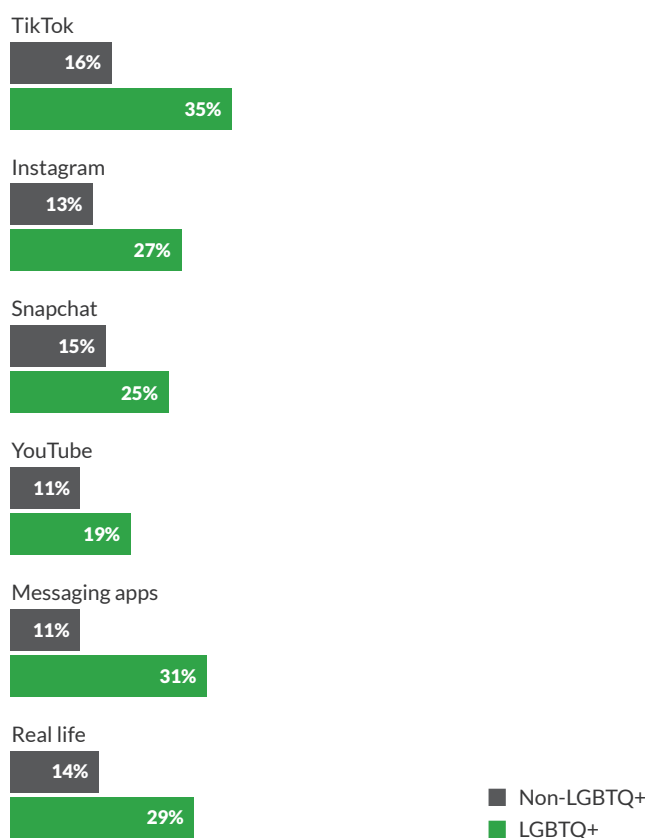
LGBTQ+ adolescents report being frequently exposed to hate speech related to sexual and gender identity (i.e., “People say mean or rude things about people of my same sexual or gender identity.”) across platforms. More than one in three LGBTQ+

young people (35%) who use TikTok say they have this experience daily or more on the platform, as do 31% of LGBTQ+ users of messaging apps, 27% of Instagram users, 25% of Snapchat users, and 19% of YouTube users (Figure H).

Of note, LGBTQ+ adolescents are also more likely than their non-LGBTQ+ peers to say that they frequently connect with others who share their interests or identities on TikTok (57% vs. 43% among users) and YouTube (43% vs. 33% among users), reflecting the important role that social media platforms can play in connecting marginalized adolescents with similar peers (Figure I).

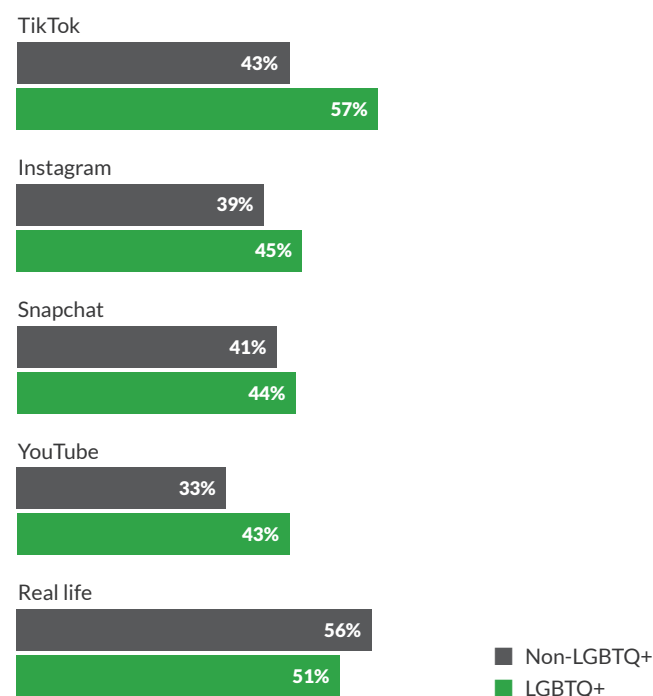
**FIGURE H. Exposure to hate speech related to sexuality or gender, by LGBTQ+ identity**

Report daily exposure on each platform and in “real life.”



**FIGURE I. Connection with others who share interests or identities, by LGBTQ+ identity**

Report daily connection on each platform and in “real life.”



FIGURES H and I:

Notes: Among adolescent girls who use each platform. *Real life* among all adolescent girls surveyed.

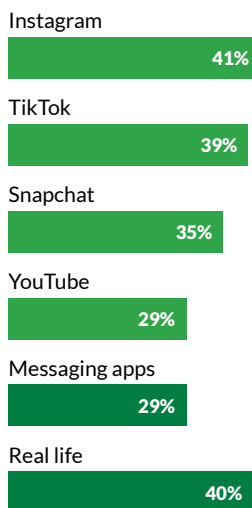
## 7. When it comes to mental health content across platforms, girls say they encounter helpful content more often than harmful content. But among girls with moderate or severe depressive symptoms, roughly seven in 10 who use Instagram (75%) and TikTok (69%) say they come across problematic suicide-related content at least monthly on these platforms.

Four in 10 girls who use Instagram (41%) and TikTok (39%) report coming across harmful suicide-related content at least monthly on these platforms (see Figure J). At the same time, the majority of girls report regularly coming across helpful mental health information and resources on social media, with more than half of users of TikTok (60%), Instagram (56%), Snapchat (52%), and YouTube (55%) saying that they see this content at least monthly on these platforms (see Figure K).

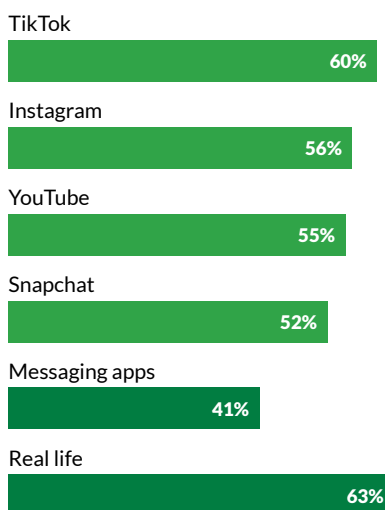
Notably, girls with depressive symptoms were more likely to come across *both* harmful suicide-related content and helpful mental health content, compared to girls with no depressive symptoms. Girls with moderate to severe depressive symptoms were nearly three times as likely as girls without depressive symptoms to come across harmful suicide-related content across platforms at least monthly (see Figure L on page 13).

Yet girls with moderate to severe depressive symptoms were also roughly one and a half times as likely as girls without depressive symptoms to say they come across helpful mental health resources and content across platforms at least monthly (see Figure M on page 13).

**FIGURE J. Exposure to suicide-related content**  
Report at least monthly exposure on platform and in “real life.”

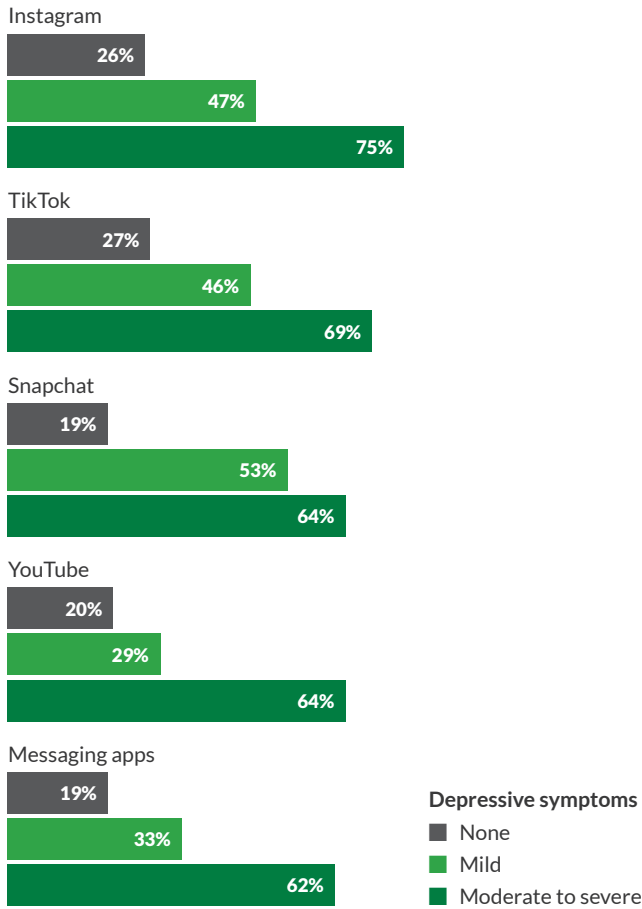


**FIGURE K. Access to mental health resources**  
Report access at least monthly on platform and in “real life.”

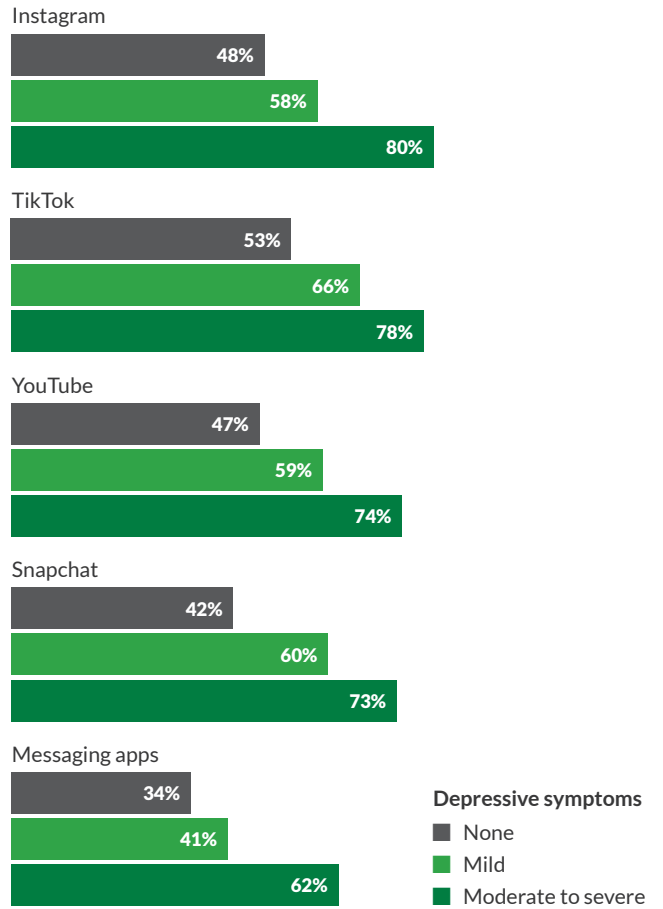


FIGURES J and K:  
Notes: Among adolescent girls who use each platform. *Real life* among all adolescent girls surveyed.

**FIGURE L. Exposure to suicide-related content, by depressive symptoms**



**FIGURE M. Access to mental health resources, by depressive symptoms**



FIGURES L and M:  
Note: Among adolescent girls who use each platform.

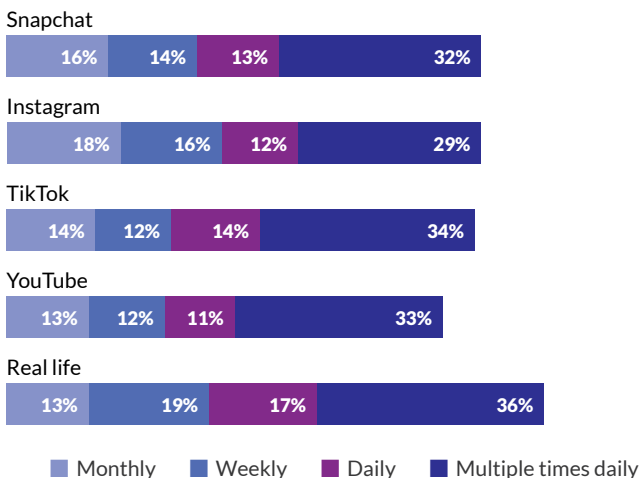
## 8. Girls have mixed experiences related to body image when they use social media.

Roughly one in three girls who use TikTok (31%), Instagram (32%), and Snapchat (28%) say they feel bad about their body at least weekly when using these platforms, while nearly twice as many say they feel good or accepting of their bodies at least weekly while using TikTok (60%), Instagram (57%), and Snapchat (59%) (see Figure N).

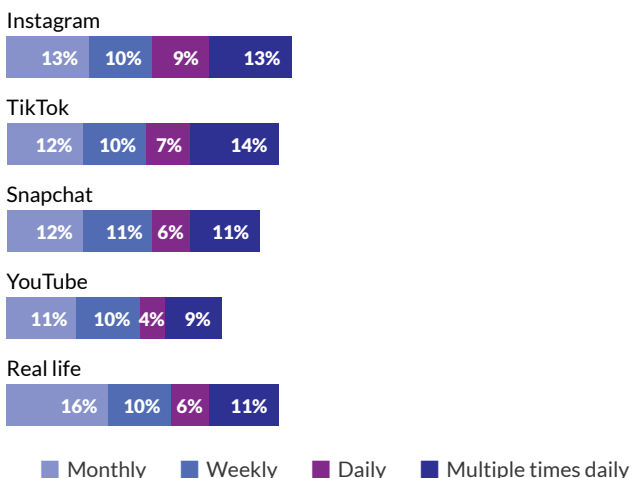
Roughly one in three girls who use TikTok (31%) and Instagram (32%) reported body dissatisfaction (i.e., negative feelings about their body or appearance) weekly or more when using those platforms; 28% of Snapchat users and 23% of YouTube users reported the same.

Despite these experiences of body dissatisfaction, roughly six in 10 girls who use TikTok (60%), Instagram (57%), and Snapchat (59%) also reported feeling good about or accepting of their bodies at least weekly when using these platforms (see Figure O).

**FIGURE N. Positive body image experiences (body acceptance) on social media and in “real life,” by frequency**



**FIGURE O. Negative body image experiences (body shame/dissatisfaction) on social media and in “real life,” by frequency**

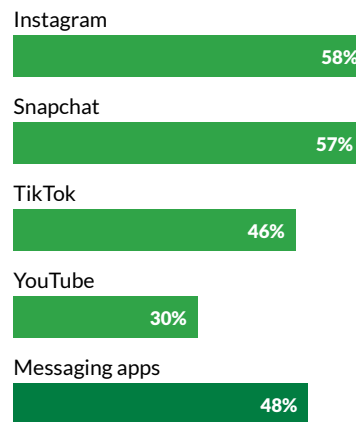


FIGURES N and O:  
Notes: Among adolescent girls who use each platform. *Real life* among all adolescent girls surveyed.

## 9. The majority of girls who use Instagram (58%) and Snapchat (57%) say they've been contacted by a stranger on these platforms in ways that make them uncomfortable, and nearly half of girls who use TikTok (46%) have had this experience on the platform.

Many girls report frequent unwanted contact with strangers on certain platforms (Figure P). Nearly six out of 10 girls who use Instagram (58%) and Snapchat (57%) say they've been contacted by a stranger in ways that make them uncomfortable on those platforms. These experiences were less common, though still frequent, on other platforms, with nearly half of TikTok (46%) and messaging app (48%) users having been contacted by strangers on these platforms. Teen girls (age 13 to 15) who use TikTok were more likely than preteen TikTok users (age 11 to 12) to have been contacted by strangers on the platform (49% vs. 42%).

**FIGURE P. Unwanted contact by strangers on social media**  
Report having ever been contacted by strangers in ways that make them uncomfortable.

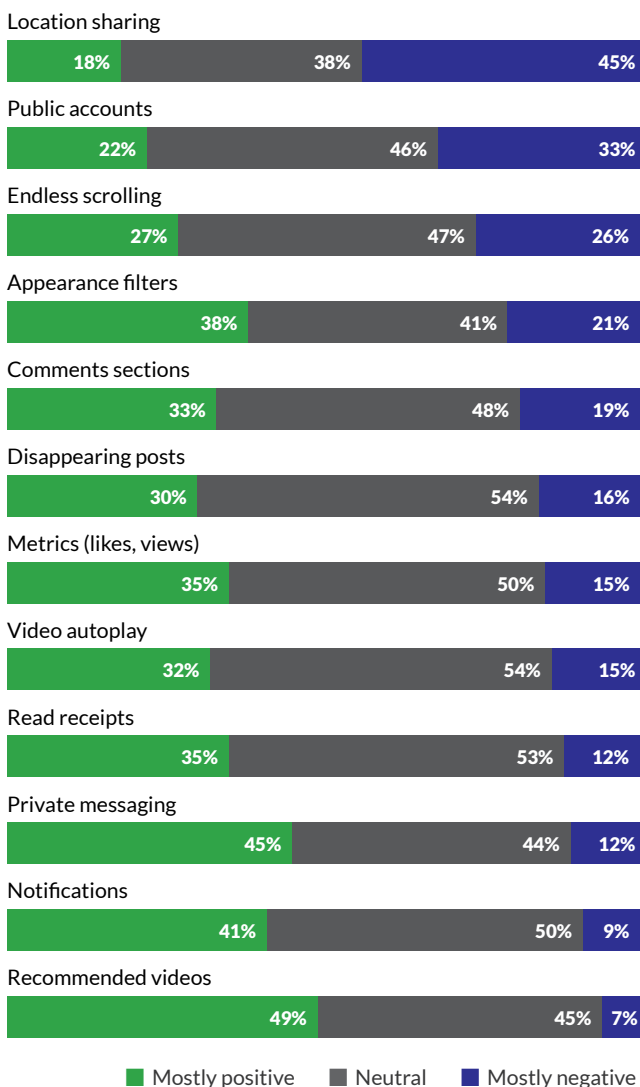


Note: Among adolescent girls who use each platform.

## 10. The majority of girls believe that features like location sharing, public accounts, endless scrolling, and appearance filters have an effect on them, but they're split on whether those effects are positive or negative.

This survey is one of the first to ask girls directly how they believe common features of popular social media platforms affect their well-being. Girls were most likely to say that location sharing (45%) and public accounts (33%) have had a mostly negative effect on them, compared to other features (Figure Q). In contrast, they were most likely to say that video recommendations (49%) and private messaging (45%) had a mostly positive impact on them.

**FIGURE Q. Perceptions of the effects of social media**  
Believe this feature has had a ... effect on them.



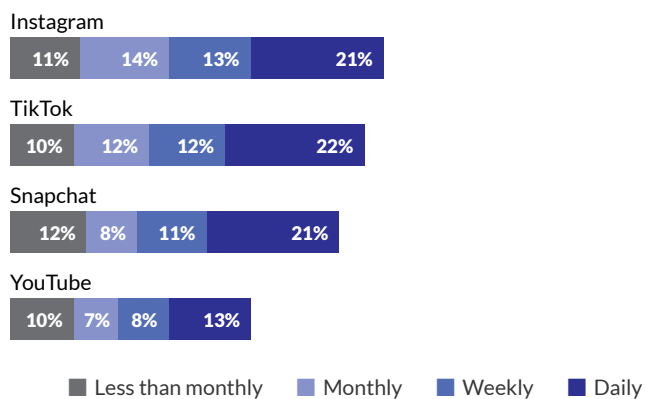
Notes: Among adolescent girls who had ever used social media (n = 1,365). Bars may not sum 100% due to rounding.

In addition to asking girls about their perceptions of these features' overall effects on them, we asked girls directly about one particular social media feature: numerical metrics, including views, followers, shares, and "likes." The majority of girls report having ever struggled with "focusing too much" on these metrics on TikTok, Instagram, or Snapchat, with roughly one in five girls who use TikTok (22%), Instagram (21%), and Snapchat (21%) having this experience daily on these platforms (Figure R).

This experience of focusing too much on metrics was especially common among girls who already may be vulnerable in some way, including those with depressive symptoms, those experiencing social difficulties in their lives outside of social media, and LGBTQ+ adolescents.

The features of social media platforms may play a key role in girls' experiences online, both positive and negative—from social pressures, to feelings of "addiction," to opportunities for discovery and creative expression. Understanding girls' perceptions of these social media features is critical to shaping platforms in ways that maximize their benefits for girls' well-being, while minimizing their risks, particularly for girls who are the most vulnerable.

**FIGURE R. Focus on social media metrics, by frequency**  
Report focusing too much on numbers like views, followers, "likes", comments, or shares on each platform



Note: Among adolescent girls who use each platform.

# Positive or negative?

Girls assess how social media platform features shape their online experiences.

From appearance-altering filters to location sharing, the social media platforms that girls use share features that shape their online experiences. Here's a look at what some of these features are designed to do, and whether the girls in our survey felt they were positive, negative, or somewhere in between.\*



Mostly  
negative



## Location sharing

Automatic sharing of users' locations.

Girls believe location sharing has a ...



### POTENTIAL NEGATIVE EXPERIENCES

Concerns about safety  
Fear of missing out ("FOMO") or social exclusion

### POTENTIAL POSITIVE EXPERIENCES

Social connection

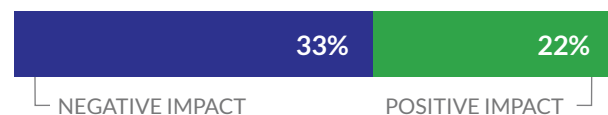
*"They really need to block older people from stalking younger."* —13-year-old



## Public accounts

All users can see one's posts or contact them, even if not a "friend" or "follower."

Girls believe public accounts have a ...



### POTENTIAL NEGATIVE EXPERIENCES

Unwanted contact by strangers  
Reputational concerns or social comparison

### POTENTIAL POSITIVE EXPERIENCES

Social connection  
Activism

*"I would make it a safer platform for teens to hang out and talk together. Right now, anyone can find you and bullies are mean."* —12-year-old




\*For girls' evaluations of all 12 design features, see Figure Q in the full report.

Note: Included quotations from teens were in response to questions about changes they would make to improve specific platforms and whether they'd ever stopped using a platform (and why). Potential experiences listed are offered as examples only.



## Mostly positive



### Recommended videos

An algorithm recommends videos to watch.

Girls believe recommended videos have a ...



#### POTENTIAL NEGATIVE EXPERIENCES

Feelings of "addiction" or overuse  
Exposure to negative content (e.g., harmful suicide or eating disorder content, racist content)

#### POTENTIAL POSITIVE EXPERIENCES

Exposure to positive content (e.g., helpful mental health resources, identity-affirming content)

*"I would keep all the negative or bad videos off."*  
—14-year-old

### Private messaging

Users can send or receive direct messages, photos, videos.

Girls believe private messaging has a ...




#### POTENTIAL NEGATIVE EXPERIENCES

Unwanted contact by strangers

#### POTENTIAL POSITIVE EXPERIENCES

Social connection

*"Create a version for teens only to limit who can interact with us."* —14-year-old



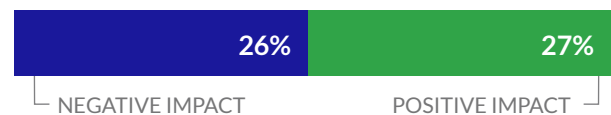
## Mixed reviews



### Endless scrolling

No clear end point to the "feed" of videos or posts.

Girls believe endless scrolling has a ...



#### POTENTIAL NEGATIVE EXPERIENCES

Feelings of "addiction" or overuse  
Interference with sleep

#### POTENTIAL POSITIVE EXPERIENCES

Discovery of content relevant to interests  
Discovery of identity-affirming content

*"I felt like I was spending too much time on it, and it was turning into an addiction."* —14-year-old

### Filters

Effects that change the appearance of photos or videos.



Girls believe filters have a ...



#### POTENTIAL NEGATIVE EXPERIENCES

Body image and appearance concerns

#### POTENTIAL POSITIVE EXPERIENCES

Fun and entertainment  
Self-expression

*"The filters cause a lot of facial dysmorphia."*  
—14-year-old

#### Methodology:

A demographically representative online survey of 1,397 girls (as identified by their parent/guardian) in the United States age 11 to 15, conducted from November 11 to December 5, 2022. The survey was administered by SSRS and approved by the Advarra IRB #IRB00000971. Once parent/guardian consent was obtained, the teen was then asked to give their assent to participate and complete the survey.



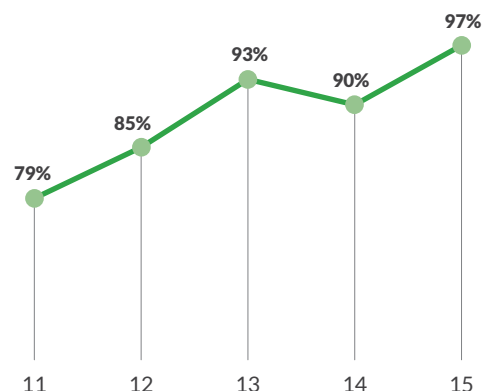
# Girls' Uses of and Opinions About Popular Social Media Platforms

While much research has aimed to investigate whether social media has a negative impact on girls' mental health, our survey addressed a different set of questions. We give voice to girls' perceptions of how social media platforms, and the features that comprise them, affect their well-being. Understanding these perceptions is an important goal in itself, as it provides insight into the ways these perceptions do and do not align with larger public narratives, and offers a road map for creating platforms that better support healthy development.

**Platform use and smartphone access.** Social media use was nearly universal among the girls we surveyed, with 98% of the sample having ever used at least one platform. Our report is focused on the top five most popular platforms: YouTube (85% of girls have used), TikTok (73%), Instagram (59%), Snapchat (57%), and messaging apps (like iMessage, GroupMe, and WhatsApp) (60%) (see Table 1).

Nearly nine out of 10 girls (89%) in our sample reported owning a smartphone they can use to access social media. This includes 79% of 11-year-old girls and nearly all (97%) of 15-year-old girls (see Figure 1). Black and Hispanic girls were more likely own smartphones (95% and 94%, respectively) compared to White girls (86%). There were no differences in smartphone access by income in our sample (see Table 2 on page 22).

FIGURE 1. Smartphone access, by age



Note: Among all adolescent girls surveyed.

TABLE 1. Use of top five platforms, by demographics

Report having ever used ...	TOTAL	Age		Race/Ethnicity				Family income		
		11 to 12	13 to 15	White	Black	Hispanic	Asian	Lower	Middle	Higher
YouTube	85%	86%	85%	83%	85%	85%	90%	84%	88%	85%
TikTok	73%	68% <sup>a</sup>	76% <sup>b</sup>	69% <sup>a</sup>	82% <sup>b</sup>	78% <sup>b</sup>	62% <sup>a</sup>	75%	74%	69%
Instagram	59%	41% <sup>a</sup>	71% <sup>b</sup>	57%	68%	56%	56%	51% <sup>a</sup>	61% <sup>b</sup>	65% <sup>b</sup>
Snapchat	57%	49% <sup>a</sup>	63% <sup>b</sup>	57%	56%	59%	56%	53%	60%	60%
Messaging apps	60%	53% <sup>a</sup>	64% <sup>b</sup>	63% <sup>a</sup>	52% <sup>b</sup>	56% <sup>a,b</sup>	67% <sup>a</sup>	52% <sup>a</sup>	59% <sup>a</sup>	71% <sup>b</sup>

Notes: Among all adolescent girls surveyed. Items with different superscripts differ significantly across rows within each category ( $p < .05$ ). See *Methodology* for income breakdowns.

**TABLE 2. Smartphone ownership, by age and demographics**

Age	TOTAL	Race/Ethnicity				Family income		
		White	Black	Hispanic/Latino	Asian	Lower	Middle	Higher
Preteens (11 to 12)	<b>83%</b>	79% <sup>a</sup>	91% <sup>b</sup>	90% <sup>b,c</sup>	76% <sup>a,c</sup>	83%	82%	83%
Teens (13 to 15)	<b>93%</b>	91% <sup>a</sup>	97% <sup>b</sup>	98% <sup>b</sup>	96% <sup>a,b</sup>	94%	94%	93%
<b>Total</b>	<b>89%</b>	<b>86%<sup>a</sup></b>	<b>95%<sup>b</sup></b>	<b>94%<sup>b</sup></b>	<b>86%<sup>a,b</sup></b>	<b>89%</b>	<b>89%</b>	<b>89%</b>

Notes: Among all adolescent girls surveyed. Items with different superscripts differ significantly across rows within each category ( $p < .05$ ). See *Methodology* for income breakdowns.

**Platform use frequency.** Girls are checking social media extremely often and spending significant periods of time on social media platforms. Girls who use TikTok say they spend two hours, 39 minutes per day on the platform, with nearly one in four (23%) saying they use the platform “almost constantly” (see Table 3).

YouTube is not far behind, with girls who use this platform saying they do so two hours, 23 minutes per day, and the majority (57%) using it multiple times per day or more. Users of Snapchat spend two hours, one minute per day, and Instagram users spend one hour, 32 minutes. Girls who use messaging apps spend one hour, 54 minutes per day on these apps.

Girls with any use of YouTube, TikTok, Instagram, or Snapchat ( $n = 1,318$ ) were most likely to say that they use YouTube (41%) the most often, followed by TikTok (36%), Snapchat (12%), and Instagram (11%). Among girls who report using all four of these platforms ( $n = 464$ ), nearly half of girls said they use TikTok (47%) the most often, followed by YouTube (21%), Snapchat (20%), and Instagram (11%).

**TABLE 3. Social media platform use frequency and daily time spent**

	YouTube	TikTok	Instagram	Snapchat	Messaging apps
<b>Frequency:</b> Percent who use platform ...					
Once or twice per month	6%	6%	10%	11%	8%
Once or twice per week	14%	11%	16%	12%	16%
About once per day	22%	14%	24%	15%	16%
Multiple times per day	41%	41%	32%	34%	39%
Almost constantly	16%	23%	12%	17%	16%
<b>Daily time spent</b>	2:23	2:39	1:32	2:01	1:54

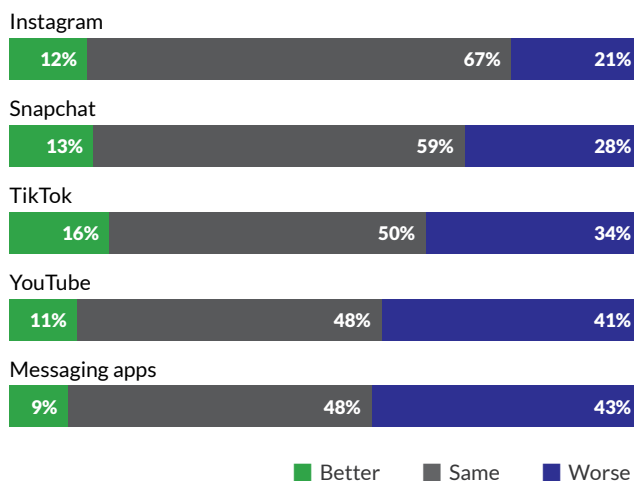
Notes: Frequency items among adolescent girls who have ever used each platform. Daily time spent among adolescent girls who have used each platform in the past month.

**Girls imagine their lives without social media.** Across platforms, girls generally had positive or neutral perceptions of social media’s impact on their lives (see Figure 2). Girls who use Instagram (67%) and Snapchat (59%) were especially likely to say their lives would be “the same” without these platforms, compared to others, perhaps indicating that these platforms play a less central role in girls’ lives. Compared to other platforms, girls who use TikTok (34%), YouTube (41%), and messaging apps (43%) were more likely to say their lives would be “worse” without these platforms. At the same time, girls who use TikTok were more likely to say their lives would be “better” without the platform, compared to girls who use YouTube and messaging apps (16% vs. 11% and 9%, respectively).

Girls who reported their lives would be “better” without the social media platforms they use may be a particularly important focus of intervention and prevention efforts. Adolescents who are LGBTQ+ (see Table 4) were more likely than their non-LGBTQ+ peers to report that their lives would be better without each platform they use, as were girls from higher-income households and girls with depressive symptoms (see *Depression and Social Media* on page 29).

Beliefs about the effects of platforms on people their age. Girls had differing opinions on the effects social media platforms have had on people their age. The majority of girls (65%) said YouTube has had a “mostly positive” impact. In contrast, girls were more likely to say that TikTok (26%) and Snapchat (26%) have had a “mostly negative” impact compared to other platforms (see Figure C in *Key Findings* on page 6). We do not know from this survey whether these perceptions are based on direct experiences with the platforms or observations of their peers, or based on the larger public discourse about social media, which may filter down to them through adults, peers, or the media.

**FIGURE 2. Girls imagine life without social media**  
Report life would be ... without this platform



Note: Among adolescent girls who have ever used each platform.

**TABLE 4. Say their lives would be better without social media, by demographics and LGBTQ+ identity**

Platform	TOTAL	Age		Race/Ethnicity				Family income			LGBTQ+ identity	
		11 to 12	13 to 15	White	Black	Hispanic	Asian	Lower	Middle	Higher	Yes	No
YouTube	<b>11%</b>	11%	11%	9%	11%	15%	15%	8% <sup>a</sup>	10% <sup>a</sup>	16% <sup>b</sup>	21% <sup>b</sup>	9% <sup>a</sup>
TikTok	<b>16%</b>	17%	15%	17%	12%	20%	11%	14%	15%	20%	27% <sup>b</sup>	14% <sup>a</sup>
Instagram	<b>12%</b>	14%	12%	13%	11%	21%	17%	8% <sup>a</sup>	10% <sup>a</sup>	19% <sup>b</sup>	21% <sup>b</sup>	11% <sup>a</sup>
Snapchat	<b>13%</b>	16%	12%	14%	12%	15%	12%	10%	16%	14%	29% <sup>b</sup>	11% <sup>a</sup>
Messaging apps	<b>9%</b>	9%	10%	8%	4%	12%	14%	6% <sup>a</sup>	10% <sup>a,b</sup>	12% <sup>b</sup>	21% <sup>b</sup>	8% <sup>a</sup>

Notes: Among adolescent girls who have ever used each platform. Items with different superscripts differ significantly across rows within each category ( $p < .05$ ). See *Methodology* for income breakdowns.

**TABLE 5. Belief that platform has had a “mostly negative” impact on their age group, by demographics**

Platform	TOTAL	Age		Race/Ethnicity				Family income		
		11 to 12	13 to 15	White	Black	Hispanic	Asian	Lower	Middle	Higher
YouTube	5%	3% <sup>a</sup>	6% <sup>b</sup>	5%	3%	3%	4%	5%	4%	4%
TikTok	26%	25%	26%	29% <sup>a</sup>	15% <sup>b</sup>	24% <sup>a,b</sup>	28% <sup>a</sup>	23%	25%	29%
Instagram	19%	20%	18%	18%	19%	21%	12%	23% <sup>a</sup>	17% <sup>b</sup>	17% <sup>b</sup>
Snapchat	26%	27%	26%	29% <sup>a</sup>	22% <sup>a,b</sup>	23% <sup>a,b</sup>	17% <sup>b</sup>	25%	28%	25%
Messaging apps	10%	12%	9%	7% <sup>a</sup>	14% <sup>b</sup>	12% <sup>a,b</sup>	7% <sup>a,b</sup>	14% <sup>a</sup>	10% <sup>a,b</sup>	7% <sup>b</sup>

Notes: Among all adolescent girls surveyed. Items with different superscripts differ significantly across rows within each category ( $p < .05$ ). See *Methodology* for income breakdowns.

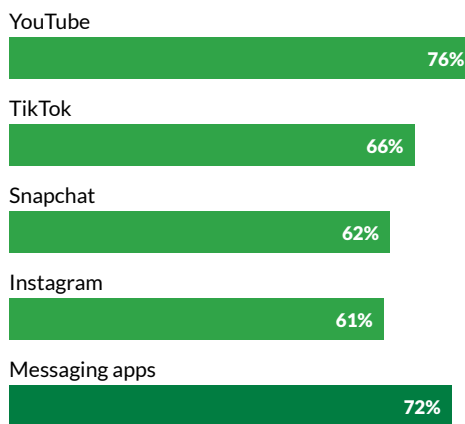
Perceptions of social media platform’s impact differed somewhat by girls’ race, ethnicity, and income (see Table 5). Perceptions of YouTube’s impact differed by age, with teen girls who use the platforms more likely than preteen girls to say it has had a mostly positive impact (72% versus 60%).

**Beliefs about younger social media users.** When girls who use each platform were asked whether they would recommend the platform to “someone who is just starting out with using social media,” the majority of girls indicated that they would across platforms (see Figure 3). Roughly three out of four girls would recommend YouTube (76%) and messaging apps (72%), with TikTok (66%), Snapchat (62%), and Instagram (61%) close behind.

The majority of girls in our sample also said that young people should be allowed to use YouTube (77%) and messaging apps (57%) at age 12 or younger, whereas the majority indicated that young people should be 13 or older before using TikTok (51%), Instagram (62%), and Snapchat (60%). This may reflect the reality that younger girls are more likely to use YouTube compared to other platforms, or it may reflect greater concerns about safety or well-being on these other platforms. Teen girls were more likely than preteen girls to say that young people should be 13 or older to be allowed to use each platform (see Table 6 on page 25).

**FIGURE 3. Recommended social media platforms**

Platform users that would recommend it to younger users



Note: Among adolescent girls who have ever used each platform.

**TABLE 6. Age at which girls believe young people should be allowed to use each platform**

Age	YouTube	TikTok	Instagram	Snapchat	Messaging apps
9 or younger	35%	9%	4%	5%	14%
10	24%	17%	14%	13%	21%
11	5%	6%	5%	6%	6%
12	14%	18%	16%	16%	15%
<b>TOTAL: 12 and younger</b>	<b>77%</b>	<b>49%</b>	<b>38%</b>	<b>40%</b>	<b>57%</b>
13	10%	19%	22%	21%	17%
14	4%	7%	10%	9%	8%
15	4%	8%	10%	10%	6%
16 or older	5%	17%	19%	21%	13%
<b>TOTAL: 13 and older</b>	<b>23%</b>	<b>51%</b>	<b>62%</b>	<b>60%</b>	<b>43%</b>

Note: Among all adolescent girls surveyed.

## THE PULL OF SOCIAL MEDIA

### Feelings of “addiction,” interference with sleep, and availability stress

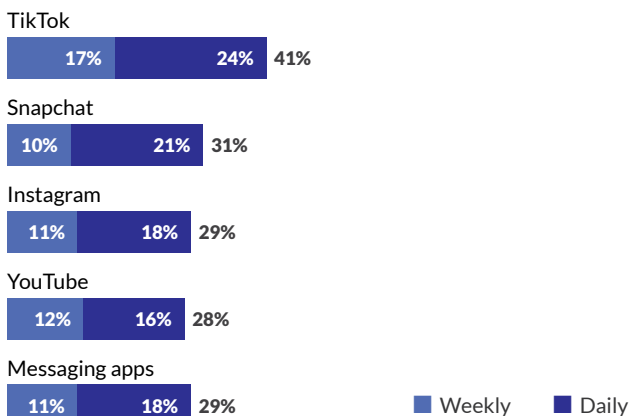
Despite many girls’ positive perceptions of social media’s overall impact on their lives, a meaningful proportion of girls report challenges with regulating their use. Numerous features of social media, like algorithmic video recommendations, endless scrolling, notifications, and autoplay, can make these platforms difficult to stop using.

**Social media “addiction.”** For each platform, girls reported how often they feel like they’re “addicted” to the platform, or “end up using it for a longer period of time” than they originally planned. Although social media “addiction” is not a formal psychiatric diagnosis, this phrase is used colloquially to describe feelings of difficulty controlling social media use, so we used this term in our survey. A higher proportion of girls who use TikTok (45%) reported feeling addicted to the platform or using it more than intended at least weekly, compared to the proportion of other platform users who feel this way about Snapchat (37%), YouTube (35%), and Instagram (33%) (see Figure D in *Key Findings* on page 6).

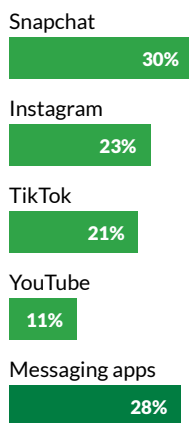
**Social media use and sleep.** Adequate sleep is crucial during the adolescent years for physical and emotional development. Unfortunately, sleep interference is one potential consequence of social media overuse. In our survey, four in 10 girls (41%) who use TikTok said it interferes with their sleep at least weekly, with one in four (24%) saying it interferes daily (see Figure 4). For the remainder of platforms, roughly three in 10 girls who use YouTube (28%), Instagram (29%), Snapchat (31%), and messaging apps (29%) said these platforms interfere with sleep at least weekly.

**Availability stress.** Pressure to remain in contact with friends and acquaintances may also cause girls to feel pulled to use social media frequently. This feeling of availability stress, or pressure to be available or responsive to peers on social media, was especially common on apps where direct messaging is a primary focus. Nearly one in three girls who use Snapchat (30%) and messaging apps (28%) reported feeling this pressure to stay connected daily, compared to Instagram (23%), TikTok (21%), and YouTube (11%) (see Figure 5).

**FIGURE 4. Interference of social media with sleep**  
Report that platform gets in the way of sleep ...



**FIGURE 5. Availability stress**  
Report daily feelings of pressure to be available or responsive right away on platforms



FIGURES 4 and 5:  
Note: Among adolescent girls who use each platform.



## IN THEIR OWN WORDS

### Girls' experiences with stopping or limiting their use

A total of 38% of social media users in our sample reported that they had ever stopped using a platform or limited how much they use it because they felt it had a negative impact on them. When asked which platform(s) they had stopped or limited using, girls cited: TikTok (40%), Instagram (32%), Snapchat (31%), YouTube (24%), Facebook (19%), messaging apps (12%), and a small number of other platforms (9% Twitter, 8% Discord, 3% Reddit).

We asked girls to tell us, in their own words, why they had stopped or limited use of that platform, with each girl answering for only one platform.<sup>1</sup> Across platforms, girls were especially likely to highlight four reasons for stopping or limiting their use:

1. Many girls felt they were spending too much time on the platform, or that their use was getting in the way of other things they wanted to do. This was especially common for YouTube (43%), but it was also common for TikTok (23%) and Instagram (23%), compared to Snapchat (10%).
2. Girls also indicated that they'd stopped using platforms because they came across bad, age-inappropriate, or negative content. This was especially common for TikTok (38%) compared to Snapchat (20%), YouTube (19%), and Instagram (16%).

Why did you stop or limit your use of social media?

*"... 'cause you spend many hours watching videos."*

—13-year-old YouTube user

*"It's time consuming and takes away from other things I could be doing."*

—11-year-old Instagram user

*"I felt like I was spending too much time on it, and it was turning into an addiction."*

—14-year-old TikTok user

*"I felt the app wasted my time, and it just made me more predisposed to get sucked into my phone (Snap, TikTok, etc.) for prolonged periods of time."*

—15-year-old Snapchat user

*"There were bad videos that gave me nightmares one time. Told me to hurt my family."*

—11-year-old YouTube user

*"Because stuff came up that wasn't for a kid."*

—11-year-old Instagram user

*"I watched one or two videos and they took over my algorithm with really depressing and anxiety videos."*

—14-year-old TikTok user

*"Kids at my school were sending a lot of inappropriate photos and messages to each other."*

—14-year-old Snapchat user

1. Participants only responded if they indicated they had ever stopped or limited use of a platform (and if multiple platforms, asked to refer to the one they had stopped using most recently). Because of this, the total number of respondents for each platform was somewhat small (TikTok:  $n = 137$ , Snapchat:  $n = 97$ , Instagram:  $n = 70$ , YouTube:  $n = 68$ ). Thus, the percentages reported in this section should be interpreted with caution. Note that responses could be coded under more than one category.

3. Girls also cited concerns about bullying or mean comments, “bad” people, and privacy. This was especially common for Snapchat (37%), compared to TikTok (14%) and YouTube (8%), but was also somewhat common for Instagram (24%).

*“People were really mean and negative in the comments, which made me feel bad about myself. I took a break from YouTube to make myself feel better.”*

—12-year-old YouTube user

*“I was being bullied by other kids at my school who made accounts about ugly people and posted about me being ugly and doing cringey things.”*

—13-year-old Instagram user

*“People kept trying to message me, and it made me uncomfortable.”*

—14-year-old Snapchat user

*“People can be cruel in the comments.”*

—14-year-old TikTok user

4. Finally, a small portion of girls indicated that they felt the platform had a negative effect on their self-image or mental health, including 19% for Instagram, 16% for YouTube, 8% for TikTok, and 6% for Snapchat.

*“YouTube just made me realize that I didn’t like my own body as much as I used to.”*

—15-year-old YouTube user

*“I had unrealistic ideas of what I should look like and how my life should be.”*

—13-year-old Instagram user

*“The filters cause a lot of facial dysmorphia.”*

—15-year-old Snapchat user

*“I felt like my mental health was not doing well because I was too commonly comparing myself to others.”*

—13-year-old TikTok user

# Depression and Social Media

Nearly four in 10 girls in our sample (38%) reported symptoms of depression, with 21% indicating mild symptoms and 17% indicating moderate to severe symptoms, based on the PHQ-8 scale (Kroenke et al., 2009; see Table 7). These numbers are generally consistent with other data on the prevalence of depressive symptoms in young people (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2020; Daly, 2022).

**Perception of effects of social media platforms.** In general, girls with depressive symptoms, compared to those without, were more likely to cite perceptions of both positive and negative impacts of social media. Girls with moderate to severe depressive symptoms were more likely than those without depressive symptoms to perceive “mostly negative” impacts of YouTube (10% vs. 4%), Instagram (26% vs. 17%), and messaging apps (19% vs. 8%) (see Table 8) on people their age.

Similarly, girls with moderate to severe symptoms were more likely to say that their lives would be “better” without each platform (see Figure 6 on page 30). Yet girls with mild depressive symptoms who use each platform were also more likely than those without depressive symptoms to say their lives would be “worse” without YouTube (53% vs. 38%), TikTok (41% vs. 33%), Snapchat (38% vs. 26%), and messaging apps (52% vs. 42%), suggesting that social media may have an outsize impact on the lives of girls with depressive symptoms—both good and bad.

**TABLE 8. Perception of platforms’ effect on people their age, by depressive symptoms**

Overall effect	Depressive symptoms		
	None	Mild	Moderate to severe
<b>Mostly negative</b>			
YouTube	4% <sup>a</sup>	1% <sup>b</sup>	10% <sup>c</sup>
TikTok	25%	24%	32%
Instagram	17% <sup>a</sup>	19% <sup>a</sup>	26% <sup>b</sup>
Snapchat	26%	25%	30%
Messaging apps	8% <sup>a</sup>	10% <sup>a</sup>	19% <sup>b</sup>
<b>Mostly positive</b>			
YouTube	65%	61%	65%
TikTok	44%	46%	38%
Instagram	39%	37%	37%
Snapchat	31%	34%	35%
Messaging apps	53% <sup>a</sup>	50% <sup>a,b</sup>	43% <sup>b</sup>
<b>Neither positive nor negative</b>			
YouTube	30% <sup>a</sup>	37% <sup>b</sup>	25% <sup>a</sup>
TikTok	32%	30%	29%
Instagram	44%	45%	38%
Snapchat	43%	42%	34%
Messaging apps	40%	41%	38%

Notes: Among adolescent girls who use each platform. Items with different superscripts differ significantly across rows within each category ( $p < .05$ ).

**TABLE 7. Depressive symptoms, by demographics**

PHQ-8 score (0 to 24)	TOTAL	Age		Race/Ethnicity				Family income		
		11 to 12	13 to 15	White	Black	Hispanic	Asian	Lower	Middle	Higher
None (0 to 4)	<b>62%</b>	68% <sup>a</sup>	59% <sup>b</sup>	61%	68%	66%	64%	63%	62%	61%
Mild (5 to 9)	<b>21%</b>	18%	22%	24% <sup>a</sup>	16% <sup>b</sup>	15% <sup>b</sup>	14% <sup>a,b</sup>	17% <sup>a</sup>	25% <sup>b</sup>	22% <sup>a,b</sup>
Moderate to severe (10 to 24)	<b>17%</b>	14% <sup>a</sup>	19% <sup>b</sup>	15%	16%	19%	22%	20% <sup>a</sup>	13% <sup>b</sup>	18% <sup>a,b</sup>
• Moderate (10 to 14)	<b>10%</b>	8% <sup>a</sup>	11% <sup>b</sup>	9%	9%	9%	11%	12% <sup>a</sup>	6% <sup>b</sup>	10% <sup>a</sup>
• Severe (15 to 24)	<b>7%</b>	6%	8%	7%	7%	10%	10%	8%	7%	7%

Notes: Among all adolescent girls surveyed. See *Methodology* for income breakdowns.

**FIGURE 6. Girls imagine life without social media, by depressive symptoms**

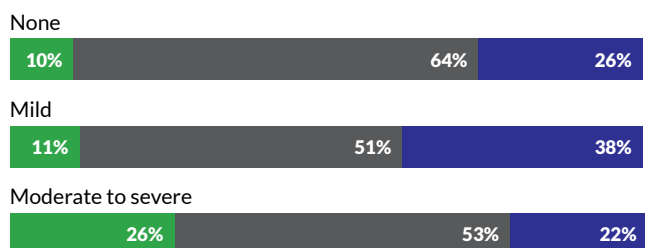
Report life would be ... without each platform

■ Better ■ Same ■ Worse

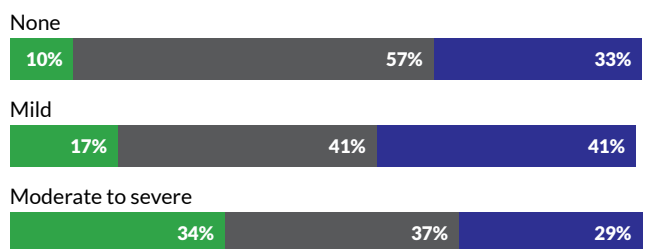
**Instagram, depressive symptoms**



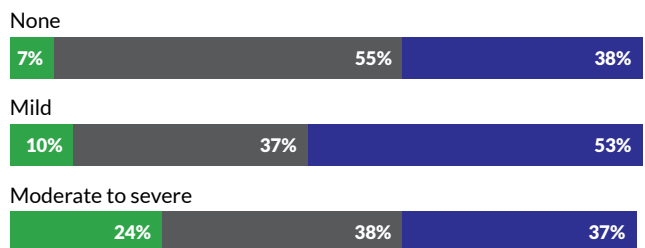
**Snapchat, depressive symptoms**



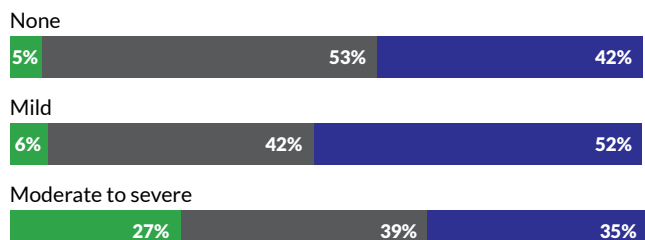
**TikTok, depressive symptoms**



**YouTube, depressive symptoms**



**Messaging apps, depressive symptoms**



Note: Bars may not sum 100% due to rounding.

**Overuse of social media.** Girls with depressive symptoms were more likely to report feelings of “addiction” or using platforms more than intended, and to indicate that these platforms interfere with their sleep (see Table 9). For example, girls with moderate to severe depressive symptoms who use TikTok were more than twice as likely as those with no symptoms to report feelings of addiction, or using the platform more than originally intended at least weekly (68% vs. 33%). They were also far more likely to report that the platform interferes with their sleep at least once per week (70% vs. 27%).

**TABLE 9. Use of social media, by depressive symptoms**

Report ...	Depressive symptoms		
	None	Mild	Moderate to severe
<b>Using “almost constantly”</b>			
YouTube	15%	15%	22%
Instagram	9% <sup>a</sup>	9% <sup>a</sup>	24% <sup>b</sup>
Snapchat	15%	17%	24%
TikTok	20% <sup>a</sup>	21% <sup>a</sup>	34% <sup>b</sup>
Messaging apps	13% <sup>a</sup>	12% <sup>a</sup>	30% <sup>b</sup>
<b>Feelings of “addiction” or using more than intended*</b>			
YouTube	23% <sup>a</sup>	41% <sup>b</sup>	65% <sup>c</sup>
Instagram	22% <sup>a</sup>	39% <sup>b</sup>	59% <sup>c</sup>
Snapchat	26% <sup>a</sup>	49% <sup>b</sup>	54% <sup>b</sup>
TikTok	33% <sup>a</sup>	60% <sup>b</sup>	68% <sup>b</sup>
Messaging apps	20% <sup>a</sup>	34% <sup>b</sup>	60% <sup>c</sup>
<b>Interference with sleep*</b>			
YouTube	17% <sup>a</sup>	35% <sup>b</sup>	60% <sup>c</sup>
Instagram	17% <sup>a</sup>	33% <sup>b</sup>	56% <sup>c</sup>
Snapchat	20% <sup>a</sup>	41% <sup>b</sup>	54% <sup>c</sup>
TikTok	27% <sup>a</sup>	56% <sup>b</sup>	70% <sup>c</sup>
Messaging apps	16% <sup>a</sup>	37% <sup>b</sup>	65% <sup>c</sup>

\* Weekly or more frequently

Note: Items with different superscripts differ significantly across rows within each category ( $p < .05$ ).

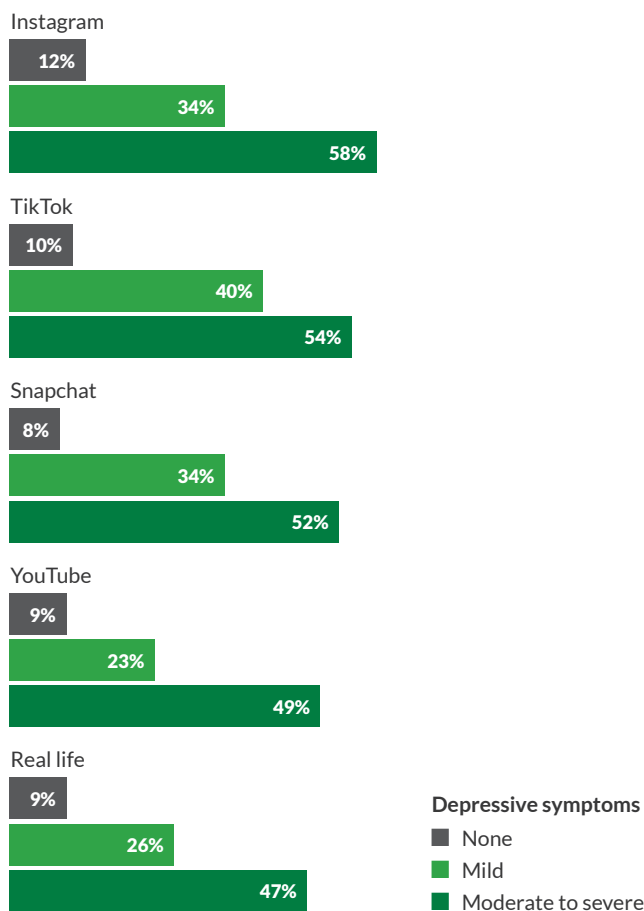
FIGURE 6 and TABLE 9:  
Note: Among adolescent girls who use each platform.

**Social media experiences among girls with depressive symptoms.** Compared to girls without depressive symptoms, girls with depressive symptoms reported having a range of social media experiences more frequently across platforms—both positive and negative. For example, the proportion of girls who report daily negative social comparison experiences on each platform (and in person) was higher among girls with greater severity of depressive symptoms (see Figure 7). At the

same time, the proportion of girls who report daily social connection with others with shared identities or interests was higher among girls with moderate or severe depressive symptoms (versus no depressive symptoms) among users of YouTube and TikTok (see Figure 8). These findings suggest that girls with depressive symptoms may be more likely to have difficulties with social media but also be more likely to take advantage of its benefits.

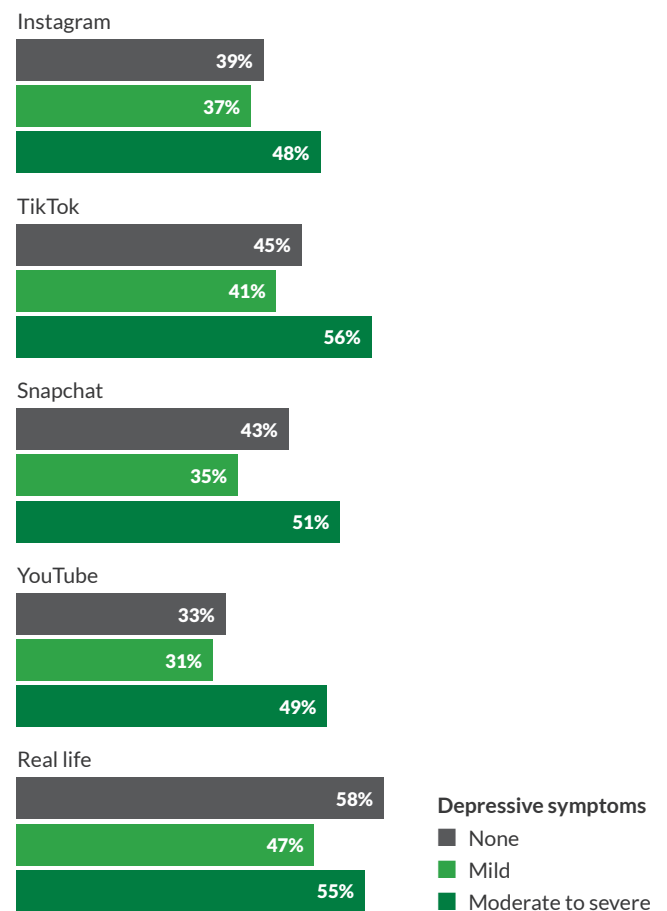
**FIGURE 7. Daily social comparison experiences on social media and “real life,” by depressive symptoms**

Feel like other people’s lives are better



**FIGURE 8. Daily social connection experiences on social media and “real life,” by depressive symptoms**

Can connect with others with shared interests or identities



FIGURES 7 and 8:  
Notes: Among adolescent girls who use each platform. *Real life* among all adolescent girls surveyed.

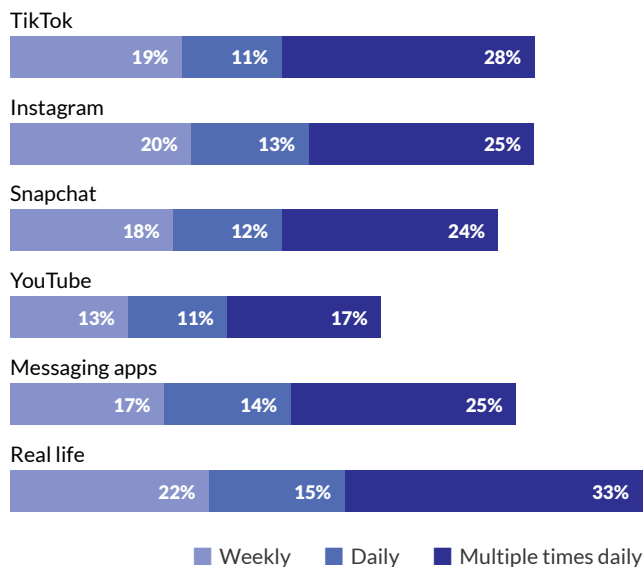


# Social Life on Social Media: Challenges and Opportunities

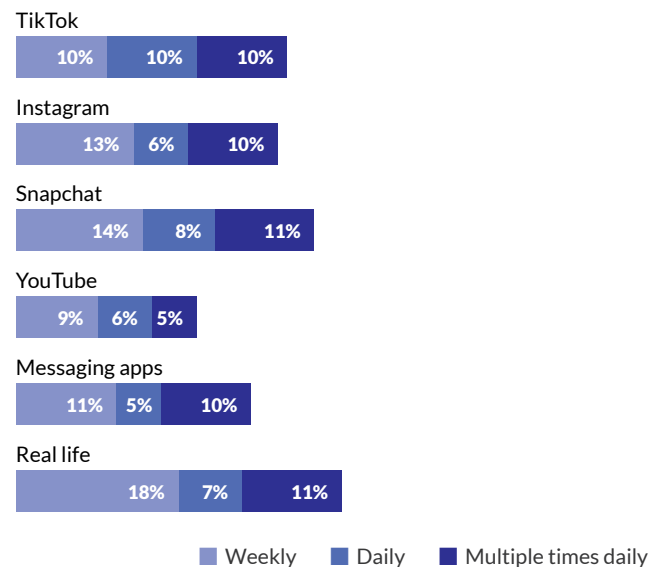
**Positive and negative social experiences.** Our survey asked girls about a range of social experiences and pressures, both online and in person (i.e., outside of social media). Girls reported frequent positive social experiences, like connecting with friends, meeting new people, or getting support, across platforms (Figure 9). Unfortunately, negative social experiences—

like drama, bullying, and feeling left out—were also common across platforms, with nearly one in three girls who use TikTok (30%), Instagram (29%), and Snapchat (33%) saying they have these experiences at least weekly on those platforms (see Figure 10).

**FIGURE 9. Positive social experiences on social media and in “real life,” by frequency**



**FIGURE 10. Negative social experiences on social media and in “real life,” by frequency**



FIGURES 9 and 10:

Notes: Among adolescent girls who use each platform. *Real life* among all adolescent girls surveyed. *Positive social experiences*: “Something happens with my friends or peers that makes me feel good (like staying connected to friends, getting support, or meeting new friends).” *Negative social experiences*: “Something happens with my friends or peers that makes me feel bad (like drama, bullying, mean comments, fighting, or feeling left out).”

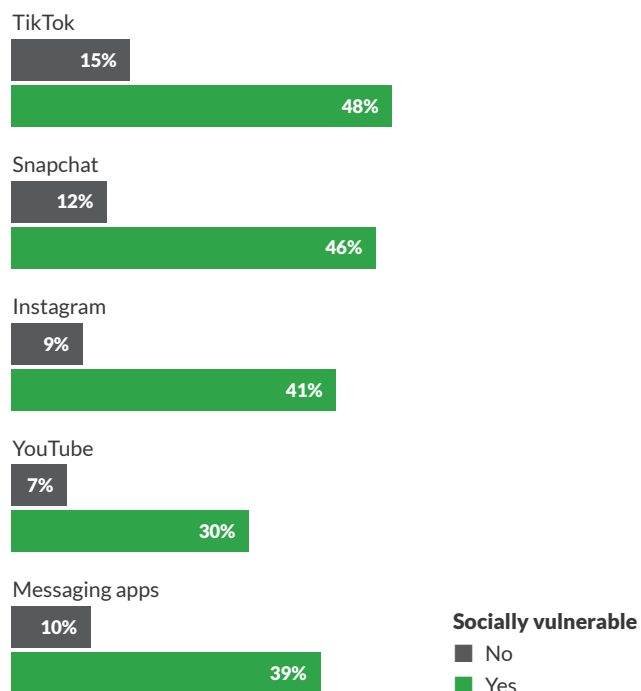
**Social media experiences among socially vulnerable girls.**

Girls who struggle in their social lives offline were more likely to report both more positive and negative experiences on social media in our survey. Roughly one in five girls in our sample (18%) reported daily experiences of bullying, drama, or feeling left out in their offline lives, outside of social media. Compared to the rest of our sample, these socially vulnerable girls were more likely to say that when it comes to social media, they have frequent negative social experiences across platforms, like being bullied or feeling left out (see Figure 11).

Importantly, though, socially vulnerable girls were also more likely to say they have frequent positive social experiences on social media, like meeting new friends, connecting with others, or getting support (see Figure 12).

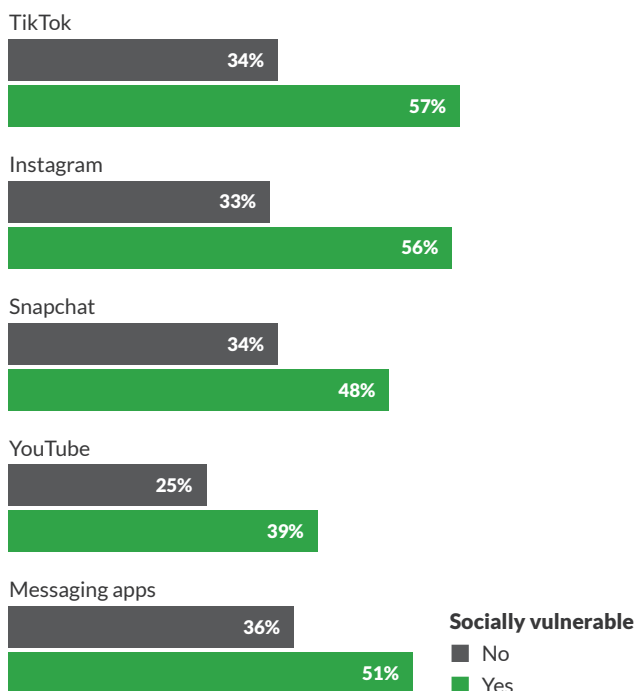
**FIGURE 11. Negative social experiences on social media, by offline social vulnerability**

Report negative experiences at least daily



**FIGURE 12. Positive social experiences on social media, by offline social vulnerability**

Report positive experiences at least daily



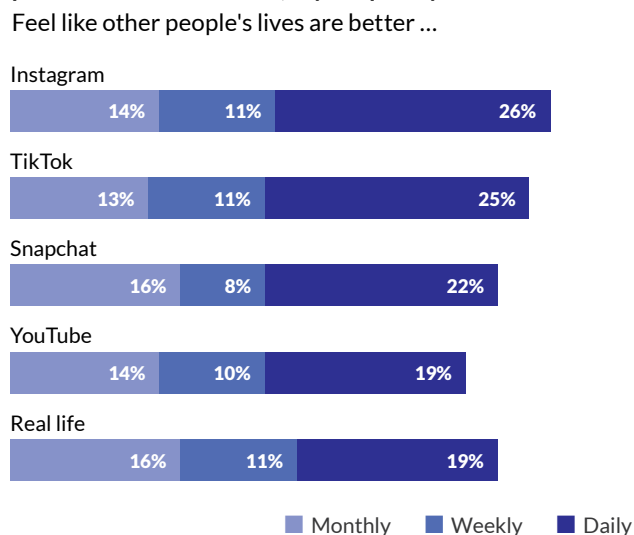
FIGURES 11 and 12:

Notes: Among adolescent girls who use each platform. *Socially vulnerable* girls are those reporting daily negative social experiences (bullying, feeling left out) in their offline lives, outside of social media. *Negative social experiences*: "Something happens with my friends or peers that makes me feel bad (like drama, bullying, mean comments, fighting, or feeling left out)." *Positive social experiences*: "Something happens with my friends or peers that makes me feel good (like staying connected to friends, getting support, or meeting new friends)."

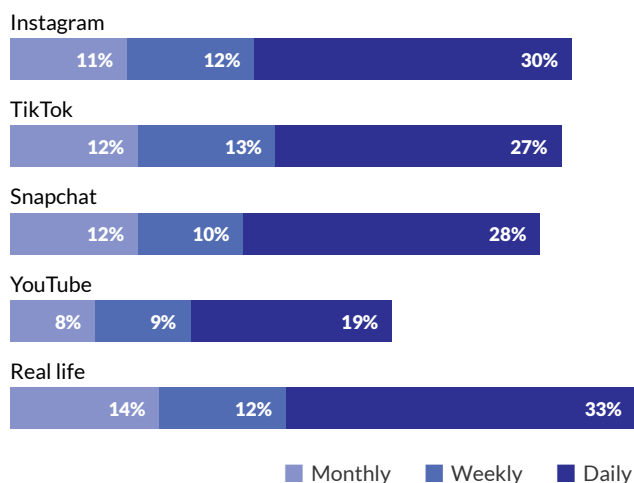


**Social pressures and risks.** Girls report a range of social pressures across platforms, in addition to availability stress (the pressure to be responsible and available to friends, as reported above). Roughly one in four girls who use TikTok (25%), Instagram (26%), and Snapchat (22%) say they have daily experiences of negative social comparisons (“feeling like other people’s lives are better than mine”) on these platforms (see Figure 13). Further, roughly half of girls who use TikTok

**FIGURE 13. Negative social comparison on social media platforms and in “real life,” by frequency**



**FIGURE 14. Pressure to present “best self” on social media platforms and in “real life,” by frequency**



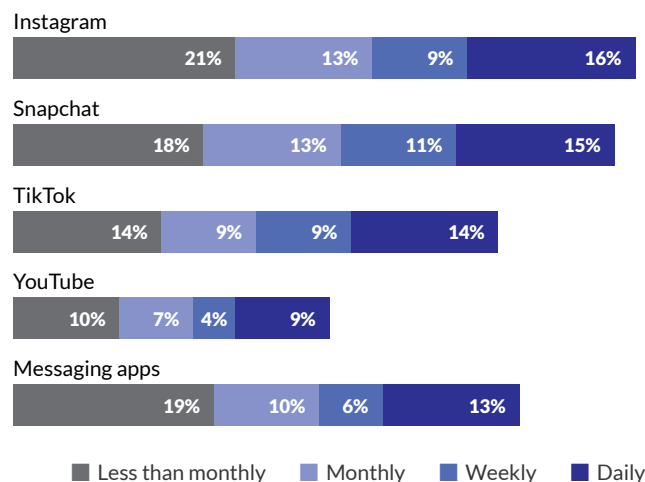
FIGURES 13 and 14:  
Notes: Among adolescent girls who use each platform. *Real life* among all girls surveyed.

(52%), Snapchat (50%), and Instagram (53%) report feeling pressure to present the “best version” of themselves at least monthly on these platforms, with more than one in four experiencing this pressure daily on TikTok (27%), Instagram (30%), and Snapchat (28%) (see Figure 14).

**Contact by strangers on platforms.** Girls encounter social risks on social media platforms as well, with a striking proportion of girls reporting they have been contacted by strangers “in ways that make [them] uncomfortable.” (see Figure 15). Nearly six out of 10 girls who use Instagram (58%) and Snapchat (57%) say they’ve ever had unwanted contact with a stranger on those platforms, as have nearly half of TikTok (46%) and messaging app (48%) users.

Notably, preteens (age 11 to 12) were equally as likely as teens (age 13 to 15) to say they had been contacted by strangers in ways that made them uncomfortable on most platforms. This is notable, as it indicates that preteens who are using these platforms may encounter some of the same risks as older girls. One exception to this pattern was among girls who use TikTok, with teens more likely than preteens to say that they’d had this experience on the platform (49% vs. 42%). No differences emerged by race or ethnicity in terms of likelihood of having had this experience.

**FIGURE 15. Unwanted contact by strangers**

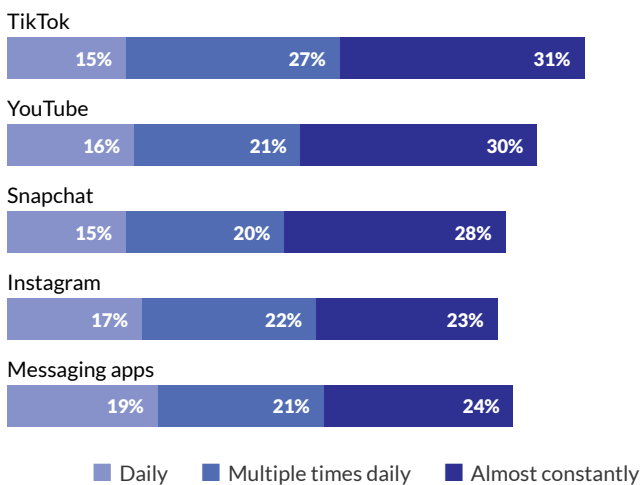


Note: Among adolescent girls who use each platform.

**Benefits of social media.** Despite potential downsides of social media, adolescent girls report benefits across platforms, including entertainment and fun, self-expression, discovery and exploring interests, and social activism. More than two out of three girls reported having fun or being entertained by each social media platform at least daily (see Figure 16), and a significant portion of girls report using each platform to express themselves creatively, discover or learn new things, and/or engage in social activism (see Table 10).

Compared to girls of other races, Black girls who use YouTube and Instagram were especially likely to say they use these platforms daily to express themselves creatively, and YouTube for learning and discovery (see Table 10). In addition, Black and Hispanic girls who use YouTube and Instagram were more likely than girls of other races to say they use these platforms for activism on a daily basis. Compared to girls from middle and higher-income households, girls from lower-income households were more likely to use platforms for creative expression and activism daily.

**FIGURE 16. Fun and entertainment on platforms, by frequency**



Note: Among adolescent girls who use each platform.

**TABLE 10. Self-expression and discovery on social media, by demographics**

Report each experience daily on each platform	TOTAL	Age		Race/Ethnicity				Family income		
		11 to 12	13 to 15	White	Black	Hispanic	Asian	Lower	Middle	Higher
<b>I post things that allow me to express myself creatively.</b>										
YouTube	24%	23%	25%	23% <sup>a</sup>	42% <sup>b</sup>	23% <sup>a</sup>	13% <sup>a</sup>	29% <sup>a</sup>	26% <sup>a</sup>	18% <sup>b</sup>
Instagram	37%	36%	37%	35% <sup>a</sup>	49% <sup>b</sup>	36% <sup>a,b</sup>	20% <sup>a</sup>	43% <sup>a</sup>	36% <sup>a,b</sup>	31% <sup>b</sup>
Snapchat	40%	38%	42%	43%	42%	43%	24%	47% <sup>a</sup>	38% <sup>a,b</sup>	35% <sup>b</sup>
TikTok	38%	36%	40%	38% <sup>a</sup>	45% <sup>a</sup>	37% <sup>a</sup>	21% <sup>b</sup>	44%	35%	36%
<b>I learn new things, explore my interests, or discover new things (like restaurants or places I want to go).</b>										
YouTube	42%	41%	43%	41% <sup>a</sup>	51% <sup>b</sup>	35% <sup>a</sup>	33% <sup>a</sup>	45%	41%	41%
Instagram	37%	36%	38%	39%	36%	37%	33%	38%	38%	37%
Snapchat	31%	33%	30%	32%	34%	24%	22%	35%	30%	29%
TikTok	46%	44%	47%	47%	51%	45%	27%	47%	49%	41%
<b>I take action on issues I care about.</b>										
YouTube	24%	26%	24%	21% <sup>a</sup>	33% <sup>b</sup>	34% <sup>b</sup>	14% <sup>a</sup>	33% <sup>a</sup>	24% <sup>b</sup>	19% <sup>b</sup>
Instagram	30%	26%	31%	27% <sup>a,b</sup>	38% <sup>c</sup>	38% <sup>b,c</sup>	18% <sup>a</sup>	38% <sup>a</sup>	26% <sup>b</sup>	26% <sup>b</sup>
Snapchat	28%	28%	28%	27%	33%	31%	22%	35% <sup>a</sup>	25% <sup>b</sup>	22% <sup>b</sup>
TikTok	31%	32%	31%	28%	36%	38%	23%	38% <sup>a</sup>	29% <sup>b</sup>	27% <sup>b</sup>

Notes: Among adolescent girls who use each platform. Items with different superscripts differ significantly across rows within each category ( $p < .05$ ). See Methodology for income breakdowns.

## IN THEIR OWN WORDS

### What changes would girls make to social media platforms?

In our survey, we asked girls to tell us, in their own words, how they would change each platform to make it better for teens' well-being.<sup>2</sup> Across platforms, girls prioritized changes that would ensure they viewed more appropriate, positive content as well as protect their privacy and safety, such as:

#### **Adding age limit restrictions or age-appropriate content.**

Suggestions included having more age-appropriate content just for teens, putting age restrictions in place to not allow adults to follow minors, having a section of the platform just for teens, and putting time limits in place for younger age groups. The proportion of girls who reported this was especially high for YouTube (21%) and TikTok (21%), versus Snapchat (12%), and messaging apps (10%). A similar number (13%) of girls reported this for Instagram.

*If you could make one change to your social media platform to make it better for teens' well-being, what would it be and why?*

*"Better ways to find things for [kids] my age."*

—13-year-old YouTube user

*"Make some of the adult content not available to see without parent consent."*

—15-year-old Instagram user

*"Adults can't add us kids."*

—13-year-old Snapchat user

*"More kid content."*

—14-year-old TikTok user

*"Create a version for teens only to limit who can interact with us."*

—14-year-old messaging app user

*"Filter accounts with inappropriate content better."*

—11-year-old YouTube user

*"They really need to block older people from stalking younger."*

—13-year-old Instagram user

*"If I could make one change to Snapchat to make it better for teens, I would add more security features."*

—14-year-old Snapchat user

*"Set up privacy settings for sexual content."*

—13-year-old TikTok user

*"I would make it a safer platform for teens to hang out and talk together. Right now, anyone can find you and bullies are mean."*

—12-year-old messaging app user

2. Participants were randomly assigned to report on one of the top five most popular platforms (that they had used). If participants did not use any of these platforms ( $n = 44$ ), they were randomly assigned to one of the five. Thus, roughly 20% of girls surveyed ( $n$ 's between 278 and 282) answered for each platform. Note that responses could be coded under more than one category.

**Promoting more positive content.** Suggestions included removing hateful or violent content, reducing the use of photo filters or editing, and providing more positive mental health resources. This suggestion was endorsed for YouTube (12%), Instagram (12%), Snapchat (6%), and TikTok (7%), but for messaging apps by only 1% of girls.

*“I would keep all the negative or bad videos off.”*

—14-year-old YouTube user

*“Stop mean/negative posts. Lots of people post mean things about people in my school, which I think is hurtful. I would like there to be less bullying online.”*

—13-year-old Instagram user

*“More positive teen groups.”*

—11-year-old Snapchat user

*“I would have them remove videos that are harmful and dangerous (like all the challenges that destroy stuff in schools or hurt other people).”*

—14-year-old TikTok user

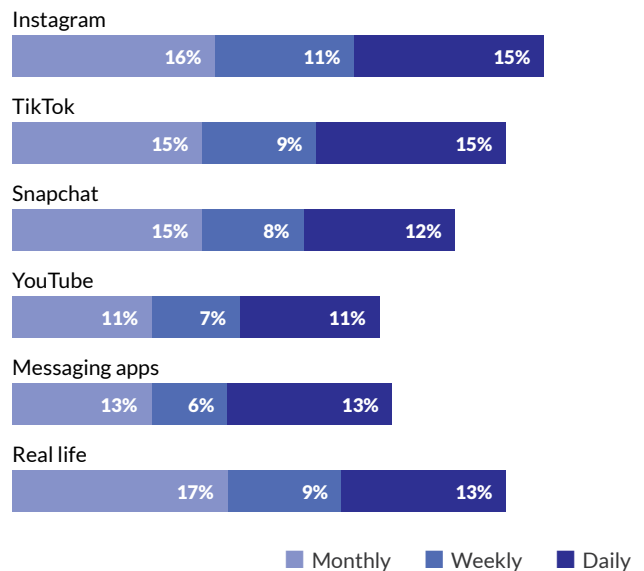
# Mental Health Resources and Risks on Social Media

The presence of information and content related to mental health on social media is a key factor in understanding the impact of these platforms on girls' well-being. Such content may include helpful resources and information, some of which may be provided by established organizations or authorities, and some of which may come from peers with lived experience of mental illness. However, this content can also include problematic posts, videos, and photos that may be upsetting or triggering for girls, and which may contain inaccurate information.

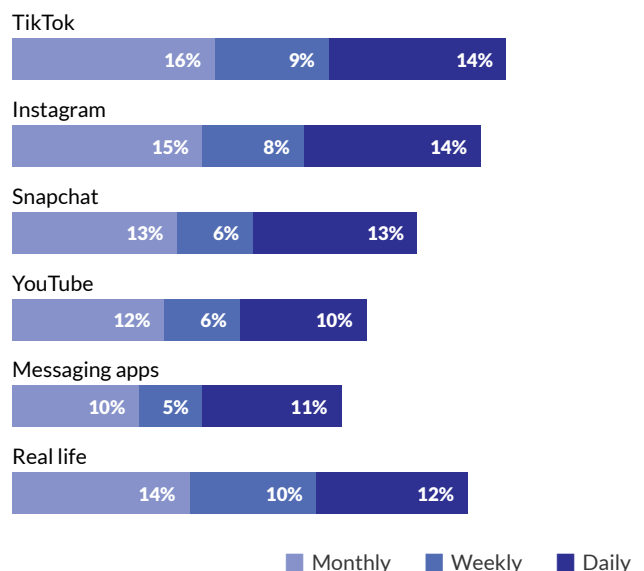
**Suicide and self-harm content.** Girls report that exposure to harmful suicide-related content is prevalent across major social media platforms. More than a quarter of girls who use Instagram (26%) and TikTok (24%), and one in five girls who use Snapchat (20%) say they “hear or see things about suicide or self-harm that are upsetting to [them]” at least weekly on these platforms, with 15% of girls who use TikTok and Instagram saying they come across this type of content on the platforms daily. As a point of comparison, 22% of girls also report “seeing or hearing things about suicide” that are upsetting to them at least weekly in real life, outside of social media (see Figure 17).

**Eating disorders content.** Exposure to harmful content related to eating disorders was common among girls as well, with roughly one in three users of each of Instagram (37%), Snapchat (32%), TikTok (39%), and YouTube (28%) reporting they come across this content at least monthly on these platforms (see Figure 18). As a point of comparison, 35% of girls say they “see or hear things about eating disorders that are upsetting to [them]” at least monthly in their lives outside of social media (see Table 11 on page 40).

**FIGURE 17. Report exposure to suicide- or self-harm-related content, by platform**



**FIGURE 18. Report exposure to eating disorder-related content, by platform**



FIGURES 17 and 18:  
Notes: Among adolescent girls who use each platform. *Real life* among all adolescent girls surveyed.

**TABLE 11. Experiences with mental health content and information on social media and in “real life”**

Report having each experience at least monthly on ...	TOTAL	Age		Race/Ethnicity				Family income		
		11 to 12	13 to 15	White	Black	Hispanic	Asian	Lower	Middle	Higher
<b>Exposure to harmful suicide/self-harm content/information</b>										
YouTube	<b>29%</b>	24% <sup>a</sup>	33% <sup>b</sup>	26% <sup>a</sup>	39% <sup>b</sup>	32% <sup>a,b</sup>	26% <sup>a,b</sup>	35% <sup>a</sup>	28% <sup>b</sup>	25% <sup>b</sup>
Instagram	<b>42%</b>	35% <sup>a</sup>	43% <sup>b</sup>	39%	47%	46%	38%	47%	39%	37%
Snapchat	<b>35%</b>	36%	35%	37%	40%	25%	38%	35%	36%	32%
TikTok	<b>39%</b>	31% <sup>a</sup>	43% <sup>b</sup>	37%	46%	35%	43%	39%	38%	38%
Messaging apps	<b>29%</b>	24% <sup>a</sup>	33% <sup>b</sup>	28%	40%	32%	22%	32%	29%	27%
Real life	<b>39%</b>	33% <sup>a</sup>	45% <sup>b</sup>	40%	43%	41%	31%	39%	42%	40%
<b>Exposure to harmful eating disorders content/information</b>										
YouTube	<b>28%</b>	24% <sup>a</sup>	32% <sup>b</sup>	27%	36%	30%	25%	31%	29%	26%
Instagram	<b>37%</b>	30% <sup>a</sup>	37% <sup>b</sup>	31% <sup>a</sup>	44% <sup>b</sup>	44% <sup>b</sup>	33% <sup>a,b</sup>	40%	35%	34%
Snapchat	<b>32%</b>	33%	32%	33%	33%	25%	38%	31%	33%	32%
TikTok	<b>39%</b>	31% <sup>a</sup>	43% <sup>b</sup>	41% <sup>a</sup>	42% <sup>a</sup>	29% <sup>b</sup>	33% <sup>a,b</sup>	37%	38%	38%
Messaging apps	<b>26%</b>	20% <sup>a</sup>	30% <sup>b</sup>	26% <sup>a</sup>	41% <sup>b</sup>	22% <sup>a</sup>	19% <sup>a</sup>	25%	30%	24%
Real life	<b>36%</b>	30% <sup>a</sup>	38% <sup>b</sup>	38%	37%	30%	32%	34%	38%	34%
<b>Access to helpful mental health resources/information</b>										
YouTube	<b>54%</b>	50% <sup>a</sup>	58% <sup>b</sup>	52%	60%	53%	54%	56%	56%	52%
Instagram	<b>57%</b>	49% <sup>a</sup>	59% <sup>b</sup>	52% <sup>a</sup>	68% <sup>b</sup>	66% <sup>b</sup>	58% <sup>a,b</sup>	56%	56%	57%
Snapchat	<b>52%</b>	49%	54%	55%	52%	46%	57%	50%	54%	50%
TikTok	<b>60%</b>	53% <sup>a</sup>	65% <sup>b</sup>	61%	62%	55%	66%	61%	60%	59%
Messaging apps	<b>40%</b>	37%	43%	35% <sup>a</sup>	55% <sup>b</sup>	43% <sup>a,b</sup>	38% <sup>a</sup>	44% <sup>a</sup>	47% <sup>a</sup>	33% <sup>b</sup>
Real life	<b>64%</b>	57% <sup>a</sup>	67% <sup>b</sup>	63%	62%	62%	53%	60%	67%	63%

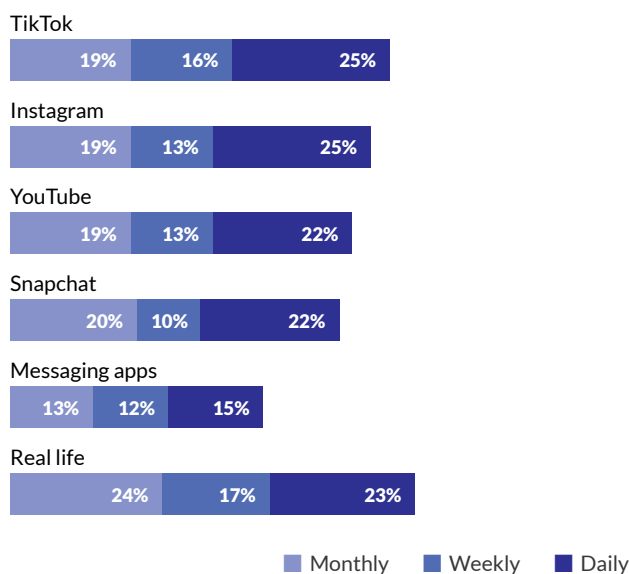
Notes: Among adolescent girls who use each platform. *Real life* among all adolescent girls surveyed. Items with different superscripts differ significantly across rows within each category ( $p < .05$ ). See *Methodology* for income breakdowns.

**Mental health resources.** Social media platforms are also serving as a key resource for girls finding helpful information related to mental health. The majority of girls said they come across helpful mental health information or resources on social media regularly, with nearly one in four girls saying they come across this content daily on YouTube (22%), Instagram (25%), Snapchat (22%), and TikTok (25%) (see Figure 19). A similar number of girls say they see or hear helpful information about mental health in their lives outside of social media, too (40% weekly and 23% daily).

**Exposure to mental health content among girls with depressive symptoms.** Girls with depressive symptoms were significantly more likely to come across both harmful and helpful mental health content across platforms, compared to girls without depressive symptoms.

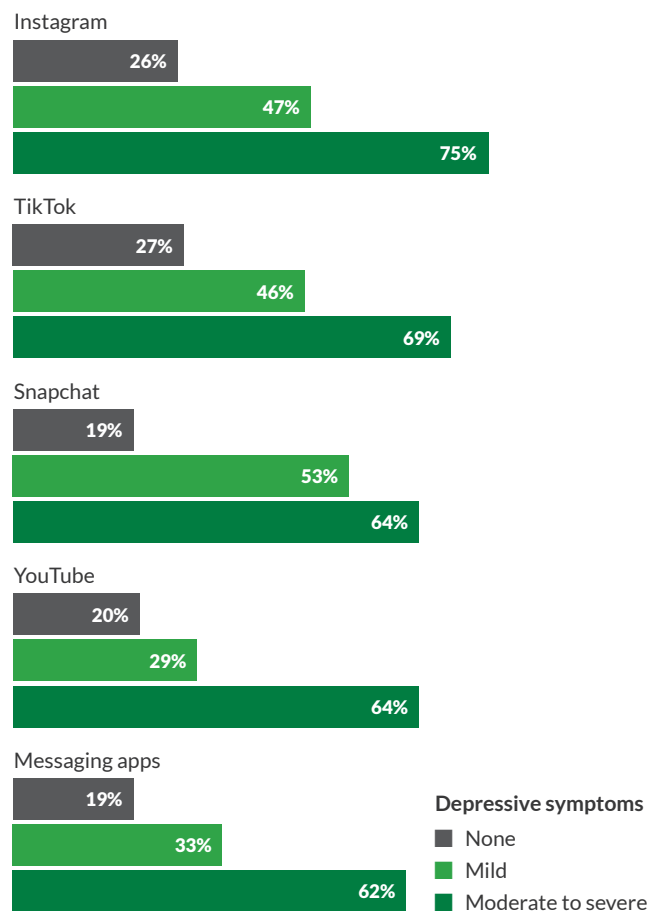
Concerningly, three-quarters of girls with moderate to severe depressive symptoms who use Instagram (75%) say they come across harmful suicide-related content on the platform at least monthly, compared to just 26% of girls without depressive symptoms (see Figure 20). Similarly, nearly seven in 10 girls with moderate to severe depressive symptoms who use TikTok (69%) say they come across this content at least monthly, versus 27% of girls without depressive symptoms. A similar pattern emerged for other platforms. At the same time, roughly three-quarters or more of girls with moderate or severe depressive symptoms who use TikTok (78%), Instagram (80%), YouTube (74%), and Snapchat (73%) say they see helpful mental health content or resources at least monthly on these platforms (see Figure 21 on page 42).

**FIGURE 19. Access to mental health resources, by frequency**



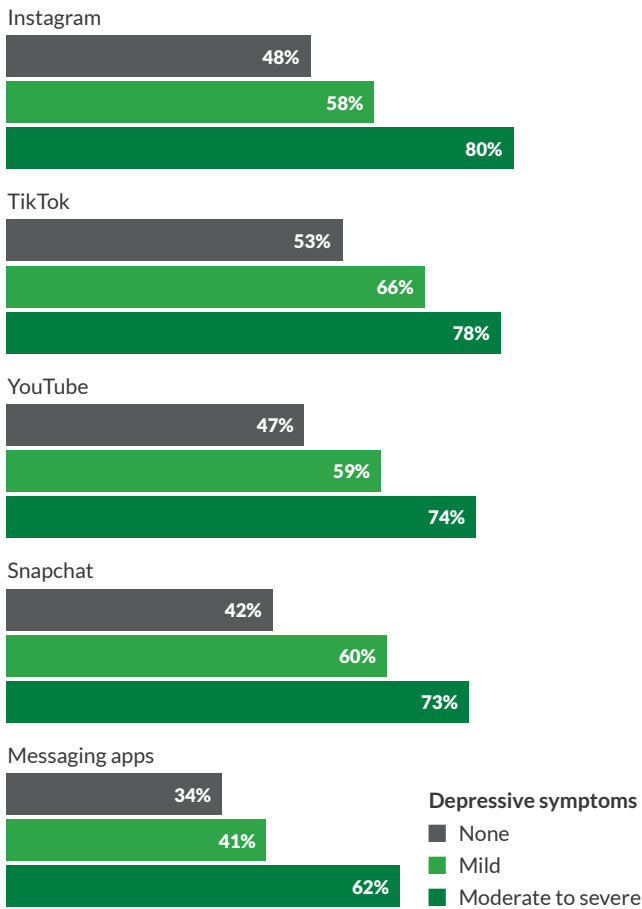
Notes: Among adolescent girls who use each platform. *Real life* among all adolescent girls surveyed.

**FIGURE 20. Exposure to suicide-related content, by depressive symptoms**



Notes: Among adolescent girls who use each platform.

**FIGURE 21. Access to mental health resources, by depressive symptoms**

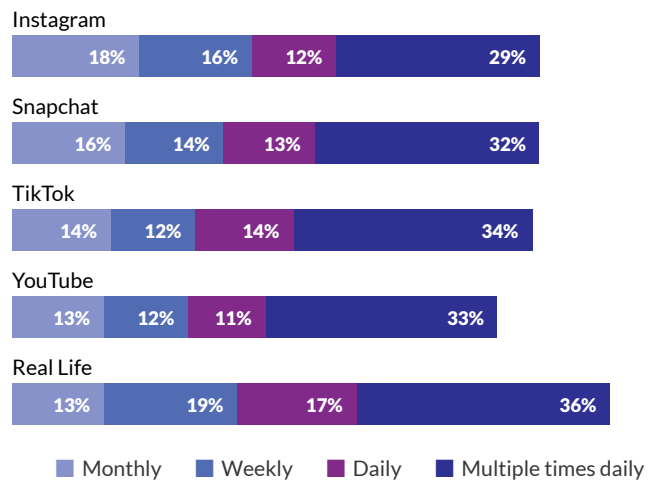


Note: Among adolescent girls who use each platform.

**Body image and social media.** Girls generally reported more frequent positive feelings about their bodies than negative when using social media, with the majority reported feeling good or accepting about their bodies or appearances at least occasionally while using each platform (see Figure 22). In terms of body dissatisfaction, roughly one in three girls who use TikTok (31%), Instagram (32%), and Snapchat (28%) say they feel bad about their body at least weekly when using these platforms, as do 23% of YouTube users.

Our survey asked girls how often they have the experience of “feeling bad about [their] body or appearance” or “feeling good or accepting about [their] body or appearance” on each platform, so we cannot say whether girls believe these platforms actually contribute to feelings of body dissatisfaction or acceptance. To further explore these findings, we separately asked girls how often they feel this way about their bodies in real life, or outside of social media.

**FIGURE 22. Positive body image experiences (body acceptance) on social media and in “real life,” by frequency**



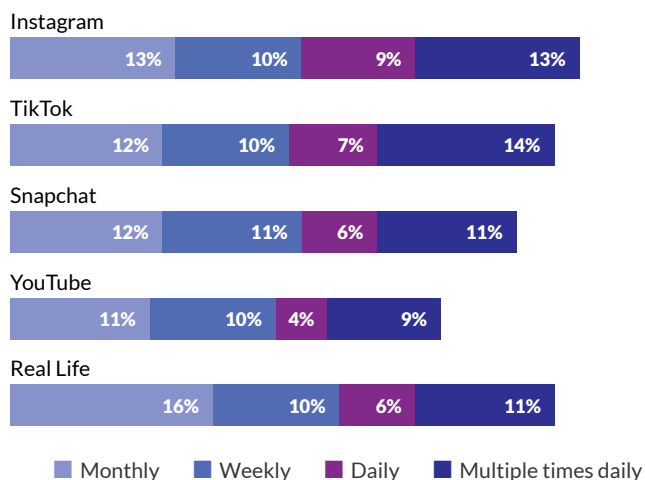
Notes: Among adolescent girls who use each platform. *Real life* among all adolescent girls surveyed.



Girls who struggle with poor body image in general—reporting daily experiences of feeling bad about their bodies outside of social media—comprised 17% of our sample. Unsurprisingly, among this group of girls, body dissatisfaction was common in the context of social media use (see Table 12). For example, one in four girls with poor body image who use Instagram (25%) say they feel bad about their bodies “almost constantly” on the platforms, compared to just 3% of girls without poor body image, with a similar pattern on other platforms (see Table 12).

It is notable, however, that even among girls who report less frequent body dissatisfaction outside of social media, one in 10 who use Instagram (11%) and TikTok (10%) are reporting daily body dissatisfaction on these platforms (see Table 12).

**FIGURE 23. Negative body image experiences (body shame/dissatisfaction) on social media and in “real life,” by frequency**

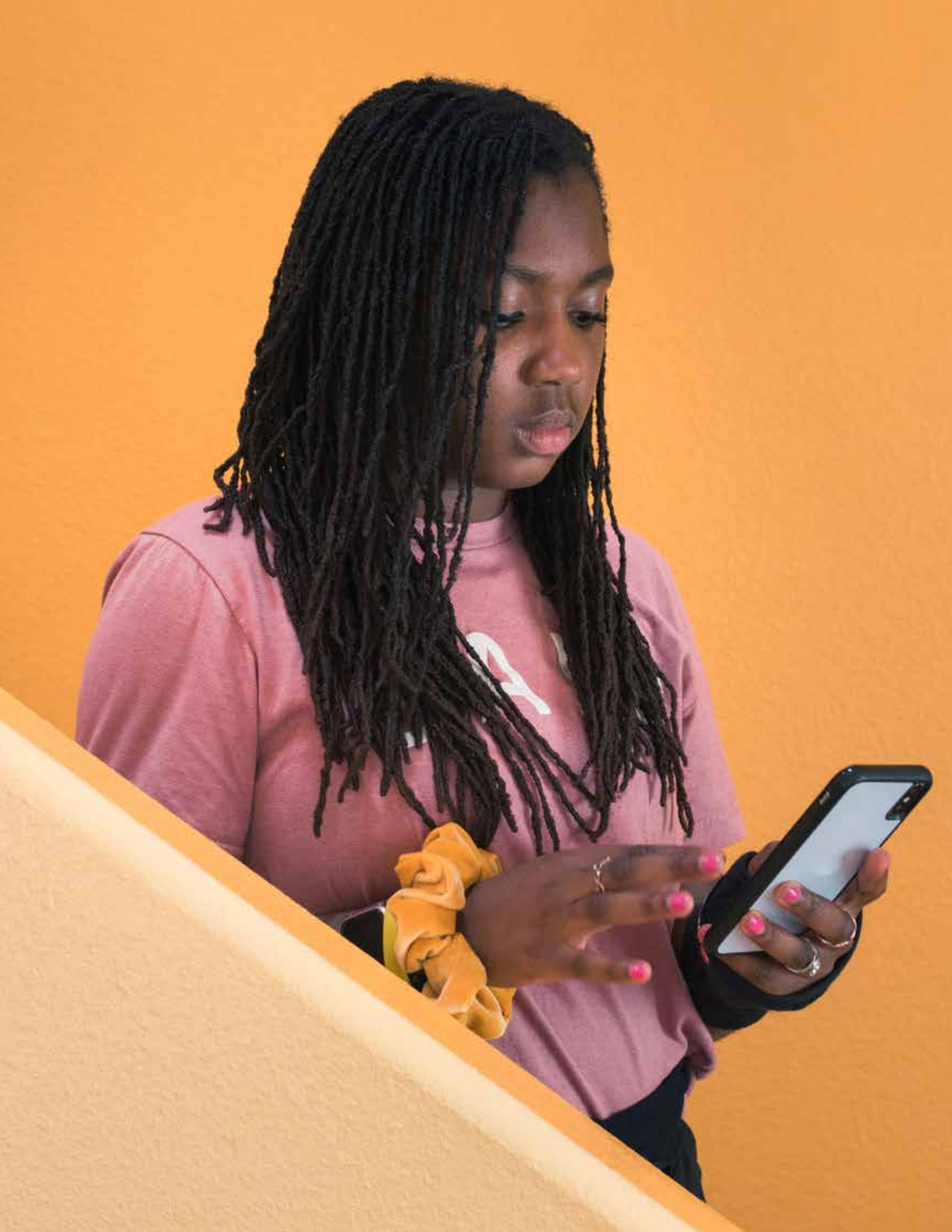


Notes: Among adolescent girls who use each platform. *Real life* among all adolescent girls surveyed.

**TABLE 12. Body image on platforms, by poor offline image**

Report body dissatisfaction or acceptance on ...	Poor offline body image	
	No	Yes
<b>YouTube</b>		
Body dissatisfaction (daily)	5% <sup>a</sup>	49% <sup>b</sup>
• Once per day	2% <sup>a</sup>	16% <sup>b</sup>
• Multiple times per day	2% <sup>a</sup>	16% <sup>b</sup>
• Almost constantly	1% <sup>a</sup>	18% <sup>b</sup>
Body acceptance (daily)	46%	37%
<b>Instagram</b>		
Body dissatisfaction (daily)	11% <sup>a</sup>	67% <sup>b</sup>
• Once per day	6% <sup>a</sup>	22% <sup>b</sup>
• Multiple times per day	2% <sup>a</sup>	20% <sup>b</sup>
• Almost constantly	3% <sup>a</sup>	25% <sup>b</sup>
Body acceptance (daily)	43%	33%
<b>Snapchat</b>		
Body dissatisfaction (daily)	7% <sup>a</sup>	54% <sup>b</sup>
• Once per day	5% <sup>a</sup>	14% <sup>b</sup>
• Multiple times per day	1% <sup>a</sup>	17% <sup>b</sup>
• Almost constantly	1% <sup>a</sup>	24% <sup>b</sup>
Body acceptance (daily)	46%	37%
<b>TikTok</b>		
Body dissatisfaction (daily)	10% <sup>a</sup>	62% <sup>b</sup>
• Once per day	5% <sup>a</sup>	15% <sup>b</sup>
• Multiple times per day	3% <sup>a</sup>	21% <sup>b</sup>
• Almost constantly	2% <sup>a</sup>	26% <sup>b</sup>
Body acceptance (daily)	52% <sup>a</sup>	37% <sup>b</sup>

Notes: Among adolescent girls who use each platform. *Body acceptance*: “I feel good or accepting about my body or appearance.” *Body dissatisfaction*: “I feel bad about my body or appearance.” Items with different superscripts differ significantly across rows ( $p < .05$ ).



# Race-Based Experiences on Social Media

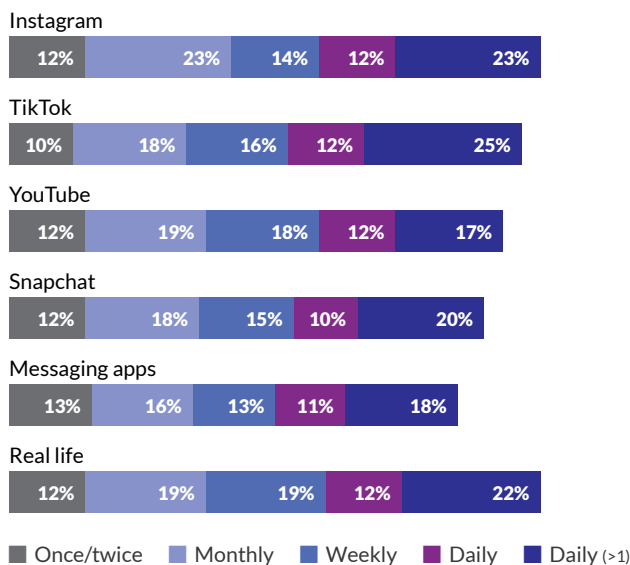
**Positive or identity-affirming content.** Social media platforms may provide an important resource for engaging with positive messages and content related to racial identity. Girls were asked to report the frequency with which “people say positive or uplifting things about people of [their] same race or ethnicity” on each platform, and in their offline lives outside of social media. Encountering positive or identity-affirming content was especially common on TikTok, with 37% of girls of color who use TikTok reporting having this experience daily on the platform (see Figure 24).

**Racism on social media.** Despite positive aspects of racial identity development that may play out on social media platforms, exposure to racism remains an unfortunate reality for adolescent girls of color on social media. Girls were asked to report the frequency with which “people say mean or rude things about people of my same race or ethnicity” on each platform and in real life. Girls of color were somewhat more

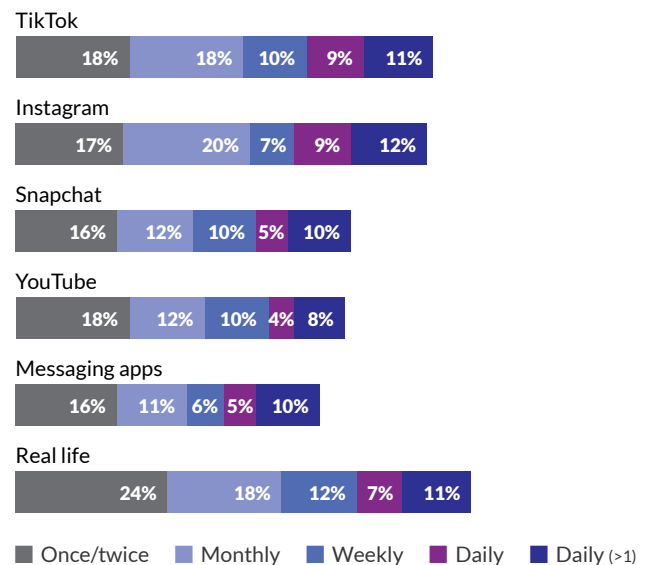
likely to come across racist content on TikTok (20% of girls of color who use TikTok say they come across it daily on the platform) and Instagram (21%), compared to YouTube (12%) (see Figure 25). Notably, roughly two in three girls of color who use TikTok (66%) and Instagram (64%) report having ever come across racist content on these platforms. As a point of comparison, 72% of girls of color have ever encountered racist language in real life (outside of social media), with 18% saying they encounter it daily.

Among users of Snapchat, Black girls reported more frequent exposure to racism on the platform compared to Hispanic girls (47% vs. 28% at least monthly) (see Table 13 on page 46). Black girls also reported more frequent exposure to racism in their offline lives (57% at least monthly), compared to Hispanic (39%) and Asian (28%) girls. There were no differences among girls of different racial and ethnic backgrounds in their exposure to positive racial language.

**FIGURE 24. Report exposure to positive racial language on social media and in “real life” among girls of color, by frequency**



**FIGURE 25. Report exposure to racism on social media and in “real life” among girls of color, by frequency**



FIGURES 24 and 25:

Notes: Among adolescent girls of color who use each platform. *Real life* among all adolescent girls of color surveyed (n = 702). *Girls of color* include all non-White girls in the sample, including girls who are Black, Hispanic, Asian, more than one race, or other races. *Positive racial language*: “People say positive or uplifting things about people of my same race or ethnicity.” *Racism*: “People say mean or rude things about people of my same race or ethnicity.”

**TABLE 13. Race-based experiences on social media and in “real life,” by demographics**

Girls of color who report having exposure to ... at least monthly on each platform	TOTAL	Age		Race/Ethnicity		
		11 to 12	13 to 15	Black	Hispanic	Asian
<b>Racist language</b>						
TikTok	<b>47%</b>	43%	49%	53%	43%	53%
YouTube	<b>34%</b>	28% <sup>a</sup>	39% <sup>b</sup>	43%	32%	31%
Instagram	<b>48%</b>	40%	51%	56%	44%	40%
Snapchat	<b>37%</b>	39%	36%	47% <sup>a</sup>	28% <sup>b</sup>	38% <sup>a,b</sup>
Messaging apps	<b>32%</b>	24% <sup>a</sup>	37% <sup>b</sup>	41%	33%	24%
Real life	<b>47%</b>	41% <sup>a</sup>	51% <sup>b</sup>	57% <sup>a</sup>	39% <sup>b</sup>	28% <sup>b</sup>
<b>Positive or identity-affirming language</b>						
TikTok	<b>72%</b>	72%	72%	75%	73%	64%
YouTube	<b>66%</b>	60% <sup>a</sup>	69% <sup>b</sup>	67%	70%	63%
Instagram	<b>71%</b>	70%	72%	74%	72%	63%
Snapchat	<b>63%</b>	66%	61%	71%	63%	62%
Messaging apps	<b>59%</b>	56%	60%	60%	64%	58%
Real life	<b>72%</b>	70%	73%	75%	70%	71%

Notes: Among adolescent girls of color who use each platform. *Real life* among all adolescent girls of color surveyed. *Girls of color* include all non-White girls in the sample, including girls who are Black, Hispanic, Asian, more than one race, or other races. Comparisons among groups should be interpreted with caution, given small sample sizes. Items with different superscripts differ significantly across rows within each category ( $p < .05$ ).

# LGBTQ+ Adolescents and Social Media

Fourteen percent of respondents in our sample ( $n_{\text{weighted}} = 189$ ) identified as bisexual, lesbian, pansexual, asexual, queer, gay, or “other” sexual orientation, or as transgender, male (differing from female sex assigned at birth), genderqueer/nonbinary, transgender, or “other” gender. We refer to these adolescents as LGBTQ+ in this report.

**Connecting with similar peers.** Social media platforms may offer an important source of connection and support for LGBTQ+ adolescents. The majority of LGBTQ+ individuals in our sample who use TikTok (57%) reported that they “connect with people who share [their] interest or identities” on the platform daily, and they were more likely than their non-LGBTQ+ peers (43%) to say this (see Figure I in *Key Findings* on page 11).

**Exposure to hate speech.** Despite positive opportunities to connect with similar others, LGBTQ+ adolescents were also roughly twice as likely as their non-LGBTQ+ peers to encounter hate speech related to sexual and gender identity daily across platforms (i.e., “people say mean or rude things about people of my same sexual or gender identity”). Among TikTok users, 35% of LGBTQ+ adolescents report seeing this content every day, compared to 16% of non-LGBTQ+ girls (see Figure H in *Key Findings* on page 11). This same pattern held for YouTube (19% vs. 11%), Instagram (27% vs. 13%), Snapchat (25% vs. 15%), messaging apps (31% vs. 11%), and in their lives outside of social media (29% vs. 14%).

**Other social media experiences among LGBTQ+ adolescents.** LGBTQ+ adolescents were more likely to report a range of experiences—both positive and negative—compared to non-LGBTQ+ girls (see Table 14).

**TABLE 14. Positive and negative social media experiences, by LGBTQ+ identity**

Report having each experience daily or more on each platform	Non-LGBTQ+	LGBTQ+
<b>I post things that allow me to express myself creatively.</b>		
YouTube	23% <sup>a</sup>	35% <sup>b</sup>
Instagram	36%	41%
Snapchat	39%	47%
TikTok	37% <sup>a</sup>	50% <sup>b</sup>
<b>I learn new things, explore my interests, or discover new things (like restaurants or places I want to go).</b>		
YouTube	41%	48%
Instagram	35% <sup>a</sup>	47% <sup>b</sup>
Snapchat	30%	38%
TikTok	43% <sup>a</sup>	58% <sup>b</sup>
<b>I take action on issues I care about.</b>		
YouTube	24% <sup>a</sup>	34% <sup>b</sup>
Instagram	28% <sup>a</sup>	37% <sup>b</sup>
Snapchat	25% <sup>a</sup>	40% <sup>b</sup>
TikTok	30% <sup>a</sup>	40% <sup>b</sup>
<b>I end up feeling like other people's lives are better than mine.</b>		
YouTube	17% <sup>a</sup>	26% <sup>b</sup>
Instagram	23% <sup>a</sup>	37% <sup>b</sup>
Snapchat	19% <sup>a</sup>	37% <sup>b</sup>
TikTok	21% <sup>a</sup>	36% <sup>b</sup>
<b>I feel pressure to present the “best version” of myself.</b>		
YouTube	19%	25%
Instagram	28% <sup>a</sup>	41% <sup>b</sup>
Snapchat	26% <sup>a</sup>	41% <sup>b</sup>
TikTok	24% <sup>a</sup>	41% <sup>b</sup>

Notes: Among adolescent girls who use each platform. Items with different superscripts differ significantly across rows ( $p < .05$ ).

Differences between LGBTQ+ and non-LGBTQ+ adolescents were particularly notable in their exposure to mental health content on social media (see Table 15). LGBTQ+ individuals were up to two times more likely than non-LGBTQ+ girls to be exposed to harmful suicide and eating disorders-related content across platforms (and in real life; see Table 15). Notably, however, LGBTQ+ individuals were also more likely than non-LGBTQ+ girls to encounter helpful mental health resources and information on most platforms, with, for example, three in four LGBTQ+ adolescents (75%) who use TikTok encountering helpful mental health resources on the platform at least monthly, compared to 57% of non-LGBTQ+ TikTok users.

**TABLE 15. Exposure to mental health content and information, by LGBTQ+ identity**

Report having each experience monthly or more on each platform	Non-LGBTQ+	LGBTQ+
<b>Exposure to harmful suicide/self-harm content/information</b>		
YouTube	26% <sup>a</sup>	49% <sup>b</sup>
Instagram	37% <sup>a</sup>	60% <sup>b</sup>
Snapchat	31% <sup>a</sup>	51% <sup>b</sup>
TikTok	34% <sup>a</sup>	63% <sup>b</sup>
Messaging	25% <sup>a</sup>	57% <sup>b</sup>
Real life	37% <sup>a</sup>	57% <sup>b</sup>
<b>Exposure to harmful eating disorders content/information</b>		
YouTube	26% <sup>a</sup>	42% <sup>b</sup>
Instagram	33% <sup>a</sup>	50% <sup>b</sup>
Snapchat	30% <sup>a</sup>	40% <sup>b</sup>
TikTok	35% <sup>a</sup>	57% <sup>b</sup>
Messaging	22% <sup>a</sup>	52% <sup>b</sup>
Real life	33% <sup>a</sup>	50% <sup>b</sup>
<b>Access to helpful mental health resources/information</b>		
YouTube	52% <sup>a</sup>	67% <sup>b</sup>
Instagram	55%	63%
Snapchat	49% <sup>a</sup>	66% <sup>b</sup>
TikTok	57% <sup>a</sup>	75% <sup>b</sup>
Messaging	38% <sup>a</sup>	58% <sup>b</sup>
Real life	61% <sup>a</sup>	72% <sup>b</sup>

Notes: Among adolescent girls who use each platform. *Real life* among all adolescent girls surveyed. Items with different superscripts differ significantly across rows ( $p < .05$ ).

# Girls' Beliefs About Key Features of Social Media Platforms

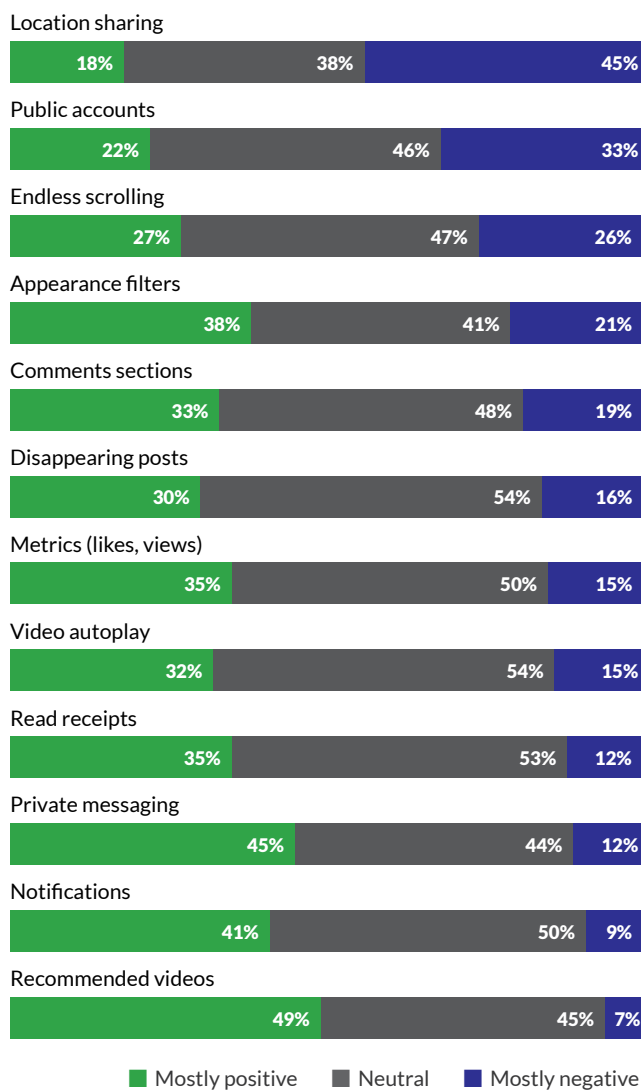
Features of social media platforms are key design choices that shape the ways adolescents engage with these platforms. While much debate has taken place regarding the positive or negative impacts of features like “autoplay,” “likes,” and filters, our survey is one of the first to ask girls directly for their opinions on whether these features have a positive or negative impact on their well-being.

The majority of girls in our sample recognized that these features have an effect on them, but they had mixed opinions on whether those effects are positive or negative.

Compared to other features, a greater proportion of girls cited “mostly negative” impacts of location sharing (45%) and public accounts (33%) (see Figure 26). It is possible that these negative perceptions are due to girls’ concerns about safety or privacy, or to other possible downsides of these features (i.e., potential for social exclusion or reputational concerns). Alternatively, these perceptions may be driven simply by negative views of these features by girls’ peers, family members, and/or the media.

In contrast, girls were most likely to report that video recommendations (49%) and private messaging (45%) had a mostly positive impact on them. Girls had mixed opinions of many social media features, with roughly an equal percentage of girls saying that “endless scrolling” has had a mostly positive (27%) or mostly negative (26%) effect on them, and 38% saying appearance filters have a mostly positive effect, compared to 21% who say filters have a mostly negative effect.

**FIGURE 26. Perceptions of the effects of social media**  
Believe this feature has had a ... effect on them.



Notes: Among adolescent girls who had ever used social media (n = 1,365). Bars may not sum 100% due to rounding.

**Perceptions of social media features differ by age and race/ethnicity.** Teen girls were more likely than preteen girls to report negative impacts of appearance filters (23% vs. 26%), visible numerical metrics like “views” and “likes” on their posts (18% vs. 12%), and notifications (11% vs 7%), though the majority of all girls reported no impact or mostly positive impacts of these features (see Table 16). Perceptions of features also differed somewhat by race, with White and Hispanic girls generally more likely than girls of other races to report “mostly negative” impacts of certain features, and Black girls generally less likely to do so (see Table 16).

**Perceptions of social media features differ among girls with and without depressive symptoms.** Girls with and without depressive symptoms differed in their perceptions of the positive and negative effects of certain social media features (see Table 17 on page 51). For example, girls with moderate or severe depressive symptoms were more likely than those with no depressive symptoms to say that “notifications” had a mostly negative impact on them, but were also more likely to say that this feature had a mostly positive impact. A similar pattern of results emerged for other features, including metrics (i.e., “likes”, views, shares), recommended videos, read receipts, location sharing, endless scrolling, and public accounts. Though preliminary, these results echo prior findings in suggesting that girls with depressive symptoms may be more invested in various aspects of their social media use—both positive and negative.

**TABLE 16. Perceptions of negative effects of social media features, by demographics**

Report feature has had a mostly negative effect on them	TOTAL	Age		Race/Ethnicity				Family income		
		11 to 12	13 to 15	White	Black	Hispanic	Asian	Lower	Middle	Higher
Comments sections	<b>19%</b>	22%	18%	19% <sup>a</sup>	17% <sup>a,b</sup>	23% <sup>a</sup>	9% <sup>b</sup>	17%	22%	18%
Filters	<b>21%</b>	16% <sup>a</sup>	23% <sup>b</sup>	24% <sup>a</sup>	7% <sup>b</sup>	23% <sup>a</sup>	9% <sup>b</sup>	18%	22%	21%
Metrics	<b>15%</b>	12% <sup>a</sup>	18% <sup>b</sup>	15%	11%	18%	12%	15%	16%	16%
Recommended videos	<b>7%</b>	6%	7%	5%	4%	9%	9%	6%	8%	6%
Endless scrolling	<b>26%</b>	27%	25%	30% <sup>a</sup>	14% <sup>b</sup>	29% <sup>a</sup>	27% <sup>a</sup>	21% <sup>a</sup>	26% <sup>a,b</sup>	30% <sup>b</sup>
Video autoplay	<b>15%</b>	13%	16%	16% <sup>a</sup>	6% <sup>b</sup>	14% <sup>a</sup>	19% <sup>a</sup>	11% <sup>a</sup>	13% <sup>a</sup>	20% <sup>b</sup>
Private messaging	<b>12%</b>	13%	11%	10%	12%	16%	10%	14% <sup>a</sup>	11% <sup>a,b</sup>	9% <sup>b</sup>
Location sharing	<b>45%</b>	46%	43%	47% <sup>a</sup>	33% <sup>b</sup>	36% <sup>b</sup>	38% <sup>a,b</sup>	43% <sup>a,b</sup>	49% <sup>b</sup>	39% <sup>a</sup>
Notifications	<b>9%</b>	7% <sup>a</sup>	11% <sup>b</sup>	9%	8%	11%	8%	8%	9%	10%
Disappearing posts	<b>16%</b>	16%	16%	17% <sup>a</sup>	8% <sup>b</sup>	13% <sup>a,b</sup>	18% <sup>a</sup>	18%	16%	13%
Public accounts	<b>33%</b>	35%	31%	33% <sup>a,b</sup>	27% <sup>b</sup>	40% <sup>a</sup>	28% <sup>ab</sup>	33%	34%	30%
Read receipts	<b>12%</b>	11%	13%	14%	9%	13%	11%	10%	14%	13%

Notes: Among adolescent girls who have ever used social media. Items with different superscripts differ significantly across rows within each category ( $p < .05$ ). See *Methodology* for income breakdowns.



**TABLE 17. Perceptions of social media features, by depressive symptoms**

Feature/Perceptions	Depressive symptoms			Feature/Perceptions	Depressive symptoms		
	None	Mild	Moderate to severe		None	Mild	Moderate to severe
<b>Comments sections</b>				<b>Private messaging</b>			
Mostly positive	35%	29%	35%	Mostly positive	46%	44%	41%
Neither positive nor negative	48%	49%	44%	Neither positive nor negative	43%	44%	45%
Mostly negative	17%	23%	21%	Mostly negative	11%	12%	14%
<b>Filters</b>				<b>Location sharing</b>			
Mostly positive	38%	38%	38%	Mostly positive	18% <sup>a</sup>	11% <sup>b</sup>	26% <sup>c</sup>
Neither positive nor negative	42%	38%	42%	Neither positive nor negative	39%	38%	35%
Mostly negative	19%	24%	21%	Mostly negative	44% <sup>a</sup>	51% <sup>b</sup>	39% <sup>a</sup>
<b>Metrics</b>				<b>Notifications</b>			
Mostly positive	33% <sup>a</sup>	36% <sup>a,b</sup>	43% <sup>b</sup>	Mostly positive	40% <sup>a</sup>	40% <sup>a</sup>	49% <sup>b</sup>
Neither positive nor negative	54% <sup>a</sup>	45% <sup>b</sup>	34% <sup>c</sup>	Neither positive nor negative	55% <sup>a</sup>	46% <sup>b</sup>	37% <sup>b</sup>
Mostly negative	12% <sup>a</sup>	19% <sup>b</sup>	23% <sup>b</sup>	Mostly negative	6% <sup>a</sup>	14% <sup>b</sup>	14% <sup>b</sup>
<b>Recommended videos</b>				<b>Disappearing posts</b>			
Mostly positive	49%	44%	52%	Mostly positive	28%	32%	33%
Neither positive nor negative	46% <sup>a</sup>	47% <sup>a</sup>	37% <sup>b</sup>	Neither positive nor negative	57%	51%	49%
Mostly negative	5% <sup>a</sup>	8% <sup>a,b</sup>	11% <sup>b</sup>	Mostly negative	15%	17%	18%
<b>Endless scrolling</b>				<b>Public accounts</b>			
Mostly positive	26% <sup>a</sup>	24% <sup>a</sup>	37% <sup>b</sup>	Mostly positive	19% <sup>a</sup>	22% <sup>a</sup>	33% <sup>b</sup>
Neither positive nor negative	49%	46%	42%	Neither positive nor negative	48% <sup>a</sup>	48% <sup>a</sup>	34% <sup>b</sup>
Mostly negative	25% <sup>a,b</sup>	30% <sup>b</sup>	22% <sup>a</sup>	Mostly negative	33%	30%	33%
<b>Video autoplay</b>				<b>Read receipts</b>			
Mostly positive	33%	27%	35%	Mostly positive	37%	30%	37%
Neither positive nor negative	53%	58%	51%	Neither positive nor negative	53% <sup>a,b</sup>	56% <sup>b</sup>	46% <sup>a</sup>
Mostly negative	15%	15%	14%	Mostly negative	11% <sup>a</sup>	13% <sup>a,b</sup>	17% <sup>b</sup>

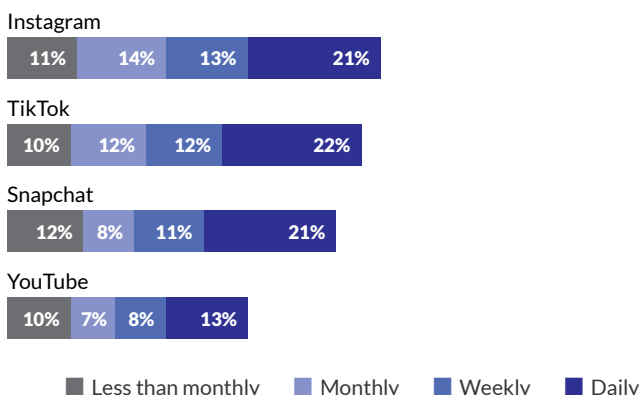
Notes: Among adolescent girls who have ever used social media. Items with different superscripts differ significantly across rows ( $p < .05$ ).

**Focus on metrics.** We also asked girls about their experiences with one particular social media feature: numerical metrics. Specifically, we asked girls how frequently they “focus too much on numbers like views, followers, likes, comments, or shares.” The majority of girls who use TikTok (56%), Instagram (59%), and Snapchat (52%) say they’ve ever had this experience, with roughly one in five who use TikTok (22%), Instagram (21%) and Snapchat (21%) saying they have this experience daily on these platforms (see Figure 27).

Focusing too much on metrics was especially common among girls who may already be vulnerable, including LGBTQ+ adolescents, girls who are “socially vulnerable,” and girls with depressive symptoms (see Table 18). For example, girls with moderate or severe depressive symptoms who use Instagram were nearly four times as likely as those with no depressive symptoms to say they have this experience daily on Instagram (45% vs. 12%), and a similar pattern emerged for YouTube (29% vs. 9%), Snapchat (34% vs. 11%), and TikTok (43% vs. 14%).

The features of social media platforms may play a key role in girls’ experiences online, both positive and negative—from social pressures, to feelings of “addiction,” to opportunities for discovery and creative expression—and these features may be especially influential among girls who are the most vulnerable. Understanding girls’ perceptions of these social media features is critical to shaping platforms in ways that maximize their benefits for girls’ well-being, while minimizing their risks.

**FIGURE 27. Focus on social media metrics, by frequency**  
Report focusing too much on numbers like views, followers, likes, comments, or shares on each platform



Note: Among adolescent girls who use each platform.

**TABLE 18. Focus on metrics (likes, views, followers) across vulnerable groups**

Report focusing too much on ... metrics daily	TOTAL	Depressive symptoms			Socially vulnerable		LGBTQ+	
		None	Mild	Moderate to Severe	Yes	No	Yes	No
YouTube	13%	9% <sup>a</sup>	12% <sup>a</sup>	29% <sup>b</sup>	29% <sup>a</sup>	9% <sup>b</sup>	19% <sup>b</sup>	12% <sup>a</sup>
Instagram	21%	12% <sup>a</sup>	25% <sup>b</sup>	45% <sup>c</sup>	43% <sup>a</sup>	15% <sup>b</sup>	31% <sup>b</sup>	19% <sup>a</sup>
Snapchat	21%	11% <sup>a</sup>	35% <sup>b</sup>	34% <sup>b</sup>	37% <sup>a</sup>	17% <sup>b</sup>	26%	20%
TikTok	22%	14% <sup>a</sup>	27% <sup>b</sup>	43% <sup>c</sup>	46% <sup>a</sup>	16% <sup>b</sup>	33% <sup>b</sup>	20% <sup>a</sup>

Notes: Among adolescent girls who use each platform. Items with different superscripts differ significantly across rows within each category ( $p < .05$ ).

# Recommendations and Conclusions

Adolescent girls spend a significant portion of their time engaging with popular social media platforms. The ways they're spending this time, and their perceptions of social media's impact, matter. Debates surrounding social media often spark controversy and concern, yet rarely are young people themselves part of these discussions. Our survey puts adolescent girls' voices front and center, and the results offer a window into how we can better support young people online.

Social media platforms play a central role in many girls' lives, and yet girls have mixed opinions about the effects these platforms are having on them. Girls are more likely to say that their lives would be "worse," rather than "better," without social media, and they cite frequent positive experiences, ranging from identity affirmation to social connection and access to helpful mental health resources and information. At the same time, girls are encountering challenges and risks: Many report feeling "addicted" to the platforms they use, or are often on them more than intended. Exposure to harmful content, related to eating disorders and suicide in particular, is all too common. Many girls cite frequent unwanted contact by strangers.

For adults invested in helping adolescents navigate these risks and benefits, a delicate balance is needed, taking into account the features of different platforms as well as the existing vulnerabilities that some adolescents bring when they enter these spaces.

Echoing prior research, our results suggest that girls who are vulnerable in their offline lives, including LGBTQ+ adolescents and those already struggling socially, are more likely to face challenges on social media than those who are less vulnerable (Rideout & Robb, 2021). Critically, however, they are also more likely to reap the benefits of social connection online. Similarly, among girls with depressive symptoms, the challenges of social media may be amplified (including frequent exposure to harmful suicide-related content), yet these girls also say they frequently benefit from access to helpful mental health resources online.

Each platform may also present a somewhat different collection of risks and benefits:

- Girls are spending the majority of their time online watching TikTok, so this platform plays an important role in both the positive and negative experiences they have.
- Consistent with TikTok's design as a space for viewing a vast library of algorithmically driven content, girls are more likely to say they feel "addicted" to the platform or use it more than they intended. Girls are also more likely to say that using TikTok interferes with their sleep, compared to other platforms.
- Girls are more likely to report pressures to be available or responsive to peers on Snapchat and messaging apps, which involve more frequent one-to-one messaging.
- Girls are more likely to report unwanted contact by strangers on Instagram and Snapchat.
- Among girls of color, TikTok and Instagram were cited as the platforms where they're more likely to come across both racist content and racial identity-affirming content.

Despite these differences, girls reported that many experiences were equally likely to occur across platforms, perhaps reflecting the greater need to identify particular design features that may have a more positive or negative impact on their well-being. Many of the negative online experiences girls have may be partially driven by certain features. For example, negative content may be suggested by algorithmic recommendations, and feelings of "addiction" or overuse may be driven by features like "endless scroll" and "autoplay." Unwanted contact by strangers is made possible through public accounts, and social pressures may be driven by metrics such as "likes" and "views."

Our survey is also one of the first to ask girls directly about their perceptions of how specific social media features affect them. Girls are more likely to perceive "mostly negative" impacts of location sharing and public accounts, compared to other features, and they had mixed opinions about features like "endless scroll" and "appearance filters."

This information cannot tell us whether given features are objectively good or bad for girls' mental health. It can, however, guide important steps toward creating digital spaces that better meet adolescent girls' needs.

The results of our survey make it clear that social media's presence in girls' lives is unlikely to fade anytime soon. The challenge, then, is to think critically about how to design these platforms to best support adolescents' safety, privacy, and well-being online. We must determine how to reduce risks while optimizing benefits, how to minimize the negative aspects while maximizing the positive ones, and how to do so in a way that accounts for the needs of those who are most vulnerable.

# Methodology and References

This report represents the results of a demographically representative online survey of 1,397 girls (as identified by their parent/guardian) in the United States age 11 to 15, conducted from November 11 to December 5, 2022. The survey was administered by SSRS and approved by the Advarra IRB #IRB00000971. Once parent/guardian consent was obtained, the teen was then asked to give their assent to participate and complete the survey.

Girls were invited to participate in a self-administered online survey (in English or Spanish) through their parents/guardians, who were targeted both via the SSRS Opinion Panel and non-probability panels. The web panel allowed for over-sampling of harder to recruit participants to secure a readable base among subgroups. Data were weighted to represent the target population of preteens and teens. The sampling error for the complete set of weighted data is  $\pm 3.5$  percentage points.

## Sample design

A mix of ethnicities was sought for this survey, including an oversample for Black, Asian, and Other groups (ethnicity was determined by parent/guardian responses about their child). The SSRS Opinion Panel members are recruited randomly based on nationally representative ABS (Address Based Sample) design (including Hawaii and Alaska). ABS respondents are randomly sampled by Marketing Systems Group (MSG) through the U.S. Postal Service's Computerized Delivery Sequence File (CDS). The SSRS Opinion Panel is a multimode panel. Internet households participate via web while all noninternet households (including those who have internet but are unwilling to take surveys online) participate via phone. Across probability and nonprobability panels, specific targeting was done to ensure that a balanced representation of girls across ages, races, and regions was reached.

## Data processing and weighting

The final sample of 1,397 completes (307 probability and 1,090 nonprobability) was weighted to represent residential 11- to 15-year-old females in the United States. There were 147 opt-in panel respondents and four SSRS Opinion Panel

respondents were removed due to data quality issues. Hybrid samples blending probability and nonprobability completes required special weighting procedures. The sample was weighted using SSRS's Hybrid Encipher calibration solution, which controls selection bias by weighting on both demographic and nondemographic characteristics that explain selection into the nonprobability sample.

The steps for this procedure are:

- Weight the probability completes using standard base weight adjustments and ranking to external demographic benchmarks.
- Assign "pseudo-base weights" to the nonprobability completes using a propensity adjustment.
- Identify optimal internal calibration margins for weighting the hybrid sample.
- Calibrate the hybrid sample (probability and nonprobability completes) to obtain the final hybrid weights.

## Presentation of data

**Statistical significance.** Where relevant, differences among groups have been tested for statistical significance, including differences between demographic groups and differences between social media platforms. Findings are referred to in the text in a comparative manner (e.g., "more than" or "less than") only if differences are statistically significant ( $p < .05$ ). Comparisons between demographic groups use standard independent-samples tests; comparison between platforms, when relevant, used paired sample tests or tests that correct for partially overlapping samples.

**Open-ended responses.** Responses to open-ended questions were read, and nonsensical responses (e.g., random characters) removed during data quality checks by SSRS. An analysis team at SSRS hand-coded responses to identify codes and subcodes.

## Subgroups

**Age.** The survey was conducted among girls age 11 to 15 (i.e., “adolescent girls”). We examined differences across “pre-teens” (age 11 to 12) versus “teens” (age 13 to 15).

**Race/Ethnicity.** The survey used the following question to identify participants’ race and ethnicity: “What race(s) and/or ethnicities do you identify with?” and provided a list of responses, with the option to select multiple responses. When findings are broken down by race/ethnicity, participants classified as “Black,” “Hispanic/Latino,” “Asian,” and “White” are those who identified only with that category. Respondents in other categories are included in findings based on the total sample, but not in results broken out by race/ethnicity, due to smaller sample sizes.

**Family income.** Parents or guardians of survey participants were asked the following question: “In 2021, what was your total family income from all sources, before taxes?” and provided with a list of eight options ranging from “\$0 to \$24,999” to “\$400,000 and up.” The following categories were created: *Lower income* (less than \$50,000), *middle income* (\$50,000 to \$100,000), and *higher income* (greater than \$100,000).

**LGBTQ+.** The LGBTQ+ category included respondents who listed their sexual orientation as bisexual, lesbian, pansexual, asexual, queer, gay or “other” sexual orientation, or who listed their gender as transgender, male (differing from female sex assigned at birth), genderqueer/nonbinary, transgender, or “other” gender. Participants were excluded from comparisons if they answered “Questioning/not sure” or “Prefer not to answer.”

**Depressive symptoms.** This survey used the Patient Health Questionnaire Depression Scale (PHQ-8; Kroenke et al., 2009) to assess symptoms of depression. Responses were coded numerically and summed, with possible scores between 0 to 24, and the following cutpoints: *no depressive symptoms* (0 to 4), *mild symptoms* (5 to 9), *moderate* (10 to 14), *moderately severe* (15 to 19) and *severe* (20 to 24). We combined moderate and severe categories for analyses in this report. Self-report responses to the PHQ-8 do not serve as clinical diagnoses of depression.

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# Questionnaire

## BASIC SOCIAL MEDIA QUESTIONS

- Q1. Which of the following social media platforms have you EVER used?**  
*YouTube, TikTok, Messaging apps like iMessage, Messenger, GroupMe, or WhatsApp, Instagram, Snapchat, Facebook, Twitter, Discord, Reddit, Other, None*
- Q2. How often have you used << INSERT PLATFORM >> in the PAST MONTH?**  
*Never (I used this in the past but haven't used it in the past month), Once or twice per month, Once or twice per week, About once per day, Multiple times per day, Almost constantly*
- Q3. How much time did you spend on << INSERT PLATFORM >> YESTERDAY?**
- Q4. Which platform do you use the MOST often?**  
*YouTube, TikTok, Snapchat, Instagram*
- Q5. Do you have a smartphone where you can access social media?**  
*Yes, No*
- Q6. Would your life be better, worse, or the same if you didn't have << INSERT PLATFORM >>?**  
*Better, Worse, The Same*
- Q7. Would you recommend << INSERT PLATFORM >> to someone who is just starting out with using social media?**  
*Yes, No, It depends*
- Q8. At what age do you think young people should be allowed to use << INSERT PLATFORM >>?**  
*Younger than 8, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18 or older*
- Q9. Overall, what effect do you think each of the platforms below has had on people your age?**  
*YouTube, Instagram, Snapchat, TikTok, Messaging apps like iMessage, Messenger, GroupMe or WhatsApp  
Mostly positive, Mostly negative, Neither positive nor negative*
- Q10. Have you ever stopped using a social media platform, or limited how much you use it, because you felt it had a negative impact on you?**  
*Yes, No*
- Q10a. Which of the following social media platform(s) did you stop using or limit how much you use because you felt it had a negative impact on you?**  
*(Select all that apply) YouTube, TikTok, Messaging apps like iMessage, Messenger, GroupMe, or WhatsApp, Instagram, Snapchat, Facebook, Twitter, Discord, Reddit, Other*

**Q10a1. Which social media platform did you MOST RECENTLY stop or limit your use of because you felt it had a negative impact on you?**

*YouTube, TikTok, Messaging apps like iMessage, Messenger, GroupMe, or WhatsApp, Instagram, Snapchat, Facebook, Twitter, Discord, Reddit, Other*

**Q10b. Why did you stop or limit your use of <<INSERT Q10a1 RESPONSE>>?**

*Please be as specific and detailed as possible. [open ended]*

**Q11. If you could make one change to << INSERT Q1 PLATFORM >> to make it better for teens' well-being, what would it be and why?**

*Please be as specific and detailed as possible. [open ended]*

## EXPERIENCES ON SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS

**E1. How often have you had the following experiences on ...**

*Never, Only once or twice in my life, Once or twice per month, Once or twice per week, About once per day, Multiple times per day, Almost constantly*

**Items asked for each of TikTok, YouTube, Snapchat, and Instagram (among youth who use each platform):**

- a. I feel pressure to be available, "on," or responsive right away.
- b. I feel like I'm "addicted" or end up using it for a longer period of time than I originally wanted to.
- c. Using it gets in the way of my sleep.
- d. Strangers try to contact me in ways that make me uncomfortable.
- e. I post things that allow me to express myself creatively.
- f. I focus too much on numbers like views, followers, likes, comments, or shares.
- g. I learn new things, explore my interests, or discover new things (like restaurants or places I want to go).
- h. Something happens with my friends or peers that makes me feel bad (like drama, bullying, mean comments, fighting, or feeling left out).
- i. Something happens with my friends or peers that makes me feel good (like staying connected to friends, getting support, or meeting new friends).
- j. I see or hear things about suicide or self-harm that are upsetting to me.
- k. I see or hear things about eating disorders that are upsetting to me.
- l. I see or hear helpful information or resources about mental health.
- m. People say mean or rude things about people of my same race or ethnicity.
- n. People say positive or uplifting things about people of my same race or ethnicity.
- o. People say mean or rude things about people of my same sexual, or gender identity.
- p. I have fun, laugh, or am entertained.
- q. I feel bad about my body or appearance.
- r. I feel good or accepting about my body or appearance.
- s. I end up feeling like other peoples' lives are better than mine.
- t. I take action on issues I care about.
- u. I feel pressure to show the "best" version of myself.
- v. I connect with people who share my interests or identities.



**Items asked for messaging apps like iMessage, Messenger, GroupMe, or WhatsApp (among youth who use these platforms):**

- a. I feel pressure to be available, “on,” or responsive right away.
- b. I feel like I’m “addicted” or end up using it for a longer period of time than I originally wanted to.
- c. Using it gets in the way of my sleep.
- d. Strangers try to contact me in ways that make me uncomfortable.
- e. Something happens with my friends or peers that makes me feel bad (like drama, bullying, mean comments, fighting, or feeling left out).
- f. Something happens with my friends or peers that makes me feel good (like staying connected to friends, getting support, or meeting new friends).
- g. I see or hear things about suicide or self-harm that are upsetting to me.
- h. I see or hear things about eating disorders that are upsetting to me.
- i. I see or hear helpful information or resources about mental health.
- j. People say mean or rude things about people of my same race or ethnicity.
- k. People say positive or uplifting things about people of my same race or ethnicity.
- l. People say mean or rude things about people of my same sexual or gender identity.
- m. I have fun, laugh, or am entertained.

**E2. How often have you had the following experiences in “real life” (i.e., in-person, NOT on social media)?**

*Never, Only once or twice in my life, Once or twice per month, Once or twice per week, About once per day, Multiple times per day, Almost constantly*

- a. Something happens with my friends or peers that makes me feel bad (like drama, bullying, mean comments, fighting, or feeling left out).
- b. Something happens with my friends or peers that makes me feel good (like staying connected to friends, getting support, or meeting new friends).
- c. I see or hear things about suicide or self-harm that are upsetting to me.
- d. I see or hear things about eating disorders that are upsetting to me.
- e. I see or hear helpful information or resources about mental health.
- f. People say mean or rude things about people of my same race or ethnicity.
- g. People say positive or uplifting things about people of my same race or ethnicity.
- h. People say mean or rude things about people of my same sexual or gender identity.
- i. I have fun, laugh, or am entertained.
- j. I feel bad about my body or appearance.
- k. I feel good or accepting about my body or appearance.
- l. I end up feeling like other peoples’ lives are better than mine.
- m. I take action on issues I care about.
- n. I feel pressure to show the “best” version of myself.
- o. I connect with people who share my interests or identities.

**E3. Every social media platform has different “features.” Some of these features might have a positive impact on you, and others might have a negative impact on you. What effect do you think these social media features have on you?**

*Mostly positive, Neither positive or negative, Mostly negative*

- a. Comments section
- b. Filters that change the appearance of photos or videos
- c. Number of “likes” or “views” on my posts or videos
- d. Recommended videos (i.e., an algorithm recommends videos for me to watch)
- e. Endless scrolling (i.e., there’s no clear end point to the “feed” of videos or posts)
- f. Autoplay (i.e., after one video ends, another one starts playing automatically)
- g. Private messaging (i.e., sending or receiving direct messages, photos, or videos)
- h. Automatic sharing of my and other people’s locations
- i. Notifications (i.e., I get an alert on my phone when something happens on the social media app)
- j. Posts, stories, or messages that “disappear” after a certain amount of time
- k. “Public” accounts (i.e., anyone can see my posts or contact me, even if they’re not a “friend” or “follower”)
- l. Read receipts (i.e., indications that a message has been opened, delivered, or read)

#### DEPRESSIVE SYMPTOMS

**S1. Over the last two weeks, how often have you been bothered by the following problems?**

*Not at all, Several days, Over half the days, Nearly every day*

- a. Little interest or pleasure in doing things
- b. Feeling down, depressed, or hopeless
- c. Trouble falling asleep, staying asleep, or sleeping too much
- d. Feeling tired or having little energy
- e. Poor appetite or overeating
- f. Feeling bad about yourself, or that you are a failure or have let yourself or your family down
- g. Trouble concentrating on things, such as reading the newspaper or watching television
- h. Moving or speaking so slowly that other people could have noticed. Or, the opposite — being so fidgety or restless that you have been moving around a lot more than usual



## About Common Sense

Common Sense is the nation's leading nonprofit organization dedicated to improving the lives of all kids and families by providing the trustworthy information, education, and independent voice they need to thrive in the 21st century. Our independent research is designed to provide parents, educators, health organizations, and policymakers with reliable, independent data on children's use of media and technology and the impact it has on their physical, emotional, social, and intellectual development. For more information, visit [commonsense.org/research](https://commonsense.org/research).



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