



Children's Online Insights Panel: Waves 1-4 Summary Report

Beano Brain
May 2026





The Online Safety Act 2023 (the Act) sets out duties for all regulated online services to protect children from content that is harmful to them.¹ Under the Act, Ofcom has duties to produce codes of practice and guidance setting out how services can meet their duties. In April 2025, we published the first [Protection of Children Codes of Practice](#), outlining the steps services can take to protect children from harmful online content. These Codes built on the protections already in place to [protect all users from illegal harms](#), including protecting children from harms such as grooming and sexual exploitation.

In 2025, Ofcom commissioned research agency Beano Brain to deliver an ongoing programme of qualitative research with a dedicated panel of 8-17-year-olds. The Children's Online Insights Panel provides regular, child-led perspectives on how young people experience the online world, helping Ofcom stay close to emerging behaviours, trends, and risks as they develop. These insights support Ofcom's understanding of children's online lives and inform future policy thinking, as part of our commitment to incorporate children's voices and perspectives in policymaking.

In December 2025, we published an interim [summary report](#) covering the first two waves of the research (March – August 2025). This latest report brings together key findings from all four waves of the research from March 2025 – February 2026, highlighting key themes and activities that emerged over the year. The report focuses on the features, functionalities, and content the children engaged with, as well as some of the actions they took in response. Some of the data in this report was collected before Ofcom's [Protection of Children Codes of Practice](#) came into effect in July 2025.

This report is part of our wider set of research activities that explore a range of experiences and views about the online environment and will add to the evidence base for Ofcom and our stakeholders regarding particular types of popular platforms, content and functionalities and the potential impact these have on children and young people. [Our website](#) contains more information about our regulatory work to ensure online services protect children from illegal and harmful content online.



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Research Objectives

In 2025, Ofcom commissioned Beano Brain to conduct ongoing qualitative research with a dedicated panel of 18* children and young people. The Children's Online Insights Panel was created to:

Deliver timely and direct insights into how 8-17-year-olds are experiencing and navigating their digital worlds.

Understand the online services they use, and the features and functionalities within these services they engage with.

Identify the online activities and trends shaping their online lives.

These insights help Ofcom stay informed about the opportunities and challenges some young people are facing online, to better understand their online experiences, and to consider emerging risks. This allows Ofcom to incorporate children's voices and perspectives in their policymaking.

**Beano Brain recruited 20 x 8-17-year-olds in total (15 plus 5 over-recruits/replacements) for the panel. In each wave, 18 panellists participated and all were invited to complete digital monthly diaries, with a minimum of 15 taking part in in-depth interviews.*



Image sourced: Pexels, Monstera Production



The Children's Online Insights Panel is an **ongoing, qualitative research project** involving regular touchpoints with the panellists through a mixture of online digital diaries and in-depth interviews. **Its purpose is not to provide in-depth analysis of individual topics; rather, it aims to capture a broad range of children's experiences and behaviours.**

We intentionally **recruited actively engaged online users**, to capture a wide range of platforms, features, functionalities and content the panellists are likely to have encountered or engaged with. These types of users can be early adopters of online trends (however this was not a focus of the recruitment), which may offer qualitative insights into emerging risks and harms. As a result, **the findings in this report may not fully represent the experiences of the 'average' child online user.**

The views expressed in this report are those of the panellists and do not necessarily reflect the views of Beano Brain or Ofcom.

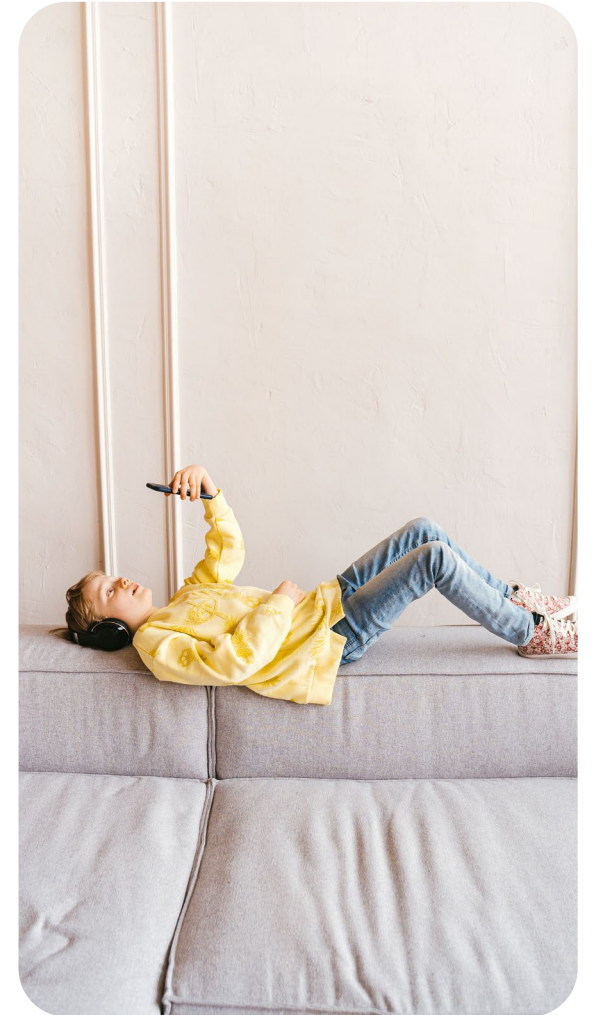
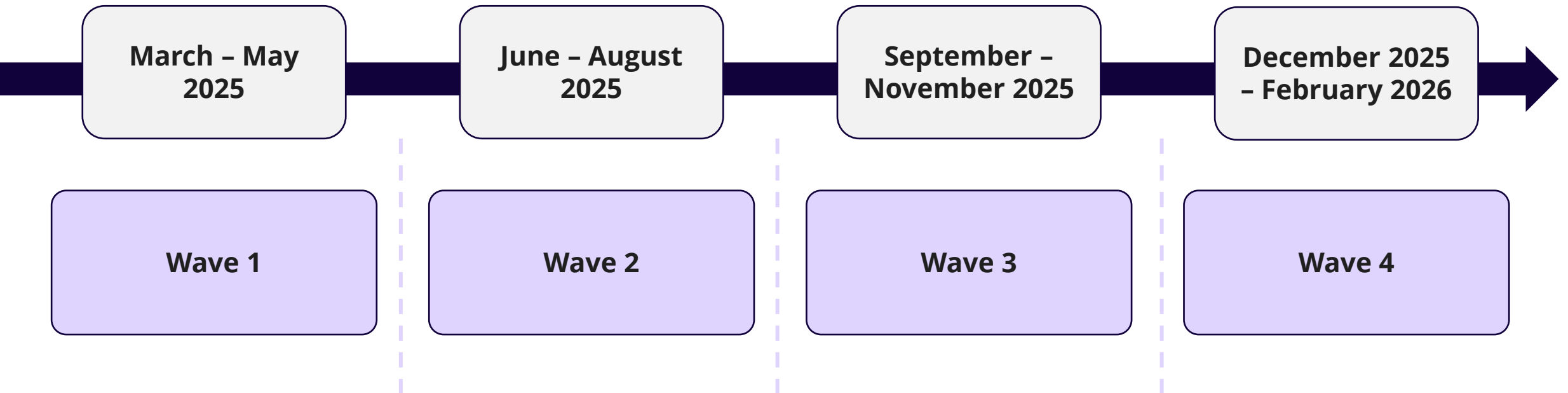


Image sourced: Pexels, Antoni Shkraba Studio

Fieldwork Dates



There were four Waves of fieldwork that took place over the course of a year*. Within each Wave, panellists completed digital diary tasks about their online activity, as well as completing a follow-up in-depth interview.



*See appendix for exact dates of diaries and interviews.



Below is the core approach for the panel. A Wave spanned 3 months and consisted of a 3-day digital diary each month with follow-up, in-depth interviews (IDIs) held on Zoom once per Wave:

3-day digital diary with 18 panellists*

Across 3 days each month, panellists engaged in **two core diary activities** (c. 45mins per day).

This took place on the platform ****Indeemo**, moderated by Beano Brain researchers. The purpose of the activities was to get an **up-to-date children's eye-view** regarding online behaviour and trends.

***Indeemo is an AI-powered, mobile-first qualitative research platform designed to capture in-the-moment consumer insights through video, photo, and screen recordings.*

15-16 x follow up IDIs*

Each quarter, panellists took part in a **60min IDI (which included a 15-minute discussion with their parent) via Zoom** with the Beano Brain research team.

The IDIs are formulaic in nature, ensuring they **captured ongoing information, insights, and developments**. This also allowed time to explore and be reactive toward new findings and happenings from across the relevant period, or **urgent topics defined by the Ofcom policy team**.

Quotations included in this report are from both the panellists and their parents



*Our target sample was 15 panellists, but Beano Brain over-recruited by 5 to mitigate potential dropouts during the year. This meant the specific panellists completing the diaries and IDIs could vary each Wave. Nonetheless, every Wave included 18 diary participants and 15-16 panellists selected for quarterly IDIs based on priority insight areas. *See slides 90-92 for a more detailed sample breakdown.*

Waves 1-4: Calendar Context



From a contextual perspective, there were periods across Waves 1-4 of this study that may have influenced some panellists' online behaviours, including time spent online, as their available free time changed in line with academic deadlines and school term dates. Wider events during this year-long period, such as global conflict, also at times appeared in panellists' feeds. In July 2025, Ofcom's Protection of Children Codes of Practice came into force, setting out the measures services could take to meet their duties to protect children under the Online Safety Act*. Taken together, these contextual factors form the backdrop to the experiences described by panellists across the research.

	Wave 1 March – May 2025	Wave 2 June – August 2025	Wave 3 September – November 2025	Wave 4 December 2025 – February 2026
Their world	Wave 1 took place during peak revision and exam months for some panellists.	Wave 2 took place at the end of term , heading into the summer holidays , where panellists had more free time to be online. With the warmer weather came a greater focus on body improvement content e.g., summer 'glow up' routines.	Wave 3 took place at the beginning of a new school year, bringing new friendship dynamics for some and a shift to the darker/colder months .	Wave 4 saw panellists through the Christmas period and the start of the new year, with a focus on New Year's resolutions for some panellists. Older panellists saw content about resolutions related to diets and exercise.
The wider world	Recent change in the US presidency, with Donald Trump taking office (January). Ongoing wars in Russia/Ukraine and the Middle East.	Wars carry on globally. Greta Thunberg captured by Israeli forces as part of the Freedom Flotilla Coalition.	Storm Amy in the UK. The assassination of Charlie Kirk. Ongoing wars.	Continuation of global wars. Social media ban implemented for under 16s in Australia. Protests in the US against their Immigration & Customs Enforcement agency (ICE).
The Online Safety Act	Pre-July 25 th , 2025: Ofcom's Protection of Children Codes of Practice were not yet in force.		Post-July 25 th , 2025: The Codes of Practice came into force. In Wave 3, some younger panellists started to become aware of and were impacted by Roblox's age verification safety and privacy measures** (see slide 77). In Wave 4, two 12-year-old panellists reported that using TikTok's 'Not Interested' feature positively impacted their feeds and reduced their exposure to certain content, including 'help videos'*** and more extreme 'sad girl'*** content (see more on slide 74).	

*These measures include having robust content moderation processes and highly effective age checks for services that allow harmful content to filter harmful content out of children's feeds. Services should either take the measures in the Codes, or other effective steps to meet their duties.

**Roblox began mandating mandatory, AI-based facial age estimation for all users to access chat features in early January 2026. The global rollout followed testing in select regions in December 2025, requiring users to verify their age to communicate via text or voice.

***See glossary slide in appendix for full definition.

Notes On The Report



All participant names in the report are pseudonyms; no child is referred to by their real name. Gender and age (and, where relevant, SEND*/neurodivergence) are included alongside verbatim quotations to provide context.

Throughout the report, "**panellist**" or "**panellists**" refers to the children who took part in the study.

Quotations included in this report are from panellists' diary entries and IDIs with the panellists, and their parents (who were interviewed during the last 15 minutes of the IDIs). **The age of each panellist per quotation reflects the age they were at the time the research Wave took place.**

We have included a **brief glossary in the appendix of the report**, to support understanding of certain terms and concepts referenced by the panellists throughout the research.

Where **specific creators or videos** are referenced in the report, these were mentioned by panellists during the research.



Throughout the report, there are **case studies** reporting on individual experiences from panellists.

In a few instances, we have marked a page with the following **icons**:



This indicates that a page references material that could be **uncomfortable** for readers – including references to eating disorders or sexual content.



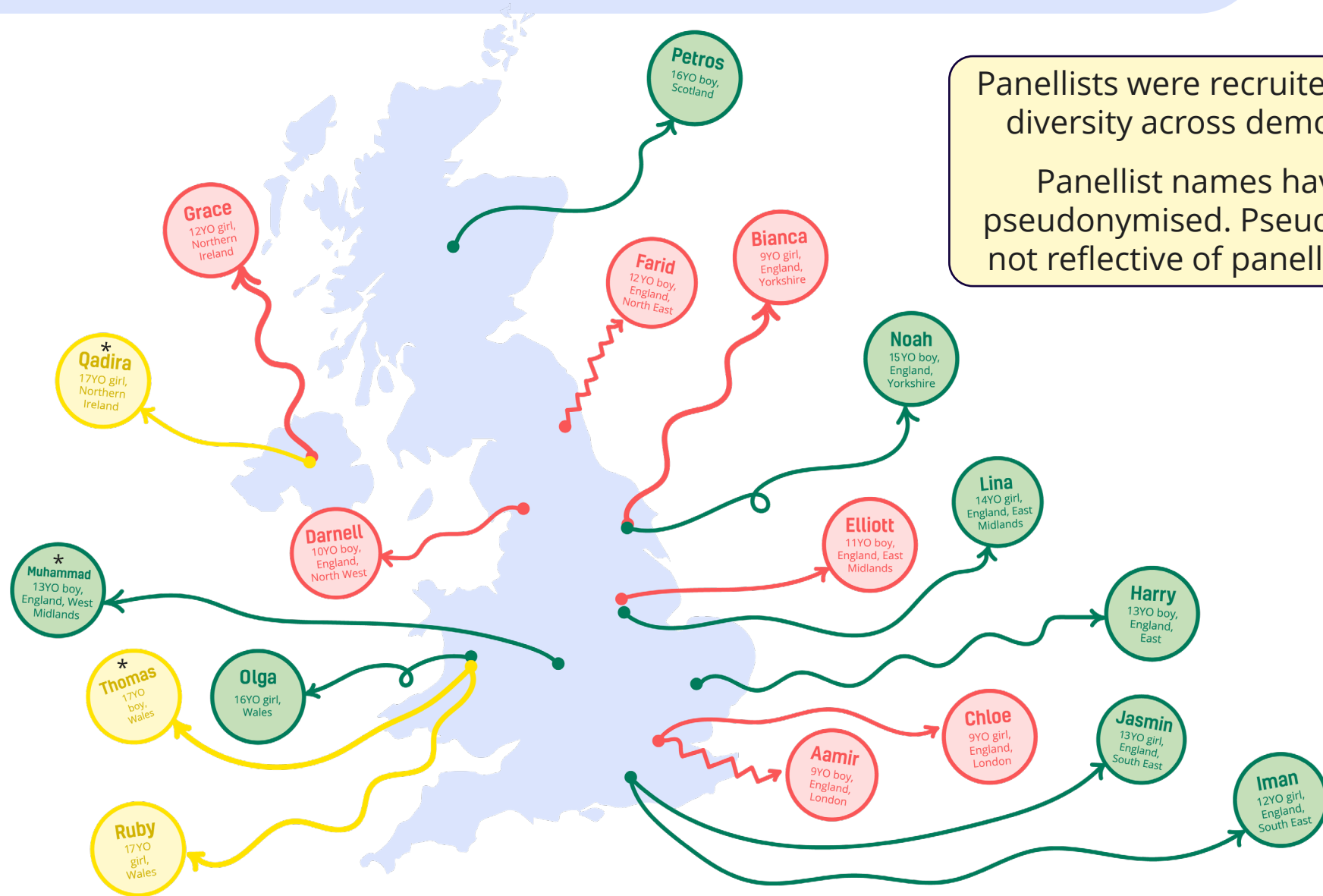
This indicates a summary of Beano Brain's **researcher reflections** on what could be seen from this year's evidence and hypotheses about how these might develop.



*SEND refers to Special Educational Needs and Disabilities.

Image sourced: Unsplash, Vikas Makwana

Meet The Panellists: A Visual Spread Of Locations Across The UK



Panellists were recruited to ensure diversity across demographics.

Panellist names have been pseudonymised. Pseudonyms are not reflective of panellist identity.

**The composition of the panel varied slightly across Waves, as some participants withdrew from the study and others were recruited later to replace them: Kwame left the panel in Wave 1 and was replaced by Qadira. Sam left the panel in Wave 2 and was replaced by Thomas. Muhammad left the panel in Wave 4, month 2 but was not replaced due to nearing completion of Wave 4. Please see full profiles of all panellists that took part in the study (at any given time) in the Appendix.*

The image features a central white cloud-like shape with a scalloped border. This shape is surrounded by multiple concentric layers of blue and yellow lines, creating a decorative frame. The background is a solid blue color.

Summary of key findings

Executive Summary



Over the course of a year, **panellists' online experiences were constantly shifting** with trends, platform updates, and seasonal factors e.g., school terms, exams, Christmas, and the new year. **Panellists, therefore, navigated a rapidly evolving online environment.** While panellists felt that platforms offered opportunities for **connection, creativity and learning**, some also felt that these same **features** could occasionally **intensify pressure, overwhelm, and expose** them to **risk**. Panellists showed **agency in shaping their environments, whilst also operating within a wider context of age assurance measures, algorithms set to maximise engagement, and social expectations.** **Parents of our panellists, meanwhile, were attempting to keep up with their child's online behaviours,** often feeling outpaced by design features that they found difficult to supervise.

There are 5 key themes that summarise panellists' online experiences (*see next slide*).



1

ROLE OF ONLINE ALGORITHMS

Across Waves, panellists encountered a broad spectrum of content across several platforms – **from harmless entertainment to highly sensitive material**, including **graphic violent content**. This content was often viewed unintentionally without warning, and were felt by panellists to be influenced by algorithmic recommendations, not active searching. In some cases, panellists described wanting more trigger warnings or quicker platform responses to harmful content.

2

SOCIAL CONNECTION

Group chats, messaging features, live updates, and gaming communities were major touchpoints where panellists **socialised**. From the panellists' perspectives, these digital spaces offered **fun, belonging, and peer connection**, but also introduced **negative experiences** such as bullying within group chats, strangers adding or messaging them, feeling overwhelmed by constant notifications, or pressure from peers and platforms to stay online longer (e.g., streaks, challenges, gaming updates).

3

USE OF AI

Across Waves, we also saw an **increase in the use of AI**, with panellists using AI tools within apps or standalone AI apps (such as ChatGPT) to look up questions for **educational** or **entertainment purposes**.

4

THE PROS AND CONS OF GAMING

Gaming was central to the vast majority of panellists' online lives across platforms, including Roblox, Minecraft, Fortnite and Gorilla Tag, offering **creativity, escape, teamwork and routine**. However, panellists also described negative experiences, including interactions with strangers, perceived pressure to spend money, engagement-driven features (such as updates, in-game currency and loot systems), and upsetting or overly scary content.

5

SAFETY FEATURES

Panellists and their parents were navigating safety features and tools with mixed success. These included age assurance checks, reporting and blocking tools, screen time limits and content restriction settings.

In some cases, these features were helpful: A few panellists described using tools such as 'Not Interested' controls to improve their feeds, and some felt age assurance and privacy features (e.g. private servers) increased their sense of safety and control. However, **effectiveness was inconsistent:** Some panellists also described ways to work around screen time and age restrictions, and reporting systems were often perceived as slow to respond to or remove harmful content.

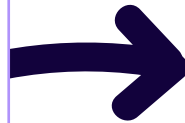


**Online features
and functionalities
used by panellists**



In this section, we explore the wide range of **features and functionalities** found on **messaging, social media and gaming platforms that panellists engaged with across Waves 1–4**. These include being part of **group chats, using artificial intelligence* tools**, as well as several features which may be **encouraging children to repeatedly visit said platforms**.

We explore **how these features influence user behaviour**, highlight what may **increase user engagement** and identify where **potential risks** may exist (e.g., where features are being used to facilitate harm, such as bullying in group chats).



Online features & functionalities used by panellists – summary findings:

Group chats were widely used and enjoyed by the panellists for socialising with friends, though some described feeling overwhelmed by the volume of messages, multiple people in group chats and number of group chats in total. Instances of bullying were also mentioned by panellists.

As we approached Wave 4 of the study, there was a noticeable shift in the amount of **artificial intelligence*** (AI) apps panellists were using for education and entertainment, with more parents using AI too. Panellists described how AI tools had been supporting their learning and development, but they also described feeling tricked with fake or misleading AI-generated content.

Features which may **encourage repeat visits** to platforms were a part of daily online routines (such as 'streaks'* with friends that are upheld by having daily communication, or live updates within games that become available at particular times of day).

Moving into Waves 3 and 4, there was an increased awareness and use of **privacy features** and behaviours mentioned by panellists in the games they play e.g., Roblox age verification process, private servers and pre-set messaging.



Online features and functionalities used by panellists

Messaging

Features that could lead to repeat visits to platforms

Safety and privacy

Use of AI

Online search behaviour

Group chats offered social connection but sometimes led to bullying and feelings of overwhelm



We explored panellists' use of **group chats**: most of the panellists are part of group chats on either **WhatsApp, TikTok or Snapchat** and enjoy them for the following reasons:

They can provide a **fun** and **engaging** environment for **interacting** with their friends.

By the time **Wave 4** fieldwork was underway, panellists explained how they enjoyed **TikTok's group chat feature** where they could **send drafts*** and **photos**.

*"I am in a few main group chats with friends from school on Snapchat and these group chats are one of my **favourite aspects of my social media** as they allow me to have (and continue) **good conversations** with friends at any point and can often be a **mood-booster** if I'm feeling lonely or stressed."*

- Ruby, Girl, 16 years old (Wave 1)

*"There's **a new update** on TikTok, and you can send photos, and you can send the drafts now, but only some people have it."*

- Iman, Girl, 12 years old (Wave 4)

However, some of the panellists made low-level comments about **feeling overwhelmed** by the amount of people in a group chat, the pressure to respond, and dealing with some of the **negative fall out** between people involved in the chat:

For some panellists, group chats can also be **vehicles for experiencing or seeing bullying**. By the time Wave 2 fieldwork was underway, researchers heard examples from panellists of schools encouraging students not to participate in group chats for this reason.

*"Luckily, I wasn't involved, but **some people in a group chat were being so mean to a girl** in our school... it was really bad. The teachers called the whole year into an assembly and said they'll go to the police about it if it doesn't stop... **I haven't been in as many group chats since.**"*

- Grace, Girl, 12 years old (Wave 2)

At times, group chats can also **feel overwhelming** for the panellists and include people they don't know in real life. Several described being part of either a large number of group chats, group chats with a large number of users or those that are inundated with lots of messages. This can include messages from people they do not know.

*"There's '**add everyone you know**' groups and I just leave them straight away sometimes, because everyone **spams** them. It works like one person will add lots of people they know, then the next person, **it could be up to 1,000 people in a group.**"*

- Jasmin, Girl, 12 years old (Wave 2)

* Drafts on TikTok are unpublished videos that are privately saved within the user's account. Although not a new feature, in Wave 4, one of the panellists liked to use it as a private diary feature, and another discovered a new update where she could share her drafts with friends or limit the amount of time they were shared for on her TikTok Story.

Messaging: Some panellists used ephemeral messaging* features for more sensitive conversations or to reduce chat overload



Most panellists aged 11+ had their own account on Snapchat and were aware of ephemeral messages*, or in some of the panellists' words **"disappearing messages."** This feature is one that they see as synonymous with Snapchat as very few panellists mentioned this as a feature they know about elsewhere. Panellists had a 'take it or leave it' approach with this feature – it's something they've grown up with.

Of those who sometimes used this feature, they explained how they liked it because it was easy for them to "gossip" about people they 'fancy', and how these types of "disappearing messages" were helpful because they didn't **'clog up'** group chats.

Within Snapchat, panellists described feeling protected by an alert that notifies you if the other user has taken a screenshot of your disappearing message/content. In their experiences, they usually found that screenshots had been accidental, or if they had confronted a friend who had done this, it didn't happen again afterwards.

"Disappearing messages [after 24hrs] is just part of Snapchat, it's not that new or exciting anymore. I only use the timed snaps when my friends and I talk about boys."
- Grace, Girl, 12 years old (Wave 2)

"Snapchat group messages usually disappear after 24hr unless you save them... I find it useful because it doesn't clog up your group chat."
- Petros, Boy, 16 years old (Wave 2)



Image sourced: Pexels, Andrea Piacquadio

*See glossary slide in appendix for full definition.



Online features and functionalities used by panellists

Messaging

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Online search behaviour

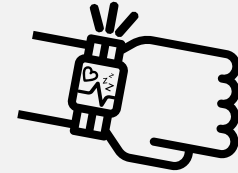


Throughout all Waves of this study, panellists engaged with various **features** within platforms and/or games that could lead to repeat visits.

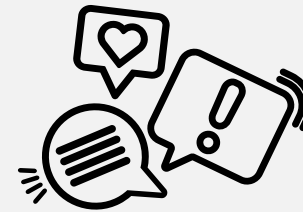
Many panellists described **emotionally charged responses** to these features.



STREAKS



**TRACKING: FITNESS,
SLEEP AND
LOCATION**



**LIVE UPDATES AND POP-UP MESSAGES IN
GAMING**

Streaks: Some panellists used streaks for a gamified way to connect with friends but sometimes felt pressure to “keep up” a good score



Throughout Waves 1-4, panellists mentioned the **streaks feature** as a way to communicate with friends. However, panellists explained how streaks can build routine and emotional investment, which in turn can lead to frustration and fear of missing out.

Streaks are an app feature that gamifies repeated actions on the app, whether messaging with other users or through repeat use of the app.

Across Waves, streaks were a popular feature panellists used across apps, such as Snapchat and Duolingo. Some panellists told researchers how the streaks feature **encouraged them to return to apps daily** because, to keep up their streaks, they were required to perform certain tasks within the app every day. They explained how they felt pressure to keep these up, so that they wouldn't lose their progress on apps such as Duolingo or streaks with friends on Snapchat. **In Wave 3**, panellists explained how TikTok had launched a new feature where you could keep a “virtual pet” alive by keeping up with streaks, encouraging them to revisit the app frequently.

*“I woke up and went on **Snapchat for around half an hour to do my Snap streaks** and checked people’s stories to see if anyone still had snow today and no one did, unfortunately.”*
– Olga, Girl, 16 years old (Wave 4)

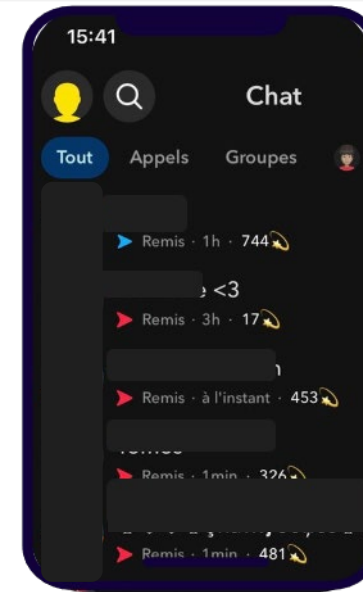


Image source: Snapchat screenshot from Olga's diary upload

*“It’s a screenshot of me snapping [messaging on Snapchat] my friends which might not be too interesting but **on the side there’s a shooting star emoji with a number which is how long I’ve kept my streak for.**”*
– Olga, Girl, 16 years old (Wave 2)

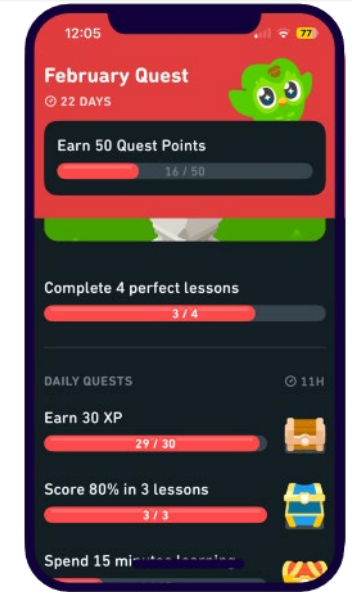
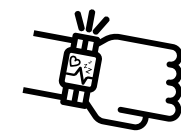


Image source: Duolingo screenshot from Harry's diary upload

*“Duolingo, I have just reached a 700-day streak. **I felt proud when I reached it because it is a big achievement for me.**”*
– Harry, Boy, 13 years old (Wave 2)

Location, fitness, and sport are ways panellists tracked their interests, but this can create fear of missing out or increased comparisons among peers



Throughout Waves 1-4, for some of the panellists, tracking features became a key part of their daily routine, and were part of the reason they liked to repeatedly visit certain apps.

LOCATION

For example, one panellist explained how they would track their friends' whereabouts using Snapchat's map feature. **In Wave 3**, some of the panellists explained how **Instagram had introduced a new map feature**, which enabled them to share their real-time location and see their friends' locations in return.

*"You can see a circle in the top row **called 'Map' which is a recent feature Instagram has added** where you can share your location on the app, which you couldn't do before."
- Olga, Girl, 15 years old (Wave 3)*

FITNESS AND SLEEP

For some panellists, **tracking tools** became part of their daily routine; e.g., **tracking their steps and sleep patterns on their Fitbit**. A younger panellist also explained how they liked to track their running status on apps such as **Couch to 5k**.*

*"**I like to check the Fitbit app daily** because it tells me how many steps I did the previous day and also gives me an accurate time for how long I slept the previous night and my sleeping patterns... I want to make sure I get enough sleep to concentrate on schoolwork."
- Olga, Girl, 15 years old (Wave 1)*

GAMING & SPORT

Some panellists explained how they liked to **track and compare against their friends' gaming scores and cricket performances**. In one case, this impacted a younger panellist's self-esteem (*see quote below*).

*"His friend whose mum said she wasn't going to get him a phone, now has one and has this app that **records all of their cricket teams' scores**... he's now always letting my son know if he didn't do as well as someone else and it's really **affecting his confidence**."
- Mum of Boy, 10, Darnell (Wave 2)*

*See glossary slide in appendix for full definition.

Live updates and in-game, pop-up messages offered excitement but can impact daily routine and keep panellists in games longer than intended



Live updates within online games (when new features, content, events or activities become available within an online game at a specific time) were top-of-mind for some panellists across Waves 1-4, along with pop-up messages enticing the player to keep playing a game if they wished to exit it.

LIVE UPDATES* AND ADMIN ABUSE*

Panellists explained how they were engaging with lots of gaming updates, particularly in Waves 3 and 4. For example, the Roblox 'Grow a Garden' game was very popular with younger panellists who were very engaged with any live updates e.g., one panellist would **block out their Saturday at 3pm** so their plans didn't get in the way of the new updates (much to their family's frustration). Some panellists looked forward to '**Admin Abuse**', a time when the Roblox 'Grow a Garden' game developer enters the game and runs events, with rare weather effects and crop mutations 1-2 hours before updates. Of those panellists who played this game, they spoke about enjoying Admin Abuse because it meant that they could access rare, in-game items.

Researcher reflections: panellists are **constantly on the watch out for new live updates**, and this can become all-consuming (and even interrupt other social plans and drastically increase their screen time).

IN GAME POP-UP MESSAGES*

One 13-year-old panellist explained how when he tried to leave a game on Roblox, a **message continuously popped up to entice the player to stay**, saying, "*Why don't you play one more game?*". In the case of this panellist, this kept him playing the game far longer than he originally intended.

*"When you try to leave a game on Roblox, a **message will keep popping up saying 'one more game, one more game'** and so I stay, and then eventually I just have to shut it down."*

- Muhammad, Boy, 13 years old (Wave 3)

*"**She was so mad that we were out having a nice family day** and were going to be late home for the update... **it's all just become a bit much.**"*

- Mum of Girl, 8, Bianca (Wave 2)

**See glossary slide in appendix for full definition.*

Online features and functionalities used by panellists

Messaging

Features that could lead to repeat visits to platforms

Safety and privacy

Use of AI

Online search behaviour



Increased use of safety features in games have reshaped panellists' relationship with privacy



In Waves 3 and 4 of this study, panellists mentioned an **increased awareness and use of privacy features** and **behaviours** in the games they play.

GAME-IMPOSED RESTRICTIONS

Roblox remained central to panellists' worlds through play, discovery via social media, and the Robux* economy. However, **age-estimation* changes that panellists started to notice and talk about in Waves 3-4 frustrated younger (9-11YO) panellists**. This was because they believed that they could no longer **cross-age chat** (an in-game text chat channel that allows communication between players of different age groups and is now restricted by age-based access controls). Panellists explained how they needed to scan their face to verify their age. Once age-verified, they believed that they could no longer speak to anyone outside their age. In practice, since January 2026, chat on Roblox is restricted to age-assured users. These users can generally communicate only with others in nearby age bands, with Trusted Connections operating as a limited exception. Users who are not age-assured cannot access chat features.

*"Roblox added something called age verification, which is really annoying... you have to scan your face, and **you're only allowed to talk to those of that certain age group.**"*
- **Aamir, Boy, 9 years old (Wave 4)**

Pre-set messages

Some panellists explained how they liked to play the game 'Among Us' because of the **quick chat feature** (pre-defined, menu-based phrases (e.g., "Need Backup!") to ensure safe, fast, and accessible communication), **vs free chat** (allows unrestricted, user-typed, real-time messaging).

SELF-IMPOSED PRIVACY BEHAVIOURS

Roblox Studios** is an in-Roblox creation mode that was being used by an 11-year-old boy panellist. He was using it to create games as it gave him admin controls, including the ability to permanently ban players from the game's server, and give others (his friends) controls and roles, such as moderators and advisors.

*"I can give people admin commands. ...there's basic, there's normal, then there's just admin and there's moderator, then there's super admin, There's advisor and then there's creator. I **gave my friend Creator because we're best friends.** ...she has **ban [actions]** and stuff..."*
- **Elliott, Boy, 11 years old (Wave 4)**

Private Servers

Minecraft Realms*** is a paid for private server* that one panellist used, splitting the price amongst a few of his friends. Panellists who had this explained how it made them feel **safe** because they had control over who they invited to join their server.

*See glossary slide in appendix for full definition.

**Roblox Studio is the free, official game development engine for creating 3D games and experiences on the [Roblox platform](#).

***Minecraft Realms is an official, subscription-based, and easy-to-use server hosting service by Mojang that allows players to create private, 24/7 online worlds for themselves and their friends.

Source: Research Conducted by Beano Brain for Ofcom, Children's Online Insight Panel, 2025-2026

Some panellists took creative and active approaches to protect their privacy



In Wave 4 of this study, there was also mentions of panellists creatively using features **in social media apps** (such as TikTok) and **search engines to protect their data and privacy**.

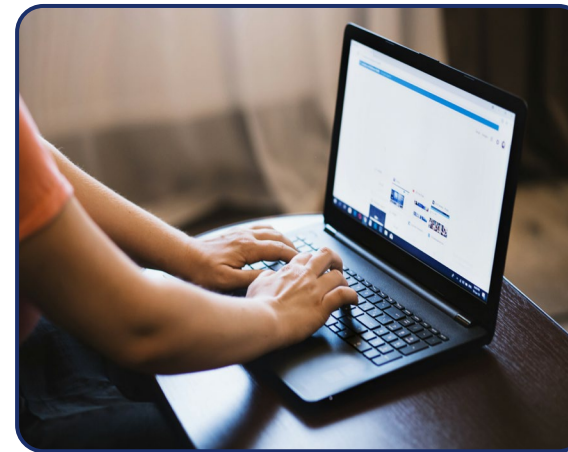
Social Media



*“When I do post, I post a video of me and my friends doing a trending dance... **if I was going to post my face, I’d put a sticker over my face.**”*
– Jasmin, Girl, 13 years old (Wave 4)

One girl panellist posted TikTok videos with her friends doing viral dances. She used **stickers and filters** to hide her face to **protect her online identity**.

Search



*“At some point, I changed my browser to **DuckDuckGo*** so it now auto-opens with that... **it doesn’t track you and it removes most adverts.**”*
– Harry, Boy, 13 years old (Wave 4)

One boy panellist explained how he used the search engine **DuckDuckGo***, because of its privacy settings; e.g., lack of ads, and not tracking his data.

Online features and functionalities used by panellists

Messaging

Features that could lead to repeat visits to platforms

Safety and privacy

Use of AI

Online search behaviour



Artificial Intelligence can support learning and personal development

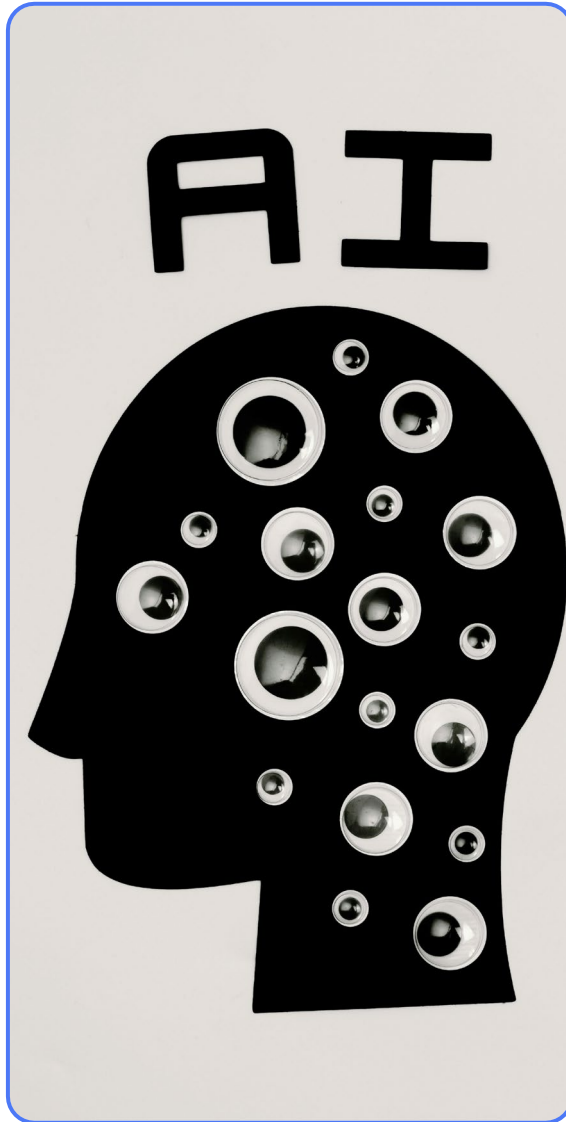


Image sourced: Pexels, Tara Winstead

From Wave 1 to Wave 4, there was a **noticeable increase in mention of AI as a feature** panellists were using across apps and devices, from entertainment to education.

Sport & Gaming

A small number of panellists mentioned how they had **used AI to track their performance** and to seek advice on how to upskill when gaming or playing sport online - and in real life e.g., using apps such as Golf Swing, Fortnite Loot box, and Rocket League.

Entertainment

Most of the panellists who used Snapchat liked to **get playful and creative using filters (including those powered by generative AI)**, sending these to their friends. Instagram came up as an example in Wave 3 for its new playful AI animal character feature.

Education

Several panellists mentioned AI apps being **helpful for homework and revision** and how ChatGPT can feel more advanced than Google Search for learning. Panellists using Gemini AI considered it to be more helpful for asking questions about homework – *more on this on slide 30.*

Health and wellbeing

Some panellists explained how they turned to Snapchat's MyAI or Gemini AI to check up on **health symptoms** or to ask it to design gym workout programmes.

*"There's a new AI feature on **Instagram** where you can choose an **animal character**... I choose a horse where it will say 'neigh' to me... it's so entertaining."
- Olga, Girl, 16 years old (Wave 2)*

*"His teachers have said he's doing really well in his schoolwork since using **ChatGPT**. I make sure he isn't just copying and pasting, and he shows me what he puts in and it isn't telling him the exact answer. He seems much more focused now."
- Mum of Boy, 17, Thomas (Wave 2)*



CASE STUDY

AI CHATBOT AS COMPANIONSHIP

A younger boy panellist explained how he increasingly turned to **ChatGPT for companionship** – for example, to ask questions and play games with when his friends were busy or didn't want to talk. He explained how he sees ChatGPT as quite knowledgeable and able to answer his questions, even if they might be more niche.

However, he commented on the fact that he does recognise it has **flaws**. For example, if he speaks to it for a long time, it sometimes appeared to revert to an older version of ChatGPT, which he deemed as **less advanced** and not as proficient at reasoning and adapting to conversation styles. He also found that ChatGPT kept repeating the same question, which he described as "annoying".

"I sometimes use ChatGPT just to speak to if none of my friends want to talk. I just talk about random stuff and sometimes questions... and normally just random thoughts that I have."

- Harry, Boy, 13 years-old (Wave 3)



Panellists could distinguish between what AI apps felt best suited for their needs



DOLA

One **11-year-old panellist** commented on the differences between ChatGPT and Dola*, and found Dola was better suited to him because he preferred the output; e.g., less long formal answers.

SNAPCHAT

One **13-year-old panellist** explained how she preferred to use **Snapchat AI**, instead of ChatGPT, because of ChatGPT's negative eco-associations that she heard about on TikTok, such as it "hurting polar bears". She used Snapchat AI for recipe ideas or quick questions, like 'what time is it' in another country.

CHATGPT

For schoolwork, the **older panellists (17 years old)** explained how they primarily used **ChatGPT** to help write and structure assignments. They gave it the mark scheme and asked it to grade assignments.

*"ChatGPT is very 2020. I now use **Dola** after seeing it advertised on TikTok. It's an app that scans my homework and tells me the answer. I don't let school know this. You can search, ask videos, send a voice message, scan photos."*
- **Elliot, Boy, 11 years old (Wave 4)**

A shift in parents' attitudes to AI:

By Wave 4, there was a noticeable shift in some of the panellists' parents' **positive perceptions and attitudes towards AI**. AI is something they had started to see their children frequently use as a positive resource, and some said that they were starting to use it in their own day-to-day lives. A mum of an older panellist had recently enrolled onto a 10-week **'Introduction to AI'** course with her partner, funded by the government, to open their eyes to AI within their own work, but also their children's lives.

*"Me and my partner, we started to do a course in AI locally, so that we **understand a bit more about it, and we're a bit more aware of what's going on.**"*
- **Mum of Girl, 16, Olga (Wave 4)**

*Dola is a smart, multi-modal AI assistant designed for productivity, creative, and organisational tasks. It functions as an all-in-one assistant that allows users to chat, generate images, manage schedules, and summarise documents through a mobile app (iOS/Android) or integrated messaging apps.



CASE STUDY

*"I saw it on **TikTok** where someone posted how they asked Grok and ChatGPT something along the lines of: 'You're a Viking back in Viking times and all young men are in battle. They're going to die... are you going to tell them and run or let them fight like men?' ChatGPT said it's better to be honest with people and **Grok said, 'All Hail Valhalla,'*** and I just found it **hilarious**. I like to ask it stupid prompts. It's the same as ChatGPT, but it's been programmed to have funny answers unlike ChatGPT."*

- Petros, Boy, 16 years old (Wave 4)

**All Hail Valhalla is Norse Mythology. The analogy would be 'Valhalla and Old Norse is the hall of the fallen.' This is where fierce warriors who are worthy of praise go after they die on this earth.*

THE APPEAL OF HUMOROUS ANSWERS FROM AI CHATBOTS

One **16-year-old boy panellist explained** (*when probed about AI tools he uses*) about **how and why he used Grok** over ChatGPT. Grok is an AI chatbot developed by Elon Musk's company xAI. **The panellist discovered Grok after seeing an advert for it on TikTok**, where someone had posted the difference in the response ChatGPT had provided vs. Grok to a question about men in battle. **He was drawn to the answer Grok provided because it was "hilarious."**

Since then, he had been deferring to Grok to **ask silly or funny questions**. He explained his view that Grok had been known for doing **"bad things beforehand"** but how he now believed that it'd been **"fixed"** and he hadn't encountered any problems himself.

*"The one [Grok] on Twitter was the one doing all the bad things before... people were sending in photos of just people and saying like really inappropriate things and the AI was making them do it... **but they did eventually fix it. A lot of Elon Musk's AI is OK now because there is also AI built into Teslas.**"*

- Petros, Boy, 16 years old (Wave 4)

Researcher reflections:

The popularity and success of **Elon Musk's** other ventures, such as **Tesla**, are attractive and appealing to the 16-year-old boy panellist, which has potential to override some of the negativity surrounding Grok (and X) and create a 'Halo effect'****** for them.

****See glossary slide in appendix for full definition.**

However, increasingly across Waves (especially Waves 3 and 4), panellists started to raise concerns about the limitations and risks of AI



AI moderators: accuracy scepticism

One **13-year-old boy panellist** spoke of some **YouTube videos** needing **age verification** before he could watch them. He thought this was a good feature but **didn't trust the AI moderation** because it can get things wrong. He shared an example of a creator he follows having a video needing age verification because he dropped his microphone in the video and it made a loud sound. The panellist told us the creator appealed this and had the age verification removed.

"I don't think the YouTube AI moderation is that good. It sometimes flags up random things. I remember there was this one video where it flagged someone dropping their microphone... I think that YouTube should have human moderation instead of AI moderation because of things like that."
- Harry, Boy, 13 years old (Wave 4)

Environmental concerns

Three girl panellists (a 12 year-old, 13-year old and a 17 year-old) made comments about **AI being perceived as bad for the planet**; e.g., negatively impacting the earth's atmosphere.

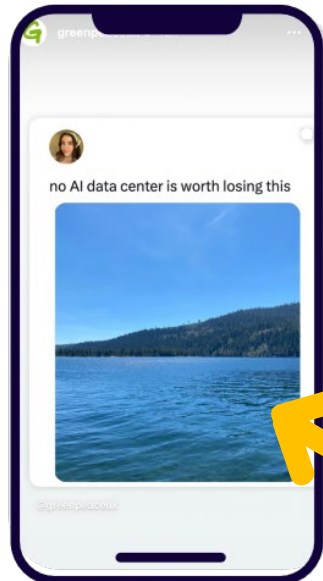


Image: Screenshot from Ruby's diary
upload: Instagram post

*"This was shared by Greenpeace's Instagram page and it is a very relevant post that reminds us how an **increase in excessive AI use is actually destroying the beauty of our natural world** just for our convenience and 'developing' our world."*
- Ruby, Girl, 17 years old (Wave 4)

Fake news*

In Wave 2 of the study, some panellists recognised an increase in fake AI-generated content, describing feeling tricked or duped by what they have seen online.

*"I really don't like the usage of AI... there's been people **uploading fake news***, like articles and stuff using AI. And it's really irritating because then it'll say something like, I don't know, kids will get paid to go to school, but then I realise it's AI and... that's really irritating."*
- Noah, Boy, 14 years old (Wave 2)

Online features and functionalities used by panellists

Messaging

Features that could lead to repeat visits to platforms

Safety and privacy

Use of AI

Online search behaviour



Panellists' online search (traditional and AI) behaviours varied depending on their needs, but typically fell into four camps



Education

Across ages, panellists often deferred to **Google as a starting point** for any questions they had, specifically regarding homework. But for panellists aged 11+, most were increasingly deferring to AI platforms for **homework and revision help**.

Examples of search platforms mentioned by panellists: Google, ChatGPT, Dola, DuckDuckGo.

Gaming

Across ages, but particularly amongst under 15s, panellists explained how they regularly searched for **gaming codes, hacks and tutorials** on how to play or make their own games.

Examples of search platforms mentioned by panellists: YouTube, TikTok, Minecraft.

*"I searched **YouTube for tutorials on how to buy paints in Gran Turismo7**. I didn't search for a special creator - I used the search bar and watched some of the videos. **It wasn't as helpful as I wanted it to be** so instead, I used Google and followed a step-by-step guide."
- **Farid, Boy, 12 years old (Wave 4)***

Entertainment

Younger panellists (under 11s) explained how they liked to search up ideas on **how to make their siblings laugh** or ask ChatGPT how to draw a dinosaur. One 16-year-old boy panellist explained how answers on Grok were particularly random and entertaining – *see more in our case study on slide 31*.

Examples of search platforms mentioned by panellists: ChatGPT, TikTok, YouTube, Microsoft Copilot, Grok.

Facts and news

Younger panellists (under 11s) explained how they deferred to Google or YouTube to find out facts such as "what's the radius of the sun", whereas the older panellists (11+) used multiple platforms (TikTok, Pinterest) to search up ideas such as **New Year's resolutions, fashion ideas** – or to verify fake news ("David Attenborough's death").

Examples of search platforms mentioned by panellists: Google, TikTok, Instagram, Pinterest, NHS website.

*"I searched this up ['Has David Attenborough died?'] as **I had heard a rumour on Saturday morning that he had passed away** and was curious, so I searched on TikTok. From my searches, I came to the conclusion that it was just a rumour, and this was the result I had hoped for. I would describe this as very useful and felt 😊 when I saw it." - **Qadira, Girl, 17 years old (Wave 4)***



—
**Online content
consumed by
panellists**



Online content consumed by panellists – summary findings:

In this section, we explore some of the main **content themes** that had emerged from the panellists' monthly diary uploads and quarterly conversations in Waves 1-4. From body improvement content, stunts and challenges, to war and political content, the panellists had been engaging with a **wide spectrum of online content**.

This section provides insight on what **captured their attention, what they were seeking from the content they consumed, and where potential risks may lie**.

Body image content reached most panellists in some form, either because they sought this content themselves or because it was served to them via their content feeds. Some of the older panellists viewed more extreme content like Looksmaxxing*. Panellists also consumed other types of body stigma* content, where one of the younger panellists encountered extreme weight loss challenge content.

Some panellists sought out physical health and wellbeing advice from influencers online. Whilst some questioned the credibility of this type of content, others, across age groups, said they readily accepted the advice presented. Other panellists engaged with mental health content, whether that was content intended to raise awareness of mental health conditions or content that felt relatable to their personal experiences. However, in one instance, parents became concerned about the nature of the content their child was consuming.

War and political content was described as being increasingly visible on panellists' feeds (by Wave 4, some panellists were actively seeking out this content), prompting mixed reactions. Some felt guilt or distress and chose to turn away, while others valued staying informed and actively sought out this content, relating to both UK and US politics.

Panellists told us that content showing stunts and challenges was a source of entertainment, but some found risky elements uncomfortable to watch.

Whilst some panellists were scrolling on their social media feeds, they were exposed to potentially harmful themes. This included graphic and distressing content, e.g., car crashes and the audio from those injured, leading to feelings of emotional discomfort.

Most teen (13+) panellists had seen graphic content related to the assassination of Charlie Kirk and were shocked to see this play out so graphically on their feeds. In some cases, school friends and peers had shared this to them directly.

**See glossary slide in appendix for full definition.*

Some of the trends panellists engaged with on TikTok had potentially harmful or sensitive themes



Wave 1

March – May 2025

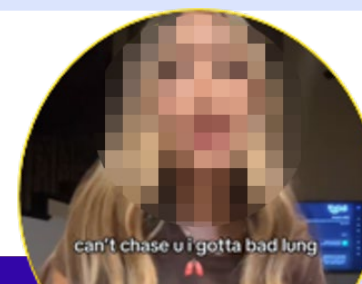
Standing on feet trend

This is a trend where one person lies on their back with legs extended while another individual attempts to balance on their feet – there could be risk of serious injury.*
Viewed by panellists aged: 12-15s



'Anxiety' dance

A trend based on a song which depicts anxiety and self-awareness (which for a younger panellist led to a difficult conversation with her parent about anxiety and mental health).
Viewed by panellists aged: 8-11s & 12-15s



Wave 2

June – Aug 2025

I can't chase you, I've got a bad lung

A meme about people not being able to run because of vaping.
Viewed by panellists aged: 12-15s

Researcher reflections:

This trend could be one to monitor around the potential glamourisation of vaping.



Researcher reflections:

This meme highlights how online relationships can centre around unhealthy or 'toxic' behaviours. These relationships can lack any natural breaks in contact, with constant access to the internet.



Wave 4

Dec 2025 – Feb 2026

Toxic online relationship meme

This meme includes images of easily escapable situations with the phrase "Help, I'm in a toxic online relationship."
Viewed by panellists aged: 13+



Wave 3

Sept – Nov 2025

'Deepthroat' song

A trend about people posting themselves miming the song's sexually explicit lyrics.
Viewed by panellists aged: 12+



*Source: Standing on feet trend: <https://www.dexerto.com/entertainment/viral-standing-on-feet-tiktok-trend-has-serious-injury-risks-experts-warn-3170497/> Images sourced: Panellists diary uploads

Online content
that panellists
had been
consuming

Body image

**Physical and
mental health**

**Political and
war-related
content**

**Stunts and
challenges**

**Unwanted exposure to potentially
harmful themes**



Older panellists engaged with content related to body image and improvement, but were sometimes served more extreme content



In Wave 1, some older panellists (16-17s) spoke about seeing large quantities of **body improvement content** on the platforms they use (being presented to them by their algorithm), despite not always actively searching for it. Even when they didn't feel directly impacted by this content, some explained how it had led to conversations around **body image and body dysmorphia among their friendship groups**.

Some panellists spoke about actively seeking out **fitness challenge content** such as Couch to 5k*, as well as healthy recipes and gym related content. However, some mentioned that they were then being shown content on their feeds that they felt **promoted unrealistic standards or behaviours** and potentially contributed to a feeling of **pressure to meet more extreme ideals**.

One 16-year-old boy panellist who had engaged with gym-related content had also mentioned how he had been presented with content related to **steroid usage which he felt to be unhealthy for younger audiences (see quote)**.

In Wave 2, the older girl panellists spoke about being presented with **content focused on becoming 'summer ready'**, including summer 'glow up'* routines. In addition, trends such as the **'getting your UV'*** were mentioned. This trend encouraged people to go outside during peak UV hours to achieve a suntan.



Image source: Screenshot from Qadira's diary upload: Instagram post

"Social media platforms can easily turn into rabbit holes of 'you shouldn't eat that', 'you need to count your calories', and I definitely think of this as a big issue when it comes to what younger users view."
- Qadira, Girl, 16 years old (Wave 1)

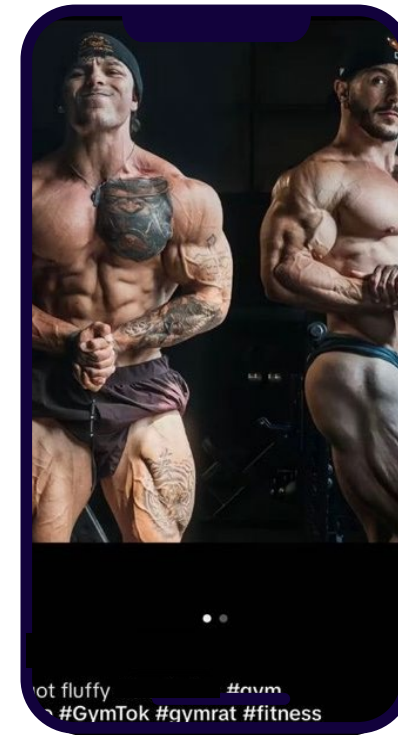


Image source: Screenshot from Petros' diary upload: TikTok influencers

"These two are called the [name of gym/fitness content creators], the second most popular gym influencers but not as child-friendly. They talk a lot about taking steroids and just unhealthy things for younger audiences."
- Petros, Boy, 16 years old (Wave 1)

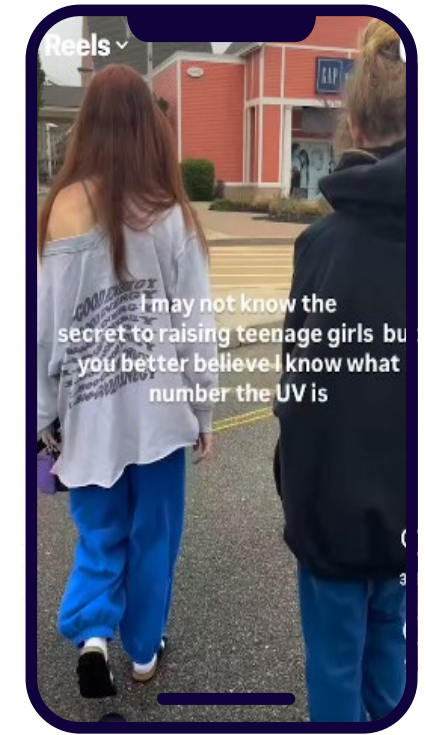


Image source: Screenshot from Ruby's diary upload: Instagram post

"In school there'd be the constant 'guys look the UV is 7, we need to go outside' and it became quite a thing (that I've experienced only this summer)".
- Ruby, Girl, 16 years old (Wave 2)

After declining in Wave 3, mentions of body image content intensified in Wave 4 around the new year



One younger panellist had seen influencers taking part in **challenges related to significant weight loss**. For example, he described how he had seen an influencer's weight loss challenge. The influencer ran a series of challenges with **participants losing a significant amount of weight** (e.g., 100 pounds) for a financial reward (up to around \$400,000).

Pinterest* was mentioned as a popular platform for some panellists (particularly older girl panellists) as a 'one-stop shop'. Some found they were encountering **body improvement content on their feeds (presented through their algorithm)**, including workout challenges such as 'ab challenges' and 'removing belly routines.'

However, in comparison to Wave 2 the summer (June – August), in Wave 3 (which took place in September–November), **panellists saw a decrease in body improvement content.**

In Wave 4, (which took place between December–January), there were mentions of body improvement content being presented to panellists again. This included **New Year's resolutions, challenges like the 75 Hard Challenge**, and posts on TikTok about dropping calories for summer**. While this uptick in body improvement content for the new year felt useful for some panellists, **they also felt it could be overwhelming**, and that it suggested they ought to be improving themselves.



Image source: Screenshot from Qadira's diary upload: Pinterest post

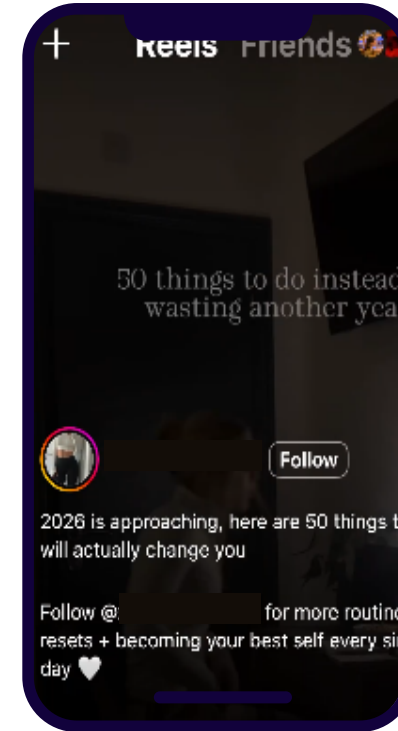


Image source: Screenshot from Rubys diary upload: Instagram post



Image source: Screenshot from Qadira's diary upload: Pinterest post

"[The 30-day ab challenge] it's a very common thing that appears on my feed and I came across this while I was scrolling on my phone.

I would find this post quite provoking, and I felt this 😬 when I saw it."

– Qadira, Girl, 16 years old (Wave 2)

"In the run up to Christmas, I've seen lots of season-related content but also more "self-improvement" content as people start to think about New Year's resolutions. This content can include useful and inspiring ideas about how to 'improve your life' but can also be slightly overwhelming and adds pressure by suggesting that you are not good enough unless you improve and have a 'glow up'."

– Ruby, Girl, 16 years old (Wave 4)



CASE STUDY

"Looksmaxxing is where people devote themselves to making themselves look better... it sounds stupid but it's things like bone smashing where people sit there with a hammer, ice stuffed in your mouth to make it seem less bloated... just stupid things, in my opinion."

- Petros, Boy, 16 years old (Wave 4)

Looksmaxxing content focuses on changing physical appearances to become 'more attractive', ranging from mainstream fitness advice to more extreme body modification techniques.

LOOKSMAXXING* CONTENT

A **16-year-old boy panellist** explained how he had been seeing more content related to 'Looksmaxxing*' (where people devote themselves to looking better) on his TikTok feed, served to him by his algorithm. Some of the things that he'd seen included **bone-smashing*** (*see quote on the left*), **using ice to reduce bloating, posts about Hunter Eyes (defining perfection by the amount of space between your eyes)** and those advocating for **injecting fat-dissolving peptides***.

*"There's a high spike in **people using peptides**, they clear up your face and help with your acne, it thickens your hair, but also burns fat at a ridiculous pace, but it can be really bad for pretty much everything, like your heart, your lungs... **A stupid amount of people are using them, and I know boys my age are using them...** One of my mates does them because his acne is really bad, **he was injecting them straight into his face.**"*

- Petros, Boy, 16 years old (Wave 4)

Researcher reflections:

While the 16-year-old boy panellist comments that 'Looksmaxxing' is not of interest to him, he's aware of how popular this content is, especially with some of his friends, one of whom has started injecting peptides into his face and worrying about the space between his eyes.



Online content
that panellists
had been
consuming

Body image

**Physical and
mental health**

**Political and
war-related
content**

**Stunts and
challenges**

**Unwanted exposure to potentially
harmful themes**



Panellists engaged with health and wellbeing content with varying degrees of scepticism



Some content encountered by panellists included **creators making medical claims or offering health advice**. Some questioned the credibility of this type of content, while others, across age groups, said they readily accepted the advice presented.



Examples included videos focused on **UPFs* (ultra-processed foods), doctors reacting to weight loss journeys and procedures such as hot cupping* and cryotherapy***. Isolated comments from panellists recognised that there could be dangerous implications from misinformation on health topics.

Other content consumed by panellists included posts about the **gender health gap*, women's health and policy changes surrounding this**, which one panellist saw as a positive and inspiring change.

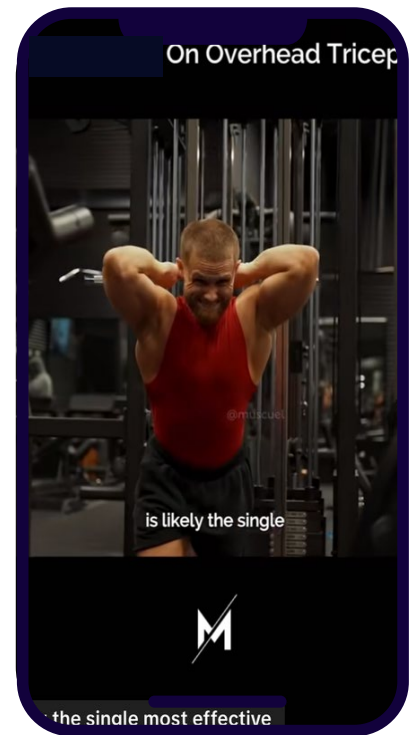


Image source: Screenshot from Petros's diary upload: TikTok post

"[name of gym/fitness content creator] is a science-based lifter who pretty much confirms or denies exercises and explains exactly what they are and what they do - he's one of the biggest faces in gym influencers right now."
- Petros, Boy, 16 years old (Wave 2)



Image source: Screenshot from Ruby's diary upload: The Guardian

"In this Instagram video, a weight-loss coach reacts to a video of a woman criticising her body's reaction to under-eating for weight loss. There appears to be a lot of accounts where individuals (who may have qualifications or [are] personal trainers or have no expertise, knowledge/training), and while these people can have positive intentions, I think it could become dangerous for some people if they are spreading misinformation, especially on sensitive topics like weight loss and body image."
- Ruby, Girl, 16 years old (Wave 2)

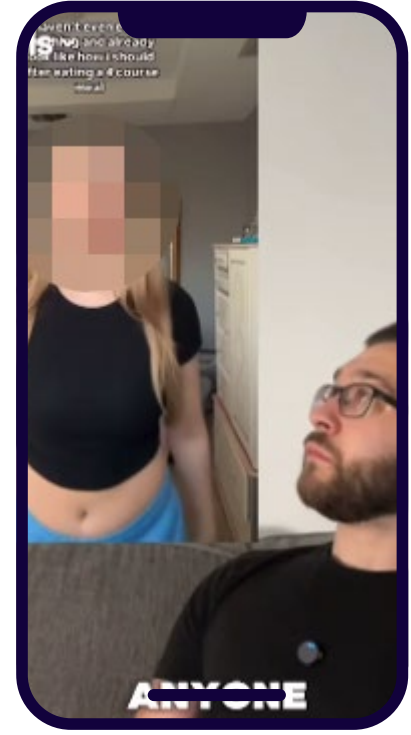


Image source: Screenshot from Ruby's diary upload: Instagram post

In Wave 4, panellists increasingly engaged with mental health related content



Some of the panellists engaged with content about mental health. In Wave 4, one 16-year-old boy panellist saw an uptick in **content spreading awareness about men's mental health**. Despite not looking for this content, he noted that he enjoyed seeing it and liked that these videos spread awareness.

Other content included 'relatable mental health' content. In Wave 4, one panellist explained how she had been consuming more content from an influencer describing herself as **'the internet's big sister'*** which is an increasingly popular type of content where the creator provides advice in the way of a 'big sister,' covering topics such as mental health and relationships. **The panellist expressed that she liked seeing this type of content**, as she could relate to it and it made her feel better.



Image source: Screenshot from Petros's diary upload: TikTok post

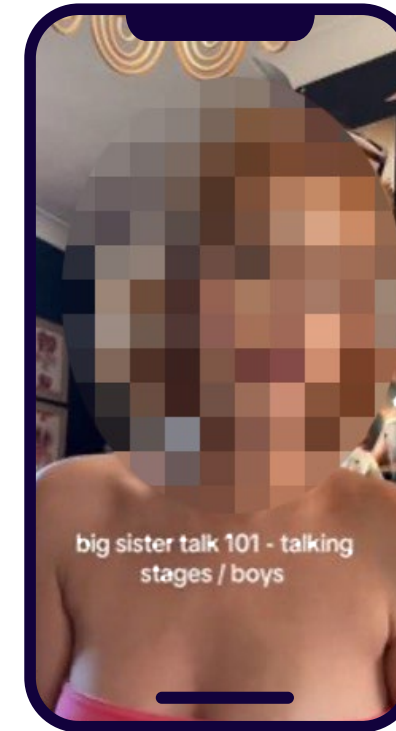


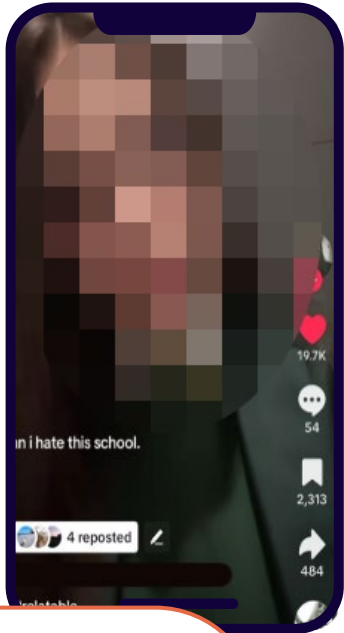
Image source: TikTok screenshot from influencer post mentioned by Iman

*"I see a lot of TikToks recently about **men's mental health**, especially in the trades [typically specialised, skilled roles e.g. plumber] at this time of year and I think that's a good thing - talking about it publicly."*
- Petros, Boy, 16 years old (Wave 4)

*"She's really relatable, she does this big sister talk thing - **she struggles with bad mental health**. I remember in December I was feeling upset because there was drama at school, and I remember watching one of her videos when I didn't want to go into school. **It made me feel better that I wasn't the only person that felt how I did.**"*
- Iman, Girl, 12 years old (Wave 4)



CASE STUDY



"We noticed she was struggling with her self-esteem... it was a tough time as she had just started high school and was exposed to lots of kids from different backgrounds with different views on politics. She told us she has been self-harming and it's then that we picked up on her 'liking', 'posting' or commenting' on mental health/depressing content she was viewing. She's now having counselling, but we've been advised to monitor, not remove social media from her as it's like an online diary for her. It's a compromise we're having to live with."

- Mum of younger girl panellist (Wave 2)

Image source: Screenshot from panellist's diary
upload: TikTok post

'SAD GIRL CONTENT'*

In Wave 2, a younger girl panellist* explained how she had been engaging with content that expressed sad feelings and other negative emotions. This included content creators discussing their dislike of certain aspects of their life, including school, which the panellist gravitated towards as she could relate to these emotions, though she did describe it herself as "a bit sad."

** We have chosen to omit some details about this panellist in order to further protect their identity.*

*"I was scrolling after school on TikTok in bed around 3:30pm and this video [video about not liking school] came up that caught my attention. I hate school and this video was relatable, and it made me feel like I can relate to other people. **It made me not feel alone and that others relate, as school is tiring and hard, and the video was a bit sad, but it was OK.** I liked it and re-posted it."*
- Girl, under 13 years old (Wave 2)

Her parents were concerned about her viewing this type of negative content (and other mental health related content) as she had been engaging in self-harm behaviours at the time. The younger girl panellist was receiving counselling (at the time of fieldwork) and **her parents described how they were advising her to not 'like', 'comment', or 'share' types of "sad girl" posts as they were concerned it would lead the algorithm to recommend her similar types of content.**

In Wave 4, the same panellist started to see less of this content on her feed, although she still watched and engaged with videos related to not liking school. However, when she found this content becoming 'too sad' she would click the 'Not Interested'* button on TikTok and **found that she started to see less of this type of content.**

**See glossary slide in appendix for full definition.*

Online content
that panellists
had been
consuming

Body image

**Physical and
mental health**

**Political and
war-related
content**

**Stunts and
challenges**

**Unwanted exposure to potentially
harmful themes**



Political and war-related content led to difficult conversations with parents and feelings of guilt from panellists



Across Waves 1-4, panellists were increasingly seeing **war and political content**, with some expressing the **negative emotional impact they felt**, and noting a **lack of content warnings**. Examples included major world events, such as **Russia's invasion of Ukraine** and the **conflict in Israel and Gaza**.

A younger panellist had been following an activist's journey to Palestine on her mum's Instagram account. **Her mum described this had led them to have a difficult conversation about the war in Gaza**. With this increased exposure, some panellists expressed feeling upset, worried or scared after encountering the content, while others said that they felt seeing this type of content was unavoidable, and did not visibly show any emotions.

One panellist, 16-year-old Ruby, spoke of **experiencing feelings of guilt** that she should be watching certain war-related content, after seeing videos that used wording to encourage the viewer to watch the full clip. **She felt there should be trigger warnings for these types of videos**.

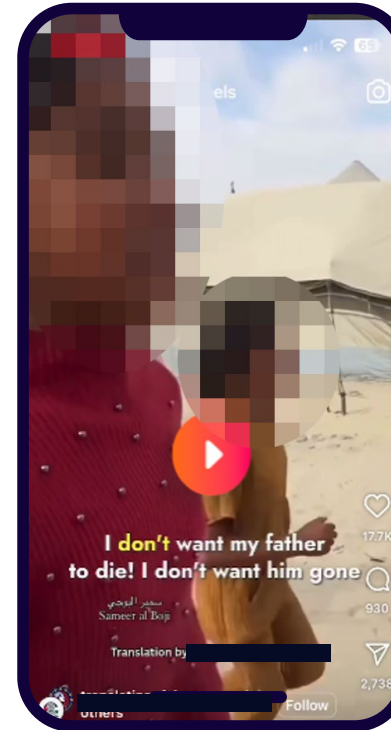


Image source: Screenshot from Ruby's diary upload: Instagram post

"With the election and change of president in the USA, the war in Ukraine and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, I have definitely noticed an increase in political content online and on social media."
- Ruby, Girl, 16 years old (Wave 1)

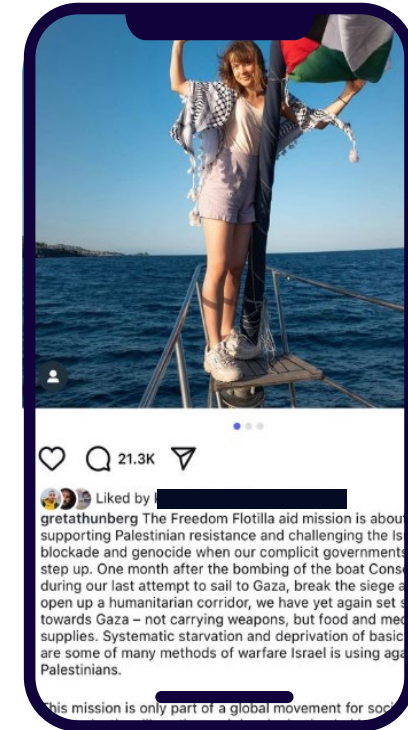


Image source: Screenshot from Bianca's diary upload: Instagram post

"There's videos that start as normal videos and then are about people fleeing war, which I think is great that they're raising awareness but think it should come with a trigger warning. It'll say, 'I won't forgive you if you don't watch' and it [the commentary around the video] just sort of guilt-trips you."
- Ruby, Girl, 16 years old (Wave 2)

In Waves 3-4, panellists' approach to political and war related content differed to earlier waves as some began seeking out or turning away from it



In Wave 3, we saw the **fears and worries** panellists had about politics and increased war-related content. For the older panellists (15-17s) they explained how the **news was increasingly becoming scary to them**. One panellist shared a post describing the “**news as horror**” to explain how she felt. For panellists who were actively seeking out this content, they explained feeling overwhelmed and unable to help. However, some panellists found this content to be **a positive addition** to their feeds, as they sought to stay informed on current affairs (see next slide 49).

By Wave 4, there were **polarised behaviours from panellists** between those actively seeking out this content and those actively turning away from it. For example, despite **being worried by recent statements from US president Donald Trump**, a **15-year-old boy panellist** explained how he still liked to keep informed about these developments. This was in comparison to another panellist who had stopped using X because it was "always about war".

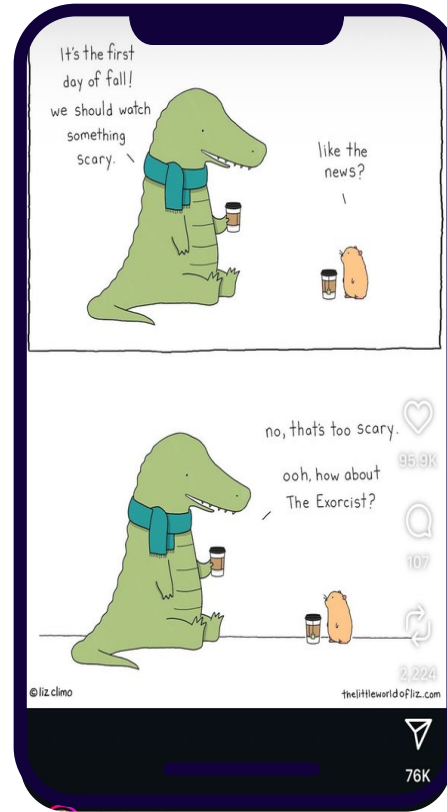


Image source: Screenshot from Ruby's diary upload: Instagram post

*"This was a post I saw on Instagram that's a cute cartoon with a more upsetting, serious note. **It's kind of a funny post but also a bit scary because I've definitely noticed how scary and negative most of the news you see/hear, especially on social media.**"*
- Ruby, Girl, 16 years old (Wave 3)

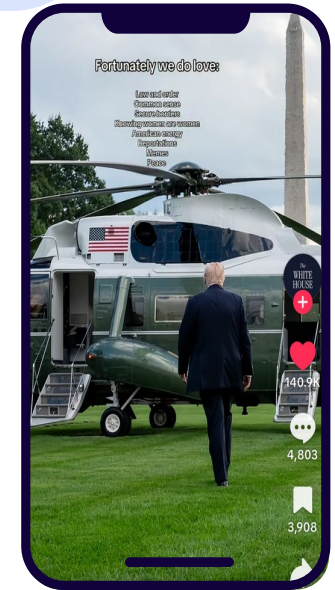


Image source: Screenshot from Petros' diary upload: TikTok post

*"On X there was always stuff about war, and it never changed. **It just made me angry, so I just stopped using it.**"*
- Jasmin, Girl, 13 years old (Wave 4)

*"Lately the news with Donald Trump has been quite concerning, but it hasn't affected me personally. **Trump bombed a country for like no reason, and everybody's been posting about how it's going to start a war...** I like knowing what's going on. It might be frightening but at least I know what's happening."*
- Noah, Boy, 15 years old (Wave 4)



A PANELLIST HIGHLY ENGAGED WITH POLITICAL CONTENT: WAVES 1-4



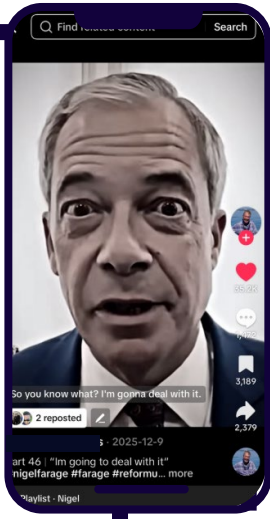
Wave 1 – March – May 2025

A **16-year-old boy panellist** was particularly engaged with political content and actively sought it out.

*"I've felt like I've saw a lot more politics on TikTok than before, majority being about **either immigrants or the Reform party, which I don't mind - sometimes I enjoy it.**"*
– Petros, Boy, 16 years old (Wave 2)

Wave 2 – June – Aug 2025

In **Wave 2**, he was engaging with content from **GB News*** and the **Reform Party*** on topics such as immigration.



Wave 4 – Dec 2025 – Feb 2026

However, in Wave 4 he explained how he struggled to navigate his own political views and how it had recently **led to a heated argument with friends via a Snapchat group chat.** He and his friends then decided to create a new rule where they wouldn't discuss religion to avoid future disagreements and avoid discussing politics as they respect that everyone has a different view.

"So, when politics is mentioned, it's a bit of a rough area. We've all agreed to completely not talk about religion just because certain people's opinions on other people's religion, kind of, you know, I mean, it creates arguments."
– Petros, Boy, 16 years old (Wave 4)

Wave 3 – Sept – Nov 2025

In **Wave 3**, he became interested in US political discourse, particularly the US government shutdown** and New York Mayoral elections. One particular post that he engaged with was by a TikTok creator who made comments about the incoming (at the time of the study) New York mayor and his religion in reference to his policies.



*"The 'FYP' is full of Mamdani and people hating him because of some of the things he's said he's going to do - in his words "I will be taxing whiter neighbourhoods more," and other controversial statements. **I personally disagree with everything he stands for and a lot of people in New York do as well.**"*
– Petros, Boy, 16 years old (Wave 3)

* See glossary slide in appendix for full definition.
**The US government shut down on October 1st 2025, and this lasted until November 13th 2025.
Image source: Both Screenshots from Petros' diary upload: TikTok post

Online content
that panellists
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Body image

**Physical and
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**Stunts and
challenges**

**Unwanted exposure to potentially
harmful themes**



Though panellists liked viewing content related to stunts and challenges, they also recognised the danger for those involved



Content relating to **stunts and challenges**, particularly appealed to the younger panellists, who described finding it funny. Various trends were mentioned, including trends that had resurfaced such as the **'Ice Bucket Challenge.'***

The **Red Bull YouTube channel** was also mentioned for its popular stunt and challenges content. One panellist explained how he watched videos on this channel which included clips (although not mentioned specifically by the panellist) with titles such as "Jumping Over a Moving F1 Car (world first)", and "World First! Bike Flip On A Moving Train". The same 9-year-old panellist also explained how he was a fan of diving and came across "**Death Diving**"* stunt content (also known as 'extreme freestyle high diving') after watching other diving related content on the Red Bull YouTube channel. He acknowledged the danger of this type of stunt.

At the opposite end of the age range, a 17-year-old panellist explained how he'd been watching **golf stunts** which he'd initially found funny, but when he **read the comments**, he realised this could have resulted in a **serious injury**, making the video difficult to watch. On this particular video, TikTok had included a **warning** at the bottom of the content, stating that participating in this type of activity could result in injury. However, panellists commented that sometimes these warnings **are not easy enough to spot** (e.g., warnings can blend in with some videos due to the small font and white text).

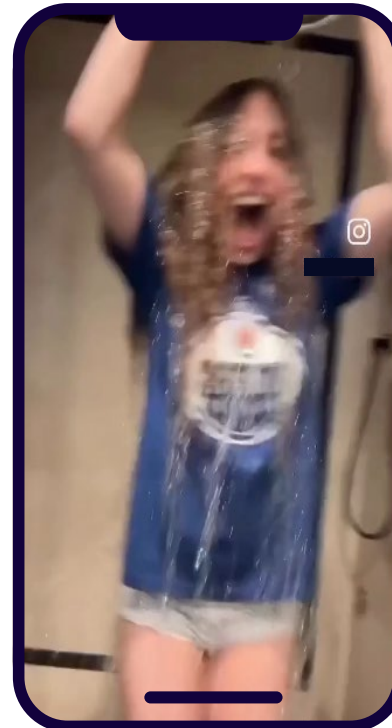


Image: source Screenshot from Olga's diary upload: Instagram post

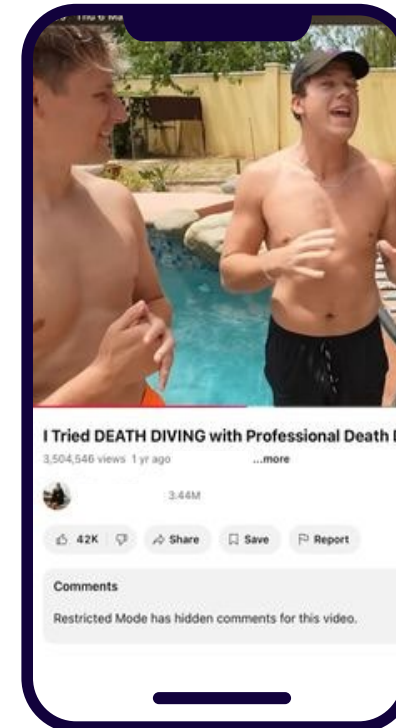


Image source: Screenshot from Darnell's diary upload: YouTube video

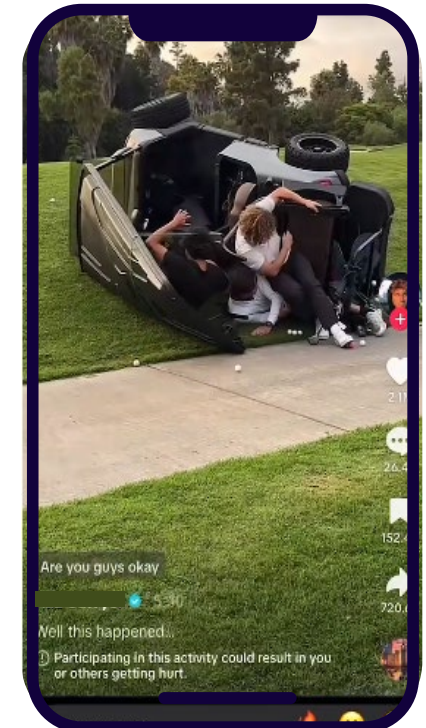


Image source: Screenshot from Thomas' diary upload: TikTok post

"I'd never heard of death diving as I'd never seen it performed and wanted to know how it was done. It was a group of guys diving into pools and I like diving into pools too, but they were way more dangerous than I would ever be."
- Darnell, Boy, 9 years old (Wave 1)

"To begin with, I thought it [golf stunts video] was funny but then I realised this isn't putting a good image on the youth in golf. I checked the comments to see what people were saying and there was several comments on the guy's leg and [people] hoping it was OK. So, I watched the video a few more times and it made me a little like squeamish as I have broken my femur and torn my ACL, so I found it [clip of injury] a bit difficult to watch in the end."
- Thomas, Boy, 17 years old (Wave 2)

Online content
that panellists
had been
consuming

Body image

**Physical and
mental health**

**Political and
war-related
content**

**Stunts and
challenges**

**Unwanted exposure to potentially
harmful themes**





UNWANTED SEXUAL CONTENT

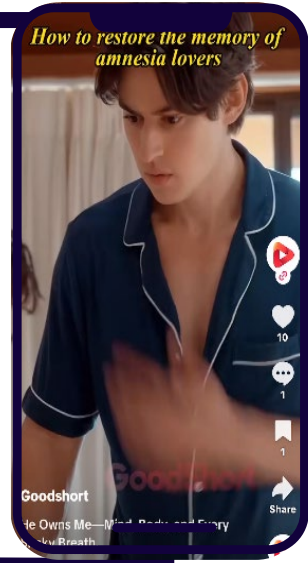



CASE STUDY

Wave 2 – June – Aug 2025

An older panellist saw an increase in **unwanted content** (i.e., content that she did not actively seek out but was presented to her through the algorithm) that she described as being **sexualised in nature**. This was compared to previous content that felt relatable and that she wanted on her feed. She would sometimes click onto this content unknowingly because creators would direct her to click onto their profile bio. However, when she clicked into this content, it linked her to OnlyFans*. She was also being shown adverts for an app called 'GoodShort'.** **The combination of both left her feeling uncomfortable because it felt inappropriate for her age and she reported this content multiple times.**

*"Something I have seen on the internet that has freaked me out is **secret p*rn or OF accounts on my normal feed** where there's a video, which would be normal, then it would say to click the link in their bio and it would lead to different websites - **it made me feel** 🤢 **but I have reported many of these accounts.**"- Qadira, Girl, 16 years old (Wave 2)*



Wave 4 – Dec 2025 – Feb 2026

However, in Wave 4, she explained how this sexual content had come back to her feed, but in the form of **sexualised mukbangs***** (videos of people eating food, which the panellist felt appeared sexualised through certain behaviours, e.g., messy eating and making prominent sounds). This made her feel uncomfortable and she had since blocked these creators after talking to her parent about this.

Wave 3 – Sept – Nov 2025

In Wave 3, **she saw a notable shift in her feed to more positive and relatable content and away from those of a sexualised nature.**

*"Something that has made me feel uncomfortable was watching **mukbangers (people who eat food on videos) sexualise their videos**. For example; making white ranch drool down their mouths or slurping unnecessarily on their foods. I don't know if it is me overreacting or seeing the wrong picture, but I have told my mum, and she has told me to ignore or block the videos. They made me feel 🤢" - Qadira, Girl, 17 years old (Wave 4)*

*"I said I'd been seeing these [inappropriate] adverts, but they've gone away now. **I'm happy they've gone away. They were very '50 Shades of Grey'***, which is inappropriate for TikTok.** I was scrolling past it and not liking it, but they just kept coming up and up, but they're gone now, which is good."*
- Qadira, Girl, 17 years old (Wave 3)

*OnlyFans is a site hosting content creators posting mainly pornographic content. Please note that the panellist did not seek out this content nor did she see any inappropriate content on OnlyFans itself, as she was not logged into the platform.

**GoodShort is a mobile app with short soap-like dramas (many of which have sexual themes).

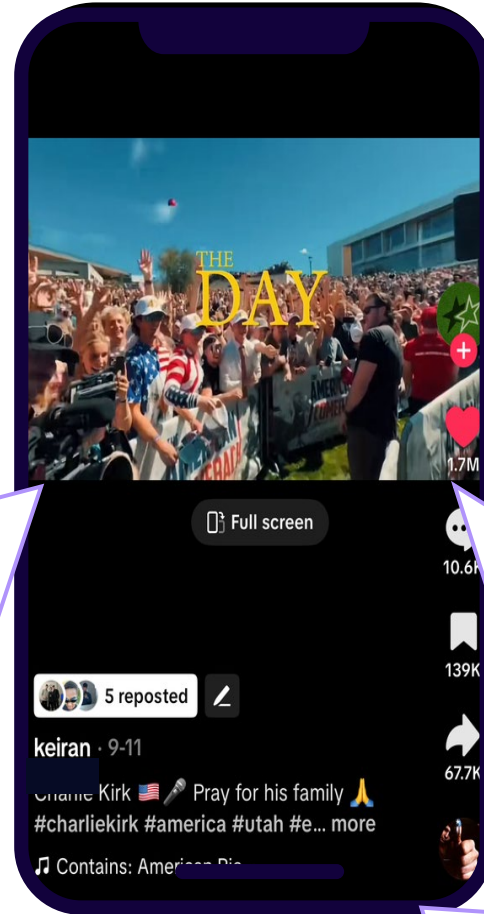
***See glossary slide in appendix for full definition.

Teen (13+) panellists were exposed to violent content and questioned the lack of platform protection from this type of content



In Wave 3, many of the teen (13+) panellists explained how they had seen or heard about the **assassination of Charlie Kirk**. Most saw the graphic video play out directly on their feeds, with TikTok recommending it on their 'For You Page'. In some cases, school friends and peers had shared this to them directly. For the panellists who saw the content, they were not only shocked by the **lack of content warnings** on these videos, but also the large volume of these videos on their feed, and the fact that TikTok hadn't removed this content.

*"Something that I've seen online that has **frightened me is the Charlie Kirk assassination**. On the day of the shooting, **I saw on my feed the close-up video of him being killed, which freaked me out... it made me quite upset** as I had followed along with Charlie's journey for a long time. This made me feel 🤢 and I reported the video and talked to my mum about it and I never saw the video again."*
- Qadira, Girl, 17 years old (Wave 3)



*"I've seen a couple [of] videos from the incident where Charlie Kirk was shot dead. **(I wasn't expecting to actually see the bullet enter his body and then to see all the blood and his body turn limp)**. I later saw the same video on my TikTok feed. **This shocked me** that the video had been posted to social media and wasn't removed by the app. I didn't think to report the video; I'm not sure why if I'm being honest."*
- Thomas, Boy, 17 years old (Wave 3)

*"I just had to scroll past, that was all I could really do. **There were so many of those videos that I couldn't just block one account to move on**. It was awful, you can see it happening in the video, it's not a friendly video. **I'd love for TikTok to have a better filter**, because I feel like people can get away with posting things like that because TikTok doesn't get rid of it quickly enough."*
- Noah, Boy, 15 years old (Wave 3)



CASE STUDY

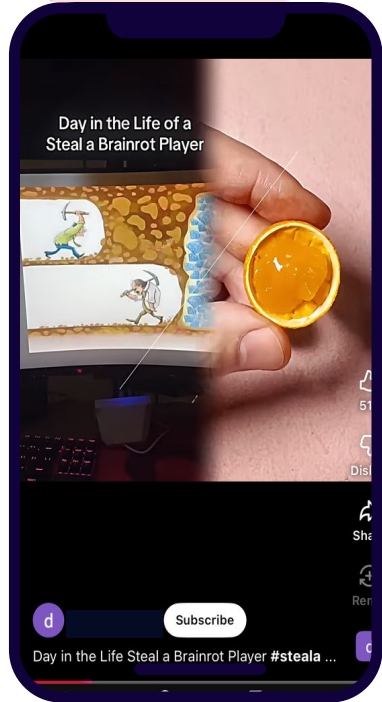


Image source: Screenshot from Darnell's diary upload: YouTube video


UNWANTED EXPOSURE TO POTENTIALLY HARMFUL AUDIO AND VIDEO

One **10-year-old boy panellist** had become interested in '**Split screen**' style **ASMR* content** that has other content (usually stories or gameplay) on one side and ASMR content on another. However, his mum became concerned that he was **unknowingly being exposed to adult themes and potentially harmful content** with these split screen videos (e.g., abuse through starvation) as seen from the discussion with the panellists' mum (*see quote below*).

A 16-year-old boy panellist explained that he often scrolled on Instagram to unwind during quieter times in the day and before going to sleep. On one of these occasions, he came across a **video of a car crash** with **upsetting content** that he had **found frightening to listen to**.

*"It starts off quite inconspicuous but then **can be inappropriate**. For example, there was one written from the point of view of a schoolboy - his mum had remarried, and the man who had moved in was abusing this boy in the way of starving him, saying he couldn't eat the food in the fridge because he hadn't contributed. **I just don't want him listening to this; it's detailing abuse. But obviously the pull for him is the ASMR videos he likes, not the audio over it.**"*
- Mum of Boy, 9, Darnell (Wave 4)

*"One of the things [I've] seen on Instagram Reels recently did disturb me a bit - **it was a video of a man dying in a car crash with audible screams of horror**. The video has since been banned by Instagram, but it baffled me that it was still allowed to be posted on the app. The emoji I'd use to describe this is (😱) as it was frightening to listen to."*
- Petros, Boy, 16 years old (Wave 1)

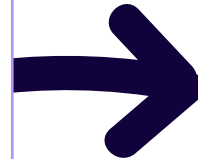


**The online
games played
by panellists**



In this section, we explore the **online games that panellists had been engaging with**, covering the positives and the more challenging aspects faced by them, and particular gaming features and platforms the panellists had been using.

We look at **what captured their attention, and what, if any, are the potentially harmful elements of their gaming worlds.**



The online games played by panellists- summary findings:

Panellists' gaming landscapes were broad and included elements of teamwork, thrill-seeking and escapism. However, these more positive aspects of gaming-were sometimes linked to more negative in-game experiences for panellists, including negative interactions with strangers and exposure to potentially distressing content.

Researchers noticed that older panellists (16+) tended to play more mature games with more violent themes (e.g., Grand Theft Auto).

In early Waves (1-2) of this study, panellists had been exposed to potential harms on Roblox (a popular game amongst panellists), for example, encountering strangers and receiving or witnessing offensive comments. However, in Waves 3-4, some of the younger panellists started to become aware of, and mention, the impact of the Roblox age verification safety and privacy measures.

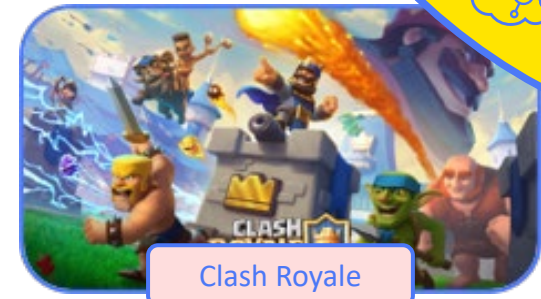
The drive to win or earn in-game currency was a key motivator for some panellists to keep playing games.

One 15-year-old boy panellist became particularly interested in virtual reality gaming and during the study became an online moderator on a Discord server (*see slide 63 for a detailed case study*).

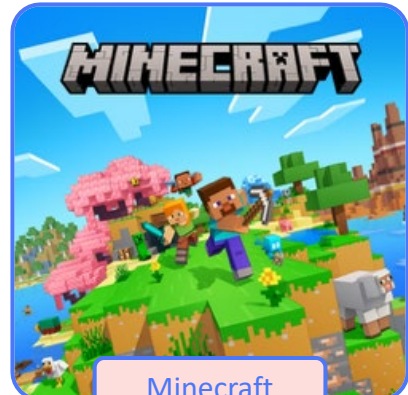
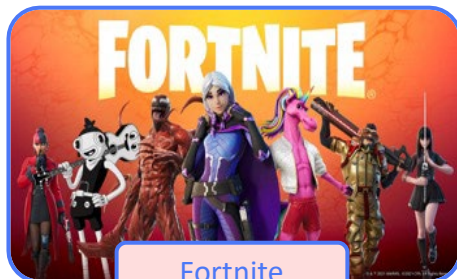
A map of the gaming landscape by age



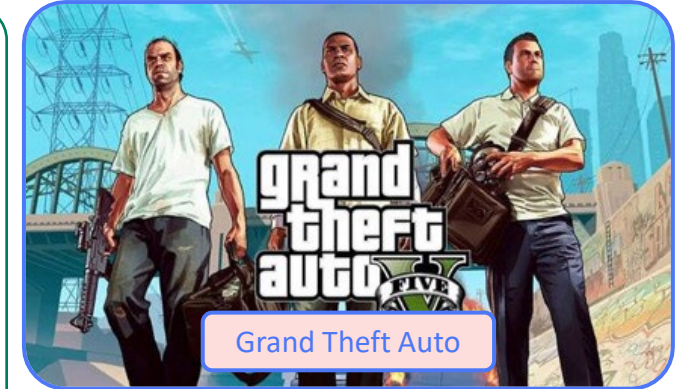
These are games regularly mentioned by panellists across Waves 1-4.



Roblox spans ages 8-14 with the older panellists gravitating to games that provide thrills.



Strategy-based games were more popular with the 12-15-year-old panellists as they looked for games that required deeper focus and were more complex.



The older male panellists gravitated to games with more adult themes.

8-11

12-15

16-17

What panellists looked for in the games they played



CONTROL

Strategy-based games allowed for **deep immersion** into the worlds they were playing in, facilitating **problem-solving** and allowing for **greater levels of control** over the worlds that they're creating.

*"I sometimes play **Ages of Conflict**, which is a game where you **create different countries** and you can get them to fight amongst each other on the map."*

- Harry, Boy, 12 years old (Wave 1)

NOSTALGIA

Some panellists looked for **nostalgia in the games they played**, going back to games they loved and played as a "kid".

*"...we've started playing **Roblox** again... all the Roblox games that we played as kids."*

- Grace, Girl, 12 years old (Wave 4)

ROMANCE

Some **panellists (typically younger girls)** looked for **'cute' or romantic storylines in the games that they played**. This reflected their interest in romance-themed content in other areas of their online worlds e.g., the content they engaged with on TikTok and Instagram.

*"I've been playing a new game called **Pocket Love**. I love the art style **and it's just so cute.**"*

- Iman, Girl, 12 years old (Wave 2)

ESCAPISM

For some panellists, they described gaming as their "escape." They went to these spaces to fully immerse into new worlds but also to **socialise with friends, relax, and unwind**.

*"My favourite things to do online are playing video games **with my school friends**. I love gaming and it's fun to do. I think at the moment me and my friends are talking about updates for Fortnite and Roblox most."*

- Farid, Boy, 11 years old (Wave 1)

TEAMWORK

Panellists enjoyed teamwork elements of the games they played, and being able to connect with friends in games like **Clash of Clans, Clash Royale and Ages of Conflict, etc.**

*"I have been playing some new games such as **Clash Royale (which has been a big thing in my friend group)**."*

- Noah, Boy, 15 years old (Wave 3)

THRILL-SEEKING

Some panellists ventured into gaming spaces that touched on **scary, spooky or horror-based themes**. They loved the **jump scares** and thrills they got from these games. Younger panellists increasingly engaged with this content only if exposed to it through friends or family.

*"I just like played some **scary games** and we played like **Piggy** and stuff like that."*

- Jasmin, Girl, 12 years old (Wave 2)

The same qualities that drew panellists into games could also make their in-game experience negative



Triggering / upsetting content

Games in the horror/scary genre sometimes included content that panellists felt was **“too scary”**; this could sometimes feel **triggering, upsetting or worrying**, especially for the **younger panellists**.

*“I feel worried about some horror games that I saw my cousins playing when we visited them. It was **scary** because there was monsters, blood and jump scares. Unexpected things was **shocking** for me. I felt 😱 scared.”*
- Aamir, Boy, 9 years old (Wave 1)

In-game chat

Panellists were also engaging in social spaces in these games where sometimes they experienced online **bullying, feelings of anxiety, feeling left out, or offensive and racist comments**.

“I found this very racist, so I reported them and they didn't get banned. This is the game, Roblox - I think they need a better banning system.”
- Muhammad, Boy, 13 years old (Wave 3)

Gaming with strangers

Panellists were engaging in social spaces within some of the games they played with 'random' players, **which researchers hypothesise could potentially include adult strangers**.

*“Today I have played on Roblox - Fisch. It's a fishing game. It's online and it picks random players to play with. **You can chat with the other players if you want to, but I didn't because I don't know them.**”*
- Farid, Boy, 12 years old (Wave 1)

Pressure to spend/upgrade

For some panellists, gaming updates felt exciting but **also placed a pressure on them to spend money on upgrades**.

“Updates make me want to play, and they make me spend money. I always want the latest update and to complete the game as quick as I can.”
- Elliott, Boy, 11 years old (Wave 3)

Highly engaging and distracting features

The **highly engaging and social nature** of these games could sometimes feel exhausting for panellists. Some panellists would end up turning away from games for short breaks or quitting certain games altogether.

*“I've also deleted the gaming app Blockblast as if I found there was nothing to do on social media, I would get easily **distracted by playing it.**”*
- Qadira, Girl, 16 years old (Wave 1)

Particularly in Waves 1-2 of this study, panellists were mentioning being exposed to potentially harmful content and interactions in Roblox



Across Waves 1-4, Roblox was a game that most panellists were playing (particularly amongst panellists aged below 15). Roblox is an online platform that allows users to **create, code and design** their own games in a colourful, boxy playful world. It's heavily based on **user-generated content*** and **community creation**. Therefore, new trending games emerge quickly.



Panellists spoke about how **they loved playing on Roblox because it frequently brought out new games** such as Grow a Garden* and 99 Nights in The Forest**, and that it kept up with the trends. However, in Waves 1-2 they also spoke about **negative experiences in Roblox, such as encountering strangers and receiving or witnessing offensive comments through the chat**.

"...hackers [in Roblox] are sometimes adults as they have grown-up voices when they speak and they can ban you for no reason. They [hackers] shouldn't ban people it makes me angry."
- Elliott, Boy, 11 (Wave 1)

*"On Roblox, someone called me a sl*t and a b*tch - it made me angry and it made sad as I'm a boy, not a girl, but it's still not kind."*
- Elliott, Boy, 10 years old (Wave 1)

"I was banned from Roblox for sticking up for myself when somebody was insulting me."
- Noah, Boy, 15 years old (Wave 2)

Researcher reflections: In Waves 1-2 we heard about how children were exposed to strangers on Roblox, and this could include users much older than them. For the panellists we spoke to, encountering online strangers or hackers (people who use unauthorised software to bypass rules and disrupt multiplayer experiences) was seen as an expected part of the platform, something they accepted as 'part of the experience' when using Roblox.



Researcher Reflections: However, **in Wave 3** (post-Children's safety duties) some of the younger panellists started to become aware of, and mention the impact of the **Roblox age verification safety and privacy measures** (see slide 77 for more detail on this). They explained how this was a positive step towards them feeling safe from "predators", but some of the younger panellists described it as frustrating because they believed that they could no longer use the chat feature with anyone that is not their age.



"My friends said Roblox, since 2026, because of child safety or whatever, it's done an age verification, so you've got to scan your face, and it has to guess your age so that you can actually use the platform."
- Farid, Boy, 12 years old (Wave 4)

*Grow a Garden is a free-to-play, immensely popular, and relaxed farming simulation game on Roblox. Users plant seeds, harvest crops for currency (Sheckles), and upgrade their plots. It features idle growth (plants grow while offline), rare mutations, and pet automation, making it a hit with millions of concurrent players.

** 99 Nights in the Forest is a popular horror-based game on Roblox which involves exploring a dark forest.

Panellists talked about the drive to earn in-game currency as a key motivator to come back and play again



Across Waves 1-4, panellists explained how they gravitated toward games **with in-game currency*** and **earning mechanisms because it helped them in the game.**

One **12-year-old panellist** received **F1 Manager 24*** for his birthday. In this game, he runs his own Formula 1 team, **earning in-game money from races, which he uses to buy better drivers.** This is a single player game, but he said it felt “addictive”.

“...it’s **addictive** because I **keep wanting to make more money and be better.**”

– **Farid, Boy, 12 years old (Wave 4)**

One panellist played the game **Red Light, Green Light** (described in Aamir’s quote to the right) on Roblox. He also plays alone, joining lobbies* with random players. **He enjoyed the challenge of the game and earning in-game currency to buy in-game upgrades and cosmetics.**

“*[It’s] a new game from December 2025... called **Red Light, Green Light**. You have to **try and get it at the end of the line so you can win and move on to the next line**. I am playing on my own with random players... This game is like the movie *Squid Game* where, **if you make the wrong move, then you get shot**. There is a traffic light that goes red light when my character needs to stop, and green light for ‘Safe to Walk’... **You can win in-game currency, which is 4/5/6 billions of winning. You can buy different classes to do different things.**”*

– **Aamir, Boy, 9 years old (Wave 4)**

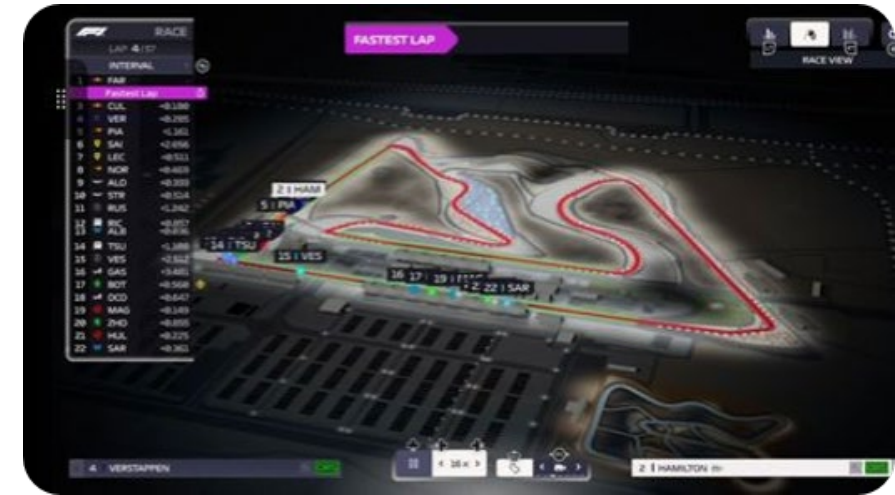


Image Source: Screenshot from Farid’s diary upload: F1 Manager 24

One 9-year-old boy panellist **received a Robux (Roblox currency) gift card** as a prize from his **teacher** for ‘star of the week’ in his class. (Star of the week is a common reward in primary schools, celebrating students’ weekly achievements.)



CASE STUDY



Researcher reflections: The panellist explained that to become a moderator for a Discord server, you need to be aged 13+***. According to him, you have to speak to the creator of the Discord server via a privately-coded lobby in-game, and voice chat with the server owner. He explained that the server owner then confirms the user's age via their voice. However, he believed that this process could mean someone younger, passing as 13+ years-old, could become a moderator, and that the "power" could get into the wrong hands.

**Gorilla Tag is a popular free-to-play, multiplayer VR game where players act as legless gorillas, using hand movements to run, jump, and climb.

*** Users officially need to be 13+ to register for Discord, this is enforced by self-declaration.

VIRTUAL REALITY* IN GAMING

In **Wave 2**, we began to hear low-level comments about panellists engaging with Virtual Reality (VR). However, in **Wave 3**, we noticed an increase in mentions of VR amongst boy panellists who were using it across gaming, but also as a form of livestreaming. For example, a boy panellist aged **15 years old** increased his game play on Gorilla Tag** (a VR game), appreciating its immersive nature and regular updates (e.g., Halloween updates), and in-built reporting system.

He would join the game via various **Discord server* links** that he found on his FYP (For You Page), then he'd enter a **public lobby*** and play with 'randoms' (who he understood were mostly the same age - he can "tell by their voice" - with a few anomalies who were either younger than him or appeared to be adults).

He applied to, and became, an **online moderator* on a Discord server**. Being a moderator for this server meant that he had the power to kick people out of the Discord server related game lobbies if someone made a comment that he felt to be rude - which he did, when he banned a younger child for saying racial slurs.

*"... the game mostly feels safe... if someone is rude, they have an **in-built reporting system** where you can select a name and give a reason for why."*
- Noah, Boy, 15 years old (Wave 3)

*"Anyone can be a **moderator** [for Discord servers]. However, the one I applied for you did have to be 13+ because, if they were to let a child onto the moderator team... they could go around doing whatever they wanted... you have to meet up in-game [with] a **private lobby code**... you'll talk to them for a bit and they'll say, 'Hey, you sound old enough, you can be a moderator.'"*
- Noah, Boy, 15 years old (Wave 3)

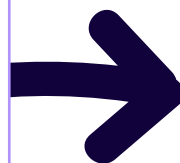




**Panellist and
parental
reactions to
online
experiences**



In this section, we explore **panellists' and their parents' reactions to their online experiences**, including approaches to managing **screen time** and **interactions with strangers**. We also cover panellists' experiences of **age assurance and instances where these measures are circumvented** to access apps or content beyond their age.



Panellists' and parental reactions to online experiences – summary findings:

Unwanted contact from strangers online caused concern and distress among both panellists and parents, leading some parents to ban certain apps.

Some parents were proactively trying to put restrictions in place (such as implementing screen time limits and physically hiding devices from their child), but said they were not always effective, as panellists described ways to bypass controls.

Panellists were likely to report negative experiences to their parents. Older panellists were more likely than younger ones to report content to the platforms themselves, but some felt disheartened if they did not see any impact of their actions.

Several panellists were aware of age assurance checks on apps, however many of the younger panellists were finding effective work-arounds to bypass the age checks.

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Some of the panellists' parents were proactively setting online restrictions for their children, but they weren't always effective



Beyond attempting to prevent interactions with strangers, some parents of panellists were **taking additional steps to protect their children online**. For example, a few of the panellists had been asked by parents or caregivers to **delete TikTok** after hearing about potential **online harms on the platform** (either from their child's school or from other parents).

However, some of the online restrictions parents were taking were proving to be ineffective with their children:

In Wave 2, researchers heard more about parents attempting to **navigate settings and restrictions in their children's apps to manage screen time**. This included a 13-year-old panellist who was allowed to have **3 hours of screen time each day**. Her parents had also set time restrictions on her TikTok account, where she could not access it between 10pm and 6am. However, she found she was able to easily **bypass this** and snooze the time limit notifications – enabling her to still use TikTok outside of these hours.

In another example, the parents of a 10-year-old panellist had allowed their son to have **access to YouTube (rather than YouTube Kids)** as he was playing Fortnite and wanted to be able to access specific Fortnite-related content (only available on the main YouTube platform). His parents attempted to **set an age restriction to not show any content available to 18+ year-olds**, but they found that **he was still encountering content they felt to be age-inappropriate**.

*"I'm **no longer allowed TikTok** after we had an **assembly my parents attended...** they were worried about the content and dangers I might see. I don't mind but **I do feel left out of group chats** that talk about TikTok trends... Instagram is always about 3 days late."*

- Olga, Girl, 15 years old (Wave 1)

*"I've given up with time limits as she'll always find a way around it... We had set time limits with our internet provider, but she can just hot spot or use her 4G. I **regret giving her a phone so young**. My advice to anyone with a child now is... just don't do it!"*

- Mum of Girl, 13, Jasmin (Wave 3)

*"It doesn't seem like there is a way to set it for his age but allow the exception of gaming content such as Fortnite... he was watching this weird video where a grown-up was voicing over how she doesn't allow her child food... which just **felt like child abuse content**."*

- Mum of Boy, 10, Darnell (Wave 2)

For parents of panellists under 16, they felt like they were fighting a losing battle with screen time limits



Across Waves 3-4, researchers probed parents on what screen time limits or settings they were implementing for their children. Parents of panellists under the age of 16 explained how they felt they had very **little control** over their children's screen time – and commented on how they found **time management tools ineffective. For example...**

Failed attempts at self-regulation

A 12-year-old panellist's parent explained how she wanted her daughter to manage her own time and **self-regulate**, but it didn't appear to work because she found her daughter on her phone at 4am (and then "cranky" the next day), she then reverted to trying to oversee her daughter's screen time herself.

*"We tried to let her manage her own screen time, but then she ends up **being on her phone until 4am** and then she's cranky the next day at school and can't concentrate."
– Mum of Girl, 12, Iman (Wave 3)*

Ineffective screen time tools

We heard some low-level comments from parents who didn't find screen time limits very effective. One parent explained that their child would still request more time, which was felt to negate the point of the screen time limit. Parents also explained how they find the **screen time battle hard work** and always end up accepting their child's request for more time. Or, in the case of one of the 15-year-old panellists, he managed to find a 'hack' where if he was to use a different device, the screen time limits didn't apply.

*"My **biggest worry** is the **amount of time he spends online**. But **it's a generational thing**... it's how they get information and we're just as bad... it's how I send him information, get hold of him, track him... it's hard to say you don't want them to spend time online but **we're making a generation where everything revolves around it, even homework! It's hard to monitor that balance.**"
– Mum of Boy, 11, Elliot (Wave 4)*

Physically hiding devices

In another example, a parent of a 13-year-old explained how she had no choice other than to **hide her daughter's phone under her pillow** after her daughter still managed to sneak it out of her parents' room at night. We also heard from a parent of a 14-year-old that their family now has a **tech cupboard** where all devices go in at 9pm and can be accessed again at 7am the next morning. On the way to school, the same parent will also put her daughter's phone in the boot, so that she isn't solo scrolling.

*"We have a **tech cupboard** and say all devices go in there at 9pm but it doesn't always happen as sometimes she's only just finished her homework at 9pm and then needs some downtime."
– Mum of Girl, 14, Lina (Wave 4)*

For panellists aged 16 and over, managing screen time was often more self-directed



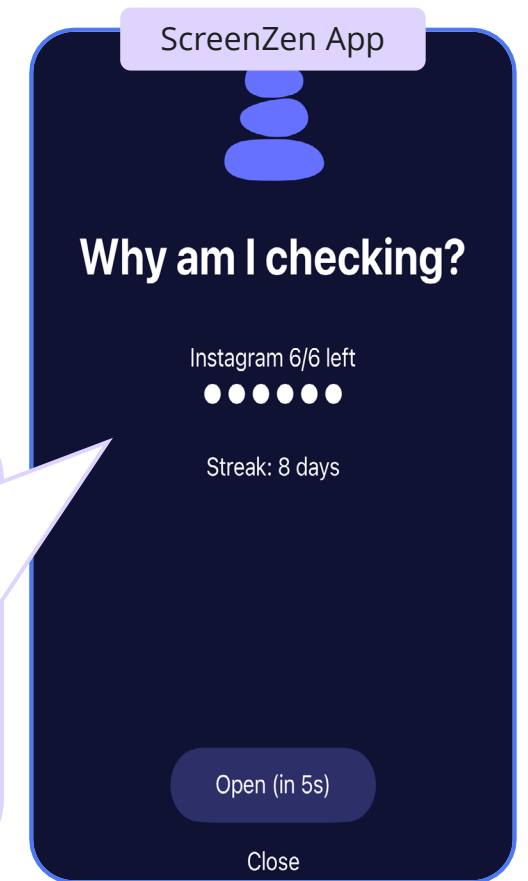
Panellists over 16 years old explained how they could recognise the impact of high screen time on their behaviour, and would self-impose their own limits, seeking out specific productivity apps to help them manage it.

Examples mentioned by panellists aged 16 and over:

- 17-year-old Qadira explained how she used the **Flora app*** while revising. She commented on how it blocks her from non-study apps and keeps her on track for an amount of time she sets.
- 16-year-old Ruby explained how she used the app **ScreenZen**** to restrict how much she's using certain apps a day.

*"The one that I used **to turn off my other apps** is **'Flora'**: you get a seed for a tree that you want to grow, and you **set it for a certain time**. You can choose what apps you're allowed to use. I would have my Spotify, my notes app, and Safari. It **disables all the other apps, and if you use those apps, it kills your tree.**"*
- Qadira, Girl, 17 years old (Wave 3)

*"[ScreenZen] you put into the app what app you want it to restrict, how long you want on that app a day, and how long you want to wait to open the app. I put it to **restrict my use of Instagram to 30 minutes a day and have found it really useful to ensure I don't just go on social media when I'm bored.** I only use it when I actually want to. It also **blocks notifications from that app. It's helpful to reduce distractions...**"*
- Ruby, Girl, 16 years old (Wave 3)



**Flora* is a gamified, Pomodoro-style productivity and focus app that encourages users to put down their phones to grow virtual trees and build positive, distraction-free habits.

***ScreenZen* is a free, donation-supported app designed to reduce screen time and break phone addiction by introducing friction to app usage.

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Online games are places panellists encountered interactions from strangers and led parents to take protective action



Across Waves 1-4, several panellists recalled how they encountered strangers online, through gaming. This is something that many of the panellists' parents were trying to take steps to avoid. Parents of younger panellists (under 12s) were more proactive in this, whereas older panellists' parents expressed feeling like they had less control.

Some panellists described interacting with strangers when **gaming**, including on **Roblox, Fortnite, or when V-Tubing on games such as Gorilla Tag**. Although many of these interactions were functional, (trading and playing with other people, for example) some instances involved being **contacted by other players** with messages that made them feel uncomfortable.

Several parents had **banned panellists** from using **Roblox**, specifically due to increased interaction with strangers. Another younger girl panellist expressed concerns to her mum about interactions with strangers on Roblox. In response, her **mum intervened** to protect her daughter while gaming, **buying her a private server** to stop interactions with strangers.

*"So, **somebody joined the game and they're like, 'Oh, hey, can we be friends?'** I was like, 'Yeah, I don't mind.' Then this girl **followed me and then thought that we were dating and started to call me her boyfriend**. I immediately shut that down and left the game because **that doesn't make me feel comfortable** if people think they can just do that... that isn't right to do. I **reported them**."*
- Elliott, Boy, 11 years old (Wave 3)

*"My mum has **banned me** from talking to people through my headset unless it's a real friend I know."*
- Elliott, Boy, 11 years old (Wave 2)

*"I bought her a **private server** in Roblox - she kept telling me that people she didn't know would try to follow her or break into her house. With the server, she has a list of friends that she can invite."*
- Mum of Girl, 9, Chloe (Wave 1)

Social media is also a place panellists encountered interactions from strangers, and led to either the panellist or parent taking protective action



Panellists told us about unwanted contact from strangers on **Snapchat and TikTok**.

In one example, a younger* panellist had a disturbing interaction on Snapchat where a stranger requested **nude images**. Since this incident, the panellist's parent no longer allows her to send a picture of her face or anything that would show her **personal identity**. The incident upset the panellist, who was left feeling scared and regretful after the event.

** We have chosen to omit some details about this panellist in order to further protect their identity.*

*"Me and my friend were having a **sleepover** when this person added me, and I knew previously my other friend had been texting him so I thought it would be okay to add him back... then we started chatting. That was all okay when suddenly he kept asking continuously **for nude pictures** of myself... I blocked them and told my mum - she got it sorted and phoned the police."*

- Girl, under 12 years old (Wave 1)

Also on Snapchat, there was an example where a **16-year-old girl panellist** explained how she noticed the Snapchat **'Quick Add' feature** (which recommends people to add based on mutual friends), was a feature that drives interaction with strangers. Although this wasn't about her own experience, she mentioned how her friend **met her current boyfriend** through this feature. She doesn't use this feature herself, as she finds it "a bit strange".

*"**'Quick Add'** says who you're mutual friends with, and most of the time you don't actually know the person and they just add you. I don't use it that much now; I think it's a bit strange sending people you don't know or haven't spoken to in person a photo of yourself. **My friend met her boyfriend through the 'Quick Add'** - actually, that's happened for a few of my friends."*

- Qadira, Girl, 17 years old (Wave 3)

In another example, a younger* panellist explained how a **26-year-old man had direct messaged him on TikTok** asking if he wanted to go out. He said no, blocked and reported him.

** We have chosen to omit some details about this panellist in order to further protect their identity.*

*"**Someone texted me on TikTok and asked me if I wanted to go out...** I said no... and how old am I ...and they said 'I'm only 26'... **so I blocked them.** I'm not dealing with them today. Blocked...and reported them ...I was calm because they didn't take it a step further ...it wasn't their fault [as he indicated the man wouldn't know his age] but at the same time they shouldn't be asking me out."*

- Boy, under 12 years old (Wave 4)

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Panellists often alerted their parents, and sometimes the platforms themselves, to unwanted online experiences



Reporting to parents

In most cases (particularly with younger panellists), the panellists themselves described how they would let their parents know when they had experienced or heard something from other users that they didn't like or were unsure of. In response to this, **most parents of panellists advised their child to block or delete the other users (individuals or groups), depending on the platform.**

*"I usually **screenshot** things from group chats and share with my mum and I delete groups if I don't like what's being said in them... like in primary school, people would swear or send weird stuff. I sometimes get random **scam messages**, and I tell Mum and she blocks them."*

- Iman, Girl, 12 years old (Wave 1)

Reporting to the platform

Many panellists described how they would **report content** they had seen if it personally affected them and if it continued to come up repeatedly.

However, **reporting content was less common among panellists who had done this previously and felt it hadn't made a difference.**

Reporting was more likely when panellists felt that the content was "serious" enough to warrant it – for example, where it was more obviously harmful (e.g., violent content, sexual content and scam posts).

*"My friend reported something on TikTok, but it never got sorted and the same content **still appeared a few days later...** so there's **no point** reporting stuff. All social media companies are run by the same person, so there's no hope."*

- Noah, Boy, 14 years old (Wave 1)

Use of the 'Not Interested' button

In another example, two 12-year-old panellists explained how they saw a **shift in their recommended videos on their For You Page** (e.g., less 'sad girl content'* and 'help videos'*) since using the '*Not Interested' feature button on **TikTok**. They found that this made their For You Page much more positive.

*"Some of those videos can be relatable because I don't like school, **but some are too sad, or I don't relate to them.** You can click '**not interested**', which means it doesn't come up on your For You Page as much, and then they go away so that you aren't seeing as many sad videos."*

- Grace, Girl, 12 years old (Wave 4)



CASE STUDY

*"It felt like **everything was running away with us** and we had to pull it back. I never want to pry on her personal group chats but after the mum told me what was going on, I was glad - we've all intervened and since, they haven't spoken about that kinda thing or Lina will tell me if the topic comes up and we discuss it."*
- Mum of Girl, 14, Lina (Wave 4)

PARENTAL OVERSIGHT OF EATING DISORDER CHAT ON WHATSAPP

Lina, a **14-year-old girl panellist**, unbeknownst to her mum, explained how she was **receiving lots of messages in a WhatsApp group** she had with 3 girls from her previous school. One of the girls kept messaging the group about her **eating disorder**.

The mum of the girl who was sharing details of her disorder reached out to Lina's mum to inform her about what had been going on, making her aware that Lina had become quite **emotionally invested** - offering advice and also sharing examples of what she doesn't like to eat.

As a result, Lina's mum explained to researchers that she'd implemented a **no screen policy for the weekend** after it happened. Now, she **no longer lets her daughter access her phone alone** (even if she's in the backseat of the car) or after 9pm. Lina's mum was especially concerned because of **her daughter's neurodivergence**, and how she may interpret and respond to sensitive content. During Wave 4, Lina's mum explained how her daughter is no longer in contact with the girl as she's become much closer to her new group of friends at secondary school.

*"My daughter just messages a few of them individually now, but I think she's a lot closer to this new group of friends at her new school now... **she definitely seems much happier in herself.**"*
- Mum of Girl, 14, Lina (Wave 4)



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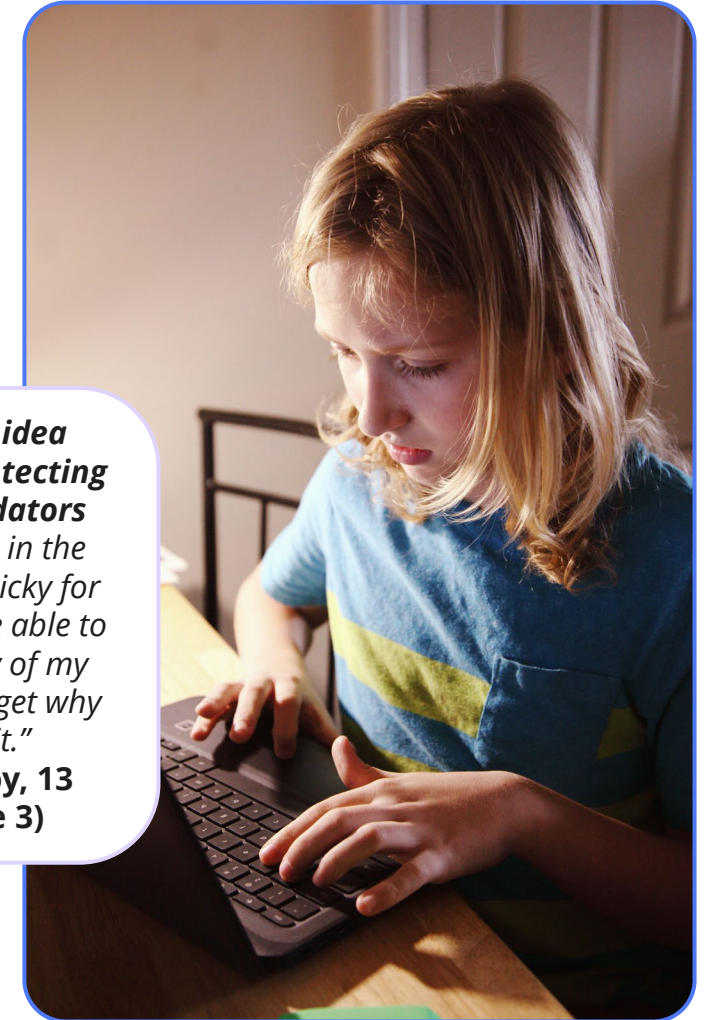
Several panellists were aware of age assurance checks on apps, especially the latest Roblox age verification process



During Waves 3 and 4, when researchers probed panellists specifically about whether they had noticed any changes or had been exposed to age assurance checks across the apps they use, they shared a few examples:

- On Roblox, a 13-year-old boy panellist, Muhammad, explained how he was asked to **check his age via photo**. He said he was aware of the reasoning behind this as, according to him, this verification was introduced off the back of the Schlep case [1]. He explained how he was supportive of it because he perceived it to be protecting users like him from 'sexual predators' but was sad because he believed that he wouldn't be able to chat with friends outside of his peer group e.g., over 16+).
- All panellists commented that they were **aware you must be 13 years old to have a social media account**, but that they found ways to circumvent the age check if underage (*see next slide 78*).
- One 16-year-old boy panellist, Petros, explained how he was aware of age assurance tools being in place on X, YouTube, and Twitch. He believed that these were in place to stop younger people **seeing over 18 + content**, such as gambling and drinking.

Image sourced: Pexels, Alexander Gray



*"I think **it's a good idea** because it's about **protecting against sexual predators** that we heard about in the Schlep case, but it's tricky for me because I won't be able to play Roblox with any of my friends over 16, but I get why they have to do it."*

- Muhammad, Boy, 13 years old (Wave 3)

[1] "He Hunted Alleged Groomers on Roblox. Then the Company Banned Him": YouTuber uses his platform to 'hunt down' predators on Roblox - <https://www.wired.com/story/he-hunted-alleged-groomers-on-roblox-then-the-company-banned-him/>

However, a few panellists had previously used age assurance circumvention



There were low-level comments from younger panellists who explained how they had used age assurance circumvention to gain access to accounts they were not allowed yet.

One 13-year-old panellist explained how she inputted her **mum's date of birth** when she signed up for a new app, even if it was one she was allowed at 13 years old, such as the app Lemon8*.

"If I download a new app on the app store, I don't have to ask my parents for permission... I usually just put my mum's D.O.B... like 1990, that makes her like 30, right? That usually works."
- Jasmin, Girl, 13 years old (Wave 3)

Another **13-year-old panellist** explained how he would ask his dad's permission to access an app that was above his age, and, if he was underage for the app or game, his **dad would put in his name and age** e.g., an Xbox game such as Grand Theft Auto.

"My dad got me Grand Theft Auto on the Xbox when I was 8... you're supposed to be 18. But he just put it in his name. I probably saw things I shouldn't have had at that age, like lots of blood."
- Muhammad, Boy, 13 years old (Wave 3)

One **15-year-old panellist** explained that when he was 9 years old, he **used the year 1990 to access TikTok**. After posting videos of himself, his account was banned because he was recognised as too young.

"When I was 9, I got TikTok by saying I was born in 1990 but that was when there was like no age verification process. But when I posted videos of myself, they would take them down because they recognised I was too young."
- Noah, Boy, 15 years old (Wave 3)

In Wave 4, Roblox introduced new age assurance processes [4]. Teens aged 13-17 who want to access a special feature, 'designed to make hangouts more fun', will have to **check their age via video selfie as part of safety and privacy measures**. Once Roblox estimates the user's age via the **AI-supported age estimation product** persona, they can then use a **new feature called "Trusted Connections"**. Teen users can then add each other as 'Trusted Connections', allowing them to communicate via voice and chat without filters. Roblox claim they will still monitor all conversations for "critical harm[s]", such as grooming.

*Lemon8 is a lifestyle-focused social media app owned by ByteDance (parent company of TikTok) that functions as a hybrid of Instagram and Pinterest.



This report draws together insights from Ofcom's Children's Online Insight Panel on how children described experiencing online platforms, features and content across Wave 1-4. These findings reflect panellists' own perspectives and experiences of navigating their online worlds, rather than an assessment of the effectiveness of individual services or safety measures.

This study, along with various others, have fed into the Children's Online Experiences Report which has been drafted by Ofcom and published on our website [here](#). The Children's Online Experiences Report examines children's online experiences before and after the children's safety duties came into force on 25 July 2025.

The Children's Online Insight Panel is continuing this year, and insights from this research will contribute to Ofcom's broader evidence base on children's online lives, helping to inform future policy thinking.

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Appendix and Glossary

Glossary of Terms [1]*



**Please note, these definitions incorporate descriptions from the panellists and further desk research by Beano Brain, where applicable.*

Term	Meaning
Admin abuse in Roblox	(Also known as 'god-mode') When a game administrator or player with special permissions uses their powers to disrupt gameplay. In Roblox, this can be entertaining and lead to exclusive gifts and experiences for players.
AI (Artificial Intelligence)	Computer systems that can perform tasks that normally require human intelligence, such as recognising speech, generating images, or chatting with users.
AI moderator/moderation (social media)	The use of AI tools to help monitor and manage content on platforms: spotting harmful posts, filtering comments, or enforcing community rules.
Anime	A style of animated TV and film originating from Japan, often popular with children and young people.
ASMR content	ASMR (Autonomous Sensory Meridian Response). A relaxing "tingly" feeling some people experience in response to soft sounds or gentle visuals, often created in videos designed to soothe viewers.
ASMR content (Split-screen)	Content where ASMR-style content plays on one side, and then on the other side another video plays which is typically unrelated.
Bone smashing	"Bone smashing" is a dangerous, non-scientific practice popularised on social media (specifically TikTok) as a method of *looksmaxxing to alter facial structure. It involves deliberately breaking or fracturing facial bones, such as the jaw or cheekbones, with the misguided belief that they will heal in a more aesthetically pleasing, defined, or masculine shape.
Big sister content	Videos where creators act like an older sibling offering advice, support, or life tips to viewers.
Body stigma content	Content that promotes negative stereotypes, prejudice, discrimination, or shame regarding an individual's body size, shape, or weight.
Chatbot (AI)	A computer program that can talk with users through text or voice, often used for support, information, or entertainment.
Couch to 5K	A fitness programme designed to help beginners gradually train to run 5 kilometres.
Cross-Age Chat	An in-game text chat channel that allows communication between players of different age groups and is not restricted by age-based access controls.
Cryotherapy	Cryotherapy, or "cold therapy," is a therapeutic technique that uses extremely low temperatures—often liquid nitrogen—to freeze and destroy abnormal tissue, reduce inflammation, or alleviate pain.
'Create Fundraiser' feature on TikTok	A tool that allows users to raise money for charities directly through TikTok videos or profiles.

Glossary of Terms [2]*



**Please note, these definitions incorporate descriptions from the panellists and further desk research by Beano Brain, where applicable.*

Term	Meaning
Ephemeral (disappearing) messages	Messages that automatically vanish after a short time, commonly used on social media platforms.
Eating disorder	Unhealthy patterns of eating or attitudes toward food and body image, which can affect wellbeing.
Death diving	Death diving is a Norwegian extreme sport where participants jump from high platforms (often 10 metres) in a horizontal, spread-eagle pose, only curling into a protective foetal position just before hitting the water.
Discord server	A dedicated online space within Discord where communities can chat using text, voice, or video.
Drafts (on TikTok)	Unpublished videos saved by users to edit or post later.
For You Page (FYP)	The For You Page (FYP) is a personalised, algorithmically curated content feed on platforms like TikTok and Instagram, designed to show users videos tailored to their specific interests, engagement history, and behaviour.
Fake news	False or misleading information spread online, sometimes shared unintentionally.
GB news	A British television news channel known for opinion-led programming.
Gifts (Livestreams)	Virtual items viewers can buy and send to creators during livestreams as a form of support.
'Glow-Up'	A transformation in someone's appearance, confidence, or lifestyle, often shared on social media.
The Gender Health Gap	Refers to women not always getting fair access to healthcare as men in the UK.
Halo effect	The halo effect is a cognitive bias where a positive impression of one trait or quality of a person, product, or brand influences perceptions of unrelated traits, often leading to overly favourable judgments.
Help videos	Social media videos where the creator is asking for some sort of help or assistance (typically in the form of interaction with the video or monetary support).
Hot cupping	The "hot cupping" trend on TikTok primarily refers to facial cupping, a beauty and wellness practice adapted from traditional Chinese medicine that uses small glass or silicone suction cups to promote a, sculpted, and "glowing" appearance.
Hunter eyes	Hunter eyes are an often masculinised and intense eye-shape, characterised by a deep-set, almond form with minimal upper eyelid exposure and a slight upward (positive) canthal tilt.

Glossary of Terms [3]*



**Please note, these definitions incorporate descriptions from the panellists and further desk research by Beano Brain, where applicable.*

Term	Meaning
Ice bucket challenge	The ice bucket challenge involves pouring a bucket of ice and water over a person's head, who then nominates others to do the same and to donate to charity.
In-game currency	Virtual money used within games to buy items, upgrades, or cosmetics.
In-game pop-up messages	Notifications or prompts that appear inside a video game, often giving instructions, warnings, or offers.
K-pop	A genre of popular music originating from South Korea, known for its choreography and dedicated fan communities.
Livestreaming	Broadcasting video in real time so viewers can watch events or gameplay as they happen or even observe other creators chatting.
Livestreams (Lives)	Live video streams on social media where creators interact with viewers instantly.
Live updates	Regular changes or fixes made to a game by its developers. These updates can add new features, improve gameplay, or correct bugs, and they download automatically when the game is updated.
Looksmaxxing	Looksmaxxing content focuses on changing physical appearances to become 'more attractive', ranging from mainstream fitness advice to more extreme body modification techniques.
Lobbies (gaming)	A virtual, pre-match staging area where players gather, socialise, and configure settings before they begin an online multiplayer match.
Meme	A funny or relatable image, video, or phrase that spreads rapidly online.
Maps (gaming)	Player-made or built environments where games take place, such as worlds, levels, or arenas.
Maps (social media)	Interactive maps within social media platforms that show location-based information. This can include seeing where posts were created, exploring local content, viewing nearby events or hotspots, or (on some platforms) seeing friends' locations if they choose to share them.
Minecraft realms	Private, subscription-based servers in Minecraft where players can safely play with invited friends.
Mukbang	Videos where creators eat large quantities of food while interacting with their audience.
'Not Interested' button on TikTok	This button allows users to signal when they're not interested in specific content, and signals to the algorithm that they'd like to see less of this type of content or creator.
Online moderator on Discord	A person responsible for enforcing rules, managing discussions, and keeping a Discord community safe.

Glossary of Terms [4]*



**Please note, these definitions incorporate descriptions from the panellists and further desk research by Beano Brain, where applicable.*

Term	Meaning
Peptides	A popular performance-enhancing aid in the bodybuilding community. They are short chains of amino acids, which are small molecules that are the building blocks of peptides and proteins. They can be applied to the skin in creams or oils, consumed as ingestible supplements, or some specialised peptides can be injected.
Private server	A controlled online space accessible only to invited users, often used for gaming or group communication.
Roblox age verification	Teens aged 13-17 who want to access a special feature, designed to make hangouts more fun, will have to verify their age via video selfie as part of safety and privacy measures.
Roblox Studios	The creation tool within Roblox that allows users to build games and experiences.
Robux	Robux is the virtual in-game currency used on Roblox. Players can use Robux to purchase virtual items such as avatar accessories, clothing, game passes, private servers, and special abilities within games. Robux is most commonly purchased with real money or through a Roblox subscription.
Skins	Cosmetic items that change how a player's character or equipment looks without affecting gameplay.
'Sad girl' content	A style of posts or videos focusing on themes of sadness, loneliness, or emotional struggle, often aestheticised for social media.
Streaks	A running count of how many days in a row a user completes a specific action on a platform. This can include messaging someone daily, playing a game each day, completing learning tasks, or maintaining any other repeated activity. Streaks are designed to encourage regular engagement and reward consistency.
Stickers	Digital images or graphics used in messaging, stories, or videos for decoration or expression.
The Reform Party	A UK-registered political party, founded in 2018 as the Brexit Party and renamed Reform UK in 2021.
Ultra-processed foods (UPFs)	Processed foods typically comprising of five or more ingredients, often including additives like preservatives, emulsifiers, and artificial colours not used in home cooking.
User generated content (UGC)	User-generated content (UGC) is any form of content—videos, images, reviews, or testimonials—created by customers or fans rather than brands.
V-Tuber	A content creator who uses a virtual animated character to appear in videos or livestreams.
VR (virtual reality)	Technology that immerses users in a computer-generated world.
75 hard challenge	A strict 75-day lifestyle challenge involving daily exercise, diet rules, reading, and progress photos.

Meet the Panellists [1]



Aamir, 9, Boy, London

Average time online:
3hrs a day

Meet Aamir, whose interests are **fashion, anime, physical health, fitness, influencers, gaming, and sport**. Aamir loves to play **Roblox, Fifa, and Basketball Legends** both alone and with friends or family. In Wave 2, Aamir's parent shared how they **imposed screen time limits to support his eye health**. Aamir's parent also shared how they allowed him on the PlayStation if he achieved grades C or above in all subjects. In Wave 3, Aamir shared how he and his siblings created a joint **YouTube account** and were **posting videos** about new toys he was gifted, Islam, and gift wrapping.

*"I love to play **Roblox** with my **brothers and sometimes friends...** we hook my mum's phone up to the TV so we can all view the same screen, especially when watching **YouTube**."*



Bianca, 9, Girl, Yorkshire

Average time online:
2hrs a day

Meet Bianca, whose interests are **gaming, arts and crafts, outdoor play, watching YouTube Shorts**, and playing **Times Tables Rock Stars**. She also likes playing **Roblox**. In **Wave 2**, Bianca's parent banned her use of Roblox (except Grow A Garden) because of concerns about her being in contact with strangers. In **Wave 3**, Bianca started using TikTok for the first time and loves watching **TikTok shopping hauls and day-in-the-life videos**.

*"Today I watched a few shopping hauls on TikTok, **but I loved watching a shopping haul** by [Influencer name] - they are sisters."*



Chloe, 9, Girl, London

Average time online:
4hrs a day

Meet Chloe, whose passions are **coding, going to Brownies after school, reading, playing games, outdoor play, and sports**. Chloe loves using Python to code, playing on Roblox, and keeping up with all the new gaming releases.

*"Things that feel new in the online world are **OBBY games**. These are games with obstacles/different stages. **Role playing games...** I think they are popular between my friends and I because they are fun."*



Darnell, 10, Boy, Northwest

Average time online:
3hrs a day

Meet Darnell, whose interests are **sports, influencers, and YouTube**. Darnell has been formally diagnosed with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). Darnell loves playing Fortnite and watching influencers on YouTube. In **Wave 3**, Darnell's parent gave him his **first phone** so they could contact each other in case of emergencies. During this period, Darnell also started playing Roblox for the first time. In **Wave 4**, Darnell's parent shared he was spending more time online while the parent was recovering from an operation. Darnell uses his phone to text friends via SMS because some of his friends have Android phones.

*"My online digital world has involved watching lots of YouTube videos, playing lots of **Fortnite with and without my friends and my cousins**, and **listening to music at home by using Alexa**."*

Meet the Panellists [2]



Elliott, 11, Boy, East Midlands

Average time online:
4hrs a day

Meet Elliott, whose interests are **gaming, influencers, celebrities, TV, and film**. Elliott loves playing **Roblox, Fortnite, and watching gaming influencers** on YouTube. Elliott also creates videos for YouTube. **In Wave 2**, Elliott's parent banned him from **Gorilla Tag** after an incident with hackers in the game. Also, during Wave 2, Elliott started using **Snapchat and Instagram** for the first time and his parent would monitor the content closely. **In Wave 3**, Elliott started **V-Tubing**. In Wave 4, Elliott had stopped V-Tubing and started making games on Roblox Studios.

"I also like to spend time on YouTube and search things up. I usually watch shorts or scroll things that are to do with the games I'm playing, like new skins. It means I know what's going on and I'm not missing out."



Grace, 12, Girl, Northern Ireland

Average time online:
4hrs a day

Meet Grace, whose interests are **dance, sports, fashion, and chatting to friends**. Grace loves playing **on Roblox, watching tutorials on YouTube**, watching influencers, and keeping up with the latest TikTok trends.

*"My favourite things to do online would probably be **scrolling on TikTok or watching YouTube**. It relaxes me and keeps me entertained so I'm not as bored."*



Farid, 12, Boy, Northeast

Average time online:
3hrs a day

Meet Farid, whose interests are **sports, reading, and watching movies**. Farid loves watching **Instagram Reels**, using **WhatsApp** to keep up with group chats, and playing **Fortnite** on his Xbox. **In Wave 4**, Farid received a **3D printer** for Christmas and an Xbox Razer hand controller.

*"I was **chatting to my school friends** tonight on WhatsApp. We have lots of groups and **we share videos and usually chat about computer games**. We shared some gaming videos about Fortnite because we all play it together. I enjoy chatting with my friends because I don't always see them on a weekend."*



Iman, 12, Girl, Southeast

Average time online:
3hrs a day

Meet Iman, whose interests are **fashion, music, dancing, TV, and film**. Iman has been formally diagnosed with **Autism Spectrum Disorder(ASD) and Dyslexia**. She loves using **Snapchat, playing Toca Life, watching YouTube Shorts**, and speaking to friends on **WhatsApp**. **In Wave 2**, Iman's parent allowed her on **TikTok** and **were trialling no screen time limits** over the summer holidays to **support self-regulation and resilience**. **In Wave 3**, Iman shared she had been on her screens less because she had a boyfriend. **In Wave 4**, Iman was using the therapy app Kooth for the first time.

*"I have been using **WhatsApp most of the day** today - just **texting my friends and putting pictures of my friends on my status**."*

Meet the Panellists [3]



Harry, 13, Boy, East

Average time online:
5hrs a day

Meet Harry, whose interests are **gaming, spending time with his friends, and learning new languages**. Harry has been formally diagnosed with **Autism Spectrum Disorder(ASD)**. Harry loves playing Age of Conflict where he creates new countries. He also loves creating in Minecraft. **In Wave 2**, Harry's parent allowed him to get **Instagram, Reddit, and Facebook** accounts following his 13th birthday.

"On Planet Minecraft, I have uploaded 2 Minecraft maps so far: Berlin and Ancient Egypt. I felt happy to see how popular it is because it took a long time to make it. I looked at this at 8:00 and looked at my analytics for 5 minutes."



Jasmin, 13, Girl, Southeast

Average time online:
5hrs a day

Meet Jasmin, whose passions are **TV, social media, sports, fashion, and beauty**. She loves keeping up with the latest trends on **TikTok**, sharing with friends, and keeping up with the latest influencer drama and playing scary games on Roblox. **In Wave 4**, Jasmin shared how she was gifted a **new iPhone and iPad** after both of hers broke. Jasmin also **stopped using Instagram** and other apps as much because she felt that the content was not changing.

"Lots of people are doing this dance at the moment; it's trending - I think it's really funny!"



Kwame, 13, Boy, Scotland

Average time online:
5hrs a day

Meet Kwame, whose passions are **sports, bikes, cars, and playing with his friends**. Kwame loves watching TikTok videos, messaging his friends on Snapchat, and playing Fortnite. **Kwame left the panel in Wave 1 (after month 1) and was replaced with Qadira**.

"I scroll on TikTok - I love bikes and it helps me decide how I want to upgrade my bike. It makes me happy and helps to motivate me."



Muhammad, 13, Boy, West Midlands

Average time online:
5hrs a day

Meet Muhammad, whose passions are **sports, cars, music, and spending time with friends**. Muhammad loves playing **Rocket League and EA FC25** on his Xbox. **In Wave 3**, Muhammad shared he was moving back in with his father. He was also starting secondary school after previously being homeschooled. **Muhammad left the panel in Wave 4, month 2** because of an online ban imposed by his parent.

"This month I've played a lot of EA FC25 on my Xbox and played a new game called UFC5."

Meet the Panellists [4]



Lina, 14, Girl, East Midlands

Average time online:
4hrs a day

Meet Lina, whose passions are **K-pop music, beauty, and celebrities**. Lina has been formally diagnosed with **Autism Spectrum Disorder(ASD)** and **Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder(ADHD)**. Lina loves finding funny memes on Instagram reels, following her favourite music artists on **Snapchat**, and listening to music artists on Spotify. **In Wave 3**, Lina's parent shared how her phone was taken away for a weekend over concerns her friend's mental health issues were putting pressure on Lina to reply.

*"I've seen this picture on Instagram on the official account for a **band called Big Ocean**."*



Olga, 16, Girl, Wales

Average time online:
5hrs a day

Meet Olga, who spends her time on **Snapchat, listening to music on Spotify, and sending memes to friends from Instagram**. Olga loves keeping up her daily **Snapchat streaks** with her friends and checking her **Fitbit**.

*"I enjoy messaging friends online, mostly **sending them silly pictures** of something I might find funny or something that's part of a conversation."*



Noah, 15, Boy, Yorkshire

Average time online:
9hrs a day

Meet Noah, whose interests are **gaming with friends, watching TikTok, and going to the park with his friends**. Noah loves to use **Snapchat, WhatsApp, TikTok and Discord** and mostly uses these apps to play **Roblox and Fortnite** with his friends. **In Wave 2**, Noah received a new **VR headset**. **In Wave 4**, Noah moved, with his mother, into her partner's home which they share with their children. Noah started playing his mother's partner's **Xbox**.

*"I call my friends using **Snapchat** and we play **Roblox games together**. I like doing that because I like **bonding with my friends**."*



Petros, 16, Boy, Scotland

Average time online:
9hrs a day

Meet Petros, whose passions are **football, basketball, and boxing**. Eventually he would like to **join the army**. Petros loves going on his phone, watching YouTube while he eats dinner, and watching **self-improvement, army content, and football edits on TikTok**. **In Wave 3**, Petros started an apprenticeship.

*"My favourite things to do online are **scrolling through TikTok** because the algorithm [is mostly] related to my interests (military, gym, football)."*

Meet the Panellists [5]



**Qadira, 17, Girl,
Northern Ireland**

Average time online:
7hrs a day

Meet Qadira, whose passions are **Christianity**, engaging with religious content, and using **Pinterest** for general inspiration. Qadira loves spending time watching **Instagram Reels** and listening to music on **Spotify**. **Qadira joined the panel in Wave 1, month 1, replacing Kwame.**

*"My favourite thing to do online is definitely **scrolling through Instagram** watching funny animal videos..."*



Sam, 17, Boy, Scotland

Average time online:
5 1/2hrs a day

Meet Sam, whose passions are **playing sports, spending time with his friends, gaming, and using social media**. Sam loves scrolling through Instagram, watching edits on TikTok, and playing games with friends. **Sam left the panel in Wave 2, month 1 and was replaced with Thomas.**

*"My favourite things to do online at the moment are probably stream different **movies, TV shows, anime, and play video games** - this feels interesting to me as I like to watch longer shows that go into depth about different things within their world, and **gaming is exciting as I play with my friends and have a laugh.**"*



Ruby, 17, Girl, Wales

Average time online:
2hrs a day

Meet Ruby, whose passions are spending time on her **farm, focusing on her school studies, and engaging with politics and activism**. She loves spending time on **Pinterest**, watching **Instagram Reels**, listening to music on **Spotify**, and messaging her friends on **Snapchat**. **In Wave 2**, Ruby was using TikTok for the first time. **In Wave 3**, Ruby shared how she started a part-time waitressing job and driving lessons, also using the Drive Test app for the first time. **In Wave 4**, Ruby got an Apple Watch and mentioned having two other jobs.

*"Group chats are one of my favourite aspects of my social media as they allow me to have good conversations with friends at any point and can often be a **mood-booster if I'm feeling lonely or stressed.**"*



Thomas, 17, Boy, Wales

Average time online:
4hrs a day

Meet Thomas, whose interests are **playing sports, playing on his console, playing mobile games, and using social media**. Thomas loves scrolling on TikTok, listening to music on Spotify, playing golf, and playing games like **Minecraft, Fortnite, and Clash Royale**. **Thomas joined the panel in Wave 2, month 2, replacing Sam. In Wave 3**, Thomas passed his driving test. **In Wave 4**, Thomas was using the Monzo app for the first time, along with a new bank card.

*"My favourite things to do online are... **speak to friends on Snapchat, scroll on TikTok, and play Clash Royale.** ...Clash Royale is exciting as **I want to have more wins than my friends** and we all play it. **GolfFix is a new app... it records your golf swing and analyses it using AI** and gives you tips to improve..."*

Overview of Sample Specification [1]



Ofcom commissioned agency Beano Brain to recruit and conduct research among Ofcom's dedicated Children's Online Insights Panel. Whilst our target sample was 15 panellists, Beano Brain over-recruited by 5 to mitigate potential dropouts during the year. This meant the specific panellists completing the diaries and IDIs could vary each Wave. Nonetheless, every Wave included 18 diary participants and 15-16 panellists selected for quarterly IDIs based on priority insight areas.

Sample Profile	Criteria Sub-Groups	Quotas
Gender	Boys	10
	Girls	10
Age	8-11	7
	12-15	9
	16-17	4
Location	England - North	4
	England - South	3
	England - Midlands	5
	Scotland	3
	Wales	3
	Northern Ireland	2

Overview of Sample Specification [2]



Ofcom commissioned agency Beano Brain to recruit and conduct research among Ofcom's dedicated Children's Online Insights Panel. Whilst our target sample was 15 panellists, Beano Brain over-recruited by 5 to mitigate potential dropouts during the year. This meant the specific panellists completing the diaries and IDIs could vary each Wave. Nonetheless, every Wave included 18 diary participants and 15-16 panellists selected for quarterly IDIs based on priority insight areas.

Sample Profile	Criteria Sub-Groups	Quotas
Parent's ethnicity	White	14
	Asian	3
	Black African	2
	Mixed Ethnicity	1
Household	Nuclear family	11
	Single Parent	8
	Grandparent with main custody	1
Household income per year	Less than £22,501	2
	£22,501 - £40,000	8
	£40,001 - £60,000	3
	£60,001 - £75,000	4
	£75,001 - £89,000	3

Sample Specification (achieved)



Device ownership

All panellists owned or had access to a smartphone.

10 x owned or had access to a gaming console.

9 x owned or had access to a gaming laptop or desktop.

Frequency of online usage

All panellists were actively engaged online users who agreed they 'spent almost all their spare time on their screen or gaming online.'

All went online multiple times a day and spent a minimum of 2 hours online per day (not including school/homework uses).

Platform and app engagement

All used at least one, or a combination of, social media, messaging services, video-sharing platforms and/or gaming platforms at least a few times week.

Amongst the panel there was a mix of behaviours and activities - for example, creating and uploading content, online gaming, livestreaming, commenting on posts, being in group chats.

Panellist special educational needs

4 x panellists were recruited with additional needs e.g., ADHD, Autism or Dyslexia.

Other information

3 x panellists in this study spoke English and another language that was secondary.



Once recruited, Beano Brain conducted 30-minute onboarding calls with panellists to confirm suitability for the project, and as a chance for Beano Brain researchers to explain the cadence of activities and answer any questions before the first online diary started. Beano Brain also spoke to panellists' parents to ensure they were happy with their child's responsibilities, and that they could support them in being a panel member.

3-day Digi panel

Introduction

Including an overview of activities, key project information, and contacts for the Beano Brain team.

My Online Diary

3 daily diary tasks, asking panellists to upload screenshots, videos, and images showing us their daily online activity with a focus on:

- Apps they're frequently using and what features & functions appeal
- Content and people they've personally interacted with online
- Content and conversations that have evoked an emotional response

Summary: My Online World

A summary task asking panellists to reflect on their online behaviour across the month, with a focus on:

- Their favourite things to do online at the moment
- What feels new in their online world
- Apps/websites they've started or stopped using
- Any content that made them feel sad, scared, worried, or anxious, and what platforms they encountered this on

Follow-up 60 min IDIs (In-Depth Interviews)

Child Panellist interview section (45-50 minutes)

Revisiting examples shared on the community in greater depth and probing on specific questions from the internal project/policy team.

Parent of Panellist interview section (5-10 minutes)

Gaining the parent's perspective of their child's online behaviours, giving them a chance to ask the moderator any questions, and confirming their child is happy to continue to take part.



3-day digital diary with 18 panellists

Wave 1 dates:

Month 1: 6th – 8th March 2025
Month 2: 3rd – 5th April 2025
Month 3: 9th – 11th May 2025

Wave 2 dates:

Month 1: 6 – 8th June 2025
Month 2: 4th – 6th July 2025
Month 3: 8th – 10th Aug 2025

Wave 3 dates:

Month 1: 5th – 7th Sept 2025
Month 2: 3rd – 5th Oct 2025
Month 3: 7th – 9th Nov 2025

Wave 4 dates:

Month 1: 5th – 7th Dec 2025
Month 2: 9th – 11th Jan 2026
Month 3: 6th – 8th Feb 2026

15-16 x follow-up IDIs

Wave 1 dates:

w/c 17th – w/c 28th March
2025

Wave 2 dates:

w/c 14th – w/c 21st July
2025

Wave 3 dates:

w/c 6th – w/c 13th October
2025

Wave 4 dates:

w/c 12th – w/c 26th
January 2026



As part of the project's set-up and ongoing management, Beano Brain worked with Ofcom to design a safeguarding and ethics policy, along with a separate risk matrix, to ensure all panellists were adequately protected while taking part*. Beano Brain endeavours to ensure children are not exposed to any harm, that their consent is freely given, that they understand what the research involves and the questions being asked of them, and that they are comfortable with the research environment. Beano Brain act on any safeguarding concerns appropriately, following agreed procedures. Due to the longitudinal nature of the project, parental and participant consent is also re-sought at regular intervals during the project.

*This research was conducted in accordance with privacy and data protection principles. Beano Brain is part of the DC Thomson Group, and their privacy policy can be accessed [here](#).

