

AMENDED Exhibit 593

PLAINTIFFS' OMNIBUS OPPOSITION TO DEFENDANTS' MOTIONS FOR SUMMARY JUDGMENT

Case No.: 4:22-md-03047-YGR

MDL No. 3047

In Re: Social Media Adolescent Addiction/Personal Injury Products Liability Litigation

Screen time and algorithm focus groups [ROI] Q3 2021

TikTok Family Panels Research

Wave Two: Focus Group – ROI, July 2021

Background

This is the second wave of research across the UK, Ireland, France, Germany and Italy, listening to teenagers about their online lives. The methodology is detailed in the appendix and this report considers the thoughts and reflections of teenagers in the ROI. The findings from this research will be used to test platform changes in a forthcoming online community involving parents and teens.

This project explores the role of agency in enhancing young people's wellbeing. Specifically, we want to understand whether offering enhanced and more innovative screen-time management tools and/or more control over their For You Feed might enhance their sense of agency and have a positive impact on their wellbeing.

Agency refers to a person's "belief in their capability to exercise some measure of control over their own functioning and over environmental events." (Bandura, 2001, p.10). Feeling out of control has a negative impact on physical health and psychological wellbeing (Pagnini et al, 2016). Conversely, high levels of perceived control over one's environment increases one's ability to cope with adversity and positively alters perception of our circumstances - even when those circumstances are unchanged.

During the discussion with the teens we avoided framing the discussion as a 'dosage' issue and instead focused on what made them feel in control or out of control, exploring this generally at first, then specifically in relation to TikTok. After discussing in depth their thoughts and feelings about the app we moved onto ideas to enhance their ability to decide a) how much time they spent on TikTok and b) what they saw on their For You Feed (FYF - the central feature of the TikTok platform where content is curated to the user's specific interests).

Research objectives

To explore young people's views on feeling in control - what does it mean to be in control of a situation?

To understand how teens feel about spending time on TikTok. What motivates them to go on to TikTok and where do they spend their time?

How do they feel about the time they spend on TikTok?

Do teens feel they have personal control over the time they spend online?

What do they do currently to manage their screen-time, how well does it work and what can TikTok learn from this?

What could help them to achieve more of a sense of control?

Could enhanced and innovative screen-time management tools that offer teens more control over when they use TikTok have a positive impact on their wellbeing?

Get reactions to TikTok's ideas around the 'take a break' alarm clock, algorithm re-set and a more granular version of the 'not interested feature

1. Executive Summary

Agency and TikTok

The research confirms the hypothesis that having agency can play a positive role in a teen's mental wellbeing and that a lack of agency can have a negative impact. When teens have agency, they report that life feels easier, relaxed and allows space for other activities. Teens describe feeling happy and enjoying life. When they lack agency, they say they may experience stress and anxiety, a sense of being overwhelmed and missing out. The example of leaving it too late to go to bed can lead to lethargy and lack of focus. Consequently, teens report feeling disappointment, anger / annoyance with themselves, or guilt.

All teens acknowledge that they sometimes lack agency on TikTok (specifically the FYF): they say that it is hard to stop once you're on it and time can run away. Reported feelings are more negative if this takes away from other activities and when the weather is good outside – a wasted opportunity to be outdoors. Negative feelings are less frequent among older boys who feel they have matured to manage their time well, but negative feelings can occur as often as once a week – or even daily for others.

Current strategies for screen-time management and appetite for enhanced screen-time tools

The majority have strategies or tools to help them manage their time, if only occasionally e.g. their phone alarm, to do lists, schedules, apps. Younger boys are the exception, saying they don't use any tools and rely heavily on parents. TikTok screen-time tools were not used, however. These suffer from some low awareness – and some say they are 'hidden' in the settings rather than obvious when using the app. **With a pre-disposition to helping themselves, these teens were very open to, and keen on using enhanced screen-time tools.**

Potential solutions for screen-time management

A timer/alarm (such as the Take a Break feature) and Downtime options were both appealing ideas, with the vast majority of teens saying they want to use them. The younger boys were more contradictory in that they sometimes said they wanted to use screen-time tools and at other times not.

Teens told us they would expect to use these tools in the mornings, around homework / study, bedtime, sunny days. Rather than express a clear preference on either tool, teens feel there is room for both. The Downtime feature would better suit advance planning whereas the timer/alarm could work well just before a session end. **Importantly, teens want choice and flexibility** – not just in which option to use, but when to set it, and what type of alarm they want when their time is up. Video was a clear winner for most, but some – like the older boys – prefer something simpler e.g. an alarm, blank screen, for one a song to suit the mood. Also, options for a snooze/dismiss function – as there were mixed views on this. Although the majority say it's best to block the entire app, a minority want uninterrupted access to creator/editing aspects - this too could be an option. Another suggestion for screen-time was to select a 'what will you do next?' theme so that the FYF could feature clips related to the next task.

Other suggestions included: a counter of time or clips to keep users aware of time spent on the app, messages to encourage breaks and alternative activities (and the benefits of this to wellbeing), TikTok-specific screen-time reports.

Control over the Algorithm

Although the majority of teens are happy with how well their algorithm works, there was strong interest in the **'more detailed not interested button'**, for its promise of easily ruling IN new content, as well as ruling content OUT and options within that. The result is a more positive TikTok experience – although it may encourage users to stay on the app for longer. The **Shake It Up** idea also scored highly and was more relevant than the **total Reset** idea, as you get to keep some of what you enjoy alongside exposure to new content. However, teens often assumed – and wanted – to have control over what stays and what goes. Education on the algorithm was interesting, but featured only once in teens' top two. **Most want to see how TikTok uses and shares their data.**

Overall

Teens want both screen-time and algorithm features but overall screen-time ones are considered more helpful, especially term-time when teens want to manage time around school work. Younger boys may be harder to convince, as they take longer to admit having negative feelings on TikTok, and – unlike the others - have not yet reached the stage where they take proactive measures to help themselves. Algorithm features are liked for their promise of an even better TikTok experience.

2. Exploring agency in teens

We started the discussion by exploring teens' sense of control over aspects of their lives – asking for examples of when they feel in control and when they don't feel in control, how this makes them feel and what the implications are. The term 'agency' was not used when discussing with teens to make the subject matter more relatable.

There was a spectrum across the teens from those who are more organised and disciplined to those who struggle with managing their schedule – the younger boys sitting at the extreme of this continuum.

Examples of times when teens have agency include when they have completed their schoolwork on time, are well prepared for tests and exams, when they're ready to perform well in sport, when they are able to incorporate good sleep, fresh air, and exercise into their routine. Deadlines and not wanting to disappoint yourself, teachers or others are drivers. The majority of older teens use timetables, schedules, to-do lists to keep on top of what they have to do. One older boy booked himself onto night school for 3 hours a day as discipline for his studies, another uses *Forest* app. Older teens are largely left alone by parents to manage their own time. There was some use of lists and apps (Daily Planner, Fabulous) among younger girls but without much consistency. Their male counterparts use nothing of this sort and have a relatively heavy reliance on their parents to keep them on track.

When teens have agency, they feel easier and more relaxed, less stressed and with time for other interests. Teens feel happy and able to enjoy life. An older girl said she feels 'proud' of herself when she feels in control and one younger boy projects feeling more enthusiastic. Hence, **the research supports the hypothesis that having agency can play a positive role in a teen's mental wellbeing.**

"I like getting it done then I don't have to think about it and can go and do other things" – 13 yr old, girl

"If you're organised it makes life a lot easier, you know what you're doing, [life is] more enjoyable" – 17 yr old, boy

"I want to please my teachers and not upset them – this drives me to organise myself. I always want to do the best I can" – 17 yr old, girl

"I feel proud that I'm ready and I did enough work" – 17 yr old, girl

Examples of times when teens lack agency include when they leave schoolwork to the last minute, are ill-prepared for exams, are late to bed or to school. Being 'stuck' on social media is spontaneously mentioned as one root cause.

When teens lack agency, they can feel stressed and worried, both in the moment and - for older teens - their future (for example if it compromises school results). They can feel overwhelmed and miss out on other activities. Going to bed late can lead to lethargy and lack of focus. Consequently, teens describe disappointment, anger or annoyance with themselves - and for some older teens, guilt. As such, **the research demonstrates that a lack of agency can have a negative impact on a teen's mental wellbeing.**

"Annoys me when I don't get things done" – 13 yr old, girl

"I get confused all the time with being on time, other people are a lot more in control than I am" – 13 yr old, boy

"It's kind of tense, you miss the train then miss your class, have to catch up, miss out on being with your friends, you're worried about missing class, miss on the exam" -17 yr old, boy

How do teens feel about their time on TikTok?

The teens were asked to identify their feelings through the usage of emojis. The exercise enabled them to more easily express their emotions.

Teens' emotions on TikTok

Younger teens

Older teens

Boys



When I'm on it, happy, happy watching



Most of the time happy feeling from it



If I'm getting off. You want to stay on, annoyed you have to get off



I shouldn't have been on it, you're a bit embarrassed about it, you could have been doing something better / On it a long time and you see the time – it's embarrassing how long you've been on it. Your whole day has gone

Tired of doing nothing then do nothing because you're tired (a vicious circle)



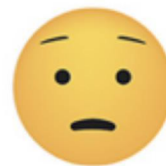
Surprise yourself at how much time you've spent on there



Feel angry with yourself for spending all that time on there



Disappointed with yourself, you've wasted time, could have done something better



When you've been on all night and feel you've wasted your time, unproductive, you wake up late, has a knock-on effect

Girls



Can be funny / fun



When I'm on it



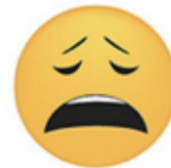
*Can be a fact video – surprise
at learning something*



*Disappointed in yourself - all the
things you could have done with
that time, all you did was enjoy
yourself, videos didn't benefit
you in any way*



*Haven't realised I spent that
amount of time on it, oh no!
Way too long! There are other
things I can be doing – it's time
wasted*



*Fed up - whilst on it feels fine,
once off it feel annoyed with
myself – why so much time?
Overwhelmed - I'm on it so long,
I have to do a bunch of other
stuff now*



*Makes me feel lazy – not doing
anything, just sitting scrolling*



*Tired because I'm up late at
night*

There is a lot to like about TikTok and as such it is firmly established in these teens' online

life. It is fun, entertaining, sociable, inspires, educates and informs. Connecting with 'people like me' means content is relatable and engaging.

"You can go on all day, there's always something new to watch so you are on there longer than any other app" – 13 yr old, girl

"The next video might be really good... I keep scrolling, you wouldn't get bored because they're so short" – 13 yr old, girl

"I use my phone to wind down, I can't get tired for a while"- 13 yr old, boy

"It's the variety, you're never done and the social aspect, sending stuff to people, conversations, there's something for everyone"- 17 yr old, boy

"You see a lot of relatable videos of my interests, it's really addictive, you feel more validated if you see things that are relatable, people have the same views as me, that's what's so compelling about it" – Marina

"It's a good form of entertainment for me, I like all the stuff I see on it, it's all tailored to me and my interests" – Cory

However, **teens are quick to identify negative feelings relating to spending time on the app**: it is difficult to resist and once they're on it's difficult to stop. They can easily – and without realising it - clock up a lengthy session. **Feelings are more negative if this takes away from other activities** e.g. schoolwork, bedtime, seeing friends, practising music, exercise, fresh air, esp. in summer when they could be making the most of sunny days. Less so when they have fewer commitments – e.g. no plans during school holidays, over lockdown, on rainy days or evenings when they're bored.

Teens may feel they have missed out or should have spent their time better. They may feel bad about themselves: disappointment, embarrassment, regret at not having had more self-discipline. They may be late to bed which can lead to tiredness and low performance the next day and may get in trouble with teachers or (for younger teens) parents.

"Sometimes you'll get drawn into it and you can't control anything, it's so easy to keep scrolling and flicking videos, you can't get off it because it's endless" – 13 yr old, boy

"Happens very often that I use TikTok and I get drawn into it, prevents me from finishing other tasks like chores, anything, even getting out of bed, stops me going out with my friends, stops you from having those moments in your life you should have" – 13 yr old, boy

"I wouldn't put a time frame on it, it's when it's interrupting your day and more than a quick 20 min break, you put off study and sleep because of it, that's too much" – 17 yr old, girl

You're doing homework it's just there and you want to go on it, like when you're doing research on Google, it's distracting and you don't get your work done, you get in trouble the next day" – 14 yr old, boy

For the older boys, who consider themselves good managers of their time nowadays, these negative feelings only occur occasionally. Younger girls say it happened a lot over lockdown but less when at school or holiday camp. For older girls it can be once a fortnight or once a week. Younger boys say once a week or even every day, even though they

initially say they don't feel bad!

The concept of 'too much TikTok' comes from the older teens themselves rather than their parents. For younger teens, it's both their own view and that of their parents (especially for the boys).

Negative feelings tend not to be directed at TikTok – the teens return to the app soon afterwards.

"I still go on it every day so it doesn't stop me that much I still enjoy the app, I just need to control my time on it more" – 17 yr old boy

Teens recognise that the app is designed this way, with its never-ending stream of short clips, colours, sounds, and algorithm providing well-tailored content to keep users engaged. A couple of older teens report that the very act of scrolling and swiping is addictive. TikTok attracts more negative feelings than other apps because it is seen as 'only entertainment', something to enjoy only in the moment vs. YouTube or Netflix which can be more informative, cultural and edifying.

"With TikTok it's just a jumble of all these irrelevant videos that are only enjoyable to you at the time, going on Netflix engages your thought processes more, you think about it, what happens next, the story, on TikTok you're a zombie looking at a screen" – 17 yr old girl

Other negatives expressed were, for one older girl that TikTok keeps you 'detached from real life' and for an older boy that it makes you feel 'groggy' (a physical effect).

What do teens do currently do to manage their screen-time?

Older teens (and to a degree younger girls) cited a range of strategies to manage their time although their use is sporadic: the majority receive **screen-time reports** from their phone and, on occasion, this has encouraged a reduction in use, at least in the short-term (not so for younger boys). Over half the older teens and all 3 younger girls occasionally use their phone's alarm or timer to set a limit for TikTok and one older girl had used a screen-time feature on her phone. None had used TikTok's settings to manage their screen-time – these are considered 'buried too deep' in the settings.

"I'll put a 10 min timer on then when it goes off I'll turn it off, so that makes me feel in control compared to going on it for ages" – 13 yr old, girl

Various avoidance strategies were discussed: older teens **leave their phone outside their room or use devices without TikTok** when doing schoolwork. An older boy **deleted TikTok** to stop him using it (now re-installed) and another said he may do this around exam-time. A younger girl dares not go **onto TikTok** in the mornings because she fears time will pass and it will make her late for school.

One older boy used **the Forest app** to help manage his screen-time and enjoyed reaching his goal of planting a real-life tree. This teen also used motivational videos on TikTok to be more active and achieve a better sleep routine. Two younger girls had tried apps - Daily Planner and Fabulous.

“You feel better about yourself, it’s good for the environment” – 17 yr old, boy

3. Potential solutions for screen-time management

In this part of the discussion, teens were asked for views on what could be valued tools and features, to help them manage TikTok experiences. They were asked to invent their own ideas at first, and then were shown some potential ideas from TikTok and asked to feed back on them.

There was high interest in new screen-time management tools. Only the younger boys express some hesitancy, but they are often contradictory – at other times saying they are keen to use them.

Teens want self-administration. Only two younger teens mention parental involvement but both admit they would not want to be subject to this themselves.

“However long you want to spend, 5 mins, 10mins, an hour everyone could choose for themselves, you pick for yourself”- 13 yr old, girl

Flexibility and customisation are crucial: in which features you want to employ - or not, in times and days, the ability to set in advance or at the start of a session, options for different warnings, to have a strict cut-off vs snooze or dismiss, customising alarms to suit different preferences e.g. video vs sound vs a blank screen.

[I’d want to set different times on different days] *“Because every day is different” – 17 yr old, boy*

“Only half an hour on sunny days and longer for rainy days, flexible for different days and scenarios” – 13 yr old, boy

Creating / editing aspects of the app do not generate the same negative feelings as the FYF. **Younger girls were keen that access to the former should not be blocked. But the consensus from others is that restrictions should be applied to the entire app** – in this way, TikTok is less of a temptation or distraction. One older boy said that this could be an option on the settings.

“I don’t feel like I’m wasting time when I make or post a video, it’s really fun, a creative element to it. But if you want to manage your time, then in that case it should be for the whole app.” – 17 yr old girl

“Just shut down the whole app, otherwise you’ll go onto your following and it’s the same thing, or start texting, it’s just easier to turn it all off” – 17 yr old, girl

“It takes me a while to edit videos, it would be annoying if it shut down”- 13 yr old, girl

What might a screen-time tool look like?

In this section, teens were asked to understand which aspects are appealing and helpful and note the features that should be taken into product development.

Timer or alarm

All five groups suggested a **timer or alarm** to limit time on TikTok – similar to how some are using their phone's timer/alarm but integrated into the TikTok app. Teens envisage setting a limit at the start of a session and want the option of how long – a range of 5 mins to 5 hours was quoted. Only the younger boys were hesitant about using this. Others say it would be helpful in the morning so they leave for school on time, prior to homework commitments, on sunny days, before social events or at bedtime to ensure going to sleep at a reasonable time.

“It would help people studying so they don't get stuck on TikTok” – 17 yr old, boy

After school you want a break, not straight into homework – so I'd set it then instead of just going on it and 'hoping' you'd get off it in time – 17 yr old, boy

“Not all the time but when I had something on, like during the week” – 13 yr old, girl

Counter of Time or Clips viewed

Older teens suggest this feature is added to the screen. It could pop up after a certain amount of time or number of clips viewed, or be a permanent feature, to keep you aware of time spent on the app (no surprises). Suggestions were for 30, 45 and 60 minutes or every 50 clips.

“A count of how many videos you've scrolled through might encourage you to stop more, give you more a sense of how long you've been scrolling, it's hard to gauge” – 17 yr old, boy

“Then you won't lose control so much of how long you've been on the app” – 17yr old, girl

TikTok messages to encourage breaks, alternative activities and communicating the benefits of this to a person's wellbeing

The majority of teens suggested some form of message in the For You Feed along these lines. There was mixed awareness of similar messages on the FYF currently – this can work sometimes, if timed well. Suggestions included: encouraging exercise and fresh air, Irish TikTokers helping with studies, communicating the importance of sleep, alternative things to do when you're bored, 'make sure to do your work!' or 'you've missed half an hour of study!'. Older boys projected that this would be beneficial to younger teens who may be less aware, or have lower acceptance, of the need to manage time on the app.

Older teens like the idea of **TikTok- specific screen-time reports** (as opposed

to the more generalist ones they receive now) showing data and graphs of use over time. The girls felt that some form of praise (e.g. via a notification) for improved screen-time management would be motivating.

“Forces you to reflect on the amount of time you’ve spent on TikTok, have you wasted your time?” – 17 yr old, boy

“You’d feel proud knowing you’ve done that” [not spent too much time on your screen] – 17 yr old, girl

‘Downtime options’

This idea was positively received to help dedicate time to other activities. All teens say they would use this. The ‘no notifications’ element is important, as this can be a big distraction, drawing teens to their phones. Teens told us that they would expect to use this on the same occasions as for the time limit idea but could involve more advance planning for commitments with consistent timings e.g. morning schedule, bedtime. It could be useful to save settings from previous days / weeks. One younger boy said it feels more fun and friendly vs a harsh alarm.

“A good idea, you won’t get notifications to pull you back into the app so you won’t look at it” – 13 yr old, girl

“Setting in advance is better, I’d forget to set it every time I went on” – 17 yr old, girl

What tells you you’ve reached your limit?

This part of the conversation focused on other ideas that the teens brought forward in how to help manage their screen time.

Some initial ideas were rather prosaic: an alarm, buzzer, simple notification, logo or blank screen. Other ideas were:

Videos from favourite personalities / Take A Break Alarm Clock

Three groups suggested this before the **Take A Break Alarm Clock** is introduced. There is high interest in this idea, except for three older boys who are less interested in personalities, preferring instead a simple alarm or shutdown. For others, the idea of having Harry Styles, Taylor Swift or others encouraging you to take a break was highly motivating. There was no interest in paying for content.

“Because it’s coming from someone you like you’re more likely to go off” – 13 yr old, boy

"You're more inclined to like it, someone you admire telling you to do a certain thing, you'd want to do it more" – 17 yr old, girl

"It's a cool idea especially for the younger people who are more influenced by certain celebrities, like 12-14 yr olds" – 17 yr old boy

Favourite song

One younger boy suggested this as an alarm – but this changes according to his mood. An older boy said annoying alarms or noises would irritate him, but younger boys could see a benefit in this: if it's annoying you're more likely to want to turn the whole app off.

"Depends what mood you're in whether you want something annoying or nice, I'd pick an annoying one, you'd try and get off your phone as quick as you can so you don't have to hear it any more" – 13 yr old, boy

Video or link to an alternative activity

One younger girl suggested this, using examples of baking recipes or study tips. She envisaged selecting a theme for this at the same time as she set up the alarm. Again, this highlights the need for personalisation / customisation: teens want something specific to them.

A warning, 5 or 10 minutes before the limit is up

There was consensus for this. For creators this was especially important, to give them time to save drafts. There were more mixed views on whether there should be a **strict cut-off or an option to dismiss**. Half felt there should NOT be an option to dismiss – otherwise they are likely to stay on the app. Others say they would get annoyed by a strict shut-down and may delete the feature: these want an option to continue scrolling. They say this can still work to make them reflect on their time on the app. One older boy suggested a blackout time of 10 minutes – too long to hang around for the app to open up again, enough time to get on with something else.

"If there was a thing that lets you keep going, I don't think I would go off it. It shouldn't let you keep going or put on a snooze button" – 17 yr old, girl

"I set a time limit for myself on TikTok for 15 mins and then every time it comes up I press another 15 mins. But I feel like I know how long I've been on it, and sometimes I might stop because I've pressed it a few times"- 17yr old, girl

"Reminding you rather than cutting off the app, otherwise you won't learn the lesson, if you cut off the phone, you be waiting til you get back on. Better to think yes, that's a good decision" – 13 yr old, boy

"The hard part is getting off it once you're on it, so if you had a 10 min cooldown then you can get into whatever else you're doing – and you'd forget about it" – 17 yr old, boy

At the end of your time, FYF content becomes less relevant

One older girl suggested this, in order to make the user less involved: *‘so that you want to come off the app’*

Teens want to see these features promoted well, and made obvious on the app, **not hidden away in TikTok settings**. Suggestions included a toggle to turn settings on and off, a widget at the bottom of the screen from which settings could be made, a ‘must-view’ tutorial.

“Make it more accessible so not deep in the settings – 17 yr old, boy

“Could have a widget at the bottom, called ‘self growth’” – 13 yr old, girl

Other considerations to help engage teens**Rewards / incentives**

Filters, special effects, or stickers generated some interest among creators (the minority in this sample). The ability to use these on your profile or in chats may broaden relevance. Similarly, older girls suggest badges which could be displayed on your profile for reaching your goals, as on *FitBit*. Two creators suggested a boost in exposure as a form of reward.

The few who are familiar with *Forest* say TikTok could learn from this app: working towards a tangible goal, and the feeling of doing something for the greater good – but they are not sure what this could be. Streaks were touted in one group – but would need to *discourage* use of the app rather than encourage it, as they do currently.

“When people visit your profile you can have all the badges where your names are and more the better” – 17 year old, girl

“You get points to not go on TikTok and with 20 points you could pay for 20 people to see your video” – 13 yr old, girl

Key outcomes of using such a tool:

The benefits of using a screen-time management tool are plentiful:

You can enjoy the app, come off it AND get other things done = best of both worlds

Don’t feel that you have wasted your time

Happy that you are more organised, everything is planned out, nothing to worry about

You don’t have to keep checking the time, you can relax and enjoy TikTok and rely on the

settings to kick you off when the time is right

Feel on top of things

Less tired, more lively

Avoid the stress of being late

Potential to build new habits / a positive life schedule = a good night's sleep, less stress

"You'd never feel guilty because you've spent the amount of time you planned to, you've enjoyed it, had your fix and finished" – 17 yr old, girl

"Relaxed, I don't have to keep checking the time, I can enjoy watching the videos more" – 13 yr old, girl

"You're relaxed, you're really in control" – 17 yr old, boy

"You'd be more content, you know your limits, managing your time better" – 17 yr old, boy

"Relieved because you're doing your homework when you should" – 17 yr old, girl

"Once you're forced off you realise it was a good idea to get off, like getting up in the morning, you don't want to do it but once you're up you're glad" – 17 yr old, boy

"I'd go outside to spend time with family" – 13 yr old, boy

"I'd feel more organised, everything planned out, nothing to worry about, I'd feel happy and not stressed – 13 yr old, girl

"Relaxed, no pressure, I'm not going to be late" – 13 yr old, girl

"I'm on top of things, know I'm not spending too much time on it" – 13 yr old, girl

4. Control over the algorithm

In this part of the conversation, teens were asked how well the algorithm works and whether they would welcome more control over it. The topic was introduced by explaining that the algorithm is *'the way TikTok collects information about how you use the app - what you watch, what you skip over, what you like and comment on, the 'not interested' button etc.) - and how TikTok uses this to show you more of what you like'*.

The majority of teens say they are happy with how well the algorithm works to bring up relevant content on their feed. Indeed, its effectiveness is what keeps them on the app for so long. Younger girls were slightly less satisfied overall.

"It's giving you what you like, that's why it's so addictive, it works too well" – 13 yr old, boy

That said, they sometimes want to rule OUT certain types of videos, or add IN new content. To rule OUT, they swipe away clips or use the 'not interested' feature. The 'not interested' feature gives a good sense of control over the FYF but some are unaware of it (including half the younger teens) whilst others prefer the ease of simply swiping the clip away.

Ruling IN content requires more effort – searching and liking the results. It is not always easy to find content you want. Suggestions were made for an option to select new topics (like they did when setting up their account) – they imagine this would give quicker results.

“You have to search for someone with that content, like videos, that can be tough, you have to find someone – finding something niche can be difficult” – 17 yr old, boy

“I wish you could choose what you wanted to see today, press a button for random videos just for one day” – 14 yr old, boy

Reactions to specific ideas to control their experience on TikTok

As part of the discussion, teens’ were asked to judge interest levels in giving teens more control over their algorithm through specific examples as seen below. In order of preference:



‘Not interested’ button

This was the most appealing idea, much liked by users and non-users of the current not interested feature. Central to appeal is that you can add IN content as well as rule it OUT and have various ‘shades of grey’ within those options. This

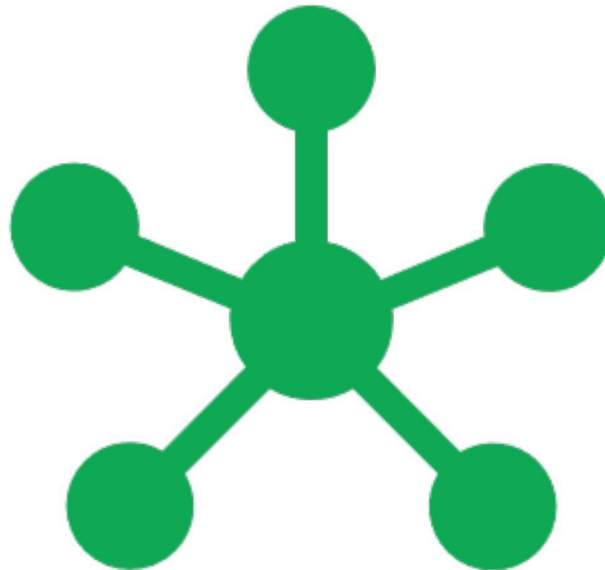
sounds easier vs their current strategies to rule new content in. The outcome is a more engaging FYF: more of what you like, less of what you don't, so a better user experience and potentially fewer negative emotions when they come off the app. It could, however, result in more time on TikTok.

"Good because you'll see a lot more of what you want, you'll want to use the app a lot more, you'll feel like the app is more worth it" – 13 yr old boy

"I wouldn't feel as guilty spending loads of time on TikTok if I really loved every minute" – 17 yr old, girl

"A more enjoyable experience on TikTok - if you're trying to limit your time you get more out of it the short time you're on it rather than scrolling for ages and ages trying to find the right thing to watch" – 17 yr old, girl

"Could happen that you spend more time on there so the alarm would be great to remind you to come off there after a while" - 17 yr old, girl



The Algorithm

The majority of teens (less so the younger girls) are intrigued to know how the algorithm works, mostly to see how TikTok uses their data and links to other apps (some suspect it picks up on conversations and online activity elsewhere). A minority want to know in order to make the algorithm work better for them, i.e. to easily include and exclude content

"I want to know how TikTok uses the data they have about me" – 16 yr old, girl

"I'd like to know how it works, to know how you get certain things" – 17 yr old boy



'Shake it up' (soft reset)

This was more positively received than the 'total reset' idea, as it retains at least some of the content you enjoy, whilst getting more exposure to new and different clips. However, teens often assume *they* would have control over what content stays and goes from their FYF to make way for new content. Their version of the idea is an attractive proposition, but it is not the intended idea behind 'Shake it up'. When understood, there is concern they may lose content they enjoy.

"Showing new things AND keeping you grounded in the stuff you like" – 17 yr old, boy

"TikTok are not 100% sure of what I want to see - I'd like to do it myself, tick a few boxes of what I like or don't mind losing" – 17 yr old, girl



‘Reset’ button

There is low interest in this idea, because the algorithm generally works very well for these teens. If their FYF was full of irrelevant content then they see this could be helpful – but this is not the reality. One exception is a young girl who deletes her app of everything except Christmas-themed videos at the end of the year. This would enable her to achieve this more easily, and to re-set again in January. Teens are keen that this is password protected, to avoid re-setting in error.

“Like when I first got TikTok, all these creators I didn’t like - boring” – 17 yr old girl

“Good idea – to wipe Christmas videos after Christmas, on the first week in January, it can be annoying, it would be cool to have one button” – 13 yr old, girl

Screen-time vs algorithm:

All groups saw potential for both screen-time tools and algorithm features and feel they should be made available to TikTok users. Overall, screen-time tools are more helpful, especially during term time when teens need to prioritise schoolwork. But enhanced algorithm features are interesting too, and could enhance their experience of the app – especially when they have plenty of time to spare. Two younger boys preferred the algorithm, one saying it is because he is selfish:

“Screen-time is more important but that’s not what I really care about, it’s about the algorithm and how I want to be entertained, I don’t want to be in charge of myself, some people want to be in control but myself, I don’t want to be in control. I’m selfish so I pick the TikTok algorithm” – 13yr old boy

5. Appendix

Ranking of algo ideas

Treat with caution: Shake it Up was often understood in a different way to how it was intended / Younger boys contradicted themselves vs what they discussed

	1st choice	2nd choice
Older girls	Joint: More detailed not interested feature / Shake It Up	
Older boys	More detailed not interested feature	Joint: Education and Shake It Up
Younger girls	More detailed not interested feature	Shake It Up
Younger boys	Shake It Up	More detailed not interested feature

List of Celebrity names

Older girls – Harry Styles, footballers, Taylor Swift

Older boys – N/A

Younger girls – Charli d’Amelio. Artists (no specific names)

Younger boys – Footballers, Jack Septiceye, KSI

Methodology

5 x online (Zoom) focus groups conducted 19th and 21st July 2021

90 mins duration

Sample

For each mini group recruit 3 children (friendship triads)

Group 1: Children aged 13-14 (same school year group) - male bias - all friends - who regularly use TikTok

Group 2: Children aged 13-14 (same school year group) – female bias - all friends - who regularly use TikTok

Group 3: Children aged 16-17 (same school year group) – male bias - all friends - who regularly use TikTok

Group 4: Children aged 16-17 (same school year group) – female bias -all friends - who regularly use TikTok

Group 5: Children aged 16-17 (same school year group) – either male or female bias - all friends - who regularly use TikTok

Regular users of TikTok i.e. almost every day

Boys and girls, a mix of ethnicity and SEG, representative of each market

At least one teen per triad creates video clips.

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