

Youth Perspectives on Expiring Content



A report from Childnet, a partner in the UK Safer Internet Centre, into children's use and experiences of expiring content.



Executive Summary

Expiring content is a key part of many young people's lives. From Snapchat to Instagram stories, expiring content is a way of messaging and sharing photos that many young people use every day. Expiring - or ephemeral - content includes posts, messages and photos that disappear after they have been viewed, or that are only available for a certain amount of time. Children and young people are growing up in a digital world where services such as Facebook, Instagram and Snapchat all have features which allow users to post things that will eventually expire.

This snapshot into how children and young people are using such technology is taken from a poll conducted in February 2019 with over 1,000 young people aged 8-17 in the UK. We also asked the Childnet Digital Leaders to give their thoughts and experiences of expiring content, with 64 responding. The findings give us a clearer picture of how regularly young people use expiring content, what they use it for and how they feel about it.

Key findings

- **7 in 10** young people aged 8-17 have used expiring content in some way over the past year.
- **86%** of 13-17's are using expiring content, compared to 62% of 8-12's.
- **Over 40%** use expiring or disappearing content to message friends every day.
- **65%** of young people think it is worth reporting expiring content if it worries or upsets them
- However, from the qualitative research we conducted with 64 Childnet Digital Leaders, only half were able to give a correct explanation of how to report an expiring post on the services they used.

Methodology

Quantitative: An online survey of 1,019 children aged 8-17 years conducted by Populus in February 2019 included two questions about expiring content.

Qualitative: Childnet coordinates a network of young people aged 8-18 years through the Childnet Digital Leaders Programme who undertake online training to become peer educators in their school communities. Digital Leaders act as role models to inspire the kind and responsible use of technology. They were invited to take part in an online consultation where they shared their experiences of expiring content, what they liked about it and what they thought could be improved. They also gave their top tips for other young people using expiring content. 64 Digital Leaders aged 8-18 participated.

"It limits the amount of time someone can see what I post or send them, it gives me a sense of comfort knowing they can't share it." Secondary Student

"(I like) that it will disappear in a few seconds and no one could save it"

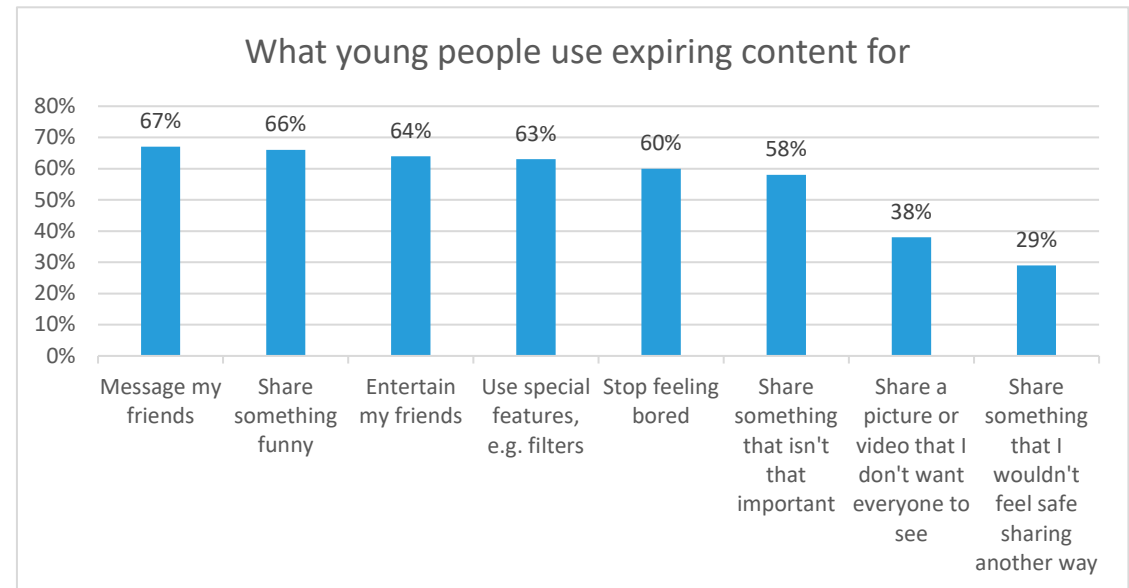
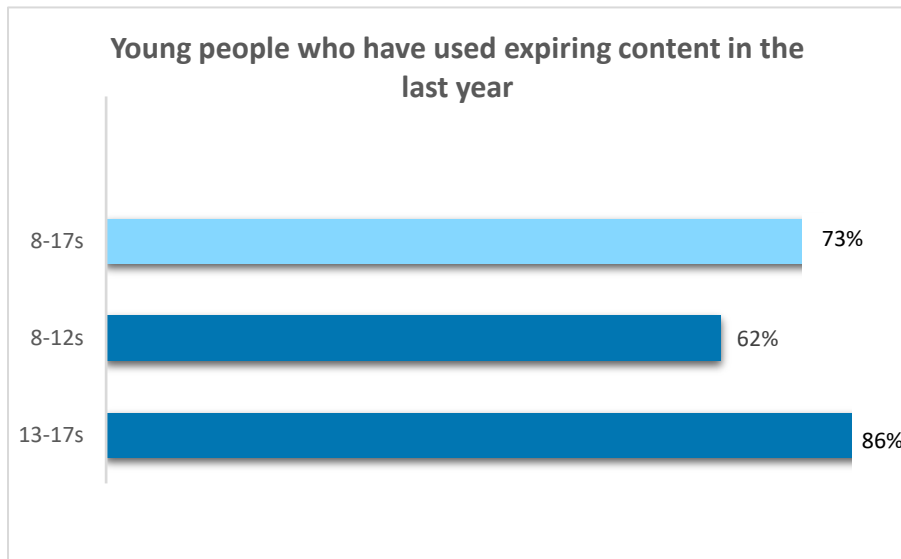
"People on the internet our age use platforms like Snapchat, Instagram and Facebook stories to message each other and send quick updates on their lives"

Secondary Student

Young people's experiences of expiring content

Our research found that 7 in 10 young people in the UK have shared something using expiring content in the last year.

Expiring content is popular among the majority of young people across the 8-17 age range, with 13-17s (86%) more likely share content using these features than 8-12s (62%). There is no significant difference between girls' (71%) and boys' (75%) use of expiring content.



The most common reason overall for young people to use expiring content is to **message friends (67%)**, with the other reasons being to **share something funny (66%)** or **entertain their friends (64%)**.

“I like the fact that I can show what I’m doing (e.g where I am on holiday) but it won’t stay up forever”

Secondary Pupil

Communicating with friends

67% of 8-17s say they use expiring content to **message their friends**. Of those:

- 42% say they do this at least once a day.
- Over half (57%) do it at least once a week.

“I like that you can send funny things or tell ur friends what u are doing now but then it disappears”

Secondary Pupil

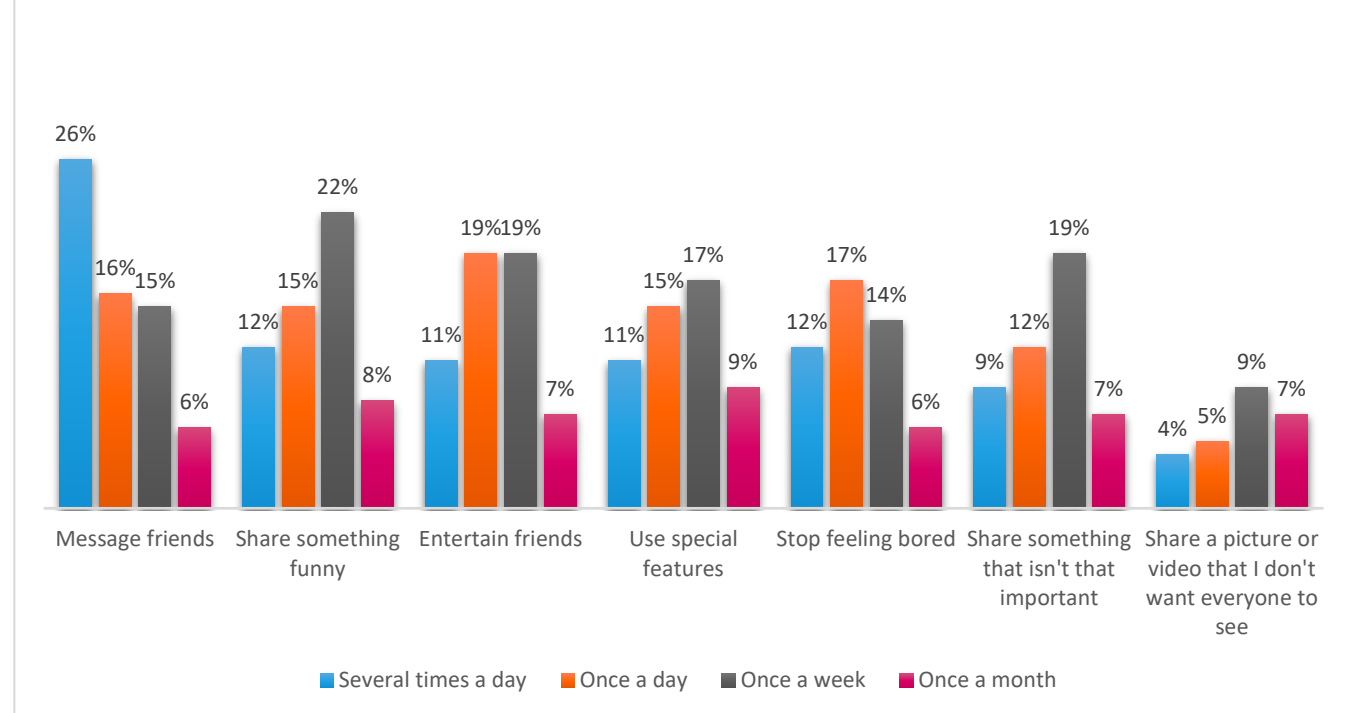
Two thirds (66%) of respondents aged 8-17 say that they have used the expiring content feature to share something funny.

- 27% say they do this on a daily basis.
- Teens (13-17s) are more likely to use expiring content to share something funny (81%) than those aged 8-12 (51%).

“You receive likes for the content, if it is a funny picture or video, nobody can keep it after 10 seconds. Other people can’t dislike it.” Primary pupil

“The non-lasting posts can be used to project other parts of their identity that they do not wish to last forever on the internet. They can be used to express inside jokes or an event that they are visiting but do not wish to conserve.” Secondary pupil

How often do young people use expiring content?



“You can post updates quickly.”

Secondary pupil

How young people feel about expiring content

Young people reported their feelings towards expiring content, and the role that it plays in their lives. They use these platforms to interact with their peers, share information and to have fun, as well as to share things they wouldn't want to permanently affect the way they were perceived online.

- **41%** said they prefer to use expiring content instead of posting something on their profile.
- **56%** said that people their age use expiring content to share things that they wouldn't normally, because it won't last.
- Only **26%** said that they can be whoever they want to be when sharing something using expiring content.

Our research found that children and young people are using expiring content to share things that they wouldn't usually on more traditional forms of media.

- 38% use it to share a picture or video that they don't want everyone to see, with 9% doing so on a daily basis.
- 28% use it to share something that they wouldn't feel safe sharing another way, with some doing this on a daily basis (6%).

When asked why they like using expiring content, many of the Digital Leaders who responded highlighted the practical implications it had for them and their friends.

"It does not clog up space/data on your profile." Secondary

"People like the idea of it not being there (...) in the future when they are different and may disagree with what they used to post." Secondary pupil

"If you send a funny picture to your friend it will not be sent to the rest of the world and will stay between your friends" Secondary Pupil

"You are able to contact your friends easier, you can play games and they are thoroughly enjoyable" Secondary pupil

"I like that it limits the amount of time someone can see what I post or send them, it gives me a sense of comfort knowing they can't share it." Secondary Pupil

"(People share) Pictures of themselves, inappropriate pictures e.g nudes, or showing certain parts of their body that they shouldn't. We had a girl at our school who also used this to make racist and mean comments offending certain communities of people." Secondary pupil

"Send nasty messages thinking it will disappear and nobody will find out. Sending pictures thinking they won't be kept." Primary Pupil

What young people were unsure about, and their concerns

We found that over half of young people who use expiring content are **unsure about how it works**. Almost half of young people (49%) aren't sure whether content actually disappears completely once it expires. 92% of those surveyed thought that 'posts shared using expiring content don't disappear everywhere'. The young people raised concerns about not knowing what happens to content once it is posted or has expired.

We also found that some young people had confusion around reporting expiring content. 65% of young people thinking it is worth reporting this content, however many of the Digital Leaders reported not knowing how to report; many giving wrongful explanations of the reporting process.

"They (young people) might choose to use expiring content to share things as it's not there forever (technically it is, though) meaning that only the people who see it first can know what it is."

Secondary pupil

"If you send a funny picture to your friend it will not be sent to the rest of the world and will stay between your friends."

Secondary pupil

"Young people believe that when the content is gone, it's gone forever."

Secondary pupil

"Many people share a belief that it is purely temporary or their friends wouldn't really take a screenshot of their status or story."

Secondary pupil

"No, I don't (know how to report). I know I can take pictures whilst it's up. Apart from that, I would report them as normal"

Secondary pupil

"I'm not quite sure (about reporting) is it in the report button? Maybe screenshot the expiring content?"

Secondary pupil

They also cite **privacy, how information about them could be given away and storage of the things they post** as things that they were unsure of when it came to expiring content.

"Even if it says it expires what really happens to it? Is it deleted or where does it go and who could gain access to it?"

Secondary Pupil

"What happens to it when it expires? Does the company/app makers see it?"

Primary Pupil

"Where do our pictures/videos go when they expire? Where is the data/information stored?"

Primary Pupil

5 tips from Childnet Digital Leaders

On using expiring content

#1 Be positive

“Use it in a good way... like wishing someone a happy birthday”

“Say nice things, don't be rude”

“Post things which will benefit yourself and others and use your platform to spread positivity”

#2 Remember screenshots of expiring content can be taken

“Be careful of what you send or say because someone could screenshot it.”

“They may disappear but people may have screenshotted your post so don't write anything you would not want someone to see.”

“Be careful what you post, because even if it is non-lasting, it could potentially contribute to your digital footprint in the future.”

#3 Don't post personal information

“Avoid posts that clearly show your whereabouts or your school”

“Don't post anything that will reveal personal information”

#4 Think about what you are posting

“Don't put up anything embarrassing or hurtful”

“Don't publish silly/dangerous things for others to see”

#5 Know how and when to report hurtful or harmful posts

“When you see something wrong report it.”

For more information visit:

www.childnet.com | www.digital-leaders.childnet.com | www.saferinternet.org.uk



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