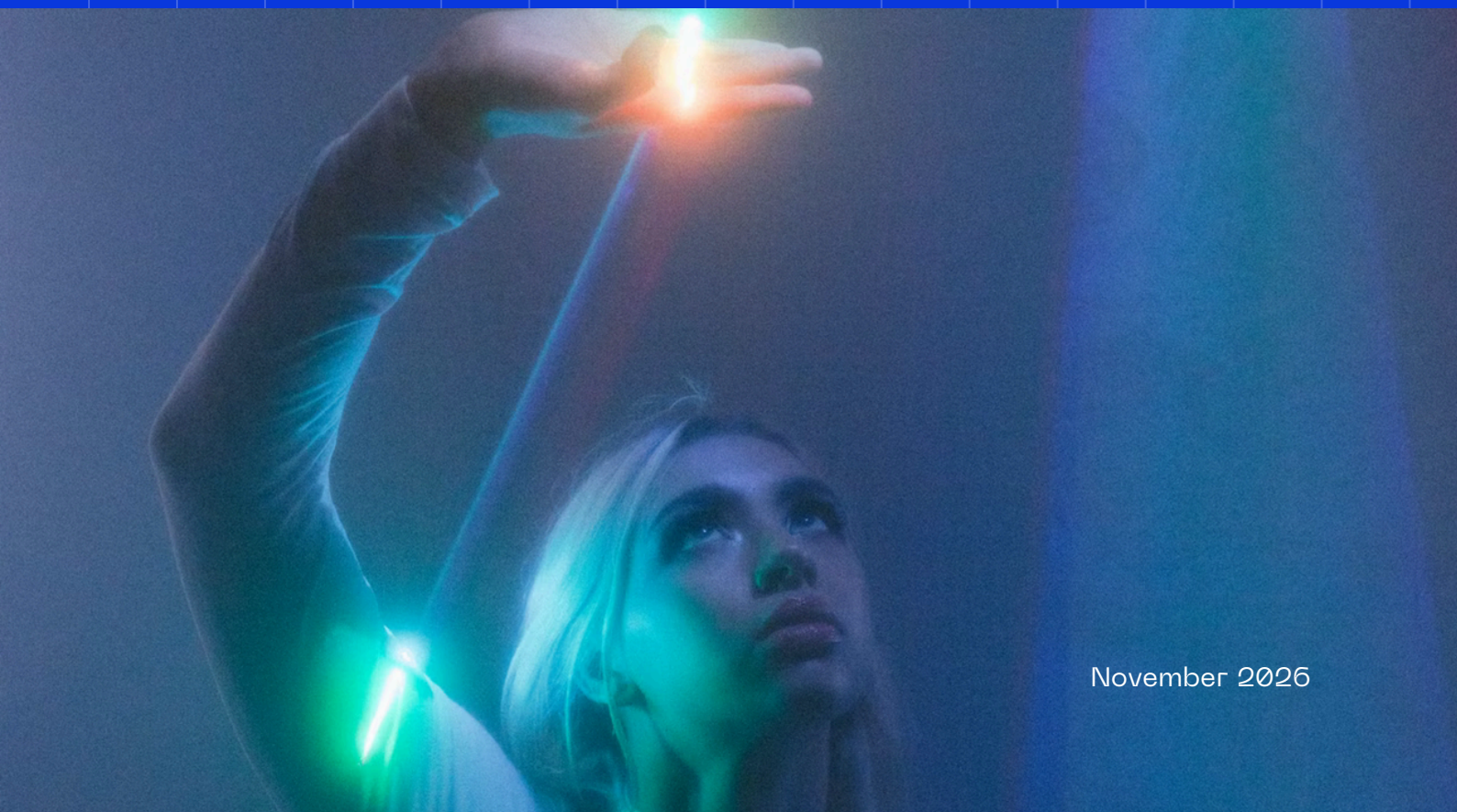
SpaceTeen ScrollReport

SCROLL/ REPORT

EXTENDED

One year of SpaceTeen research: Bringing research and design together for better social media



November 2026

Authors
Lise-Marie Nassen, Clara Virós i Martín, Amber van der Wal, Susanne E. Baumgartner, Rusen Tanribilir, Charlotte Godfried, & Sindy R. Sumter

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Executive summary

How can young people feel more in control of their social media use without losing the connection they value, or the time they want to spend offline? **SpaceTeen** brings **research and design together** to explore this question. It draws on the SpaceTeen Monitor, a **survey of 990 children and teens aged 10–18**, and **three design pilots** created with young people: Scrollternatives, Reclaimer and Happy Place. The four findings below show where balance can be difficult and how design might help. Read the full report if you want to learn more!

1) Awareness alone does not prevent overuse

Many young people **recognise that they spend longer on social media than they intend**: 72% of children and 75% of teens said they lose track of time. In the survey, **short videos, personalised content, and endless feeds** were among the **features most often linked to using social media too much**. The pilots point to calmer design, clearer cues about time and more natural stopping points.

2) Greater control should preserve connection

Social media can be hard to put down, but they also **help young people feel connected:** 51% of children and 72% of teens said they feel connected to others when using them. Scrollternatives participants proposed **feeds that stop showing new content while keeping chats available**. The **prototype PAUZE Party** develops this idea, turning a pause from doomscrolling into a social opportunity.

3) Trying to cut back does not always help

53% of teens said they **sometimes try to use social media less**. But **attempts do not always bring much relief**: 59% said the strategies they used helped a little or not at all. The pilots also highlight **moments when support may matter most**, such as **when young people are bored** or **have unplanned time after school**. Making activities with friends easier to organise could offer a more appealing alternative.

4) Offline connection needs somewhere to happen

Around **one in four children and teens** said there are **too few places in their neighbourhood to meet and relax**, and **girls** reported **a shortage more often** than boys. Happy Place explores **welcoming spaces beyond home and school**, co-designing a covered hang-out spot with teen girls; Reclaimer looks at ways to **turn ideas for spending time together into actual plans** with their **prototype CLUB**.



Foreword

In recent years, social media have become irresistible: they connect young people, give them new insights and open up new worlds. But social media also have drawbacks and risks.

The latest generation of algorithms is incredibly powerful, scrolling goes on endlessly, and sometimes social media push other important things in life aside. We have lost our sense of balance, and there is widespread concern around the world about the impact of social media on young people's mental well-being, school performance and sleep. It is human nature to think that a complex problem can be solved with simple solutions. And we see plenty of those. Advising young people to put their phones away more often. Or a ban. It doesn't work, or it doesn't work well enough.

Finding a truly sustainable solution requires different perspectives. That of research institutions, which map out for whom, when and why social media are harmful, or, conversely, help people connect — and help us find the right balance. The perspective of young people, who know better than anyone how enjoyable social media can be, but also how difficult it is to stop and what would help them.

And that of designers, who create new kinds of solutions together with experts and young people. We then need scientists to investigate which solutions are most promising when scaled up.

In this report, you will find a number of very promising solutions for restoring balance. The authors place responsibility where it belongs. Adults, including parents and caregivers, teachers, tech companies and policymakers, must work together to ensure a safe environment in which children can develop and grow up well, both offline and online. And in every decision that affects children, their perspective must come first, so that they have every opportunity, the space and the time they need to develop. SpaceTeen's work provides an important first step towards new solutions and ways of thinking, and towards a shared direction.

Loes Keijsers
Professor of Pedagogy
Erasmus University Rotterdam

Why SpaceTeen, why now?

A digital environment driven by attention

The discussion about young people's social media use often focuses on how much time they spend online. But just as important is the question of how much control young people themselves have over how they spend that time. Many social media platforms are built around a business model that puts users' attention at the centre. Algorithms continually select new content to keep users engaged, while features such as infinite scrolling, autoplay videos and notifications make it difficult to stop at a time of one's choosing. This creates tension between what young people want for themselves and how platforms are designed. Young people may intend to go online only briefly, but then keep scrolling for much longer than they planned.



Why change is so difficult

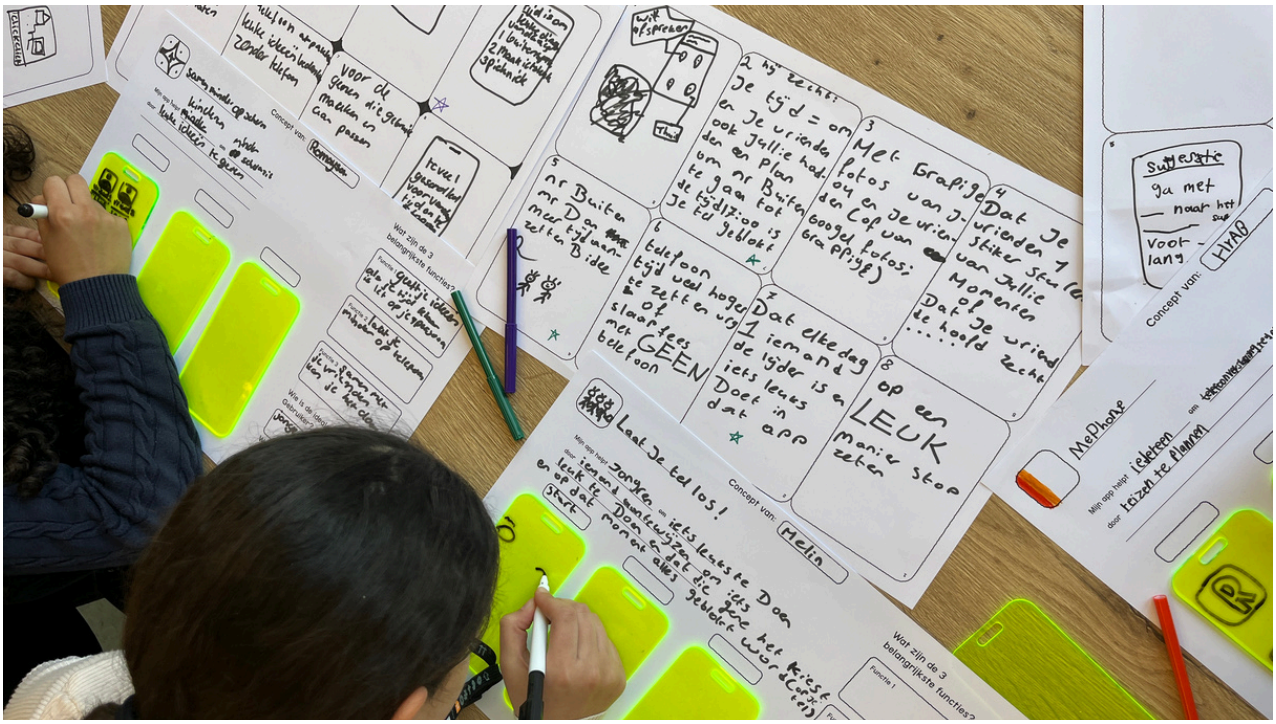
Many existing measures focus on young people's individual behaviour, for example by setting screen-time limits or turning off notifications. However, research shows that such self-regulation strategies are often only partially effective. This is understandable when young people constantly have to contend with technology that is specifically designed to hold their attention. Structural change is also slow to come. Social media platforms have commercial interests in prolonged and intensive use, so reducing excessive use is not necessarily in their interest. European legislation, including the Digital Services Act and hopefully soon the Digital Fairness Act, offers opportunities to address harmful design practices, but it takes time for such measures to lead to actual change. Meanwhile, young people are growing up in a digital environment in which they have relatively little influence over how their attention is directed.

What SpaceTeen aims to change

SpaceTeen was established to break this deadlock. The project focuses on a central question: **How can we give young people more agency over their time, attention and social media use, and create online and offline environments that support their well-being and development?**

To do this, SpaceTeen combines scientific research with the creative power of the design industry. We examine how young people use and experience social media, the role platform design plays in excessive use, and what can help young people gain more control over their time and attention. Based on these insights, we develop and test new solutions together with designers and civil-society partners. These might include alternatives to design mechanisms, ways to give young people more influence over their online experiences, and appealing places and activities where they can meet one another away from screens.

Young people play a central role as active co-researchers and co-designers. Their experiences, needs and ideas are the starting point for developing solutions that reflect their everyday lives. By bringing together scientists, designers, young people, civil-society organisations, governments and businesses, SpaceTeen aims to contribute to broader changes in how we shape digital technology and the environments in which young people live.



Understanding the SpaceTeen evidence base

Understanding young people's social media use requires more than knowing how many hours they spend online. It also means listening to what they enjoy, when use becomes unwanted, what makes stopping difficult, and what could help them make room for other activities without losing their valued online connections.

SpaceTeen brings these questions together through **four complementary research components**: the **SpaceTeen Monitor**, a large-scale survey, and three participatory design pilots, **Scrollternatives**, **Reclaimer**, and **Happy Place**. The Monitor maps children's and adolescents' social media habits and experiences, while the pilots use in-depth focus groups, creative activities and co-design to explore young people's everyday realities and develop alternatives with them.

The overview below shows the focus of each component and how it contributes to the project's aim of supporting greater control over attention and time:

01 Monitor

QUANTITATIVE

Everyday digital lives, the bigger picture

Young people's social media habits, experiences of overuse, and ways of balancing online and offline life.



02 Scrollternatives

QUALITATIVE

Better alternatives to endless scroll

How platforms could preserve connection and enjoyment while supporting more intentional use.



03 Reclaimer

QUALITATIVE

Less scrolling, more time for what matters

What helps children and adolescents step away from screens and make room for shared activities.

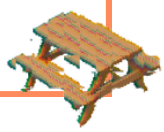


04 Happy Place

QUALITATIVE

Different spaces to come together

What makes physical places appealing for young people to meet, relax and spend time together.

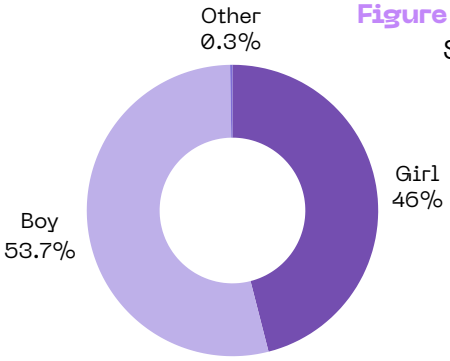


The following pages explain how each component was designed and carried out, including who participated and which methods were used. Throughout the report, each component's colour and/or icon will accompany its findings.

The SpaceTeen Monitor, mapping patterns at scale

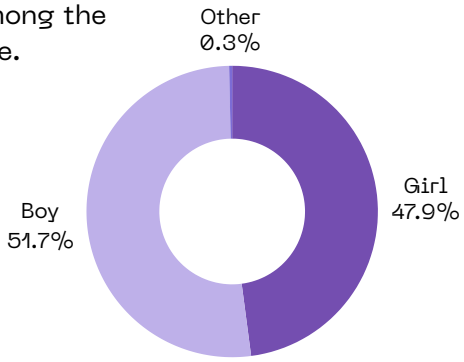
The SpaceTeen Monitor maps young people's social media habits, experiences and efforts to find balance. The survey presented in this report involved **990 participants aged 10–18:**

Figure 1. Gender distribution among the SpaceTeen Monitor's sample.



389 children aged 10–12

Mean age = 11.14 (SD = 0.81)



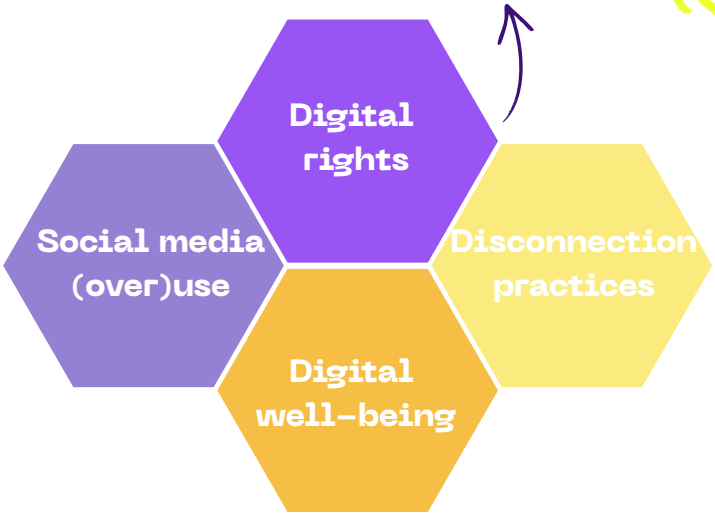
601 teens aged 13–18

Mean age = 15.51 (SD = 1.62)



KidsRights and Kinderpostzegels collaborated on the digital rights section. Findings on digital rights and related themes are presented in the separate **State of Youth NL: Social Media report.**

The survey was developed in collaboration with children and adolescents, with an adapted version for younger participants. For this version, a mascot was created: meet **Scrollie**!



The SpaceTeen Monitor covered **four main areas** (see diagram on the left). All figures in this report draw on participants' self-reported responses, with age-group comparisons made where questions are comparable. Some quotes also come from the Monitor's open-ended questions.

Some sections of the Monitor were shown only to a subset of participants, and participants could select "I don't understand the question". Therefore, sample sizes vary across questions and are reported alongside each result in this report.



Look out for **Scrollie** next to the quotes: highlighting young people's own words from the Monitor!

The pilots, designing from young people's realities

BETTER



todaytomorrow®

Scrollternatives

Better alternatives to the endless scroll

Design studio TodayTomorrow collaborated with teens to investigate how social media design—specifically dark patterns—affects their experience of connection, enjoyment and sense of control over their own media use. The pilot develops and tests alternative social media features to explore how platforms could support young people's needs.

LESS



scroll
scroll
scroll

Reclaimer

Less scrolling, more time for what matters

Design studio ScrollScrollScroll collaborated with children and preadolescents to explore how social media use is embedded in their free time, when use feels difficult to stop and what support could be helpful. The pilot focuses on developing tools that help children manage their own media use and make time for shared offline activities.

DIFFERENT

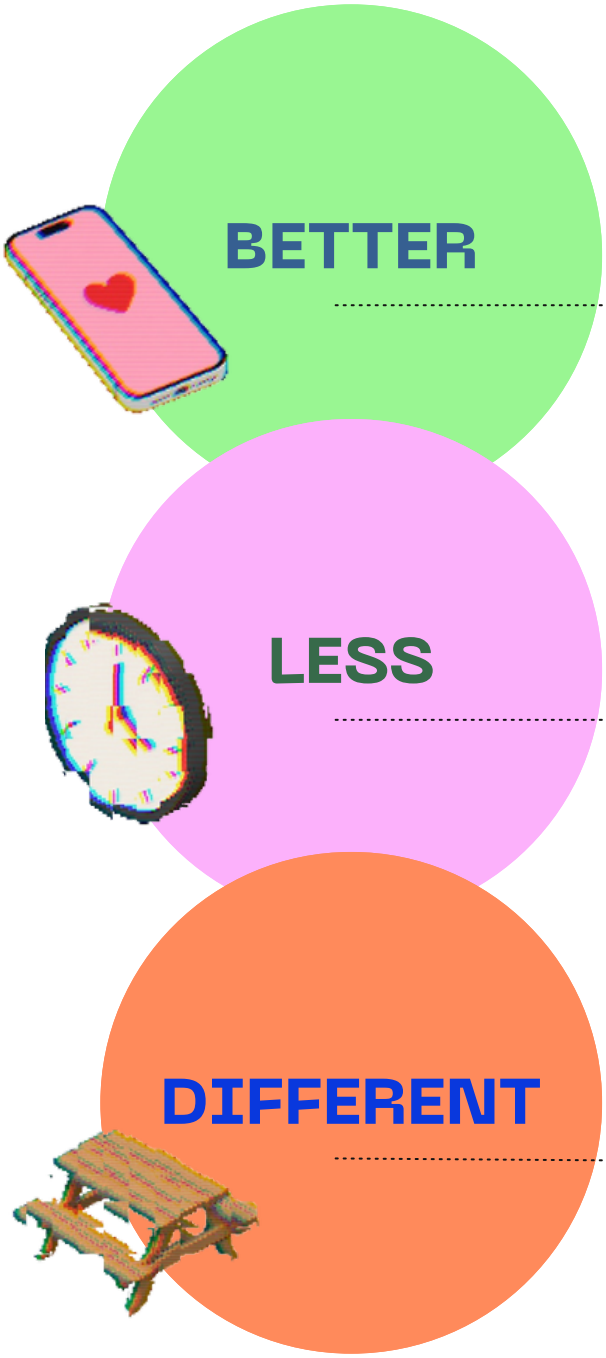


MUZUS

Happy Place

Different spaces to come together

Design studio Muzus teamed up with teens to investigate what makes physical meeting places appealing and how increased offline time could be encouraged. The pilot translates their needs and ideas into designs for places (that are not school or home) to meet, relax, and spend time together beyond the screen.



Scrollternatives

With TodayTomorrow

- 1 design sprint over several days (4 sessions)
- February–March 2026
- Teens aged 16–18, N=14
- Grafisch Lyceum Utrecht

Reclaimer

With ScrollScrollScroll

- Co-creation workshops at 3 primary schools, ages 10–12 (± 30 children)
- Design sprint in 2 first-year classes, ages 12–13

Happy Place

With Muzus

- Focus groups and co-creation sessions in Rotterdam (at Netwerk Nieuw Rotterdam), ages 16+ (± 15 teens)
- Focus groups and creation workshops in Amsterdam, girls, ages 12+ (± 7 girls)

Findings I

The balance between use and overuse: how platforms, design, and everyday moments shape young people's experiences

This section brings together data from the SpaceTeen Monitor and different pilots to explore young people's social media use and why some platforms feel harder to balance than others. It highlights the everyday moments that make stopping more difficult and shows that young people recognise features designed to keep them scrolling, even when they struggle to resist them. Their experiences point to a desire for a calmer, more manageable social media experience.

The balance between use and overuse

Understanding young people's platform use

Monitor participants were asked about 12 different platforms: **YouTube** and **WhatsApp** were the **most widely used among both children and teens**, while Snapchat, TikTok and Instagram were also widely used among teens.

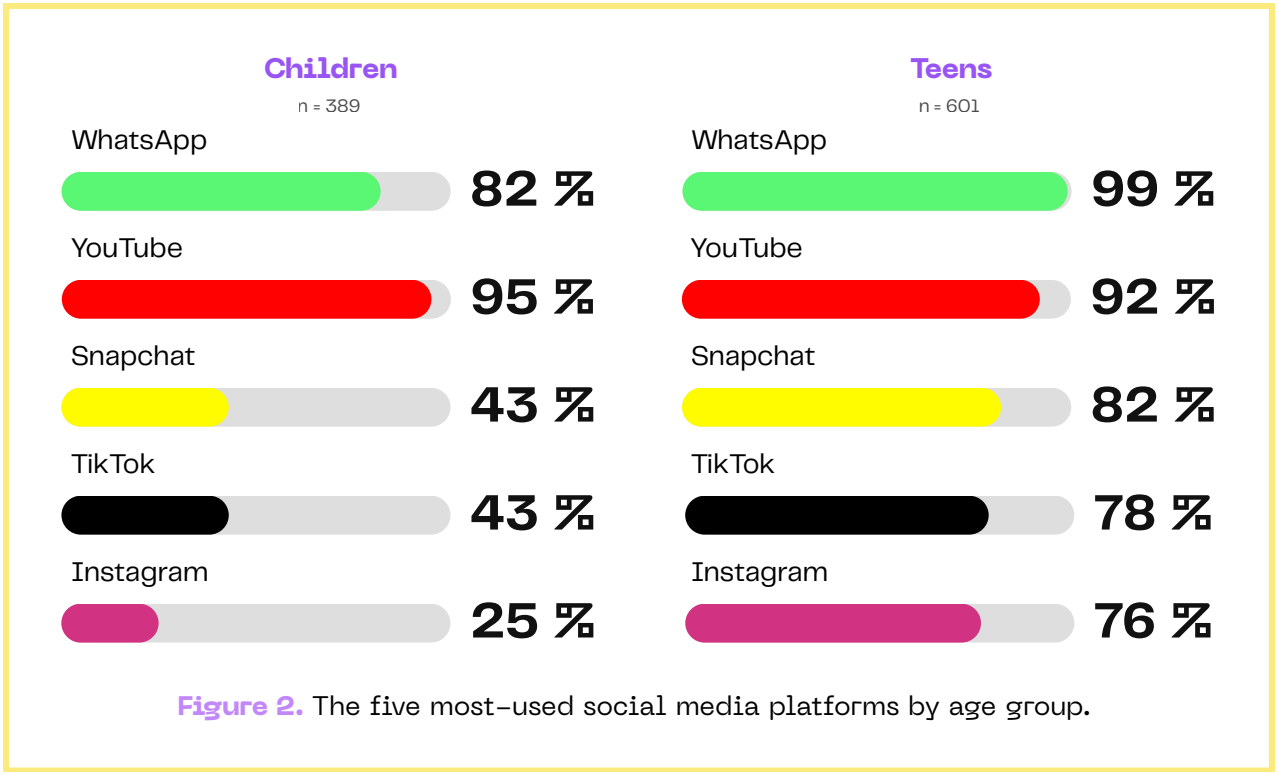
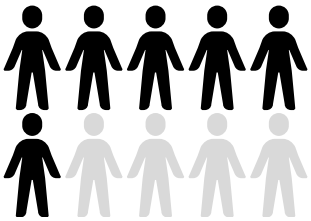


Figure 2. The five most-used social media platforms by age group.

These popular platforms do not always feel easy to balance

Among users, both **teens (58.2%)** and **children (40.7%)** felt they **used TikTok too much**, followed by Snapchat for teens (45.8%) and YouTube for children (35.5%).

6 out of 10 teens feel they use TikTok too much



WhatsApp, however, stood out in contrast to other platforms: around three-quarters of users in both age groups (76% of children and 74% of teens) felt their **use was "just right"**.



3 out of 4 young people consider their WhatsApp use to be just right

	Children			Teens		
	Too little	Just right	Too much	Too little	Just right	Too much
WhatsApp	12.0%	**76.0%**	12.0%	7.5%	**73.5%**	18.9%
YouTube	10.0%	54.5%	**35.5%**	7.6%	61.4%	31.0%
Snapchat	14.4%	56.9%	28.7%	5.7%	48.5%	**45.8%**
TikTok	12.6%	46.7%	**40.7%**	2.5%	39.3%	**58.2%**
Instagram	25.3%	58.6%	16.2%	12.0%	67.5%	20.5%

Table 1. Perception of amount of platform use among children and teens.
Percentages are calculated among participants who reported using each platform.

Some moments make it even harder to stop

Social media take up **more time on weekends than on weekdays** for both age groups, with teens reporting longer periods of use: almost half of them report spending **4 hours or more**!



Figure 3. Percentage of children and teens reporting four or more hours of social media use per day on weekdays and weekend days.

They also occupy **a considerable part of weekdays: 67% of children** and **58% of teens** reported **1 to 3 hours of use**, while 4 or more hours were much more common among teens.

	Children		Teens	
	Weekdays	Weekend days	Weekdays	Weekend days
Less than 1 hour	22.9%	17.5%	8.0%	8.2%
1–3 hours	**67.1%**	57.1%	**58.2%**	39.4%
4 hours or more	8.2%	**23.4%**	31.4%	**49.3%**
Don't know/NA	1.8%	2.1%	2.3%	3.2%

Table 2. Self-reported time spent on social media on weekdays and weekend days among children (n = 389) and teens (n = 601).

These daily totals do not tell us when use occurs, but in **Reclaimer**, the **after-school period** emerged as a **vulnerable time**: participants mentioned that being home alone, tired or bored, with nothing planned, could lead to automatic scrolling.

In the Monitor, participants were also asked in **which situations** they felt they spent **too much time** on social media. **Two moments** stood out in both age groups: **free time alone** and **before sleep**; again, times when young people may be on their own, with fewer activities or interactions to interrupt scrolling.

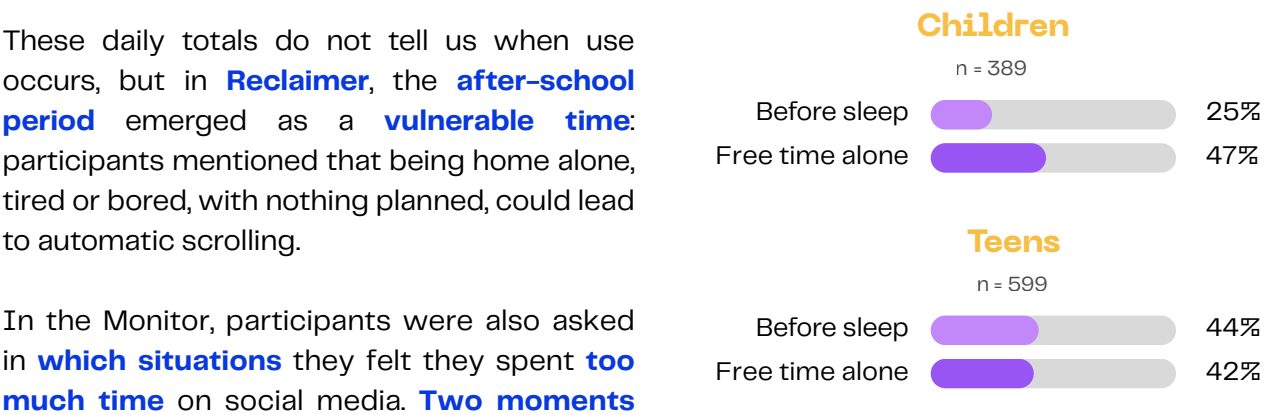
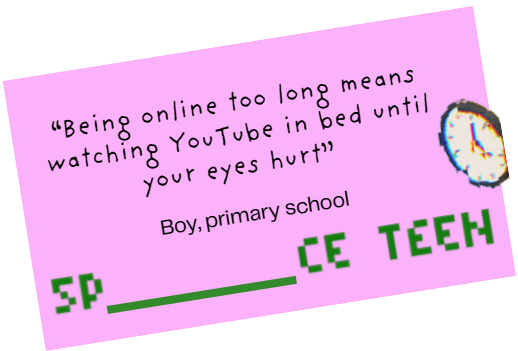


Figure 4. The two most common situations of perceived overuse, by age group.
Percentages indicate participants who selected each situation; multiple responses were allowed.



Children most often selected free time alone (47%), followed by before sleep (25%), while **teens selected before sleep** (44%) slightly more often than free time alone (42%). Reclaimer participants echoed this concern about bedtime use (see quote).

Young people recognise what draws them in

Children and teens **were able to identify which platform features contribute to their overuse**. **Short videos**, **content tailored to their interests**, and **endless feeds** topped the list: around 70% of children and roughly two-thirds of teens linked these features to using social media too much. Around half also pointed to **notifications**. This highlights how young people perceive the role of platform design in keeping them engaged.

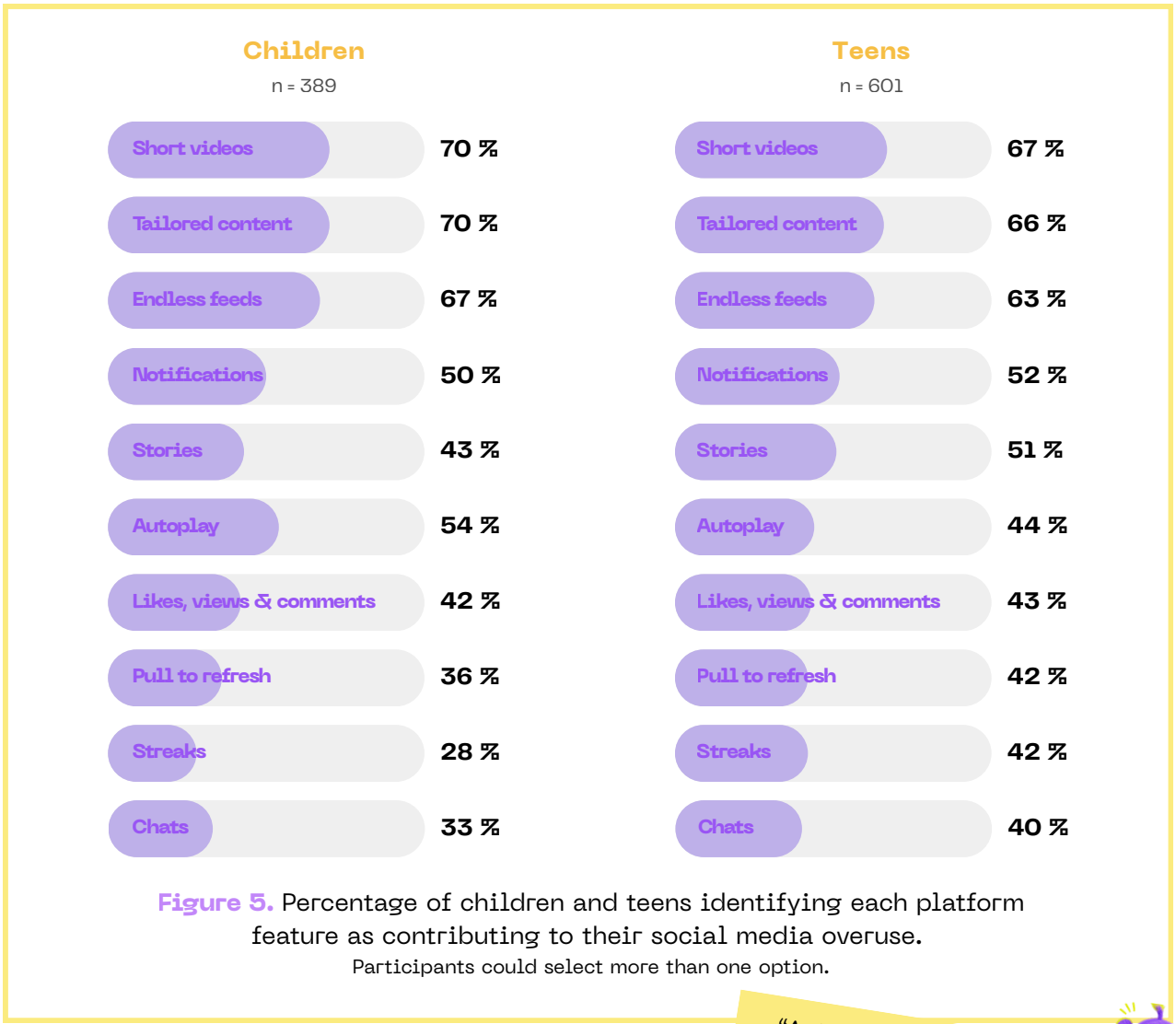


Figure 5. Percentage of children and teens identifying each platform feature as contributing to their social media overuse.
Participants could select more than one option.

But **no single feature tells the whole story**: even the least-selected options were identified by 28% of children and 40% of teens. One participant went beyond individual features, questioning how "social" social media really are in response to the Monitor's open-ended question about addictive features.





Want a calmer experience

Young people not only recognise what keeps them engaged, they **also ask for a calmer experience**. In **Scrollternatives**, participants recognised persuasive design and suggested **fewer sound effects and notifications**, along with **clear cues to help them stop**.

Reclaimer participants also identified **notifications**, **streaks**, and **unfinished game goals** as **triggers** to keep using, and some children proposed **less visually stimulating design**. Together, these ideas point towards platforms that do less to draw young people back in and make it easier to pause.

Not all time online feels worthwhile

"Too much" is not just about time spent online—it is also about how that time feels and what it takes time away from. **Losing track of time was common at both ages**: **72% of children** and **75% of teens** reported this experience. Using without a reason was reported by 47% of children and 68% of teens, while 36% and 56%, respectively, felt unable to cut back.

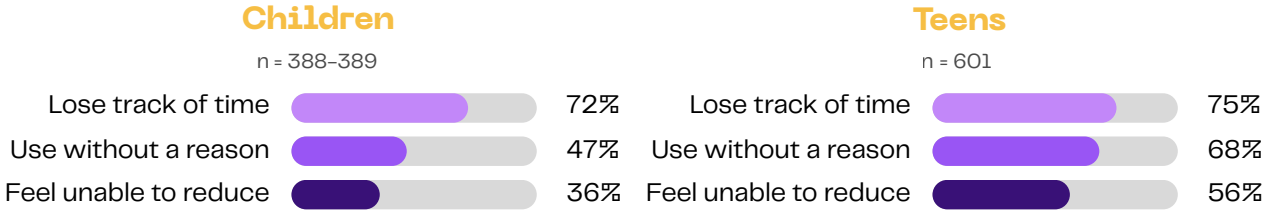
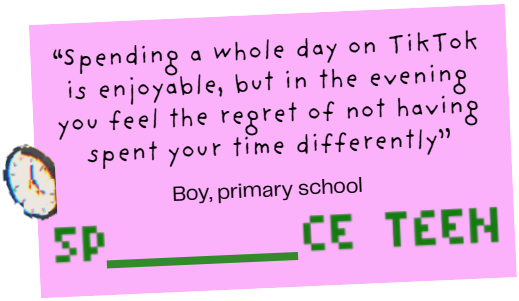


Figure 6. Percentage of children and teens who agreed or strongly agreed that they lose track of time, use social media without a reason, or feel unable to reduce.

Social media can also **compete with other priorities**. Teens more often reported **continuing** use **despite important tasks** (27% of children versus 40% of teens), but the age differences were smaller for other conflicts: often continuing **despite feeling less productive** was reported by 37% of children and 40% of teens.



The pilots added another layer in this regard: **how enjoyable use can still feel like wasted time afterwards**. Scrollternatives participants **distinguished worthwhile activity from empty scrolling**, while Reclaimer participants described **turning to their phones when bored, tired, or stressed**, and staying longer than intended.

Findings II

More control, without losing connection: how young people try to cut back and what support they need.

Alongside the importance young people place on staying connected, our research, both the Monitor and the qualitative pilots, shows that many children and teens are trying to cut back, but struggle to make it work, highlighting the need for platforms that support, rather than undermine, their efforts. Young people themselves also advocate for changes in platform design.

More control, without losing connection

Social media still have something to offer

Time online can feel wasted, but it can also **bring meaningful connection.** In the Monitor, **51% of children** and **72% of teens** agreed that using social media makes them **feel connected to others**. Similarly, **40% of children** and **51% of teens** often or almost always **feel part of a group** when communicating online.



Figure 7. Percentage of children and teens who agreed or strongly agreed that social media make them feel connected to others, or who often or almost always felt part of a group when communicating online.

This emphasis on connection also aligns with how **young people** viewed **chats** among different platform features: they were among those **perceived as least addictive** (see page 15). These Monitor findings echo a distinction made by Reclaimer participants: **meaningful online activity is not the same as simply spending time on a phone**.



Scrollternatives participants translated this distinction into **design ideas**. Several proposed **timers that stopped new feed content once a limit was reached but kept chat available**, targeting endless scrolling while preserving contact with others.

Together, these findings point towards a **more selective approach to reducing use**: the goal is not to log off completely, but to **help young people set boundaries around the parts they find difficult to manage**, without treating all time online as equally problematic.

Young people are taking steps to disconnect

Teens

n = 306



Figure 8. Percentage of teens currently trying to reduce their social media use and planning to reduce it in the future.

More than half of teens (53%) **are currently trying to reduce** their social media use, and **nearly two-thirds** (64%) **plan to do so** in the future. Both current efforts and future intentions to cut back are more common among teens than children.

But **efforts to reduce** are also evident among younger participants: **more than a quarter of children** (29%) **have tried to cut down their social media use**, and **around half** (51%) **plan to do so** in the future.

Children

n = 196



Figure 9. Percentage of children who have tried or plan to reduce their social media use.

And use different strategies to cut back

Teens

n = 306

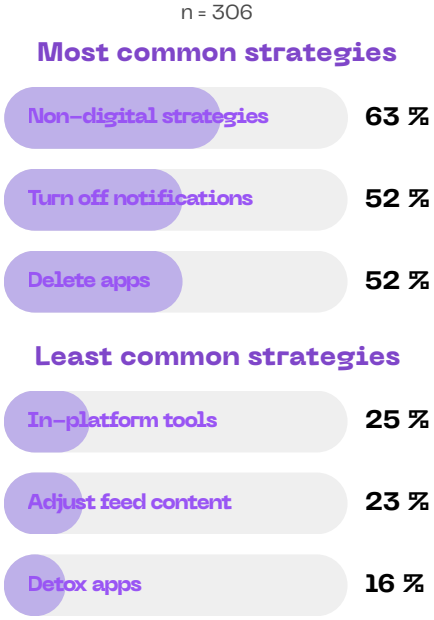


Figure 10. Most and least common strategies used by teens to reduce their social media use.
Percentages indicate use at least sometimes.

Teens reported using a range of strategies to cut back. **Non-digital strategies were the most common**, used at least sometimes by 63%, followed by **turning off notifications** and **deleting apps** (both 52%). **Fewer** reported using **in-platform tools** (e.g., TikTok's digital well-being feature) (25%), adjusting **feed content** (23%) or using **detox apps** (e.g., Forest app) (16%).

Children described their strategies in an open-ended question. Most mentioned simply **putting their phones away** or **relying on timers**, usually set by their parents.



These strategies help, but not equally for everyone

Trying to cut back does not always bring the hoped-for results. Among **teens**, **47.5%** said their **strategies helped a little** and **11.8% not at all**; only 8.6% said they helped a lot or very much. **Children reported more benefit**: **32.2%** said their **strategies helped a lot or very much**, while **equal shares** (33.9%) reported **a little or some help**, and **none** reported **no help at all**. However, these findings refer only to participants who reported having used a strategy to reduce use, so the children's sample was small (56 children, compared with 280 teens).

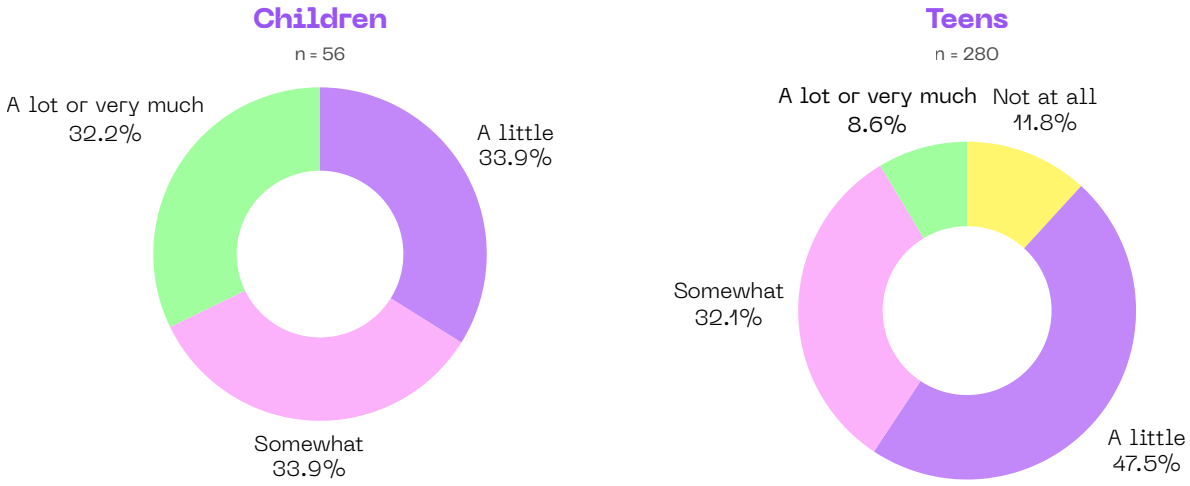
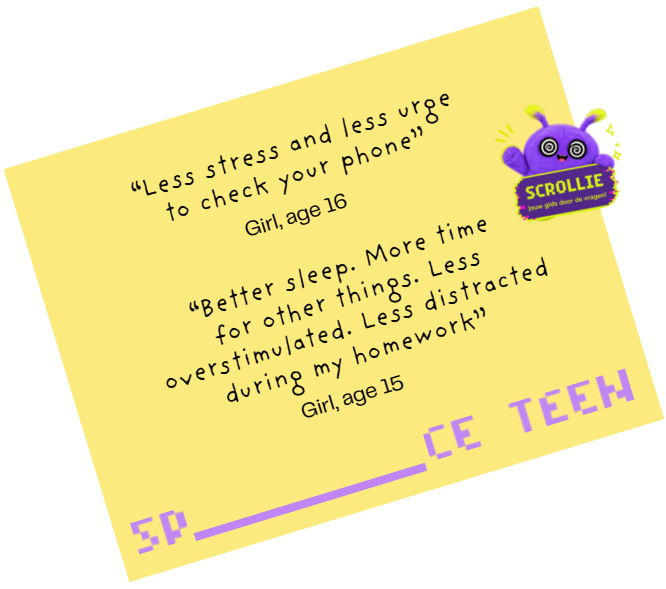


Figure 11. Reported effectiveness of strategies to reduce social media use among children and teens.



Alongside these responses, an open-ended question asked **teens** to **describe the benefits of reducing their social media use in their own words**. Their responses offer a glimpse of what cutting back can mean in everyday life: **feeling less pulled towards their phones** and **having more space to rest**, **focus** and **engage in other activities.**

Reclaimer participants expressed a similar aspiration: **not simply to spend less time on screens, but to have more time for the things they valued**.

Not every trade-off feels worth it to regain control

Cutting back can mean gaining something, rather than only giving something up. But **how much are teens willing to sacrifice for greater control?** In a question asked only to teens, the Monitor explored willingness to use settings that offer more control even when they come with drawbacks. **Views were divided**: **around a third** were **willing to accept** each trade-off, **around a third** were **unwilling**, and the **remainder** were **neutral**. Greater control alone therefore does not make these settings an obvious choice for everyone.

	Teens (n = 600)		
	Disagree	Neutral	Agree
Less enjoyment	30.8%	37.5%	31.2%
More difficult to use	28.8%	35.2%	35.0%
Missed updates	33.8%	34.5%	31.0%
Missed friends' fun	33.3%	34.0%	32.0%

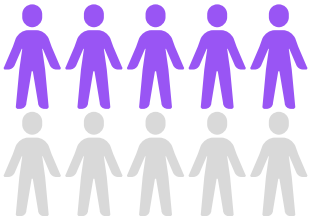
Table 3. Teens' willingness to accept trade-offs for greater control over social media use.
Responses to: "I would be willing to use settings to have more control over my social media use, even if it (implies)..."
Responses of "I do not understand the question" are not displayed, so the percentages shown do not sum to 100%.

Parents can also be part of the picture

Greater control does not have to be something young people manage alone. The Monitor also asked how often they **ask their parents for help to reduce their social media use**, or **make agreements together to use it less**. **Children** were **more likely than teens** to report **doing both at least sometimes**: just over half of children said they ask for help at least sometimes, compared with about four in ten teens (54.4% and 41.8%, respectively).

Making agreements was more common: 68.7% of children and 47.7% of teens reported doing this **at least sometimes**. At the same time, **more than half of teens** said they **never or almost never** ask for help or make agreements with parents (58.2% and 52.3%, respectively).

More than half of children ask for help from their parents at least sometimes



	Children			Teens		
	Never or almost never	Sometimes	Often or very often	Never or almost never	Sometimes	Often or very often
Ask parents for help	45.6%	**36.9%**	**17.5%**	**58.2%**	34.3%	7.5%
Make agreements with parents	31.3%	**43.6%**	**25.1%**	**52.3%**	33.7%	14.1%

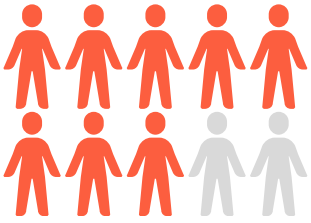
Table 4. How often children (n = 195) and teens (n = 306) involve their parents in reducing social media use.

Reclaimer offers a **concrete example of what parental involvement might look like in practice**. One child imagined an app that lets them choose a screen-time limit, while giving parents the option to adjust it if it seems too long and allowing the phone to lock. This echoes the Monitor's open-ended responses to the disconnection question, where some children mentioned timers set by their parents. Together, these examples suggest that **parental support** can take the form of a **digital boundary** while still **giving the child a role in setting it**.



Friends can play a role too

Compared with parents, **friends** were **less often involved in efforts** to **reduce social media use**. Around **three-quarters of children and teens** said they **never or almost never ask friends for help** (74.9% and 73.9%, respectively); and roughly **eight in ten** said they **never or almost never make agreements with friends** to use social media less (82.1% and 78.4%).

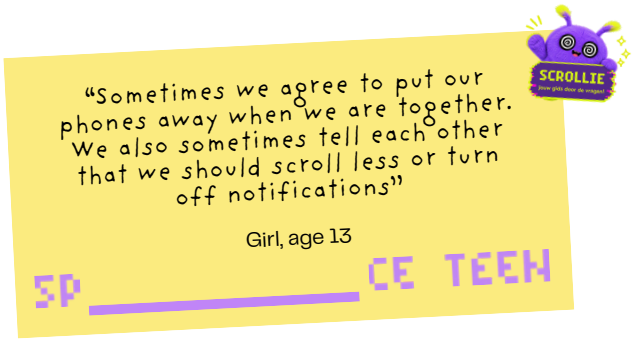


8 out of 10 young people never or almost never make agreements about use with friends

About one-quarter asked for help at least sometimes, and around one-fifth made agreements at least sometimes. All in all, peer support was uncommon. The pattern was similar across age groups.

	Children			Teens		
	Never or almost never	Sometimes	Often or very often	Never or almost never	Sometimes	Often or very often
Ask friends for help	**74.9%**	19.0%	6.1%	**73.9%**	17.3%	8.8%
Make agreements with friends	**82.1%**	11.3%	6.7%	**78.4%**	17.0%	4.6%

Table 5. How often children (n = 195) and teens (n = 306) involve their friends in reducing social media use.



Despite being uncommon, the Monitor's open-ended responses offer **examples of shared efforts** that could inform interventions. Reclaimer also proposes a complementary possibility: reaching friends through an app to coordinate fun offline activities, such as going outside together and working towards shared goals. Disconnection could then become something young people choose to do together, rather than a task each person has to manage alone.

Platforms need to do their part

78% Children (n = 193) **want design changes to make platforms less harmful**

77% Teens (n = 295) **want design changes to make platforms less harmful**

67% Children (n = 193) **consider it important to have a say in platform design**

65% Teens (n = 295) **consider it important to have a say in platform design**

Figure 12. Young people's views on safer platform design and having a say in that design.
Percentages show respondents who agreed that platforms should design their apps to be less harmful, and those who considered having a say in platform design important.

Curious about what young people think about digital rights, responsibility and regulation? Find out in our State of Youth report. Read it here (currently available in Dutch only).

Young people also **expect platforms to act**: around four in five support less harmful app design, and two-thirds value having a say in that design.

Findings III

Putting phones aside, making space for more: what young people want and need offline

The SpaceTeen Monitor and the pilots show that young people want more room for offline life. Most already enjoy sports, hobbies and meeting friends, yet many feel there are too few places to go and recognise that phones can get in the way. They expect putting phones aside to make more time for relationships, activities and rest, but turning that wish into action takes support and places to spend time together. An invitation to join in, or more chances to simply hang out, can help close that gap. The challenge is to combine the best of both worlds: online connection and offline experiences.

SP CE TEEN

Putting phones aside, making space for more

Where can youth get together? Places to connect in real life

Making space for life beyond screens also means having somewhere to go. In the Monitor, **around a quarter of children and teens** reported **too few places in their neighbourhood** where they could meet and relax (25.5% and 26.1%, respectively).

Although the overall proportions were similar across age groups, **girls more often reported a shortage than boys**. Among children, 29% of girls perceived insufficient places, compared with 22% of boys. Among teens, the corresponding figures were 31% and 22%.

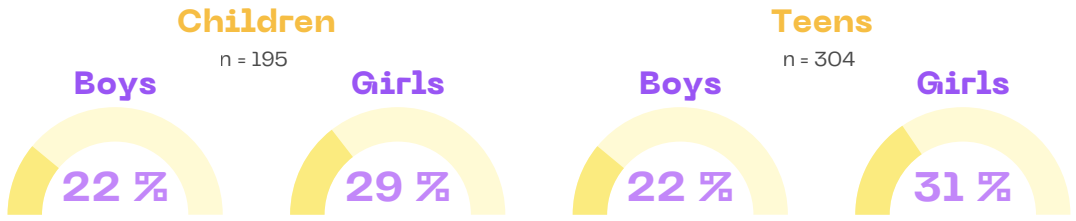


Figure 13. Perceived shortage of neighbourhood meeting places, by age group and gender.
Percentages show respondents who disagreed or strongly disagreed that there are enough places in their neighbourhood to meet and relax.

Among teens, **perceptions also differed by residential setting**. Those who described their area as **countryside more often reported insufficient places than** those who described it as a **city** (38.5% compared with 21.1%).

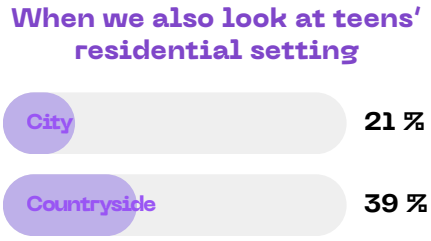
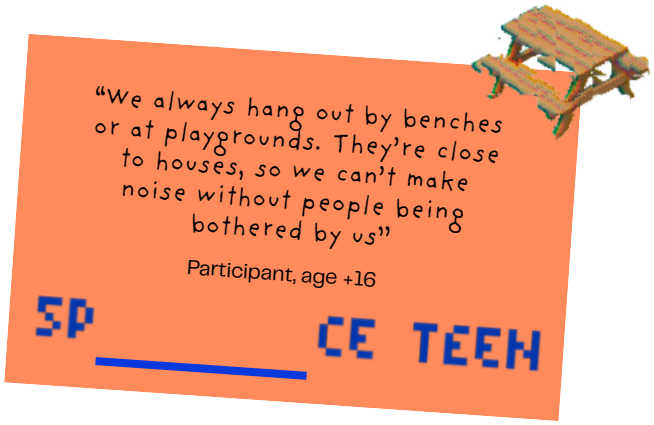


Figure 14. Perceived shortage of neighbourhood meeting places among teens, by residential setting.
Percentages show teens who disagreed or strongly disagreed that there are enough places in their neighbourhood to meet and relax.

But beyond whether there are enough places, there is also the **question of what makes them feel welcoming and suitable for young people**. The qualitative findings from **Happy Place** add this perspective, highlighting the **need for spaces where young people can easily meet friends and feel at ease.**

In **public spaces**, young people **may feel watched** or **treated as a nuisance**, while uncertainty about safety, others' openness to interaction and what is expected of them can create further barriers. These accounts point to **a need for third places,** informal meeting spaces beyond home and school that offer safety, some privacy and opportunities to connect on young people's own terms.





Alongside feeling welcome and at ease, **having something appealing to do can give young people a reason to visit these spaces**. Gaming at a community centre, going to the gym, or visiting shops offer **concrete destinations**, sometimes prompted by a parent's encouragement to leave home.

Spending time outside also does not have to be entirely screen-free: gaming can itself draw young people to a physical venue. Supporting offline activities therefore means more than encouraging them to "go outside", it also means offering places they want to go and things they want to do.

Activities and time with friends

Many young people already make time for activities and friends. As Table 6 shows, **most children and teens participate in sports**, **pursue hobbies** and **meet friends at least weekly**, with higher percentages for children across all three activities.

These activities, though, were not necessarily screen-free: hobbies may involve screens, and meeting friends in person does not rule out phone use. The findings nevertheless highlight **existing interests and social routines** that **efforts to support life beyond screens can build on**.

	Children	Teens
Sports	79.6%	72.9%
Hobbies	80.1%	72.5%
Meeting friends in person	76.5%	70.3%

Table 6. Percentage of children (n = 196) and teens (n = 306) who engage in the listed acitvities at least weekly.

When social media compete for time

Regular participation in activities does not mean social media never get in the way. In the Monitor, **37.8% of children and 42.5% of teens** felt that their **social media use left them less time for other important activities**.

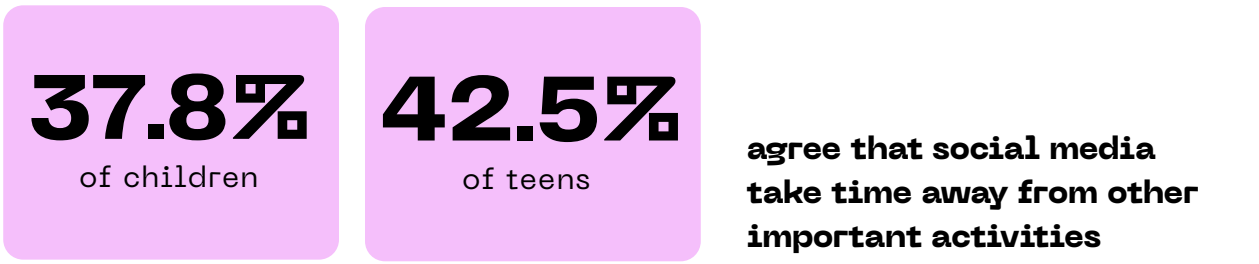


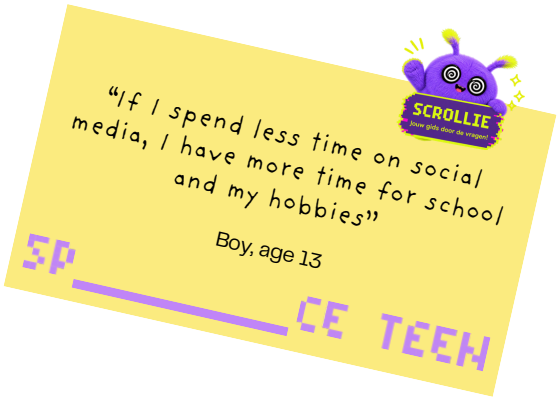
Figure 15. Perceived displacement of other important activities by social media use among children (n = 196) and teens (n = 306).
Percentages show respondents who agreed or strongly agreed that time spent on social media leaves them less time for other important activities.

Picking up a phone for schoolwork can lead to other uses instead. The concern is therefore not simply whether screens are involved, but whether **their use interferes with what young people want or need to do**.



Making room for what matters

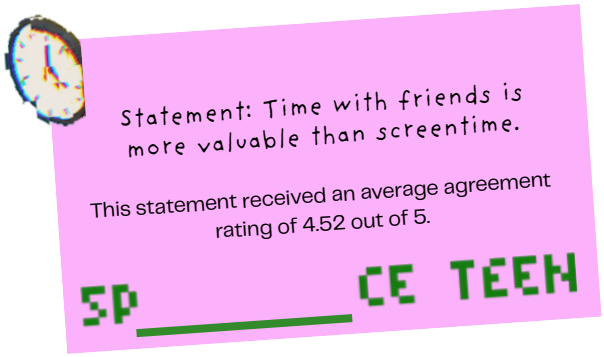
Alongside recognising what social media can get in the way of, young people describe **what they hope to make more room for**. In the Monitor's open-ended responses, these possibilities become concrete: **more time for conversations with friends and parents, schoolwork, hobbies and play**.





Their answers also suggest that the **value of this time** is about **being more present**: enjoying a proper conversation and giving attention to the people around them.





In the **Reclaimer** short survey, which was conducted within the co-creation sessions, 44 pupils rated statements about screen use and everyday activities and expressed **strong agreement** that **time with friends is more valuable than screen time**.

Yet wanting more time with friends does not automatically translate into making plans or putting the phone down. An invitation to join an activity could help bridge that gap. **CLUB**, one of the prototypes designed in Reclaimer, explores this possibility of **combining online connection with offline activities** (see the prototype showcase section).

Designing new ways to find balance

Prototype showcase

This showcase brings together prototypes from Scrollternatives, Reclaimer, and Happy Place, translating young people's experiences and priorities into concrete design ideas. They explore how design might support more intentional choices, meaningful connection and room for what matters, both online and in person.



BETTER

Scrollternatives prototype



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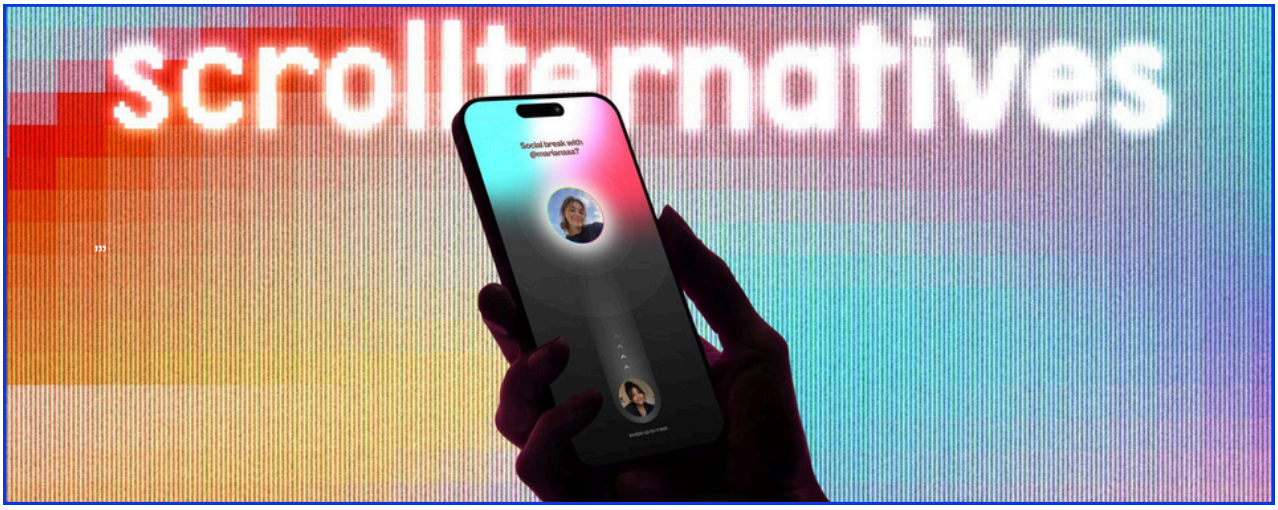
PAUZE Party: A pause with a social purpose!

PAUZE Party is designed to turn a break from doomscrolling into an opportunity for social connection. Developed by design studio TodayTomorrow together with young people in Scrollternatives, it is the first concept to be developed into a working feature. Its aim is not simply to stop scrolling, but to offer something worthwhile to do instead.

Because PAUZE Party is not embedded in any existing platform, it can be evaluated independently. A controlled study at the University of Amsterdam is planned for this winter to assess its effects, with results expected in early 2027.

If the findings are promising, the ambition is to encourage adoption by platforms committed to healthier design, including newer alternatives to established social media platforms. We are also investigating opportunities to bring other Scrollternatives prototypes to life.

For more about the design process, see the Scrollternatives report here.



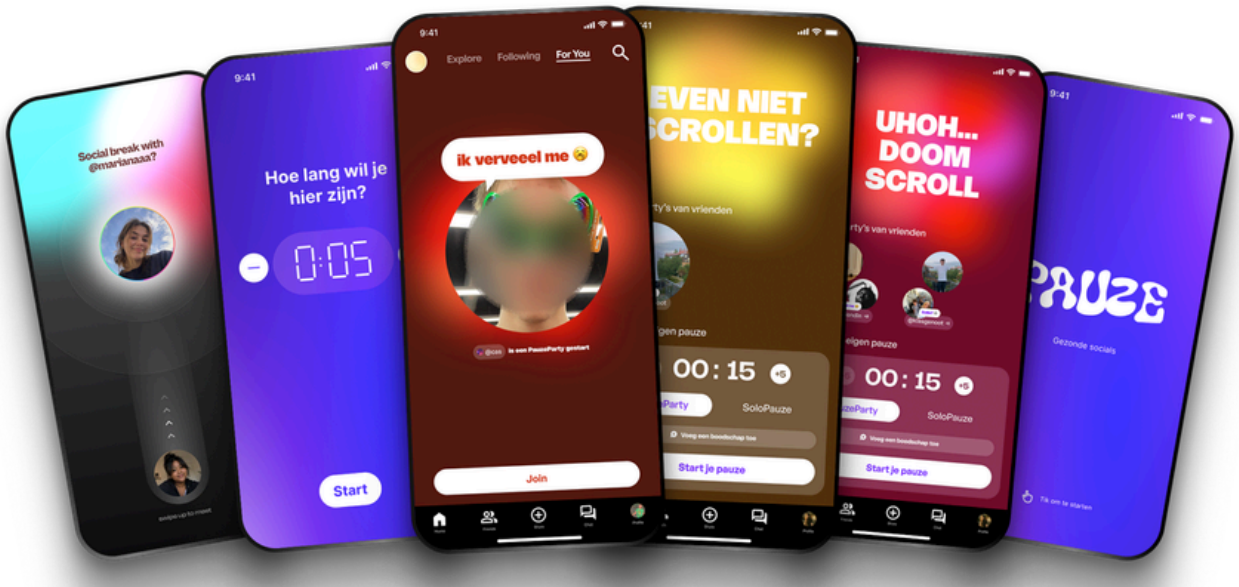
PAUZE Party prototype

BETTER

Scrollternatives prototype

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PAUZE Party: A pause with a social purpose!



PAUZE Party prototype

Would you like a social break to escape the trap of doomscrolling?

Try out the demo here

Design Research: Lisa van de Merwe
Creative Direction: Bart Bergmeijer
Design: Tim van Cappellen
Project Lead: Tijana Patteri
Development: Teije Keesmaat

LESS

Reclaimer prototype

scroll
scroll
scroll

CLUB: Turning ideas into plans!

CLUB is designed to make it easier for children to turn ideas for spending time with friends into actual plans. Developed from Reclaimer's co-creation sessions with children aged 10–14, the concept focuses on the last two years of primary school (groups 7 and 8). Its starting point is not restricting screen use, but making meaningful alternatives easier, more appealing, and more accessible.

The golden hours

The concept centres on the "golden hours" between 3 pm and 6 pm: an afternoon window with room for meeting friends, going outside and trying something new. On the platform, children can start their own club or join one that matches their interests. Together, they can suggest activities, make plans and discover new things to do. The aim is to bridge the gap between "that sounds fun" and actually doing something together, using online coordination to support shared experiences in person.

No smartphone of their own needed

Taking part would not require a smartphone of their own. CLUB is designed around a personal card and PIN code that would let children access their account on an available device. This approach aims to support their growing independence without encouraging earlier smartphone ownership: the digital tool provides a way to arrange activities, rather than becoming a reason to have a phone.

For those interested in learning more about CLUB, a more detailed report will follow soon.



CLUB prototype

LESS

Reclaimer prototype

scroll
scroll
scroll

CLUB: Turning ideas into plans!

The four pillars of CLUB:

1) Shared free time: CLUB is there for after school, when you and your friends have time.

2) Planning & organising: From organising a football tournament to shopping together after school: CLUB helps you make it happen.

3) Explore & join in: Not sure what you want to do? CLUB suggests activities in your neighbourhood that are easy to join.

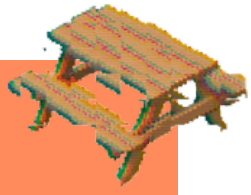
4) "Group 7": You receive your personal card and CLUB account when you start Group 7. Discover how to use CLUB together with your class.





Design Team:
Marcel Schouwenaar
Puck Siemerink
Janne van de Sande

CLUB Prototype

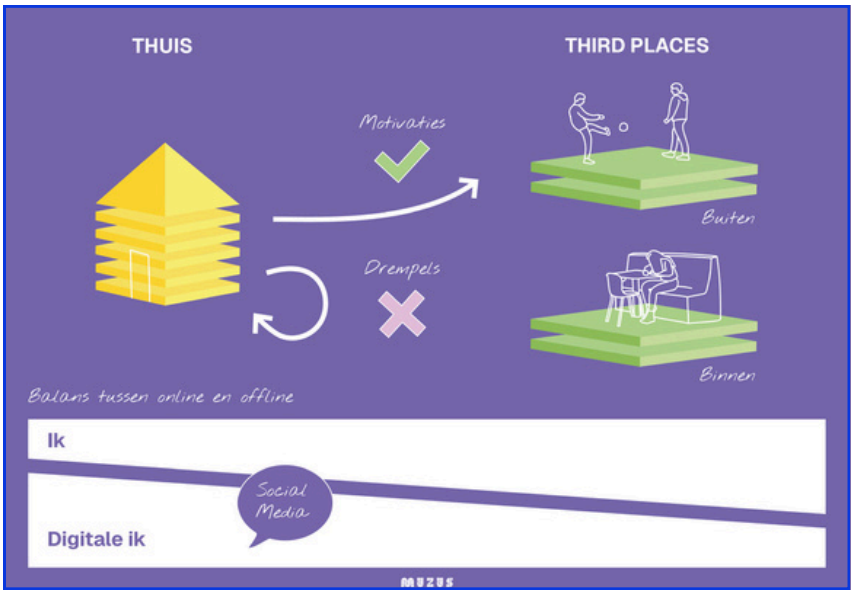


DIFFERENT

Happy Place prototype

A place to chill, grow, and connect

This design direction from Muzus focuses on creating appealing places beyond home and school where young people can spend time, meet others and do something that suits them. Through interviews, focus groups and photo challenges, they explored what makes these places attractive, and what gets in the way. Young people described social media as an easy, free way to fill their time, while alternatives can feel expensive, unfamiliar or unwelcoming. The aim is therefore not simply to discourage scrolling, but to make other possibilities more accessible and inviting.



Place to chill

Place to grow

Place to connect

Three qualities guide the design: **a place to chill**, where young people can relax, hang out and be themselves without having to do anything; **a place to grow**, where they can explore, learn and develop; and a **place to connect**, where they can spend time together and meet new people. These qualities reflect different ways young people might want to use a space, rather than a single expectation about what they should do there.

DIFFERENT

Happy Place prototype

A place to chill, grow, and connect

Building with girls in Amsterdam-Noord

Alongside football pitches mainly used by boys, girls in Amsterdam-Noord want a place where they feel welcome and that they can call their own. As part of one of four local pilots, girls are working together with Muzus and the City of Amsterdam to design, build and paint a pink-and-brown hang-out spot: a roofed bench with a cupboard containing games, lights, music, blankets and cushions.





Prototype

Design Team:
Neele Kistemaker
Rins Lindeman
Mirte van der Nat

The process starts with building trust and discovering what girls enjoy and feel is missing. By creating the space themselves, they develop pride and a sense of ownership. The next step is to see how the spot is used in public space and what helps it succeed.

The invitation to local authorities, designers and youth workers is to look beyond young people's phone use: what do their surroundings offer, and how can we create places they genuinely want to spend time in?

What can design change for young people?

Bring back the "social"

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Bart Bergmeijer
Creative Director

"Social media have the potential to offer connection. Within SpaceTeen, we can investigate how this potential can be realised and re-establish the 'social' in social media".



Give young people more say

scroll scroll scroll

"Young people should get much more autonomy over their own time and freedom. Instead of banning phones and keeping them away from children, we ask what young people want".



Puck Siemerink
Design Lead

Create places to meet



Rins Lindeman
Design Lead

"The public space is not designed by young people. Many young people expressed the need for a place to easily meet and see friends, but these places are missing. They also face barriers to meeting and engaging with others. Design can help create safe, private and open spaces that fit their needs".



Marjolein van Vlucht
Programme Manager
Design Power

Regain control of time and attention

"Young people's social media use is a complex challenge, and we all agree that action is needed to regain control over our attention and time. New technology or legislation alone doesn't provide a sufficient answer to this issue. Design with and for young people is an important key".

Beyond research

Starting conversations

Building better SPACEs for TEENs takes more than research alone. Through Dutch Design Week, ScrollCon and media interviews, we share what we are learning, invite new perspectives and connect with people who can help turn insights into action.

Opening up possibilities

At Dutch Design Week, we joined CLICKNL's public events and shared our work at AREA51, a skatepark frequented by young people. These conversations explored how design can shape a better digital world, moving beyond asking young people to put their phones away towards giving them more control over their time and attention.





Bringing people together

With Netwerk Mediawijsheid, we organised ScrollCon on 11 November 2026, bringing together young people, designers, platforms, policymakers, researchers and societal organisations. The aim was to move beyond discussing challenges and build connections that lead to concrete ideas for better social media.

Taking things further

In the coming years, SpaceTeen's insights will inform educational materials co-developed with NEMO Science Museum. The pilots will also feed into a toolkit of key enabling methodologies for working with young people, developed by Crystal Smit (EUR) and made available later. Alongside this, we are creating tools for stakeholders to brainstorm design changes together.



DDW 26 AREA51

SPACETEEN INSTALLATION

SpaceTeen Agenda for Change

Creating better social media for young people is a shared mission, and the **SpaceTeen Agenda for Change** offers practical steps we can all take. We hope you'll find something you want to try—if you do, share your experiences with us so we can keep learning together.

1 Platforms

- **Take responsibility for digital well-being:** design for balance and calmer experiences, not endless engagement.
- **Give young people a say and users control:** involve young people in design, make algorithms transparent and let users shape their feeds.
- **Make stopping easier:** reduce distractions and use clear stopping cues and well-placed friction.
- **Protect privacy:** collect less data and safeguard young people's information.

2 Young people

- **Try different apps:** explore WeAre8 and Blybahn or use Signal to chat with friends.
- **Take on a challenge:** try two days without TikTok with friends, or choose another challenge.
- **Keep your phone out of bed:** charge it away from where you sleep.
- **Choose connection over scrolling:** message a friend or plan a fun aternative together, agreeing when and where.

3 Policy

- **Include young people** in policies affecting their digital lives.
- **Hold platforms accountable** for safer design and support healthier alternatives to engagement-driven platforms.
- **Invest in offline spaces** where young people can meet and connect.
- **Fund digital literacy and independent research:** support young people and parents, and investigate platform design and its effects.

4 Schools & Youth Organisations

- **Make platform tricks visible:** teach young people how dark patterns keep them engaged.
- **Co-design phone-free spaces and times with young people.**
- **Model alternatives:** use alternative platforms for school and youth communication.
- **Create scrollternatives together:** develop activities and hang-out spaces young people would genuinely choose over scrolling.

5 Parents

- **Model balanced phone use in everyday life.**
- **Make room for phone-free moments**, such as at dinner or in bedrooms.
- **Support offline connection:** help teens pursue activities they enjoy and access places to meet without direct adult supervision.

SpaceTeen Team: The people behind SpaceTeen

Research
University of Amsterdam



Sindy Sumter
Programme Lead
Researcher



Lise-Marie Nassen
Programme Manager
Researcher



Amber van der Wal
Researcher



Susanne Baumgartner
Researcher



Clara Virós i Martín
SpaceTeen
Visiting Researcher



Charlotte Godfried
Research Intern



Rusen N. Tanribilir
Researcher



Marthe Möller
Researcher



Rhianne Hoek
Researcher

Research
Erasmus Univeristy Rotterdam

Creative Partners



Bart Bergmeijer
Creative Director



Lisa van de Merwe
Design Researcher



Tijana Patteri
Project Lead



Marcel Schouwenaar
Design Lead



Puck Siemerink
Design Lead



Rins Lindeman
Design Lead



Neele Kistemaker
Design Lead



Crystal Smit
Researcher



Mirte van der Nat
Design Lead

SpaceTeen Partners: Stichting Koninklijke Nederlandse Kinderpostzegels, KPN, YoungMedia, NEMO Science, VodafoneZiggo, Universiteit van Amsterdam, Erasmus Universiteit
Associate Partners: Gemeente Amsterdam, KidsRights, RECImpact, ASCoR
Creative Partners: ScrollScrollScroll, Muzus, TodayTomorrow

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