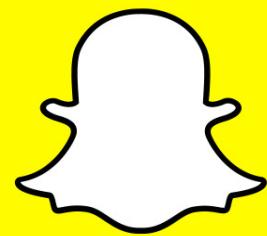
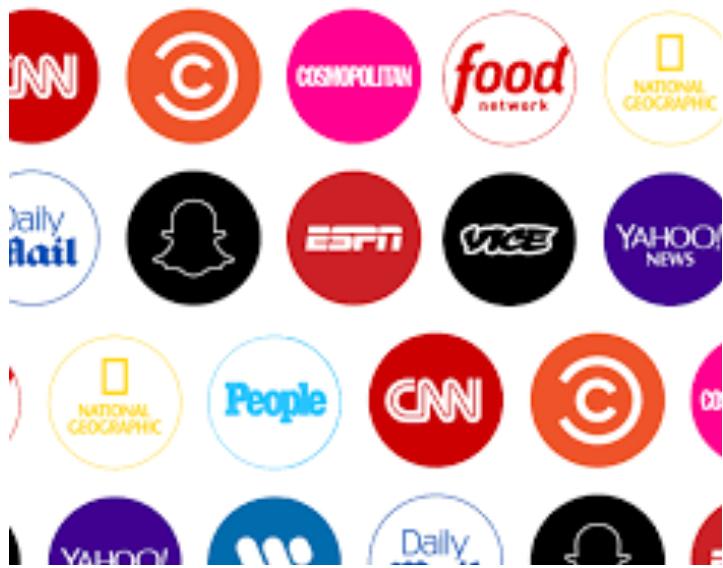
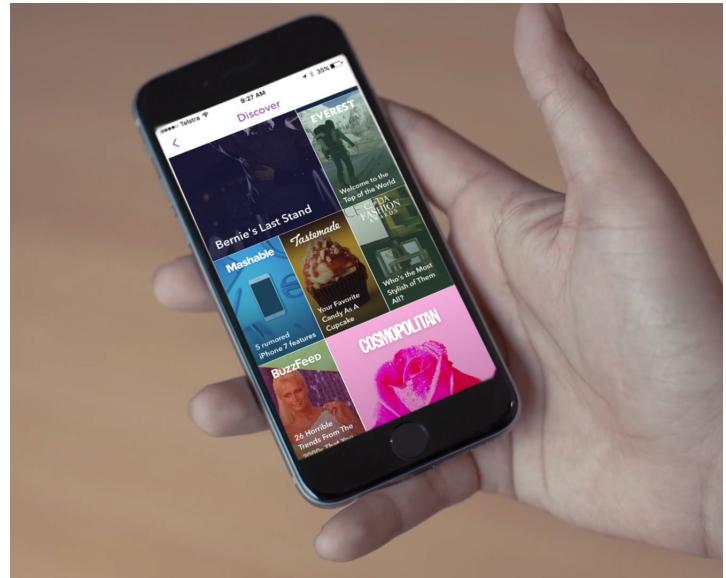


# Snapchat Discover



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SI 110

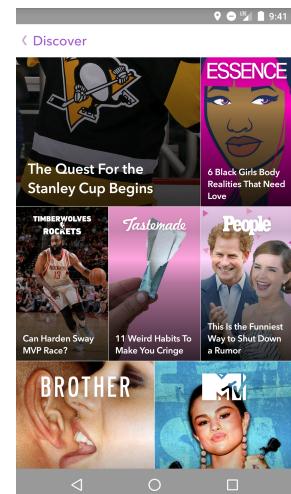
# An Effective Channel for Information and Entertainment

## Snapchat: An Overview

What started as a simple photo messaging app has grown and evolved into a multi-media experience, offering a mixture of private messaging and public content to more than 150 million users around the world.<sup>1</sup> Immensely popular among the teenage and young adult demographic, users can take photos and videos that self-delete after viewing, customize them with filters and stickers, send them to each other, and post them to their “story”, which all of their followers can view for twenty-four hours. Along with the stories of friends, users can view similar stories of content curated by Snapchat or third-party publishers and media outlets with the app’s Discover Stories. This report will serve to analyze and evaluate a user’s experience of Snapchat Discover stories using Nielsen’s Ten Usability Heuristics for User Interface Design. I will also discuss how they serve as an effective channel through which many users consume information and entertainment, especially the youngest demographics, and offer suggestions as to how a business or media outlet could take advantage of the feature and possibly build their user base.

## Snapchat Discover: A Closer Look

Snapchat’s website advertises the feature as a way to “keep up-to-date on breaking news 📰 [sic] the big game 🏈 [sic] or your favorite celebs 😎📸 [sic] with Discover!”<sup>2</sup> Discover is unique from the app’s main messaging function for two reasons: 1) the content posted in Discover comes from editorial entities, whether a website like Buzzfeed, a television network like CNN, or a magazine like Cosmopolitan, and 2) the content on these channels is interactive, including videos, games, quizzes, and articles, all refreshed every twenty-four hours.<sup>3</sup>



## Ranking

Throughout this paper, I will evaluate Snapchat Discover, both those channels produced by third-party media outlets and those produced and curated by Snapchat, using Nielsen’s Ten Usability Heuristics for User Interface Design. For each heuristic, I will rank Snapchat on a scale of one to three, one representing that Discover does something well, and three representing that Discover either lacks this attribute or ranks poorly.

A sample of channels offered

on Discover.

1. "Daily Active Users of Snapchat 2014-2016," *Statista*, accessed April 13, 2017, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/545967/snapchat-app-dau/>.
2. "About Discover," *Snapchat Support*, accessed April 13, 2017, <https://support.snapchat.com/en-US/a/discover-how-to>.
3. Mikah Sargent, "How to use Stories and Discover on Snapchat," *iMore*, last modified February 1, 2017, <http://www.imore.com/how-use-snapchat-stories-and-discover#discover>.

# Nielsen's Ten Usability Heuristics for User Interface Design

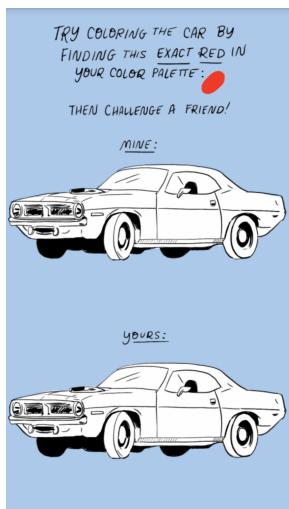
## 1) Visibility of system status

Ranking: 2

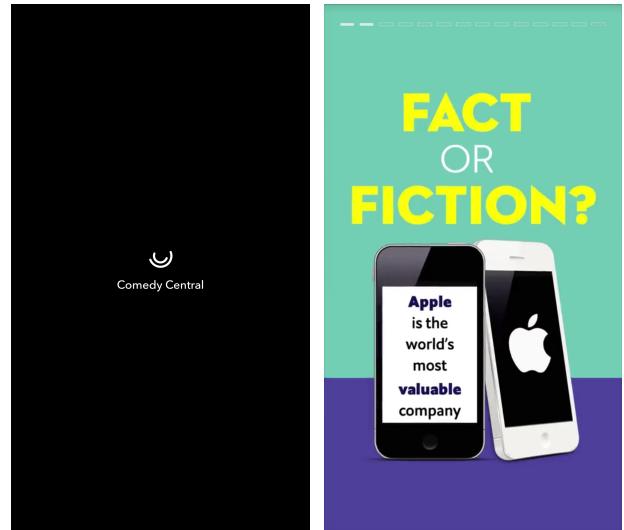
This heuristic states that the user should know what's going on inside the system, giving some kind of feedback to the user's actions within a reasonable amount of time.<sup>4</sup> Depending on a user's internet connection or data signal, a Discover story could take a while to load. The loading screen features the name of the publisher of the story and a simple, white, rotating circle on a black screen. While this lets the user know that the content is still loading, it could be improved by having some sort of creative loading screen, perhaps specific to each publisher. While viewing content, many channels show a progress bar at the top or bottom of the screen to signify how much content remains to be viewed. Each channel also signifies to the user that they have reached the end of the day's content with a screen asking you to subscribe. With the inundation of information that we face today, it is helpful of a system to provide a metric of how much information has been consumed.

## 2) Match between system and the real world

Ranking: 3



According to this heuristic, there should not be anything within the application or system that a user might not understand intuitively. To a regular Snapchat user, the use and purpose of the Discover stories might be intuitive, as they resemble individual Snapchat stories, but to a non-user the format would not be, especially as they exist in a closed system. Many of the functions and features of Snapchat Discover would also be intuitive, but to the outside user, this is not the case. For example, Buzzfeed's Discover channel often features interactive content, like this illustration of a car meant to be colored in and shared with friends, but there are no signifiers indicating how this is to be done. This lack of matching between the system and the real world could contribute to a sense of learned helplessness, which refers to "the situation in which people experience repeated failure at a task and as a result, they



Examples of a loading screen and a progress bar on two different Discover channels.

4. Jakob Nielsen, "10 Usability Heuristics for User Interface Design," *Nielsen Norman Group*, last modified January 1, 1995, <https://www.nngroup.com/articles/ten-usability-heuristics/>.

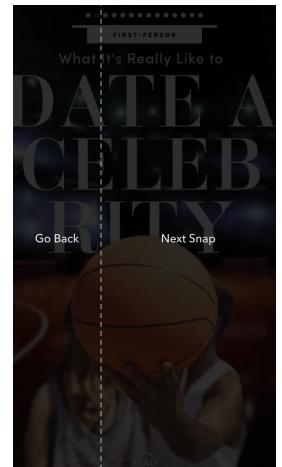
decide the task cannot be done, at least not by them.<sup>5</sup> By providing tutorials, instructions, or other signifiers, Snapchat could improve the experience of many of its Discover users, and secure many additional users.

While the format is unique, the closed system of Snapchat Discover acts as a way for the publishers and producers to sample the information they offer, hopefully gaining new loyal followers. Information is an experience good, meaning a consumer must experience it to value it, which creates an economic problem of how to get consumers to purchase information goods.<sup>6</sup> Sampling information is a solution to this, and one that businesses and other producers of information goods should take advantage of on Snapchat Discover.

### 3) User control and freedom

#### Ranking: 1

Nielsen says that, "Users often choose system functions by mistake and will need a clearly marked 'emergency exit' to leave the unwanted state without having to go through an extended dialogue."<sup>7</sup> Each Snapchat Discover channel can be exited by swiping down, a function which is common among many different apps and smartphone operating systems. Navigating through the stories is intuitive as well. While I mentioned above that instruction is lacking for some features within Discover, a short tutorial is given when you view a channel for the first time. You can tap the right side of the screen to skip or move forward through content and the left side of the screen to go back and view content again. Having the freedom to change the content they are viewing or exit a story entirely gives a user the freedom to tailor their experience, and this kind of customizable information experience is valuable to consumers.



Users navigate through stories

### 4) Consistency and standards

#### Ranking: 1

In respect to this heuristic, Snapchat stories set the standard. Across the app, actions and features are consistent. While each channel has a unique aesthetic depending on the publisher or creator, Discover stories are navigated with the same actions as individual stories and live stories curated by Snapchat within the app. Stories began as a relatively unique format, but other apps, like Instagram and Facebook, have adopted the concept of stories and have implemented them with the same functionalities following the standards set by Snapchat. This fact demonstrates the power of stories as a valuable channel for reaching a wide-ranging user base for businesses and information producers.

Instagram and Facebook  
have followed the  
standards set by Snapchat.

### 5) Error prevention

#### Ranking: 3

Some common errors experienced by users of Discover are not errors that affect how the system operates, but affect the user's experience nonetheless. A junior student at the University of Michigan says that one example is there are no checks or precautions against sending content to the wrong person. Depending on the content sent, this

could be frustrating and embarrassing to the user. This could easily be fixed with a simple pop-up message asking the user if they

5. Donald A. Norman, *The Design of Everyday Things* (New York: Basic Books, 2013), 62.

6. Carl Shapiro and Hal R. Varian, *Information Rules* (Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 1999), 5.

7. Nielsen, "10 Usability Heuristics for User Interface Design".

are sure they want to send something. According to another student, another example of a common error made when viewing Discover channels is opening a story or channel with the volume of your device on while in a public place. Most channels add music or other sound effects to their content, and more frustration and embarrassment could be avoided if there were preventative measures in place to ask the user if they wanted sound or not. Error prevention is an area in which Snapchat Discover could easily improve, and by doing so hopefully increase usage.

## 6) Recognition rather than recall

Ranking: 1

According to Nielsen, a system should “minimize the user’s memory load by making objects, actions, and options visible.”<sup>8</sup> It is better to suggest a set of options to the user than to let them try to remember. Once a user is familiar with the app, the functions and features of Snapchat Discover are for the most part intuitive, and thus recognizable. Even so, channels will provide instructions for anything that might not be intuitive, such as a “Swipe up to read” directive, or a diagram explaining how to navigate through the channel, as shown. This simplicity of navigation and use will make the system accessible and easy to new users, so a business could include these kinds of directives to reach more users.



Signifiers within Discover stories.

## 7) Flexibility and efficiency of use

Ranking: 2

Most people that I know that use Snapchat Discover are casual users, but for those users that are interested in regularly making use of the system, certain “accelerators” exist that can “speed up the interaction for the expert user such that the system can cater to both inexperienced and experienced users.”<sup>9</sup> The one feature that Discover offers that increases this efficiency of use is the ability to subscribe to channels so that they appear at the top of your unviewed stories every day. In most other respects, the system is flexible and straightforward. Producers of information could incentivize users to subscribe to their channel to maximize viewership.

## 8) Aesthetic and minimalist design

Ranking: 3

Throughout the design process, a designer should ask him or herself, “is every information displayed on the interface necessary and useful?” This is an area in which Snapchat Discover has failed. The feed of channels is cluttered with colors, images, text, and differently sized icons. A Fortune article reviewing Discover quips, “A tour of the channels can feel like an acid trip through the candy-colored diary of a hyperactive teenager.”<sup>10</sup> That being said, the largest user base of Snapchat is teenagers, and they are a dedicated and engaged audience, ready to consume any content delivered to them on their favorite platform. Perhaps in order to reach a more diverse audience in terms of age, Discover

“A tour of the channels can feel like an acid trip through the candy-colored diary of a hyperactive teenager.”

8. Ibid.

9. Ibid.

10. Erin Griffith, “The hottest club in town is Snapchat Discover,” *Fortune*, last modified September 21, 2015, <http://fortune.com/2015/09/21/snapchat-discover-publishers/>.

could redesign its interface and channels with a cleaner, simpler, more pleasing aesthetic in mind.

## 9) Help users recognize diagnose, and recover from errors

Ranking: 2

According to this heuristic, "error messages should be expressed in plain language, precisely indicate the problem, and constructively suggest a solution."<sup>11</sup> Most errors that occur within Snapchat Discover, besides those mentioned above, occur with navigation of the different stories. Besides the different signifiers and functions for navigation, while simple, the app does not provide any indication for how to solve the errors. This, again, could frustrate the user into not using the app at all and valuable viewership would be lost.

## 10) Help and documentation

Ranking: 3

While a great user interface allows the user to navigate through its features without any instruction, this is not always the case, and documentation should be readily available to help guide the user through the system. Nielsen says that "any such information should be easy to search, and focused on the user's task."<sup>12</sup> This is another area in which Discover could improve. Snapchat has help documentation on their website, but the help information within the app is difficult to find and not easily searchable. While there are many signifiers and instructions throughout the app as discussed above, it is important to provide accessible help and documentation so that users are not intimidated out of using Discover as a source for information and entertainment.

# Concluding Comments

As a medium for delivering informational and entertaining content, Snapchat is extremely powerful. "If the future of media is distributing content across numerous digital channels, media executives see Snapchat at the forefront, thanks to its engaged audience of young people."<sup>13</sup> In the world of Web 2.0, characterized by user-generated content and interactive sites, Snapchat Discover is a way for traditional media companies to gain traction.<sup>14</sup> By improving its user experience to appeal to a broader audience, Snapchat Discover could be a major source for news and entertainment.

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11. Nielsen, "10 Usability Heuristics for User Interface Design".

12. Ibid.

13. Griffith, "The hottest club in town is Snapchat Discover".

14. Penny Trieu, "Social Media," (lecture, SI 110, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI, January 30, 2017).

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