

RUNNING HEAD: PERCEPTIONS OF EXPECTATIONS SURROUNDING  
COMMUNICATION ON SNAPCHAT AND THE ROLE OF SNAPCHAT'S FEATURES

Perceptions of Expectations Surrounding Communication on Snapchat and the  
Role of Snapchat's Features

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**Declaration of Authenticity**

I hereby certify that this material which I now submit for assessment on the programme of study leading to the award of MSci Advanced Applied Psychology is entirely my work and has not been taken from the work of others save to the extent that such work has been cited and acknowledged within the text of my own work. Furthermore, I certify that all data obtained during the course of this research work and included in this text is genuine and authentic.

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### **Abstract**

**Objectives:** Communication expectations on Snapchat and the features of Snapchat itself could have important impacts on real life relationships and individual wellbeing, and yet there is currently a significant lack of research in this area. Research suggests that numerous expectations regarding aspects such as response time influence online communication.

Certain features of the platforms, such as read receipts, are thought to impact these response expectations and the communication in general. However, little research has examined how these impact communication on Snapchat, a rapidly growing social networking app. The current study aimed to bridge this gap in the literature by exploring user perceptions of these communication expectations on Snapchat, and the features that play a role. **Method:** 12

participants between the ages of 18 and 50 took part in focus groups. 8 participants took part in the first, and 4 took part in the second. Each focus group session lasted for around 45 minutes. Data was analysed using an inductive, reflexive thematic analysis approach.

**Results:** Three main themes were developed from the data, each representing meaningful information about the response expectations and features of Snapchat. The results produced a number of important findings supportive of previous research, as well as a number of novel findings. **Conclusion:** The current study contributed a significant amount of knowledge to the existing research base on communication expectations. There are a number of key response expectations that exist on Snapchat that have potential consequences for relationships and wellbeing. The features of Snapchat also play a key role in these response expectations and the communication as a result.

**Key words:** Communication expectations, response expectations, response behaviour, features of Snapchat, relationships, individual wellbeing, reflexive thematic analysis

**Perceptions of Expectations Surrounding Communication on Snapchat and the Role of  
Snapchat's Features**

The way we communicate with others and the way they communicate with us in return significantly impacts our relationships (Berger, 2014) and our psychological wellbeing as a result (Hartley, 2002). Researchers posit that the expectations we hold for this communication “define and shape interpersonal interactions” in the way that we interpret information and communicate in response (Burgoon, 1993). Therefore, understanding these expectations and their consequences is key to understanding how relationships are shaped and maintained, as well as the potential effects on wellbeing. Despite this, there are only a small number of studies that have investigated these expectations within the context of social networking sites.

Snapchat is becoming an increasingly popular social networking app in the UK with over 22 million users (Dixon, 2023). There is evidence to suggest that networking on sites such as Snapchat can have numerous effects on real life relationships as well as individual wellbeing (Dunn & Langlais, 2020; Kissinger, 2019). As a result, it is imperative that a better understanding for communication on these apps is developed, as it could have important applications to relationships and wellbeing. As such, this study aims to explore people's perceptions of these communication expectations, and the role that the features of the app itself play in this.

**Interpersonal Communication Online**

Some research has attempted to understand how the features of face to face interpersonal communication might transfer to an online communicative context, and whether they maintain the same meaning and impacts on relationships. Research by Walther et al (2005) found that the amount of subjectively experienced affinity (warmth and affection) did

not differ between face to face (FtF) and online communication. Findings from Liebman and Gergle's study (2016) built upon this by demonstrating that the duration of conversation and the use of nonverbal cues such as response latency and punctuation use had a positive causal relationship with perceived affinity in online interactions. Evidence also shows that response time is interpreted online as a non-verbal expression of interpersonal closeness, care and presence in relationships (Doring & Poschl, 2017). This evidence suggests that online communication is just as meaningful as FtF communication.

Research into instant messaging platforms indicates that communication expectations are more pronounced within a social networking context. A study looking at romantic couples' interactions on Facebook messenger found that the sender's expectations for responsiveness, and their interpretation of a delayed response together shaped the user's perception of their conversation partner (Tu et al., 2018). These findings support Pielot et al's (2014) argument that people have an expectation for quicker responses when communicating on instant messaging platforms. In addition, Kissinger (2019) found that response time expectations had the highest emotional value on Snapchat over Twitter and Instagram, which suggests that the impact of response time expectations could be even more pronounced on Snapchat.

### **Impact of App Features on Communication**

Response expectations may have an increased impact on Snapchat due to its features. Although there is a distinct lack of evidence on how the features of Snapchat specifically affect communication expectations, some studies show evidence that features like read receipts stress in users due to a perceived pressure to respond ( Hoyle et al., 2017; Chou et al., 2022; Dogruel & Schnauber-Stockmann, 2021). Users also engage in avoidance strategies, such as reading a message from the home screen, in order to avoid generating a

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read receipt (Lynden & Rasmussen, 2017). This evidence suggests that response expectations on line are pervasive. They also highlight the potential negative effects that these expectations have on individual wellbeing in terms of the stress that is created. It is important to note that the findings presented here are from studies investigating WhatsApp and Facebook, which limits the application of these results to other apps. It is possible that the features of Snapchat will have an influence on communication expectations beyond read receipts, as Snapchat has a number of other features that could affect communication.

### **Study Rationale**

It is clear from reviewing the current literature that there is a significant dearth of research concerning communication expectations on social networking sites. Furthermore, the research that has looked into this topic have focused primarily on sites like Facebook and Twitter, and have neglected rapidly growing sites like Snapchat. It is highly important that more attention is paid to these types of apps, as they are most popular within the younger generations of society, who are the most vulnerable to the potential impacts. As such, the current study aims to explore perceptions of these communication expectations on Snapchat specifically, and the role that the features of this particular app play.

### **Method**

#### **Philosophical Perspective and Assumptions**

This study was designed according to the critical realist and constructionist assumptions that reality is subjective and can only be accessed by understanding individual experiences. Perceptions and expectations regarding communication on Snapchat are created by individuals. Therefore, asking these individuals what their subjective experience is and what their expectations are is the most effective method of gaining a better understanding of what expectations underlie communication on Snapchat.



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## **Participants**

Ethical approval was gained from the University of Chichester before recruitment began. Participants were recruited to take part in the study using volunteer convenience sampling. The study was advertised on the University of Chichester's Research Participation Scheme, through which participants could volunteer to take part and receive course credit for their participation. Participants were only asked to volunteer for the study if they use Snapchat as one of their primary forms of communication (i.e. use it on a daily or semi-daily basis to communicate).

There were 12 participants in total across the two focus groups. All of the participants were female and were aged between 18 and 50. All of the participants were current Psychology students at the University of Chichester.

## **Data Collection**

Data was collected using two focus groups. Focus groups were selected due to the exploratory nature of the research, as they allow rich insights into the perspectives of individuals and groups, including the potential differences in opinion between these individuals (Rabiee, 2004). Two focus groups is considered enough by some to achieve appropriate saturation and identify the relevant themes for the topic (Guest et al., 2017), two was also considered an appropriate amount given the time pressure of the study and the small scale of the research (Sagoe, 2012).

Although sixteen participants initially volunteered, only twelve took part in the focus groups. Research suggests that groups of eight to twelve people are ideal for focus groups because they are relatively easy to manage and yield a good amount of data (Tynan & Drayton, 1988). This size was also selected as it is a large enough group that active conversation can be stimulated, and small enough that each participant had the opportunity to

express their opinion (Sagoe, 2012). All of the participants were Psychology students at the University of Chichester, which made the groups relatively homogenous. This provided some common ground for the participants to relate to each other, which arguably made the participants more comfortable in having discussions. However, no further steps were taken to ensure homogeneity within the groups, as diversity within focus groups allows different opinions on the topic to be shared (Sagoe, 2012), which is important considering the lack of research and theory in this area. It was also not deemed necessary to have homogenous groups, as the topic is largely unsensitive and conflict among the group was unlikely.

The focus group sessions lasted around 45 minutes each, and were recorded audibly using Panopto, following informed consent from the participants. The University Psychology lab room was chosen as the location because it would have been familiar to most participants, and therefore easy to find. It also had the benefit of being a relatively open but private space, which was intended to make the participants feel as comfortable as possible. The location and time at which the focus groups took place also meant that a member of staff was on site and nearby when the focus groups took place, which was intended to make both the researcher and the participants feel more comfortable.

### **Data Analysis**

The data from the focus group sessions was transcribed verbatim using Panopto software. Any mistakes in the transcription were then corrected by listening again to the recording. NVivo 12 software (QSR, 2018) and Microsoft Word were used to conduct a thematic analysis of the transcripts. The analysis was conducted following an inductive, reflexive approach, where codes and themes were consistently adjusted as the analysis progressed, and a better understanding of the transcript was developed (Braun & Clarke, 2021). This approach was chosen because of its focus on understanding subjective experiences (Braun & Clarke, 2021) which was appropriate given the philosophical

underpinnings of this study. The analysis began with immediate familiarization with the transcripts so that the researcher could make any key notes about body language and atmosphere during the focus groups. This helped inform the subsequent analysis of the transcripts by making the data understandable within the context of that particular focus group. Initial codes and points of interest were annotated onto the transcript. Once initial codes were created, the transcripts and their corresponding codes were read through again to ensure the codes represented the data, and to identify the links between them from which potential themes could be developed. This stage involved continued familiarization of the transcripts to ensure that the evolving themes were representative of the data. Once the codes were grouped into sub themes, the main overarching themes were then created (Braun & Clarke, 2021).

## **Results**

The aim of this study was to explore user's perceptions of expectations for communicating on Snapchat, and how the features of Snapchat might affect this communication. Several themes and sub themes were developed to answer the research question, as well as links between these themes. The sub-themes of each overarching theme will be identified in a table including its definition and illustrative quotes. A more in-depth explanation of the theme will follow each table.

### **Response Expectations**

The first overarching theme regarding users' perceptions and expectations for communication on Snapchat was response expectations. In other words, what the user's expected from those who they delivered messages to and why. It was evident from the focus groups that the expectations regarding response depended on a number of factors; these factors have been classified as the following sub themes.

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**Table 1**

*A Table to Show the Sub-Themes Under the Overarching Theme of Response Expectations*

Sub-Theme	Definition	Illustrative quotes
Importance of Message	The perceived importance of the message that the user had sent impacted their expectations for a response, including time taken to respond. A non-response to a message perceived as important was interpreted negatively by the respondents.	<p><i>"if I'm like asking you a question like say I'm asking you about meeting and like what time and I just never got a reply id be like no what time are we meeting. Like if I need to know it, or I want to know it, that's when ill be annoyed about it" (P11)</i></p> <p><i>"I would say yes that's important, like if it's a question that you need to know... well if you're like talking about something that is quite deep and then they just ignore you for a couple hours or a couple of days... it kind of gives a bit of a different like atmosphere." (P10)</i></p> <p><i>"It depends on what I'm messaging them about, if its just something like completely random then they take a few hours to reply... I don't like, care as much... But if it's something more like, I'm trying to plan something or do something that is like time sensitive... it's like, why have you done that. That's not cool and you get a bit more like, annoyed." (P5)</i></p>
Relationship with Recipient	The relationship between the sender and the recipient influenced the senders' response expectations. In particular, close ties were expected to respond quicker to messages. Violations of this expectation resulted in negative emotions for the sender.	<p><i>"If its my friend or someone I talk to like, all the time, unless they are genuinely doing something, as soon as they see it I expect them to message back. But if its someone I don't really know I don't really mind, cause I'm probably going to spend a couple hours seeing it and just ignoring it, so I expect it back from them." (P4)</i></p> <p><i>"if its like one of my friends, my close friends, then you have to reply to me. If I don't know who you are or I don't talk to you that much then I don't really care" (P7)</i></p> <p><i>"If its one of my friends I'm like text me back right now" (P9)</i></p>

Knowledge of usual response habits	Response expectations for close ties specifically were influenced by the sender's knowledge of their close tie's usual response habits.	<p><i>"if its someone who never usually takes that long to reply, you get a bit worried" (P7)</i></p> <p><i>" I feel like if its someone you talk to daily and they just haven't responded, I would assume that somethings horrifically wrong, like if they haven't responded for quite a few hours then obviously somethings wrong." (P7)</i></p>
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### ***Importance of Message***

The perceived importance of the message that the user had sent had a significant impact on the expectation for a response. This was expressed primarily through participant perceptions of their reaction to a violation of this response. Not receiving a timely response to messages they perceived as important created negative feelings, particularly annoyance, for a number of participants. Participant eleven discussed this within the context of an emotionally important conversation, *"If you're talking about something that is quite deep... you've come to them about something that is really personal and then they've decided to ignore it and post... it kind of gives a bit of a different, like, atmosphere"*. Participant ten also expressed annoyance if the recipient had posted *"if they're not responding to me and then I see that they've posted on their story, that pisses me off, like that would annoy me. Especially if it was an important question"* This indicates that Snapchat stories play a role in how a violation is interpreted. Not receiving a response to an important message was also interpreted by some as a lack of care *"Yeah cause then it's like oh well you don't actually care about what I'm saying"*, Which again illustrates the emotional impact of this response expectation.

### ***Relationship with Recipient***

The relationship of the recipient to the user also influenced response expectations. The participants 'expectations for a response depended on the person they were

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communicating with, which participant eight described well, *"It depends on the person again cause if it's like of one of my friends, my close friends, then you have to reply to me. If I don't know who you are or I don't talk to you that much then I don't really care"*. Participant nine described a similar expectation for her friends *"If it's my friend or someone I talk to all the time, unless they are genuinely doing something, as soon as they see it I expect them to message back."* This clearly demonstrates the expectation for a quick response from a close tie.

Not receiving a timely response from a close tie created feelings of rejection in some participants, *"I just feel like I have a bit of self-consciousness in me where I'm just like, hey do they even want to be my friend anymore if they're not responding to me"*. At this point a number of other group members nodded in agreement, indicating that they shared this feeling. However, participant eight then tells the group that it doesn't actually affect her that much: *"Its not even that deep like at the end of the day I don't even care like that"*. This was interpreted as reflecting participant eight's uncertainty or even denial of how much a violation of this expectation would affect her.

**Knowledge of recipients' usual response habits.** The response expectations for a close tie depended on the sender's knowledge of the recipient's typical response habits. The expectation for a response was lower if the sender knew that the recipient was not often active on their phone, *"If it's someone who's not usually on their phone I'm like ah it doesn't matter too much"*. The sender's knowledge of the recipients habits also influenced the sender's reaction to a violation of their response expectations. Some participants reported feeling concerned if a friend did not respond in line with their usual habits, *"If it's someone who never usually takes that long to reply, you get a bit worried"*. This demonstrates that having a knowledge of the recipient's usual response habits impacts the expectations for

response, and when these are violated for a close tie, it creates concern, and possibly stress, for the sender.

### **Response Behaviour**

The second theme represents the participant's own response behaviour, including what influenced their decision to respond a certain way, and how they use the features of Snapchat as a part of this process.

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**Table 2**

*A table demonstrating the sub-themes under Response Behaviour along with their definitions and illustrative quotes*

Sub- Theme	Definition	Illustrative quotes
Relationship with Sender	The relationship between the participant and the message sender influenced the participant's response behaviour	<p><i>"So if its someone I'm closer to it wouldn't bother me, Id open it straight away, I'm pretty on it straight away. If its someone I don't speak to that much I'm kmore like oh ill look at that in about ten minutes" (P9)</i></p> <p><i>"But if it was my friend, my brother, anyone like that, I would answer it straight away just because I'm like, I care about your conversation" (P10)</i></p> <p><i>"And also if you know your friends, you know who wants a quick message because you want to make them feel safe" (P1)</i></p>
Importance of Message	The perceived importance of the message received impacted participant's response decisions	<p><i>"if you see its not something important like someone's just put ok you're like ok don't really need to respond to that right now so you just leave it. But If its like a question then ill respond because they need the answer"(P9)</i></p> <p><i>"Like if its something quite heavy and deep, you're like ok give me five minutes to like draft something... You've got to be really supportive, so you kind of draft things out before you go okay now ill respond" (P11)</i></p>
Pressure to Respond	Participants reported feeling a pressure to respond quickly to Snapchat messages	<p><i>"The entire platform is designed around the fact that you kind of answer straight away... but for me its just like, too much pressure to keep on top of it." (P12)</i></p> <p><i>"I feel like I automatically go to like a negative response because you get so much anxiety about not sending and you're thinking about how they might be feeling in that situation" (P12)</i></p> <p><i>"so ill send a picture back but it's not sending then I feel anxiety cause then they think I'm ignoring them and I'm not." (P9)</i></p>



### ***Relationship with Sender***

The relationship that the participants had with the person sending them a snapchat had a significant impact on the way that they communicated in response. Participant seven talked about her response to a message from a close tie versus a distant tie, *"If it's a really close mate I'd message them because I like to be, like, talking to them. But if it's someone I haven't heard from in a while I'll leave it for like an hour or so because I don't know why they would message me out of the blue. So I need to think about it for a bit."* This suggests that uncertainty about the purpose of the message from a distant tie impacts the decision to respond and how quickly. Participant nine from the second group also reported that she would respond quicker to a friend than she would a distant tie, *"If it's someone I'm closer to it wouldn't bother me, I'd open it straight away...If it's someone I don't speak to that much I'm more like oh I'll look at that in about ten minutes and then half swipe and see if I want to reply"*. Overall, there seemed to be a consensus across the two groups that a message from a closer tie warranted a timelier response, whereas more time was taken to respond to a message from a distant tie. This discussion also indicates that the half swiping feature is used as a type of screening process for unexpected messages.

Furthermore, the participants also seemed to have a perception of the response expectations that were expected of them, which affected their response behaviour. Participant one describes the importance of responding quickly to certain friends *"Also if you know your friends, you know who wants a quick message because you want to make them feel safe"*.

### ***Importance of Message***

The importance of the message also affected the participants' decision to respond. Most participants reported only feeling as though they need to respond quickly if the message was important, *"If you see it's not something important like someone's just put ok, you don't really need to respond to that right now so you just leave it. But if it's like a question then I'll*

*respond because they need the answer*". This implies that the users also expect themselves to respond quickly to an important message, which links to the subsequent findings regarding a perceived pressure to respond.

### ***Pressure to Respond***

Feeling a pressure to respond to Snapchat messages was reported by several participants, especially if they had opened the message (and therefore generated a read receipt): *"If you open it then you feel like you have to give an immediate response"* (P12). Participant twelve attributed this pressure to Snapchat as an app, *"The entire platform is designed around the fact that you kind of answer straight away so I completely understand, like it drives that immediacy, which is useful for so many conversations but for me it's just like, too much pressure to keep on top of it"*. This demonstrates how the features of the app itself mediate the relationship between response expectations and individual wellbeing.

More specifically, the pressure to respond was reported to cause stress for the recipient. Participant nine described feeling anxious in a scenario where she did not have a good enough internet connection for her message to send: *"I feel anxiety cause then they think I'm ignoring them and I'm not... if I feel like that, then I'm expecting them to feel like that if they've opened it as well"*. This shows the emotional impact that the perceived pressure to respond can have on the individual. It also demonstrates that users make assumptions about how their non-response will be interpreted by the conversation partner based on how the users themselves would interpret that action, which ultimately causes feelings of stress.

### **Features of Snapchat**

The focus groups also featured discussion about the features of Snapchat; how they are used by the participants in their communication, how they influenced the participants

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response expectations, and how they affected their reactions to violations of these expectations.

**Table 3**

*This table demonstrates the sub-themes under the Features of Snapchat theme, along with their definitions and illustrative quotes*

Sub-Theme	Definition	Illustrative quotes
Half-Swiping	The ability to partially 'swipe' messages across and view them influenced communication on Snapchat in a number of ways	<p><i>"So I like that you can half swipe it without them knowing that you've seen it... I've got time to like, think of a reply before they're like oh they've opened it and not replied" (P5)</i></p> <p><i>"I'll half swipe and see if I want to reply, it depends on what they've said" (P9)</i></p> <p><i>"If you send a message and someone's half swiped it and they've not responded, I'm just like, just respond to me." (P7)</i></p>
Snap Maps	<p>Snap Maps is a geolocation feature, allowing users to see and be seen by their Snapchat friends on a map with the location of where they were last active.</p> <p>Snap Maps was reported to impact communication through its tendency to cause conflict</p>	<p><i>"that would cause so many arguments because you could see that your friends are hanging out without you... I just turned it off in the end, it's causing too much drama"(P10)</i></p> <p><i>"it caused like a massive hiccup in the relationship because people are watching me and I'm like, now I feel the need to turn it off"(P11)</i></p> <p><i>"Think I just turned it off in the end its causing too much drama... It is just a bizarre feature to know where everybody is. From my opinion it only springs negative." (P12)</i></p>

### ***Half Swiping***

The half swiping feature was perceived by the participants as both an avoidance strategy and a screening process. Half-swiping reduced the pressure on participants to respond instantly to a message, as it allowed them to view it without letting the sender know (via a read receipt), *"I like that you can half-swipe without them knowing that you've seen it... they don't know that I've seen it so I've got more time to like, think of a reply before they're like oh they've opened it and not replied"* (P5). This implies that half-swiping is used to avoid the generation of a read receipt, thus reducing the pressure to respond. Furthermore, half-swiping reportedly acts as a screening process for message importance from which users decide to respond or not: *"I'll half swipe it and see if I want to reply, it depends on what they've said"* (P9).

### ***Snap Maps***

Several participants recalled occasions where Snap Maps had impacted them negatively due to conflict. Participant eight recalled a scenario where she was active on Snapchat but had not responded to her messages, which caused conflict as her friends saw on snap maps that she was active: *"I like watching the little crime documentaries... and I just get interested and then I don't reply to people and then I get messages like 'why are you not responding to me when I can see that you're active'"*. Similarly, participant eleven spoke about a time where a friend got annoyed at her as a result of snap maps: *"I said no to my friend who wanted to go out drinking, but my boyfriend came over. Her friend had my boyfriends snap maps and then they were like, oh... and it caused a massive hiccup in the relationship because people are watching me and like, now I feel the need to turn it off"*. The same sentiment was shared by numerous participants who reported turning snap maps off as a

result of the conflict it was causing. Overall, snap maps was highlighted as a key feature impacting communication on Snapchat.

### **Summary**

In summary, three main themes were developed from the analysis: response expectations, response behaviour and features of Snapchat. Each of these themes had several subthemes that illustrated the different aspects of the overarching themes. It was clear from the analysis that several of the themes and subthemes related to one another, which reflects the complicated nature of the perceptions of expectations that are involved in communication on Snapchat.

### **Discussion**

The current study explored perceptions of expectations for communicating on Snapchat, and the role that Snapchat's features play in this. The study produced three significant themes to illustrate the expectations and the role of Snapchat's features. In this section these findings and the links between them will be discussed in light of the existing knowledge on this topic.

#### **Importance of Message**

The findings indicated that the perceived importance of the message by the sender significantly influenced the expectations for a response. The higher the perceived importance the message had to the sender, the higher their expectation was for a quicker response. Interestingly, the participants also held themselves to the same expectation that they should respond quickly to a message deemed as important (Kissinger, 2019). It was also found that a slow response to a message was interpreted as rude by the sender. These findings support previous evidence that the more important or urgent a message is perceived to be by the sender, the higher their expectation is for a shorter response time (Murphy, 2018).

Conversely, the results also suggest that users take longer to reply to an emotionally important message, as they intend to craft the 'perfect' message to show that they care about the sender. This behaviour appears to clash with the response expectations accompanying important messages. This could reflect Kissinger's (2019) finding that the implicit rules and expectations for social media are complex and vary between individuals. It is possible that this behaviour was unique to the two individuals who reported it in the focus groups. Either way, this finding warrants further exploration.

### ***The Role of Stories***

Furthermore, the recipient posting on their Snapchat story when they had not responded to the sender's message was perceived as them deliberately ignoring the important message, and thus signalled a lack of care (Doring & Poschl, 2017). This finding further supports the notion that a violation of the response expectation for important messages is interpreted negatively by the sender. It also implies that the stories feature may influence the effect that the expectation violation has on the sender and their subsequent perception of the recipient. This finding adds to knowledge of response expectations by demonstrating the role that the stories feature plays in the expectations for a response.

### **Snap Maps**

Previous research shows that Snap Maps creates stress for users of Snapchat due to the conflict it causes (Dunn & Langlais, 2020). This study similarly found that Snap Maps created conflict, as it allowed users to see that the message recipient was active on the app but had not responded to their message. This suggests that users expect a reply if the recipient is active on the app. It also indicates that Snap Maps increases this expectation, which creates conflict when it is then violated. This could have important implications for real-life relationships and wellbeing if users believe that they are being deliberately ignored.

### **Pressure to Respond**

The perception of read receipts also shows how Snapchat's features impact response expectations. Numerous findings suggest that there is an increased expectation for an instant response once a message has been read (Murphy, 2018; Fernandez & Engelbrecht, 2021) because the read receipt is interpreted as an indicator of availability (Fernandez & Engelbrecht, 2021). This expectation leads to a pressure to respond for the recipient, which results in feelings of stress (Lynden & Rasmussen, 2017; Hoyle et al., 2017; Kissinger, 2019; Liao et al., 2018). The current findings also demonstrated that users feel stress due to this pressure, and feel anxiety if they are unable to respond due to the assumption that it will be interpreted negatively by the sender. This supports existing findings that users hold themselves to the same standards that they expect from others in regards to responses (Kissinger, 2019). Therefore the current findings add to the current literature by supporting the pervasiveness of response expectations and the pressure they create.

### ***Half Swiping***

Furthermore, existing research also demonstrated that users employ avoidance strategies, such as reading snippets of the message from the home screen, to read the message without the generation of a read receipt and thus reduce the pressure to respond (Lynden & Rasmussen, 2017). The findings from the current study show that the half swiping feature allows users to read the message without generating a read receipt, which enabled them to screen the message and decide how to respond without the pressure of an immediate response. The findings therefore support previous evidence that users engage in avoidance strategies online. They also further demonstrate the pervasiveness of response expectations and the pressure they create to respond.

### ***Relationship with Recipient***

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In addition, the results showed that the closeness of the tie and knowledge of a close tie's usual response habits affected the interpretation of responses. For example, there was a lower expectation for a quick response if the recipient was known to be a slow responder in general. At the same time, a violation of these typical response habits created stress and anxiety in the sender. Research suggests that not receiving an expected response leads to speculation and increased checking (Lynden & Rasmussen, 2017). This indicates that a close tie violation of response expectations causes significant stress in the sender, which could have deleterious consequences for both the relationship and the individual's wellbeing.

### **Practical Implications**

The key implication of these findings is the knowledge that they contribute to the evidence base. This study has highlighted a number of response expectations that users have when communicating on Snapchat and the effects that these have on both the communication and the individuals involved. It has also provided some novel information regarding how the features of Snapchat impact this. The findings from this study could also have important future implications for the way that Snapchat is designed and used.

### **Strengths and Limitations**

The current study had a number of important strengths and limitations. One of the main strengths of this study was the use of focus groups to gather data. Conducting focus groups allowed the subjective perceptions of the participants to be accessed, which added valuable data to the knowledge base. However, richer data could have been produced if the focus groups were guided more effectively by the researcher.

In addition, the researcher is themselves a user of Snapchat, which is both a strength and drawback of the research. It is a strength because it meant that the researcher had a good understanding of the terminology and features being discussed by the participants, which



allowed for appropriate probing questions. The potential drawback of this is that the researcher's own opinions could have influenced which questions were asked as well as how the data was interpreted. However, it is unlikely in this case that the researcher influenced the participants responses as the discussions were primarily led by the participants themselves.

Another limitation is that the sample was limited to female psychology students at a single university, which reduces the applicability of the findings to other groups. However, the aim of this study was to gather information about the subjective perceptions of individuals. Also, the findings supported previous evidence from the literature, which suggests that they are still valid and applicable to some extent.

Perhaps the most important strength of the current study is that it produced some novel findings that have not previously been documented in the research, such as the impact of stories and half-swiping on communication. This could be viewed as a limitation validity wise, therefore more research will be required into these topics. However, it is primarily a strength as it provides the basis for future studies into communication on Snapchat.

### **Future Research**

The uses for the half-swiping feature that were revealed in the current study have not yet been explored in the research, despite the important impact that this feature has on Snapchat communication. Future studies should consider investigating this feature in more depth than was possible in this study in order to expand the research further. Such studies should also explore the snap maps and private stories in more depth, and perhaps investigate how their effects vary across different groups.

The current research also made inferences about the potential impacts of response expectations and features on relationships and individual wellbeing. Future research would

benefit from examining these impacts further as it could have important implications for wellbeing and mental health research.

### **Conclusion**

Research into communication and response expectations online has previously focused on apps like Facebook and Twitter, leaving apps like Snapchat relatively un-researched despite of the potential effects that communication expectations on these apps could have on individuals. This study contributed to the existing research on communication expectations by qualitatively exploring the expectations that exist on Snapchat, how they impact communication, and the role that the features of Snapchat play in this. A number of findings supported those previously evidenced in studies of other social networking apps. There were also some new findings, particularly regarding how the features of Snapchat impact communication. Nevertheless, further research is needed to achieve a deeper understanding of the response expectations and features of Snapchat that influence communication, for which the current findings provide a good basis.

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## Appendices

### Appendix A: Participant information sheet

 UNIVERSITY OF CHICHESTER	<b>PARTICIPANT INFORMATION FOR UNIVERSITY OF CHICHESTER RESEARCH PROJECT</b>  – Focus Group –
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>How App Features and Expectations Around Messaging Affect Communication on Snapchat</b></p>          <p style="text-align: right;"><b>UoC Research Ethics Committee Approval Number xxx</b></p>	

#### Research team

Principal Researcher:	Katherine Stevens	MSci student
Associate Researcher:	Dr. Rachel King	Supervisor

**Department Institute**

**University of Chichester**

#### Why is the study being conducted?

We would like to invite you to take part in our research study. Before you decide it is important that you understand why we are doing the research and what we are asking of you. Please read this information. If you have questions, or if you would like more information, please ask us.

Who is carrying out the research? This research project is being undertaken as part of a Masters study for Katie Stevens

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Why is the research being done? The purpose of this project is to examine how people's expectations around communicating on social networking sites affects their communication with others on Snapchat, and how certain features of Snapchat might play a role in this.

You have been invited to take part in this research because you are a daily user of Snapchat and are over the age of 18.

### **What does participation involve?**

Your participation will involve taking part in an audio and video recorded focus group at the psychology lab which will take approximately an hour of your time.

Questions will include:

- What are your expectations regarding the time taken for the person to respond to your message?"
- What expectations might you have for yourself when you receive a message on Snapchat?
- What features of Snapchat are you familiar with?
- Do you feel as though your use of Snapchat affects your wellbeing in any way?

### **What happens if you change your mind and want to withdraw?**

Your participation in this research project is entirely voluntary. If you do agree to participate you can withdraw from the research project without comment or penalty. You can withdraw anytime during the focus group. You can request to remove your quotations from the data up to two weeks after the focus group session, however this will only be possible after analysis has been completed, otherwise this could interfere significantly with others' contributions to the focus group and therefore impede the achievement of the research objectives.

Your decision to participate or not participate will in no way impact upon your current or future relationship with the University (for example your grades).

You will be able to review a preliminary outline of the results after your focus group session if you wish.

### **What are the possible benefits for me if I take part?**

It is expected that this research project will not benefit you directly. However, the research may allow you to gain a better understanding of yours and others' communication behaviours on Snapchat.

If you are a student taking part through the research participation scheme you will receive 1 hour of research participation credit upon completion of the survey



**What are the possible risks for me if I take part?**

There are no risks beyond normal day-to-day living associated with your participation in this research project.

We will be speaking about your own experience of using the social media platform snapchat, please be aware that if you have had a negative experience when using snapchat in the past remembering and reflecting on that experience may result in mild distress or discomfort.

There are minimal risks associated with your participation in this research project. However, please keep in mind that although the transcript will be anonymized and any identifiable information will be removed, there is the potential that you may be identified due to idiosyncratic speech patterns or due to the specific events being explained.

**What about privacy and confidentiality?**

In order for credit to be given, you will need to provide your name and student number on the consent form before taking part in the study. Additionally, if you choose to receive a copy of the results to comment on, you will need to provide an email address so that this can be sent to you. This information will be stored securely and will not be included in the research. Any identifying information you provide during the focus group session will be removed during transcription. Although every effort will be taken to maintain confidentiality, there is a risk that you might be identifiable through your responses (e.g. if you talk about a specific experience), however this risk is minimal. The visual and audio recording of your responses will be stored securely and deleted as soon as transcription and initial coding is complete.

Any data collected as part of this research project will be stored securely as per the University of Chichester's [data protection and privacy standard](#). Personal data will be stored for a maximum of 5 years. Personal data would only be disclosed where there is a legal basis for doing so, e.g. to protect individuals from harm, to meet a statutory or regulatory requirement.

As the research project involves an audio/video recording:

- You will have the opportunity to verify your comments and responses prior to final inclusion.
- The recording will not be used for any other purpose.
- Only the named researchers will have access to the recording.
- It may be possible to take part in the study without being visually recorded, however it will not be possible to take part without being audio recorded.

Every effort will be made to ensure that the data you provide cannot be traced back to you in reports, publications and other forms of presentation. For example, we will only include the relevant part of a quote, we will not use any names, or names will be changed, and/or details such as dates and specific circumstances will be excluded. Nevertheless, while unlikely, it is possible that if you are quoted directly your identity may become known.

**How do I give my consent to participate?**

We would like to ask you to sign a written consent form that will be provided upon arrival to the focus group session to confirm your agreement to participate.

**What if I have questions about the research project?**

If you have any questions or require further information please contact one of the listed researchers:

Katherine Stevens	ksteven9@stu.chi.ac.uk
Dr Rachel King	R.King@chi.ac.uk


**What if I have a concern or complaint regarding the conduct of the research project?**

The University of Chichester is committed to research integrity and the ethical conduct of research projects. Please contact the University's Data Protection Officer [dpofficer@chi.ac.uk](mailto:dpofficer@chi.ac.uk) if you have any queries relating to Data Protection. If you wish to discuss the study with someone not directly involved, particularly in relation to matters concerning policies, information or complaints about the conduct of the study or your rights as a participant, you may contact the Research Office on 01243 816000 or email [research@chi.ac.uk](mailto:research@chi.ac.uk).

**Thank you for helping with this research project.**

**Please keep this sheet for your information.**

**Appendix B: Participant consent form**

 <p>UNIVERSITY OF CHICHESTER</p>	<p><b>CONSENT FORM FOR UNIVERSITY OF CHICHESTER RESEARCH PROJECT</b></p> <p><b>– Interview / Focus group –</b></p>
<p><b>How App Features and Expectations Around Messaging Affect Communication on Snapchat</b></p> <p><b>UoC Research Ethics Approval Number xxx</b></p>	

**Research team**

Katie Stevens [ksteven9@stu.chi.ac.uk](mailto:ksteven9@stu.chi.ac.uk)  
Dr Rachel King [R.king@chi.ac.uk](mailto:R.king@chi.ac.uk)

**Statement of consent**

**By signing below, you are indicating that you:**

- Have read and understood the information document regarding this research project.
- Have had any questions answered to your satisfaction.
- Understand that if you have any additional questions you can contact the research team.
- Understand that participation is entirely voluntary and that you are free to withdraw without comment or penalty.
- Understand that you have the right to remove your quotations from the data after analysis has been completed, and that any request to remove your quotations before this point may not be possible having regard to permitted exemptions for research under data protection legislation i.e. where it would seriously impair the achievement of the research objectives and that you have the right to object (as indicated on the Information Sheet)
- Understand that all information will be stored securely and used in line with data protection legislation and no personal information will be shared with third parties.
- Agree to the research output being publicly available, subject to any embargo period established by the publisher.
- Understand that if you have concerns about the ethical conduct of the research project you can contact the Head of Research, Research Office on 01243 816000 or email [research@chi.ac.uk](mailto:research@chi.ac.uk).

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- Understand that the research project will include an audio and/or video recording.
- Agree to participate in the research project.

**Please tick the relevant box below:**

☐ I **agree** for the interview / focus group to be audio / video recorded.

☐ I **do not agree** for the interview / focus group to be audio / video recorded.

**Name** \_\_\_\_\_

**Signature** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date** \_\_\_\_\_

### Appendix C: Proposed Focus Group Questions

#### Potential Questions/Discussion Points – Focus Group

##### **Demographic/Contextual Questions**

- What is your age and gender?
- How many hours would you say you spend messaging/snapping on Snapchat per day?
- Is Snapchat the app you use the most to communicate with others?

##### **Questions about people’s expectations:**

- “When you send a message on Snapchat, what are your expectations around when and how the other person responds?”
- Potential prompt for this point: “for example, what are your expectations regarding the time taken for the person to respond to your message?”
- “Why do you think you have these expectations?”
- “How would you feel if the person you messaged took longer to respond than you expected, or did not respond at all?”
- “Can you think about a time where you sent a snapchat to someone and they did not respond, or they took longer to respond than you expected (For this section, ask the

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group generally to think about an experience, and see if anyone offers to talk about it, then ask the individual(s) the questions):

- a) What was your relation to this person?
  - b) How did it make you feel?
  - c) What did you do in response to this and why?
- “When you receive a message, what do you do?”
  - “What might impact your decision to respond and when?”
  - “Can you think about the most recent snapchat you received (Ask group generally and see who offers up information) :
- a) What were you doing at the time?
  - b) Did you feel obligated to respond? Why/why not?
  - c) How long did you take to respond and why?

**Potential questions about Snapchat's features:** - consider recent changes in features i.e. you can now save someone's snap into the chat history

- “Can you tell me about some of the features of Snapchat?”
- “What are your thoughts/feelings about this feature(s)?”
- “How does this feature(s) affect your expectations about messaging?”
- The participants could be prompted here based on their responses
- Are you aware of the read receipt feature?
- Are you aware of the snap maps feature?

**General questions about their use of Snapchat:**

- Do you feel as though your use of Snapchat is problematic? Why/why not?
- Would you say your use of Snapchat affects your wellbeing?
- Does anyone have anything they would like to add/discuss with the group?

## **Appendix D: Debrief Form**

### Participant Debrief

Thank you for taking the time to participate in this research

The aim of the focus group you took part in today was to explore people's expectations around communication on Snapchat, and how some of the features of Snapchat might influence this. The aim of this focus group was also to understand the potential impacts that communicating on Snapchat might have on wellbeing. Different platforms have different features and therefore it is important to understand how these different features might impact communication and wellbeing.

You have the right to withdraw your data (direct quotations) up to 2 weeks after your participation in the focus group. You can do this by emailing the researcher at [ksteven9@stu.chi.ac.uk](mailto:ksteven9@stu.chi.ac.uk) and quoting the code that you generated at the beginning of the session.

In respect of the confidentiality of the other participants, please do not discuss any of the personal information shared by the other participants in this focus group.

We understand that sometimes reflecting on difficult social experiences can be sensitive. In case you feel as though you might benefit from some support we have given some contact details below to some helpful support services:

- [wellbeing@chi.ac.uk](mailto:wellbeing@chi.ac.uk)
- [Guides to support and services - Mind](#)

If you have any questions about the study, you can reach the researchers at [ksteven9@stu.chi.ac.uk](mailto:ksteven9@stu.chi.ac.uk) and [R.King@chi.ac.uk](mailto:R.King@chi.ac.uk).

If you wish to discuss the study with someone not directly involved, particularly in relation to matters concerning policies, information or complaints about the conduct of the study or your rights as a participant, you may contact the Research Office on 01243 816000 or email [research@chi.ac.uk](mailto:research@chi.ac.uk).

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Thank you for your time and participation.