

Safe Sext: The desire of youth for less restrictive digital shadows

 By [Matt Rose](#)

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Ever heard of SnapChat? Well it's making waves in the social media scene, but why? The world of social media and online socialisation presents users of today with more ways to connect but increasingly the youth are looking for ways to express, explore and connect without consequence or concerns about their "expression" falling into the wrong hands.

- Twitter faux-pas
- Work repercussions from the weekend's debauchery on Facebook
- Intimate pictures being used as blackmail
- Unsolicited digital exposure via high profile hacks

All these are examples of how ones 'digital shadow' can come back for revenge.

Enter SnapChat, a new social IM platform that has gained notoriety for the freedom it provides to users. The ability to take racy/nude pix or 'Sexts' and share them digitally in the knowledge that they cannot be saved and will be auto deleted in your specified time limit. (+-10 seconds) This app allows instant messenger sociability without a messy foot print that could come back to haunt later in life.

If you go check the app store rankings you can see why this service is fulfilling a need. It came in at No. 6 for free applications on Apple's mobile devices and is currently at No. 33 in the Android/Google Play store.

Keep it clean

The current generation of new social users are often being warned not to post inappropriate things online; the app gives a degree of freedom by letting users share unfiltered thoughts or images without much fear of embarrassing repercussions.

"Like most people born before the 1990s, I'm not a SnapChat user, and I've long assumed the worst about the app - that combining cameras; young people; and secret, self-destructing messages could only mean trouble, teenagers are more likely using the app to safely explore the sort of silly, unguarded, and sometimes unwise ideas that have always occupied the teenage brain ... in a manner that won't haunt them forever. In other words, they're chatting with SnapChat precisely because it's not like chatting with Facebook." - *Slate Magazine's* [Farhad Manjoo](#).

Screenshots were my first reaction to hearing of this new service but steps have been taken to block this functionality. The app also notifies the other member of the chat that a screenshot has been executed.

Party photographer Kirill Bichutsky (the guy behind "[Champagne Facials](#)") , exploited the screenshot functionality of phones which seems to be the biggest bug with the platform, to create a tumblr blog featuring nude and semi-nude images female SnapChat users "[private](#)" pictures, after doing some exploratory research his new blog is actually pretty awesome. ;-)

Facebook fights back

Facebook as the giant of social media has sat up and taken notes seriously with regard to the 'instant-chat market', are revamping the Poke feature which will now enable Facebook users with similar SnapChat functionality.

The exhibitionist appeal of SnapChat reminds me of the www.Chatroulette.com Phenomenon, where users are put into

intimate video chats with random strangers from around the globe. Another consideration could be the potential enabling of a more severe form of cyber bullying, as there will be less evidence against the perpetrators.

How future users will balance the paradox of seeking notoriety of being 'internet famous' without any of the nasty pitfalls or repercussions remains to be seen. In my opinion users will continue to live double lives online. A socially acceptable avatar needs to be maintained and this digital self which will span mainly their personal Facebook and Twitter networks, the flipside a more private (secret even) experimental persona. Digital split identities that allow for experimentation, intimacy and even exhibitionist impulses.

ABOUT MATT ROSE

Matt Rose, avid trend watcher passionate about SA's people, is a senior strategic planner with Promise Brand Specialists (JHB) , specializing in market research, shopper marketing, behavioral psychology. He brings a grounded, often controversial approach to uncovering consumer insights. Honours include 2010 Loeries finalist (Digital) and 2011 Cannes Lions shortlisting (Digital). Email mtwrose@gmail.com, follow him on [@mtwrose](#) Twitter, connect [LinkedIn](#).

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