Trust-Enabled Privacy:

Social Media Designs to Support Adolescent User Boundary Regulation

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Trust-Enabled Privacy:

= interpersonal trust (the belief that others have one's best interests at heart)

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= broadcast social media

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Sharing personally meaningful moments on social media can sometimes feel high-stakes.

This hesitation to share is particularly an issue for teens who often use social media to fulfill their relational needs.

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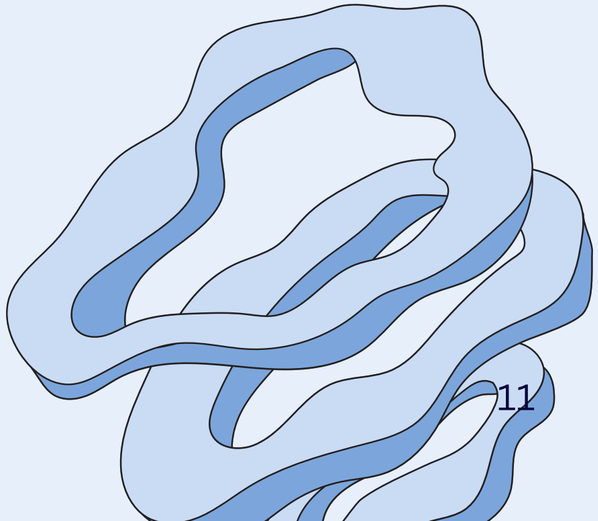
- Relationship building and identity development (which often happens through peer validation) are key parts of their growth .
- **They seek social connections on social media but often feel disappointed.**

A major source of disappointment is the lack of support for their privacy concerns.



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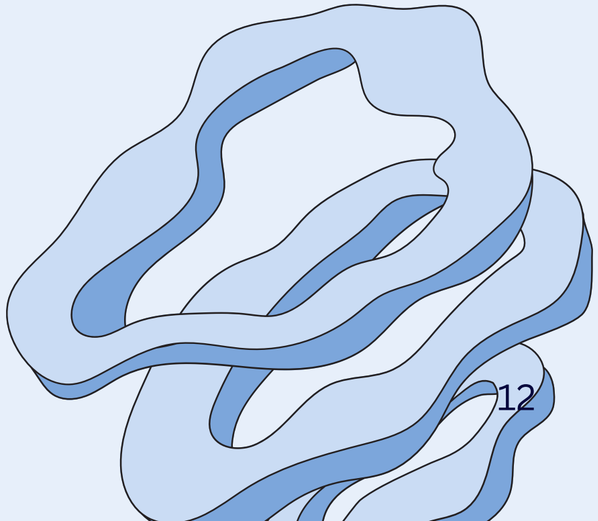

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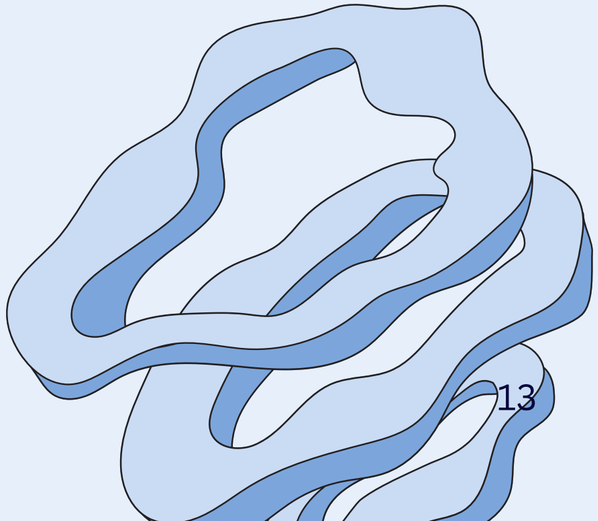

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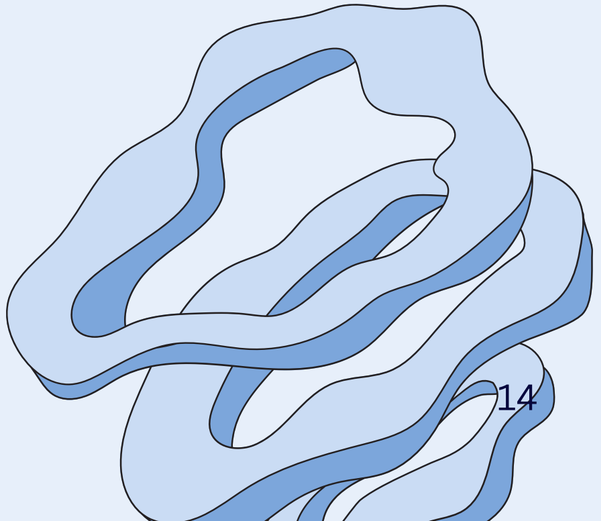

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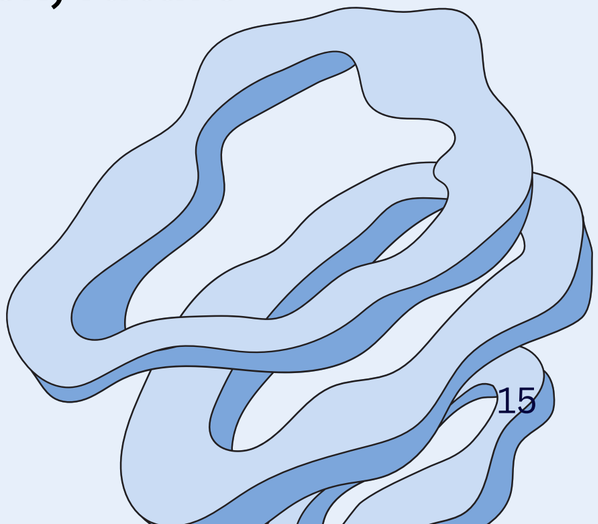

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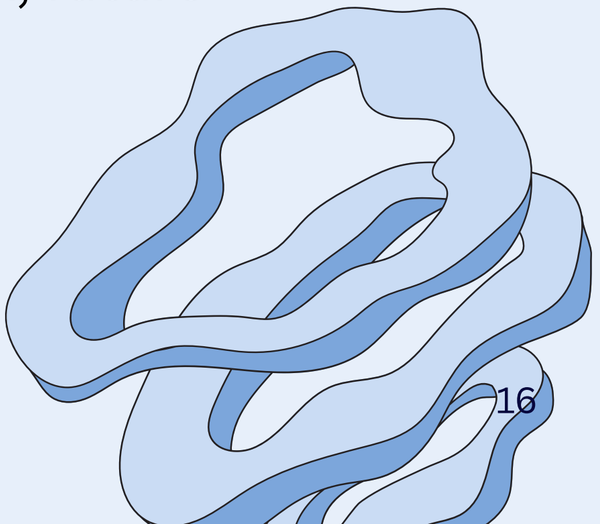
- **Even when they feel their privacy is not supported, they sometimes still feel compelled to share due to their need for peer connection.**



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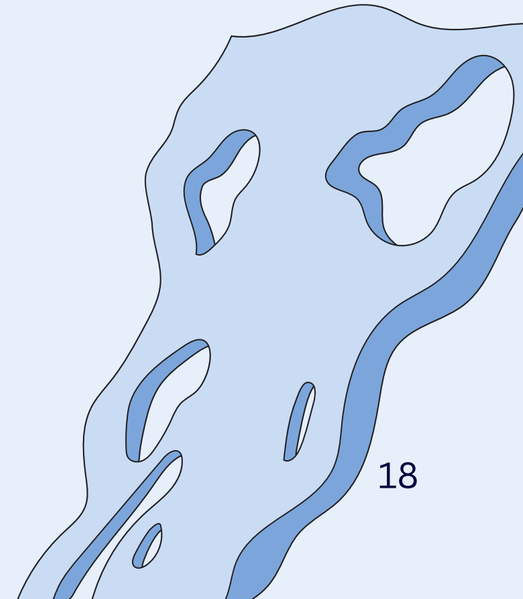

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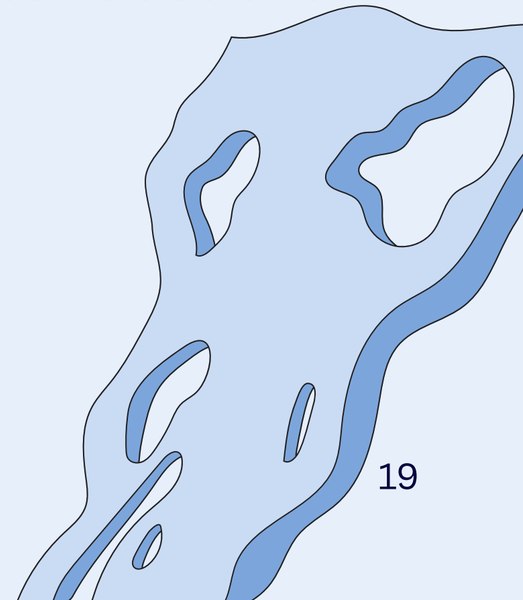

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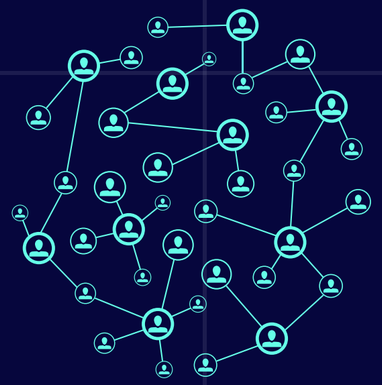
  - **Privacy resignation, "network defeatism", oversharing**

Privacy in social media, especially for teens, is not solely about restricting access to personal information.



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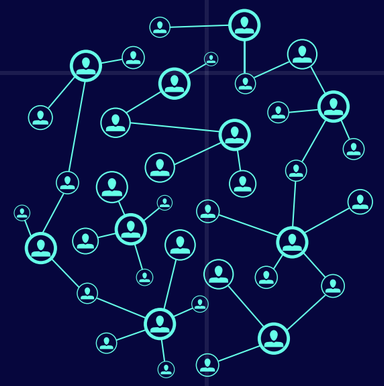
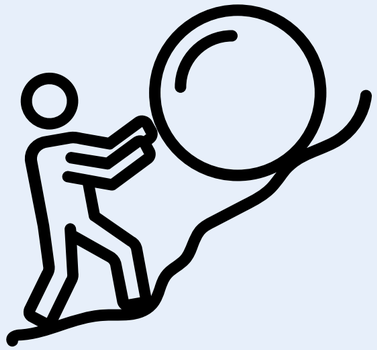


It is an ongoing process of interpersonal boundary regulation.

Social media privacy narratives and platform designs often frame privacy as a trade-off between disclosure and control. However,



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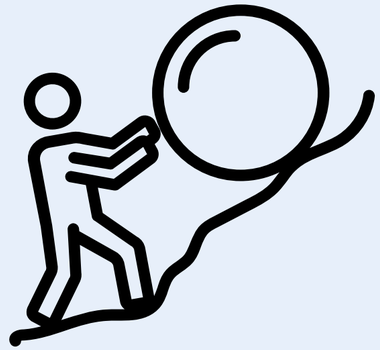
- **Privacy-as-control is ineffective a networked environment where information is co-owned:**



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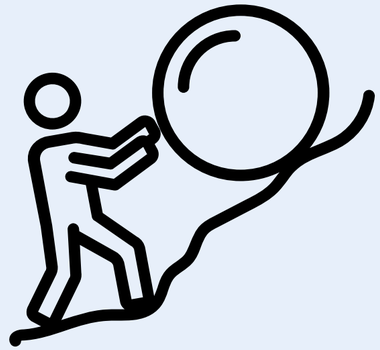

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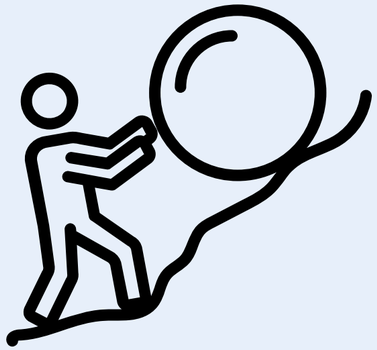

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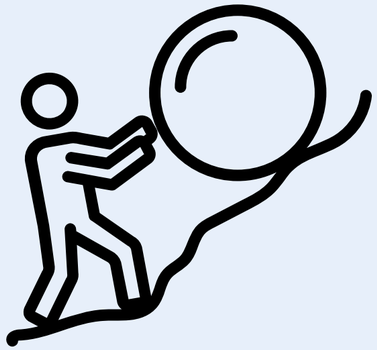
  - Implies sharing == giving up rights to privacy
  - **Hence encourages withdrawal from sharing**

    → **users miss opportunities to connect**



Our research focused on understanding how teens currently navigate self-disclosure, and how platform design may support or undermine the types of disclosure they find meaningful for social connection.

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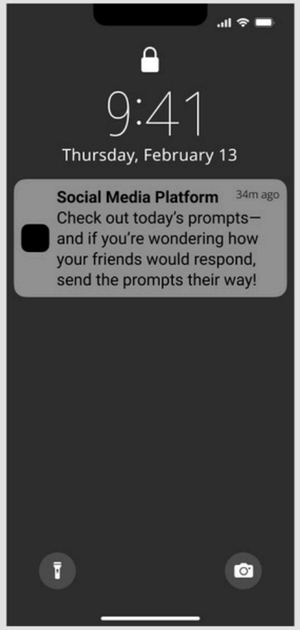
Diary Study

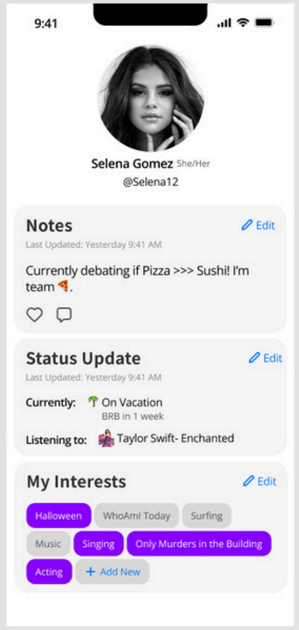
- 7 days
- Experiences of sharing or self-censoring

Co-Design Interview

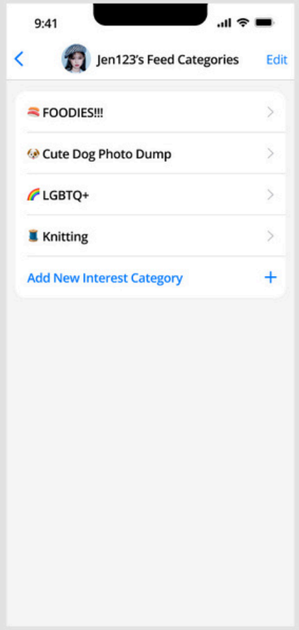
- 60 minutes
- Designs that hinder or support sharing



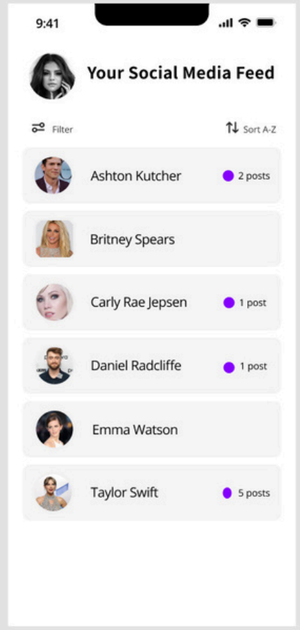
(a) Guided Disclosure



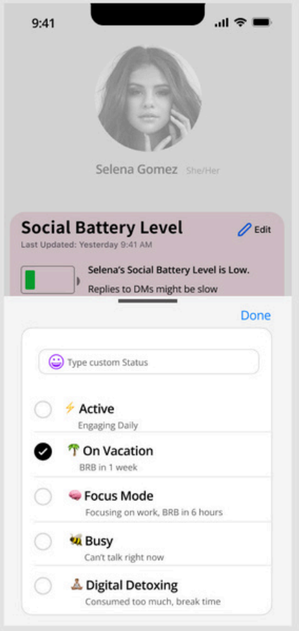
(b) Low-Stakes Disclosure



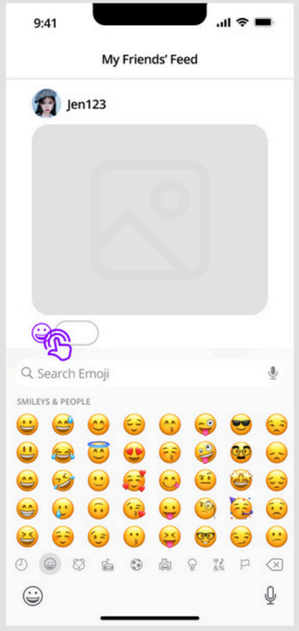
(c) Contextual Disclosure



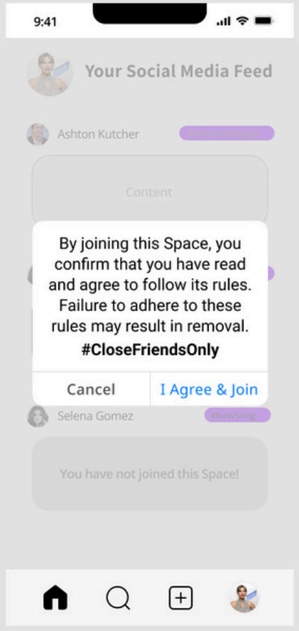
(d) Self-Contained Disclosure



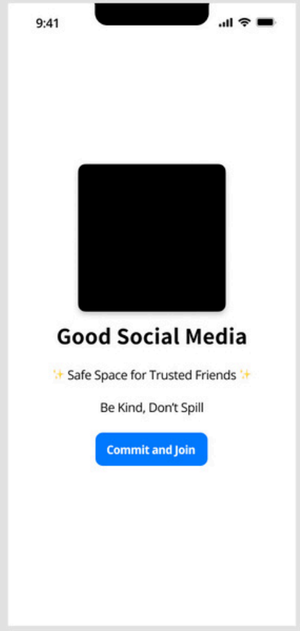
(e) Contextual Clarity



(f) Intentional Signaling



(g) Mutual Commitment



(h) Trust-Centered Norms

RQ1: **How do teens navigate self-disclosure within social media environments, and what factors influence their decisions to share?**

1. **Teens wish to share small, personal moments that could lead to meaningful connections.**

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> *“(I want to be able to share)* ***Just some of the more mundane details of my personal life you know, like … yesterday I was really happy because I made some microwave popcorn and at the end there were only 11 unpopped kernels at the bottom of the bag. Just little things like that.”*** (P_e19)

2. **Teens saw that trust and self-disclosure are deeply intertwined, bidirectionally.**

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> ***"For me, building trust looks like getting to post what you like, and maybe having a small two-minute conversation [about it] ... [Trust is a] mutual thing --- if you reply more to me and I will talk to you more. That builds trust because we get to know each other more."*** (P_c13)

RQ2: **How does social media design support or undermine trust-based self-disclosure among teens?**

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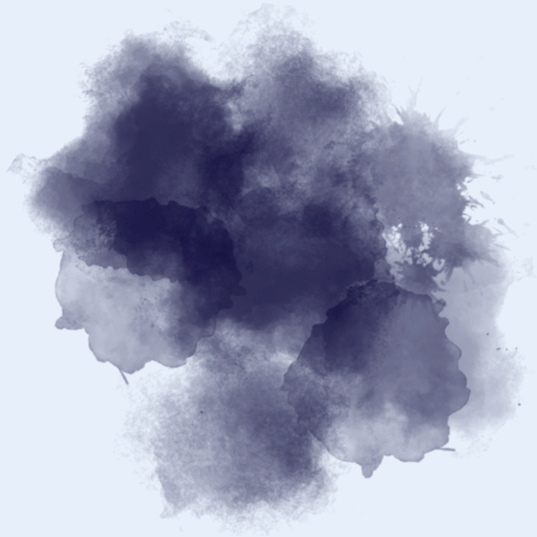

Communication Fog

ambiguous norms and audience

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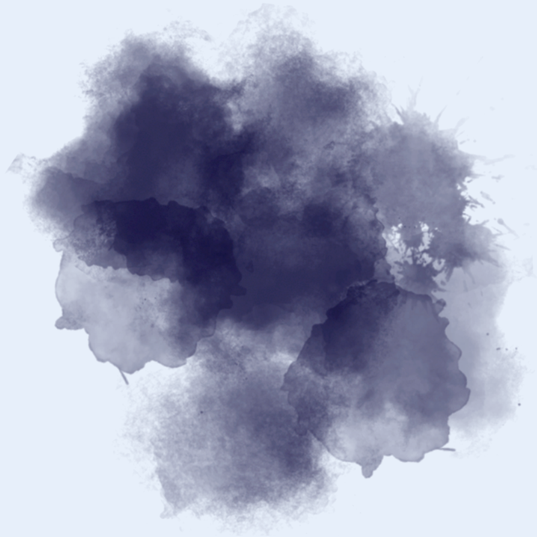

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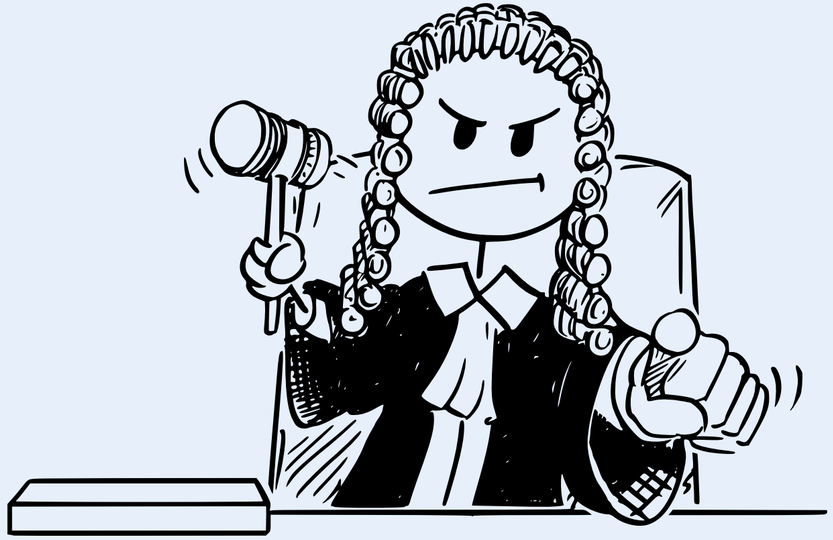
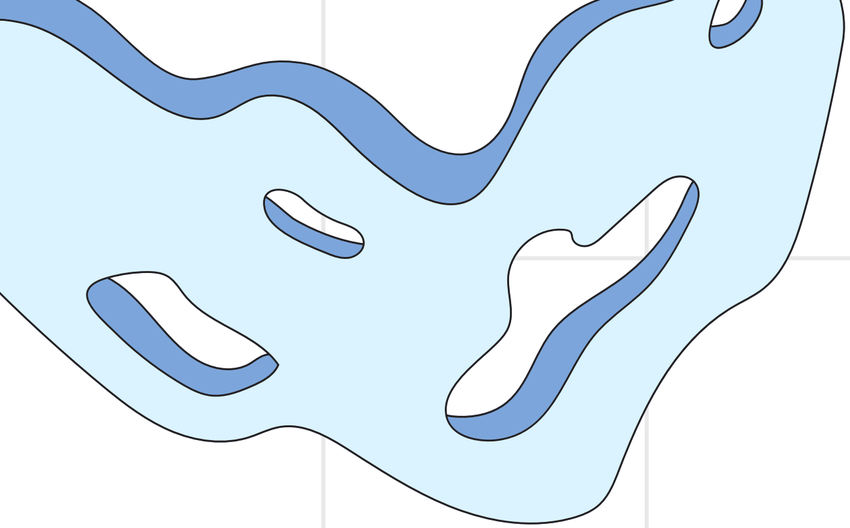
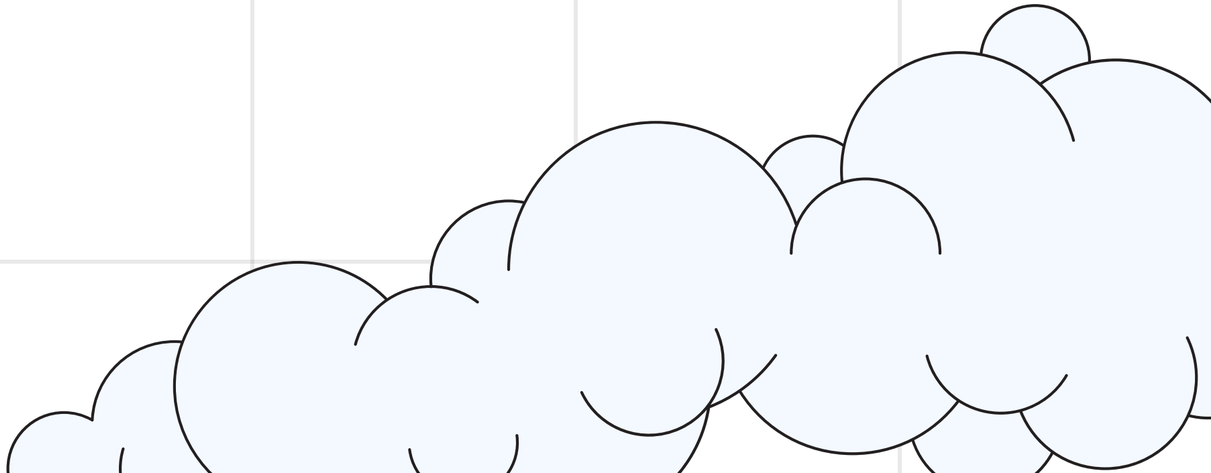


Low-Grace Culture

high-stakes environment with (perceived and actual) distrust and hostility



Examples of Communication Fog



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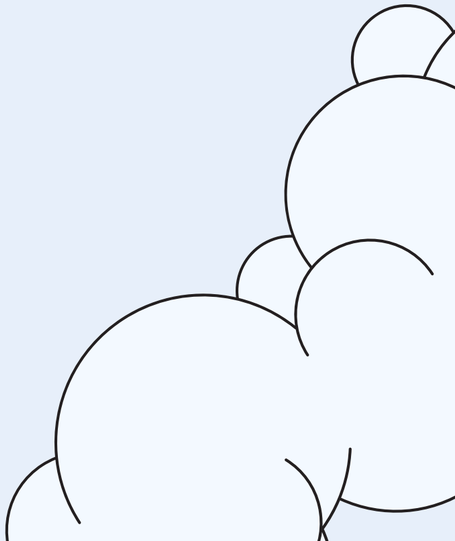
> ***“Oftentimes, I kind of match what my friends post.”*** (P_e02)
>
> ***“On Instagram, not famous people, in my experience, do not normally post random stuff like this, so it would be weird to make it my first post.”*** (P_d16)

Instagram requires users to make “active choices” about sharing.



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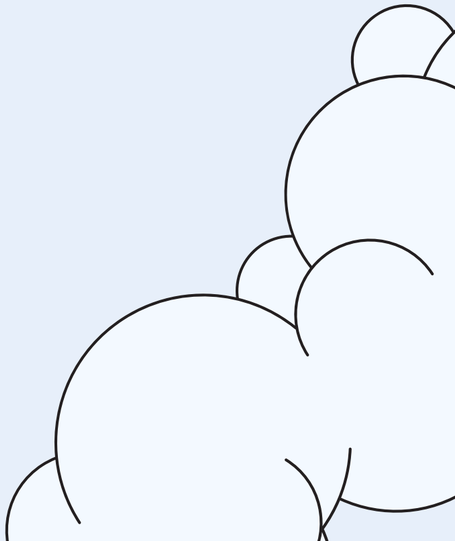
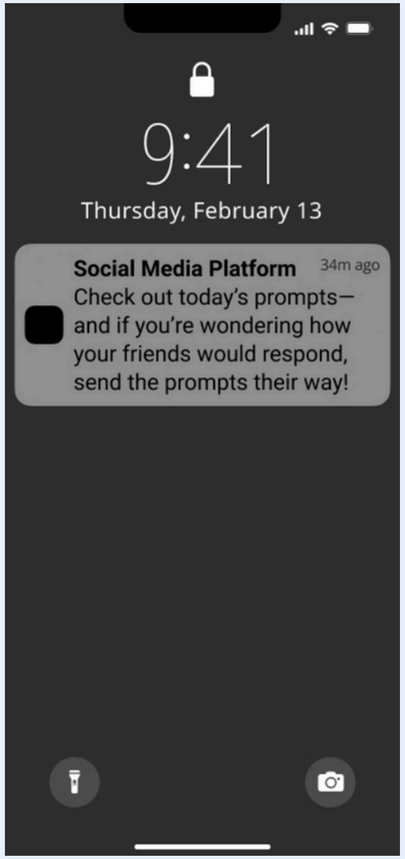
This burden can lead to fears of backlash, for example, sharing being interpreted as “attention-seeking” rather than a bid for connection.



Teens desire Guided Disclosure with clear cues about socially appropriate sharing.



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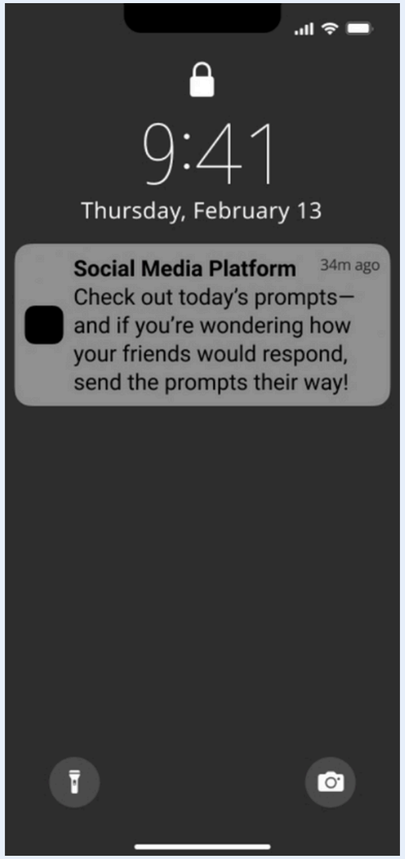

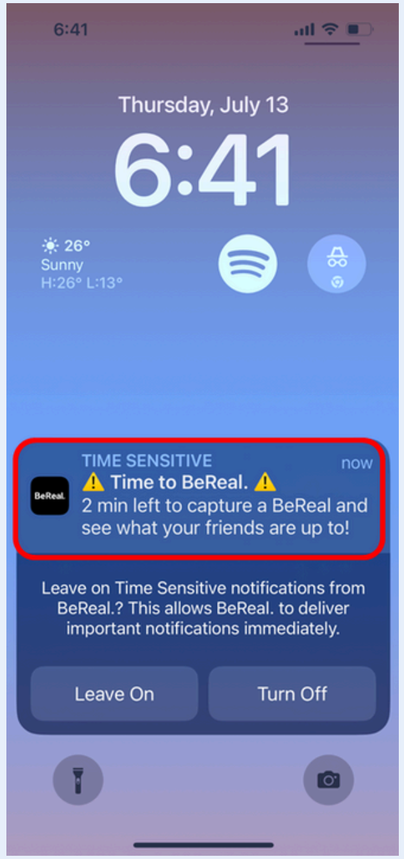

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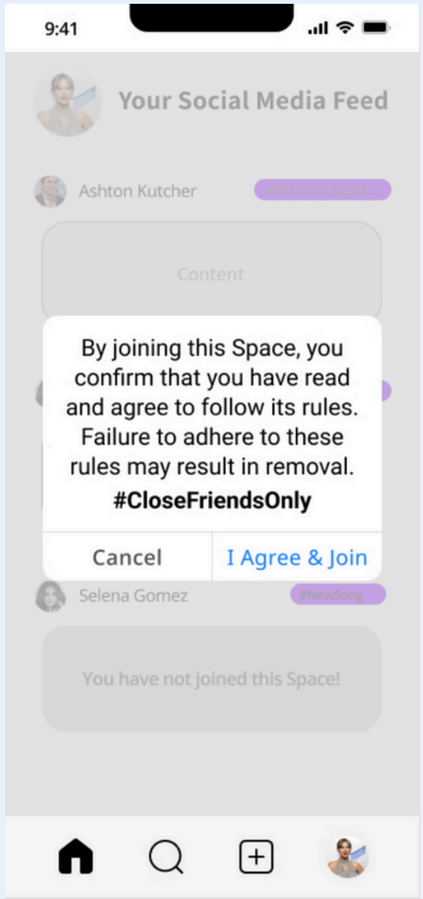
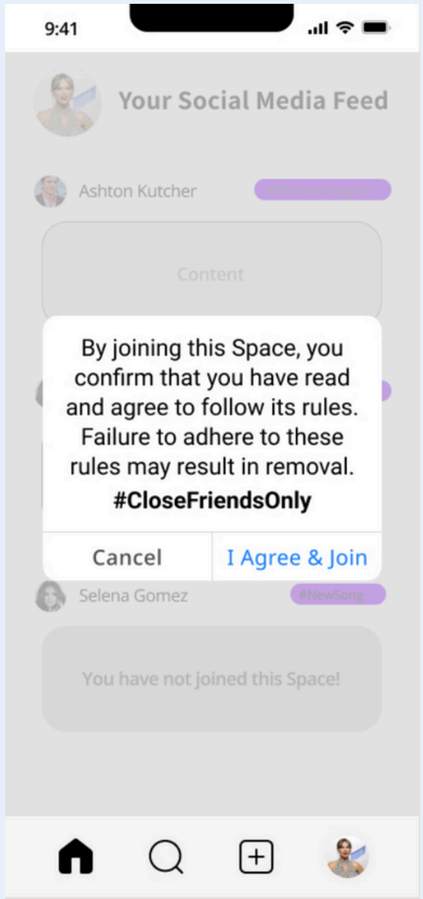
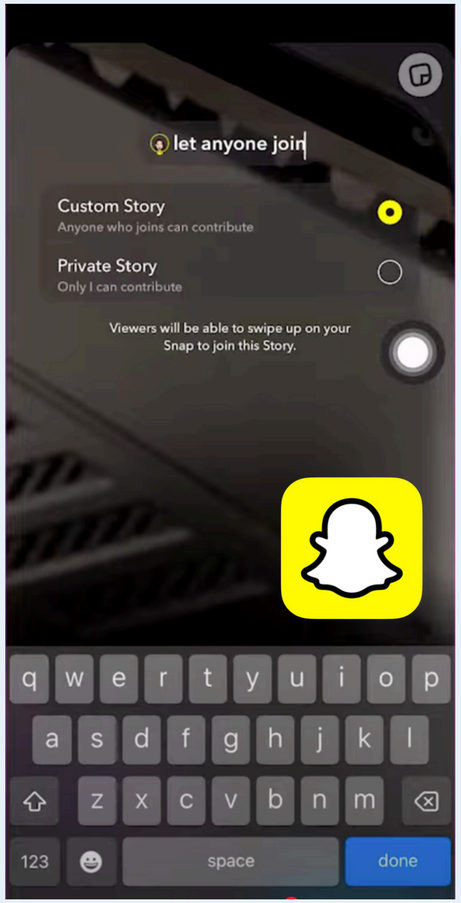
> ***“You never can really know who’s viewing your content or who’s REALLY following you.”*** (P_c08)

Teens propose Mutual Commitment to content consumption to share accountability.

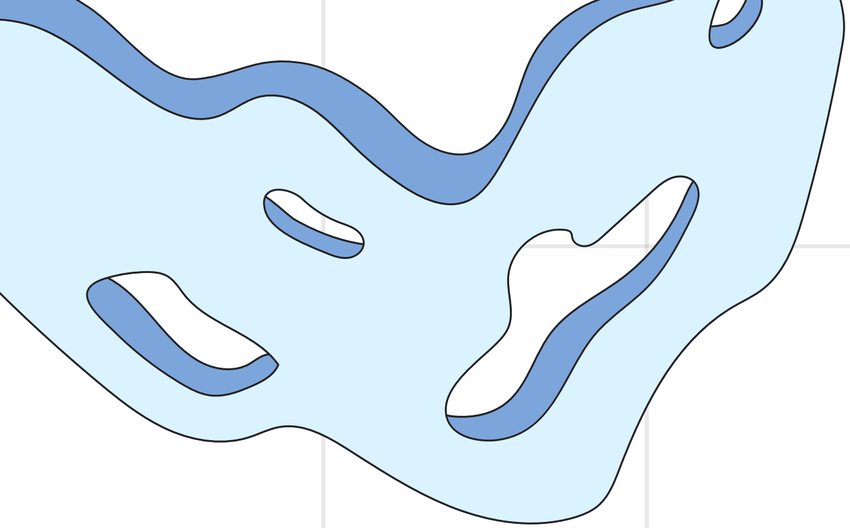


Teens propose Mutual Commitment to content consumption to share accountability.

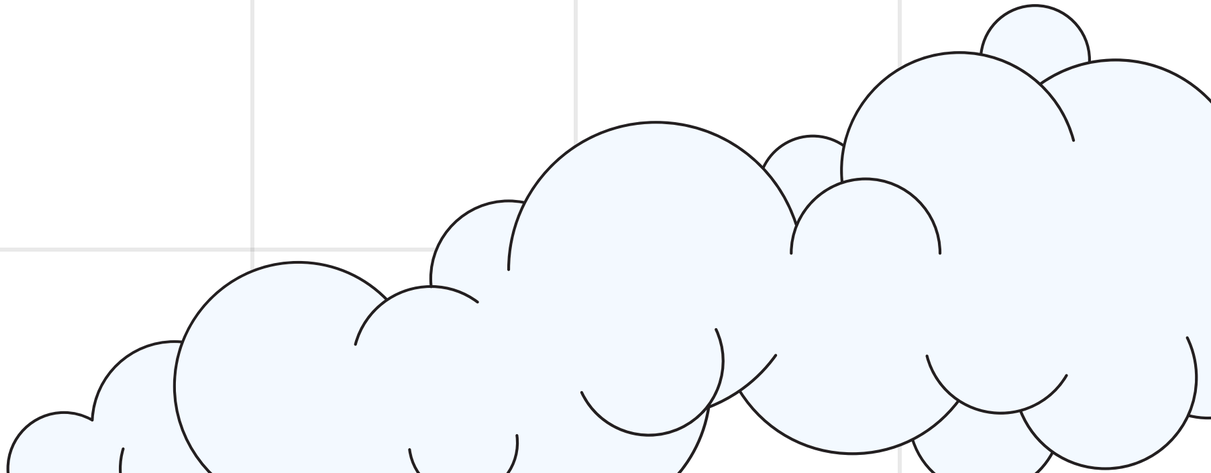




> ***"[On Snapchat's Private Story] If they joined that story, [then] they're kind of the ones subjecting themselves to it. If they didn't want to see it, they'd never had to join it."*** (P_e12)



Example of Low-Grace Culture



③ Nonconsensual Exposure makes teens fear burdening others and being judged by public standards.

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- Following someone == implicitly agreeing to see their content in your feed
- Sharing content == implicitly agreeing to appear in others' feeds

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- Following someone == implicitly agreeing to see their content in your feed
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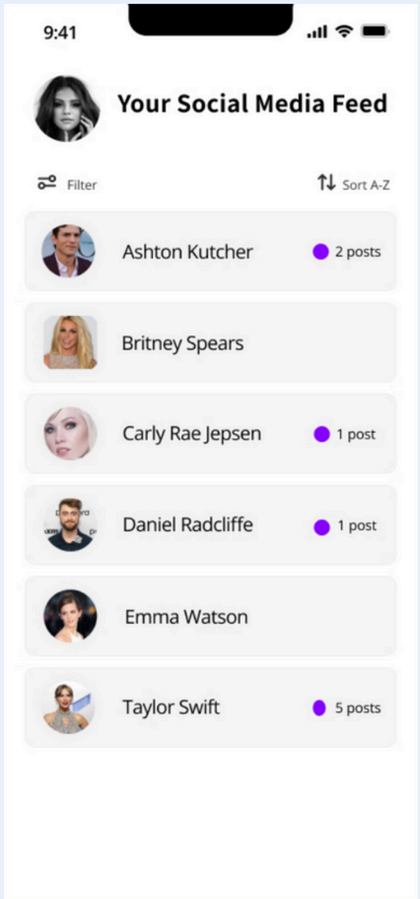
- **Viewers feel "buried" in posts**
- **Sharers fear "spamming" or "clogging" feeds**

Teens believe Self-Contained Disclosure will reduce unnecessary friction in sharing.



- share without imposing on others

> ***“Like little status updates”***
> (P_c05)

We Introduce “Trust-Enabled Privacy” as a framework that recognizes trust—whether building or eroding—as central to social media boundary regulation.

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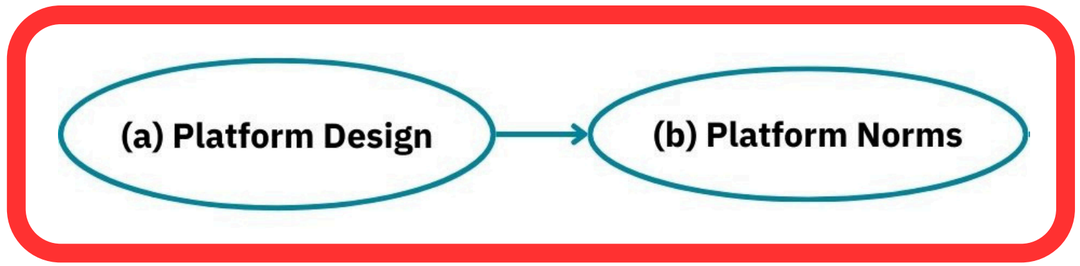

shapes →

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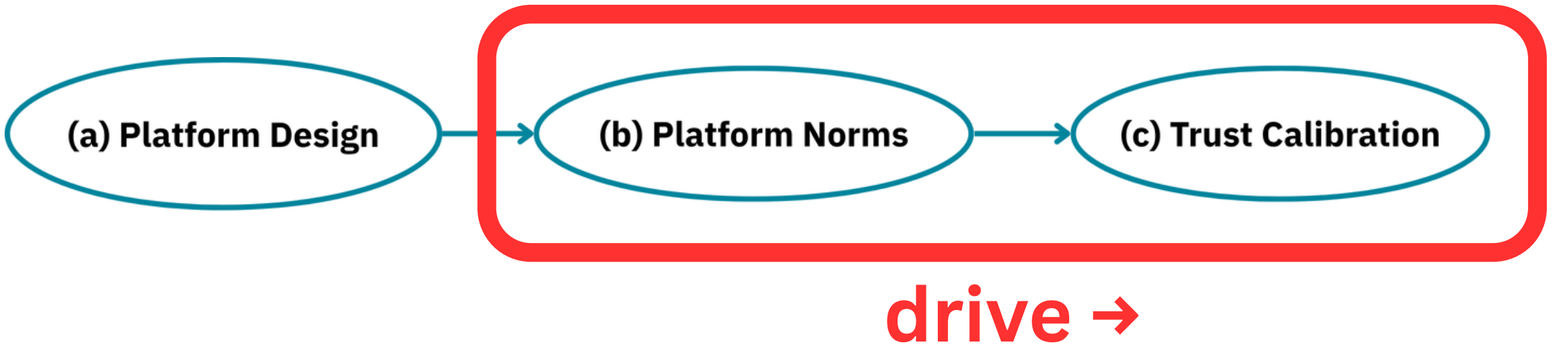

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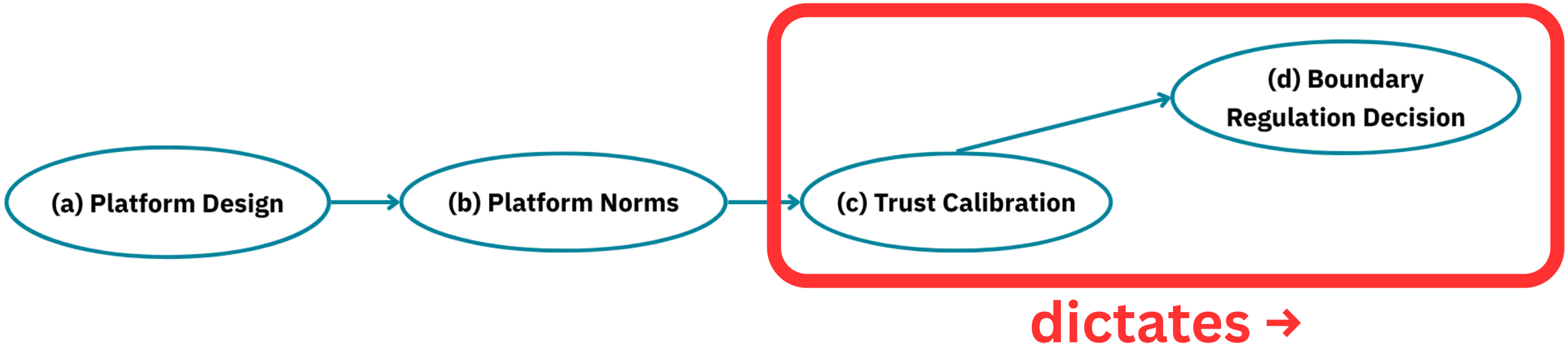

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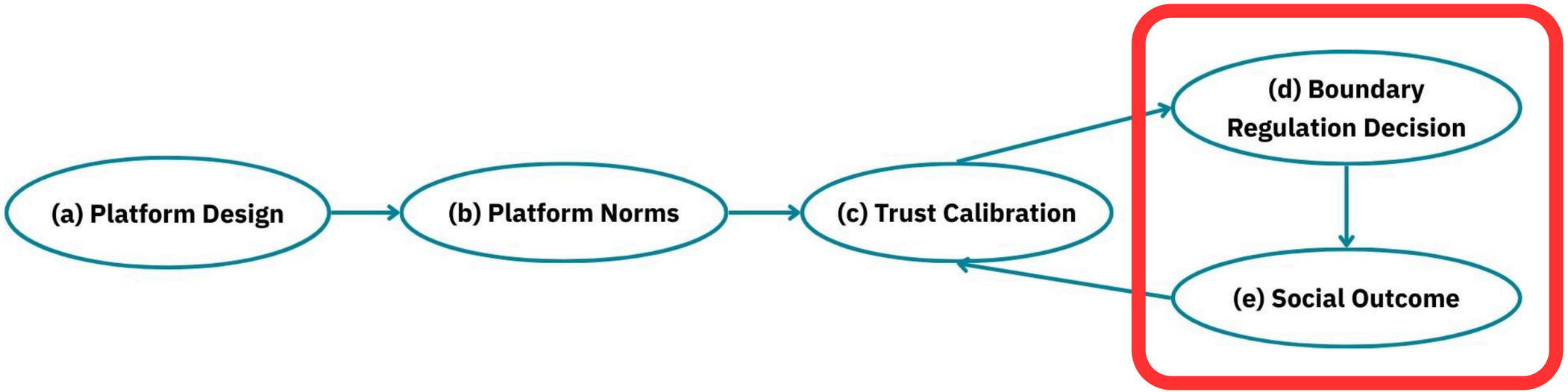

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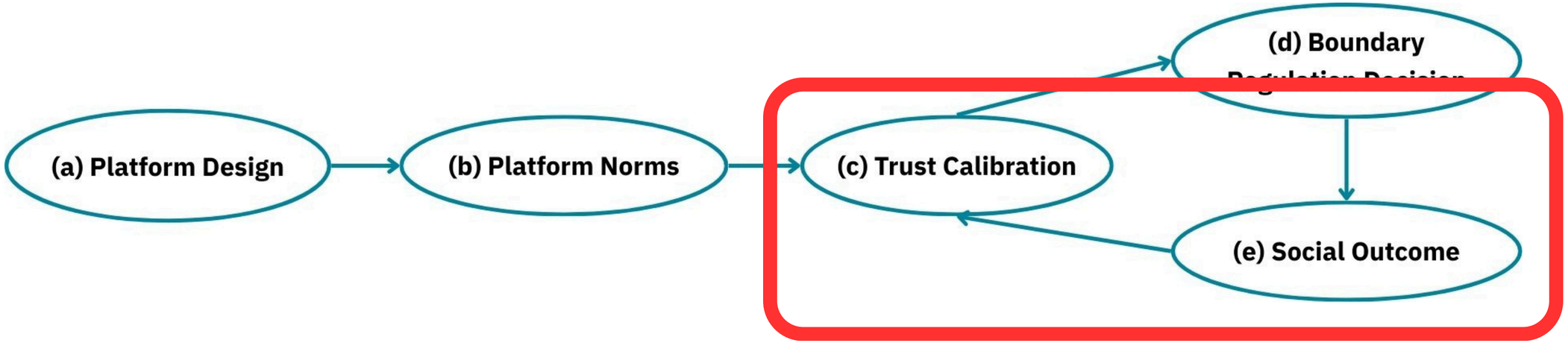

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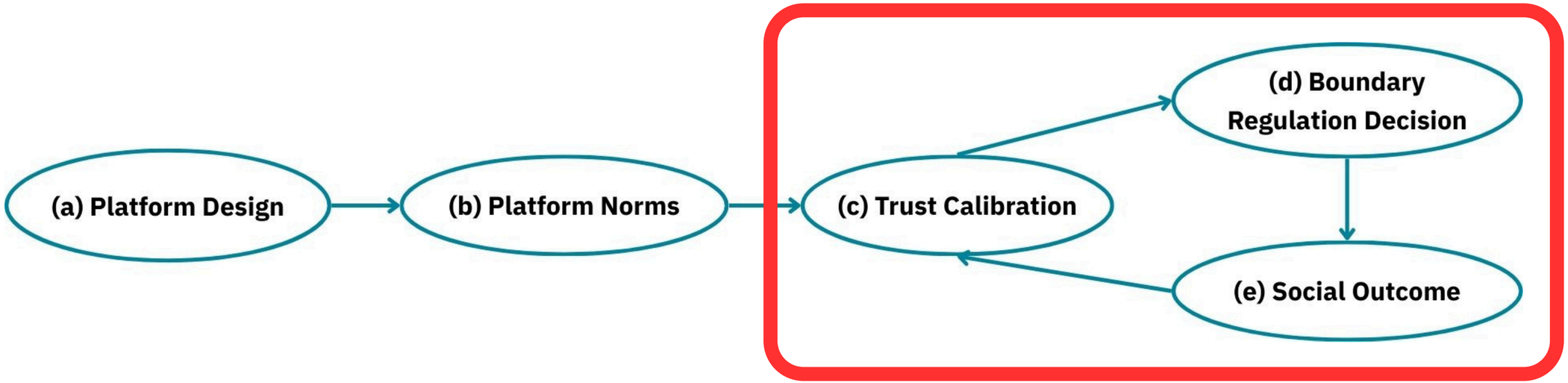

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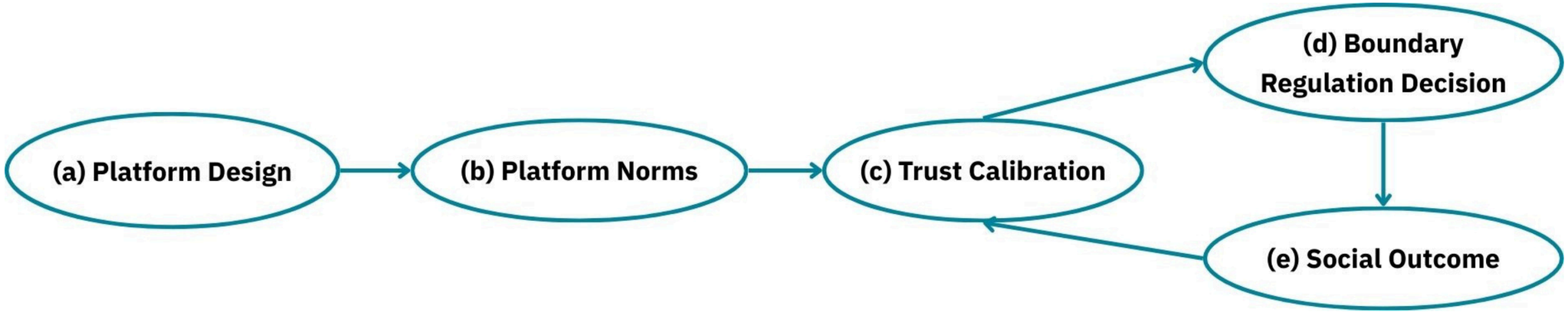

The framework also foregrounds the role of platform design in shaping platform norms, which influence trust, privacy, self-disclosure, and ultimately, *opportunities for social connections.*

To sum...

Teens want to share small, everyday moments to build trust and connection, but face high emotional stakes due to ambiguous social norms (i.e., "Communication Fog") and environments that often feel judgmental or unforgiving (i.e., "Low-Grace Culture").

We introduce 8 design ideas to counter these barriers and build trust.

Building on frameworks like *Privacy as Trust* (Waldman, 2018), we challenge the assumption that privacy and sharing are a trade-off.

Our approach calls for platform designs that intentionally cultivate trust, making privacy and sharing **mutually reinforcing** and **expanding the frontier of interactions that are safely possible** on these platforms.

Key Takeaways

1. Self-disclosure is crucial for teens, serving as the smallest token of trust and a foundation for relationship building.
2. Teens perceive **small, personal moments** as meaningful self-disclosure, yet current platforms do not support this type of sharing well.
3. We identify **two major barriers to such disclosure**—Communication Fog (ambiguous platform norms) and Low-Grace Culture (harsh social environments)—and **co-design** with teens ways to alleviate these barriers and foster trust.
4. We introduce the ***Trust-Enabled Privacy*** framework, which frames privacy as a dynamic, trust-building process rather than mere information control—an approach that is ineffective in networked environments. Critically, **platform design can either enable this trust-building or accelerate its erosion**.

Positivity ≠ Absence of Negativity

Trust-Enabled Privacy:

Social Media Designs to Support Adolescent User Boundary Regulation

JaeWon Kim, Robert Wolfe, Ramya Subramanian, Mei-Hsuan Lee, Jessica Colnago, Alexis Hiniker

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