

M&C SAATCHI TALK



DISCORD:
THE COMMUNITY
CONVERSATION
REVOLUTION?

About this report

This report is a quantitative and qualitative dive into 13-22-year olds' relationship with, view on and use of Discord. Working with Generation Z&A expert Chloe Combi, 500 members of Gen Z, with a broad spread across UK geography, socioeconomics, and race, were asked about themselves, their relationship with the screen and social media and explicitly how, when and why they use Discord.

The 500 13-22-year-olds were split into three sets (youngest, middle and oldest) and interviewed with the same questions in person, or via online calls, about their relationship with Discord. The sample of young people interviewed are representative of the UK and give unique insight into a burgeoning youth culture and community on a fascinating and often unobserved platform.

“Four billion server conversation minutes daily”¹

- Discord

So what is Discord?

Discord, a real-time messaging, video and voice social media platform, was launched in 2015 by two video gamers looking to create an environment where gamers could chat and interact with each other while playing.

Fast-forward to 2023 and Discord is no longer just for gamers. Perhaps fuelled by the social restrictions enforced during the pandemic and coupled with a dissatisfaction with other platforms and desire for higher levels of curation, it has been catapulted into the mainstream. There's a big opportunity for non-gaming brands to enter the space and help drive conversation.

Discord has evolved into a global platform for a diverse mix of communities, including students, musicians, scientists and crypto enthusiasts – and is set to become a community-building tool for brands and public personalities alike. Before Covid, Discord had around 50 million monthly active members but that number has since trebled to 150million active monthly users.¹

Unlike most social media platforms, Discord is designed with small and diverse communities in mind rather than one big central community. It aims to provide a platform where “people build genuine relationships with friends and communities close to home or around the world” – a differentiator that may have helped boost its popularity during the pandemic.

Communities are created via so-called servers, which are simply channels created for, or by, people with shared interests. The size of servers varies, but there are over 19 million active servers per week.¹ They can be open to the public but the vast majority are private, invite-only spaces for groups of friends and communities.²

Brands can get involved by creating their own servers, or facilitating conversations by partnering with an existing server. Whilst many conversation topics on the platform are related to gaming, there's a variety of subjects being discussed, from self-improvement, cooking, sneakers, to meeting new people.

No distracting ads are popping up all the time, as Discord doesn't sell ad space. Its revenue model is based on users purchasing upgrades to enhance their experience by customising their servers with bots and personalised emojis, for instance.

“150 million monthly active users”¹

- Discord



How do the users describe it?



Mikey (18): "Apart from the gaming stuff, Discord is kind of like a massive group chat, but with your real friends as well as your online friends. It's the same banter, language, memes and stuff people from the outside wouldn't get. The thing I like about it is, it's a big conversation that lays on top of each other and rolls."



Nina (17): "I thought it was just about gaming and it's big in the space, but once you get past that and the fact it's quite different from other social media sites – it's not all me, me, me – it's great. It's very content driven, got its own language and humour, but its got the best discussions on the internet on anything you can think of, from heavy metal, cooking with tuna to self-harming."



Ted (22): "I showed my brother who's in his thirties what was going on on Discord and he says it reminds him of the best of Tumblr when he was at school: fast, very funny, and excludes outsiders which gives it a bit of an outlaw appeal. It's definitely not TikTok."



Ryan (19): "Think of any topic you are into and you'll find a whole community on Discord around that with its own jokes, references and just stuff that's funny. My Dad was a magazine editor in the '90's and he says it reminds him of those days: anyone could have read it but it was the proper insiders that get the jokes, which makes you want to be on the inside."



Rae (25): "Most social media sites are about one person getting followers or people liking their content and it's always, always about image and looks. The servers on Discord big and small are about the community and the content. You get the moderators in charge, but they wouldn't work without the community and there isn't really a hierarchy. You get profile badges, but that's about what you do. It's not obsessed with famous people like every other platform. It goes back to the days of community and good content."



Tanya (14): "Discord is a space girls can game in and there's not so much hassle or bullying on it."



Isaac (15): "Discord is a lot of things, but it's a great place to get unbiased information on serious things like helping people manage your pronouns – I'm a they and it hasn't been easy at my school and Discord helped – to getting fierce makeup tips without the selling. Discord is still funny and there's jokes but it hasn't got that crazy bullying and extreme reactions to absolutely everything you see all over social media. I would say it seems more mature than a lot of other platforms."



A snapshot of social media behaviours amongst our audience:

We asked our respondents about their social media behaviours to get a feel for how they use their time online.

We first asked which social media platforms they use at least 3x per week. Unsurprisingly the usual suspects still rank highly at that level, however more 'community-based' platforms, including Discord and Reddit, are not far behind.

	TikTok	Twitch	Youtube	Snapchat	Discord	Instagram	Reddit	BeReal.	LinkedIn	Twitter
AGE										
13-15	99.5%	65%	95.5%	88.5%	39%	90%	14%	20%	5%	10%
16-19	96%	76%	95%	94%	69%	88%	61%	22%	41%	39%
20-22	97%	59%	98%	90%	60%	90%	60%	8%	70%	50%
AVERAGE	97.5%	66.7%	96.2%	90.8%	56%	89.3%	45%	16.7%	38.7%	33%

GWJ 2022 data on daily platform use by Generation Z, showed Discord use was c. 20-25% of that of TikTok, Snapchat or Instagram, and c. 50% of Twitter*.

Although that data is based on daily use, we can see from the averages above that this is likely now much closer, with our data showing that Discord use is around 60% of TikTok, Snapchat and Insta, and surpassing that of Twitter.

This may in part be due to recognition of the platform as now far more than a gaming speciality channel, broadening and deepening its appeal.

*Discord use daily/more than once a day = 12.%; Snapchat = 51.2%; TikTok = 48.4%; Insta = 59.9%; Twitter = 24.9%. GWJ 2022.

To understand trends in terms of time spent on social media, we asked our respondents to share how many hours per day they use channels for.

Hours per day on social media	13-15 Years old	16-19 Years old	20-22 Years old
1-2 Hours	20%	9%	22%
3-5 Hours	61%	61%	61%
6-9 Hours	11%	17%	12%
10+ Hours	8%	13%	5%

The data shows the majority of all age groups interviewed are spending between 3-5 hours per day on social media channels, with a minority spending more. This suggests there is much more than simply scrolling and liking going on. Our interviews revealed conversation, community and discovery beyond pure entertainment now make up a lot of their time spent on social.

Their world, our observations

We asked our groups their views on Discord, what it means to them and how it fits in their world. Their responses shone a light both on the platform and its potential and more widely, their attitudes towards social media, its value and what really matters to them.

In addition, we tasked them to design example campaigns for brands across sectors on Discord, to get a sense of how they feel brands should approach the platform - and what they want them to bring to the party.

Based on their words, we've outlined 4 key observations from the research which should be considered as social opportunity seemingly shifts from being platform-driven and returns to its origins as a community-driven connector of people with shared passions.

OBSERVATION #1:

The social is back in social

We heard that this audience are tiring of 'the show' or 'the flex' on social media platforms. Instead they are seeking to be part of communities with shared passions and substance. Being simply entertained with short-form advertising, brand banter or influencers showing their swag or exclusive access may not be enough anymore; increasingly social media users want to talk, learn and collaborate at a deeper level.



Mikey (18): "I'm a semi-professional gamer, I make a little bit of money out of it, and I like Discord. Twitch has become all about the flex and absolutely everyone wants to make money out of it, which can destroy the community feel..."

"I'm a mad vinyl junkie and I've learned more on Discord than any other space."



Saul (19): "Discord and Reddit are the only spaces I spend much time on now. Discord is great for gaming and music and I'm amazed it hasn't been picked up more by bigger brands and artists for launching and testing products because you have some very, very dedicated communities and not just in gaming spaces. I'm a mad vinyl junkie and I've learned more about music and vinyl on Discord than any other space and I've made some really good friends..."



Nina (17): "I actually got into Discord through a teacher. We were able to submit coursework through Discord and the marking system worked really well. I'm amazed that with the really efficient video interface, the beauty bloggers aren't all over it."

"Football is massive on Discord – discussion, analysis, chat, roasting and real expertise."



Jan (17): "Football is massive on Discord – football discussion, analysis, chat, roasting and some real expertise. If I was into gambling, I'd be all over Discord getting tips. Some of the predicting is mad accurate. People who really know what they're talking about."



Ted (22): "It's really interesting times for my age group – either at uni or work or somewhere in between. For us, the internet and social media isn't about socialising, measuring popularity or really even much fun anymore. Absolutely everyone is using it as a business or growth strategy. If you're on TikTok or Insta, quite often it's because you have a following. LinkedIn is massive for career growth and connections. Twitch is still big, but it's gotten a bit kiddie and same with YouTube. As Web3 grows, I definitely think sites like Discord are the next thing..."

What does it mean for brands?

Discord's dedicated communities are a hotbed of opportunity to trial ideas and products, garnering insightful and informed feedback from truly engaged audiences.

Get it right, and you can build or join a passionate community with a genuine sense of loyalty and even tribalism – creating brand and product advocates amongst their peers both online and offline.

Discord provides an opportunity to build relevance, influence and credibility.





AUDIENCE-CRAFTED CAMPAIGNS #1:

The confectionary brand



Our groups were tasked to create their own Discord campaigns across three sectors. In the first of these, they shared their thoughts on how a confectionary brand could launch onto the platform.



Danny (18): "There is a growing community for food on Discord – it's been mad helpful with cooking tips for uni. I'd be lost without it. I'm definitely going to start a cooking channel for people my age, as I think I can grow a following. YouTube and TikTok are absolutely saturated now within the foodie/brand space – but Discord is there for the taking."



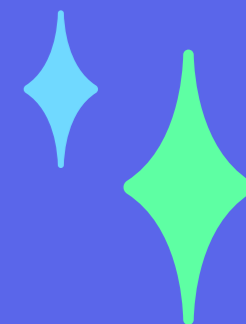
Cameron (24): "It baffles me how few major brands are on Discord. You have built-in communities, live feedback that's a lot higher quality than YouTube comments, massive growth and examples of events that did well, because there isn't as many of them."

Special flavours campaign:

- Special bars are released with a unique flavour and codes
- One month is set to treasure hunt for the special bars. This is revealed on a brand server that you have to join to be part of the event and claim prizes
- Each special flavour bar carries a prize value – for example 'Mint' is £100, 'Raisins' is £250, 'Birthday Cake' £1,000, 'Dark Chocolate' £250,000 and 'No Nuts' is the grand £1million prize
- There are live reveals of winners on Discord to keep people updated on the hunt
- Hashtags like #NoNuts1Million or #NoNutsMillionaire can be used in conversations about the campaign

Why they think it works...

- Drive sales
- Mass chatter across all social media channels with stories about finding the special bars
- Makes the brand look fun for the PokemonGo generation
- Grow an audience on Discord
- Taps into a current love and popularity of mystery, clues and competitions



Our view:

This thinking really demonstrates the audience's desire to be part of something together with brands and to have more immersive experiences which can drive conversation.

The approach isn't new, it relives the ambition of early day community-building social campaigns, or bold sales promotion tactics – and that should be reassuring. It's about adjusting techniques to better suit platforms, not about complicated new solutions.



OBSERVATION #2:

They want to be part of something

This group want to help shape and share a brand's story in their vision.

In a hark back to early social activations when brand ambassadors were sought through social, Google hang-outs were arranged and the doors were thrown open to consumers, they want to be much more a part of the brands they buy into.

Providing the opportunity to shape brands and products will appeal, as will social currency and experiences. Indeed a factor of Web 3.0 in general is allowing users and consumers to steer the ship and influence future brand decisions.

Again this is no surprise considering the success of sales promotion campaigns that allow consumers to dictate the fate of, or invent, products.



Isaac (15): "I'm queer, non-binary and proudly so and I stayed up all night for the Gucci event. I want to be in fashion and getting invited to that was sick. It felt like being invited to a member's only club and I got to chat to actual people in fashion and I got loads of other invites. That was a special day for me."

"I want to be in fashion and getting invited to that [Gucci event] was sick."



Loz, (21): "It would be the perfect place for launch parties for records, especially as you can get immediate reactions and it's a live event that's about the community, not the artist, which is pretty much all artists are now. They aren't anything without the community/fanbase. It's a perfect launchpad."

What does it mean for brands?

Don't be afraid to let go. To capture the attention of consumers of the now and the future, let them into the brand and product.

This can be done by taking advantage of the creativity and passion of the audience on Discord, and creating communities and conversations where they can become a valuable source of inspiration and advice for your brand and products. This is a space to 'open the door to the chocolate factory'; create consumer panels, appoint fan moderators and invite feedback on your plans and ambitions.

"Fashion consumers are migrating to Discord because they want more transparency and dialogue from the brands they support – and that's especially true of the Gen Z cohort."

"Discord is another form of CRM right now," said Mai. "It gets your most coveted fans and community into a conversation, which is rare on social media platforms like Twitter or Instagram."

Gen-Z marketing expert
Quiynh Mai on [glossy.com](https://www.glossy.com)³

AUDIENCE-CRAFTED CAMPAIGNS #2:

The mid-market make-up brand

In our second audience-created campaign example, our respondents were asked their thoughts on how a make-up brand could get involved on the platform



Katie (17): "Discord would work really well for makeup marketing and launches, because of the video interfaced with chat, which works better than Slack, so I can't figure out why makeup brands aren't doing more live makeovers with new products via Discord"

"I can't figure out why makeup brands aren't doing more live makeovers with new products via Discord"



Terri (19): "I do a lot of live makeup tutorials on YouTube and have a large following, so I get sent a lot of products from different brands both high street and high end. The trouble with YouTube is you do get the comments and rolling commentary on lives, but it's not very meaningful as a dialogue. I'm definitely looking into Discord, because you can chat live with your followers during tutorials or straight after which is great for you as an artist and great for the brands. Plus if they are invited to the server, it cuts down on the abuse (you're too ugly for makeup) or time-wasters, because you can kick them off the server, which you can't do with YouTube."



Cob (19): "There's almost no engagement from brands on Discord. I'd definitely follow Charlotte Tilbury, Mac, Rimmel and Kylie Jenner, as they are all brands I love."

Live make-over alongs:

- Set up a branded server and send out 1 million samples with a QR coded invite for a special event – instantly building a community and creating an experience to drive conversation on Discord
- Appoint well-known and up and coming makeup artists to deliver live 'makeover-alongs' using the products people have received. This is different to YouTube makeovers in that it's interactive and everyone does it together
- Create 'easy', 'intermediate' and 'hard' levels for audiences, who can join via video interactively for the community makeover – adding a sense of occasion or party-like atmosphere
- Users are encouraged to leave comments about the brand – usability, wearability etc. Providing market research in real-time
- Users can sign up to be brand ambassadors for regular events and are encouraged to be active on the server and invite friends to grow the community

Why they think it works...

- Community building and growth on Discord
- Digital events that appeal to the community, with users encouraged to chat and share tips live
- Democratic audience and community which is a major appeal of Discord – where audiences are equal to the 'influencers'
- Market research potential
- Early adopters of the platform can be the biggest influencers

Our view:

This audience want brands to 'bring them in' and get them involved in the development and use of the products. They want to feel on a par with the 'influencers', which reinforces that being shown ideals doesn't necessarily appeal to this cohort. Again this takes a well-known tactic and uses key components of the platform to enhance the experience, making the event more immersive and with less room for those seeking to disrupt.



OBSERVATION #3:

They want their passion to be their business

From gaming to fashion, to make-up and beyond, this audience is looking to turn what they love into work they love. Social spaces, including Discord, are where they go to get inspiration and intent.



Kate (14): "My brothers use Discord. I mostly go on TikTok and am trying to launch myself as an ethical makeup artist, but it's too hard on TikTok because there's too much competition."

"I am trying to launch myself as an ethical makeup artist, but it's too hard on TikTok."



Cara (20): "I think I'm going to focus on Discord to launch my fashion brand. I have a server with nearly 2000 members, all who are into fashion and ethical fashion, so it's kind of a natural customer base, ready-made, plus I can trial ideas with them and get really great feedback."

What does it mean for brands?

An opportunity to engage with communities by giving back. Brands can help develop their ambitions through experiences, access and expertise. This can be shared by launching servers where brand spokespeople provide sector-specific tips and guidance. Invite the audience to events and provide experiences that can help fulfil their goals, creating powerful brand advocates along the way.

AUDIENCE-CRAFTED CAMPAIGNS #3: :

The Footwear Brand

Our final audience campaign example asked our respondents to suggest how a footwear brand might get involved on the platform

Best Foot Forward competition:

- A competition to design a new sneaker – Best Foot Forward – with all profits from it being donated to good causes
- Targeted at young designers (14-30), with a strict rule that none of the entrants can be a professional designer or work for the brand, to uncover new design talent
- All entries must be submitted as an NFT via Discord
- Choosing the winner could be filmed with content released via Discord in the lead up to revealing winner
- All NFTs uploaded can be bid for and purchased, with the money going to the designer

Why they think it works...

- Campaign to drive conversation across social media
- Reflects a brand supportive of discovering new talent (and not just working with celebs)
- Growth of a Discord community with an event that stands out
- Embraces the NFT in an imaginative way that rewards all of the creators

Our view:

This is another idea which opens up the brand and product development, using the community-focus of Discord to nurture the development of emerging talent. Brands have the power to help and inspire young audiences with their own ambitions, and Discord provides the opportunity to reach and speak with them in a closed community that elevates the connection between consumer and company.



OBSERVATION #4:

They want to own their own experience

As social media platforms grow in popularity, wider audiences jump on board – from parents to brands. Whilst there is still obvious value in these spaces, they appear to become less appealing for younger audiences. Our research tells a story of a group looking to find space to escape the masses, and in particular, older generations and those seeking to promote to them.

“After years of using algorithm-based platforms like Instagram, and most recently, Tiktok, brands may find it difficult to transition to the style and tone needed to maintain and grow Discord engagement organically.”

– *glossy.com*³

Discord servers are driven by community, not platform or algorithm, which means audiences can choose to only engage with what they are interested in and passionate about, without being bombarded with things they aren't.



Ibrahim (15): “I’m a huge Discord user, I spend hours on it a day, and yes, it’s mostly for gaming, but in my opinion it’s better than YouTube, because it’s communal and the video is much better. Less pile-ons and because it’s more specialist you don’t get ALL the internet people on it. Especially parents...”

“I don’t want Discord to become the new TikTok with all those Mums dancing.”



Isaac (15): “I don’t want more people on Discord because I don’t it to become the new TikTok. Mums all doing those dances and Dads lecturing us about Ye. I LOVE the fact it’s not like YouTube, which is a f**king mess. It’s all adverts now and is s**t for gaming...”



Kayla (13): “I absolutely hate TikTok. I’m Gen A, and I hate Gen Z – they’re so lame and TikTok obsessed. We are all trying out new places because all TikTok is now whining and people trying to flex or sell you things. We’re all looking for new spaces and lots of people at school are on Discord.”

“Places like Discord are definitely on the frontier of Web3. That’s what’s next.”



Rishi (24): “I’m fascinated by Discord as it felt like one of the first places that understood the need for a more countercultural internet that parents didn’t understand. It’ll eventually be like TikTok if it grows in popularity, but for now, has an edginess, plus a Web3 outlook that feels more like the future.”



Saul (19): “IMO, NFT’s are just a stupid, flash-in-the-pan scam, but places like Discord are definitely on the frontier of Web3. That’s what’s next.”

What does it mean for brands?

With this audience, waiting for evidence of success from others before making a move might render it too late. And with no paid media best practice guidelines that we have come to lean into for social content, it might feel like a leap of faith.

However, as our research suggests, this audience are far more attuned to the commercial social practices employed for the past decade and actively moving away from the saturation of such tactics. The rewards in terms of earning the attention of this audience could be well worth the early step.

Being a slave to the former ‘rules’ for content in terms of high-production value and expense seems less of an issue. There is a rise in lo-fi content driving greater engagement and providing a more authentic experience for audiences, according to recent research from Dash Hudson.⁴

Perhaps after a seismic shift away from doing so in the evolution of brand social activation into paid, investing time and effort in nurturing a community passionate about the conversation you can help facilitate is the best way to show relevance, grow connection and appeal to this new cohort.



What Next?

Our findings show there is a clear desire for this audience to take back ownership of the conversations they see and join and be part of communities that share interests and passions – rather than stay at the whim of platform algorithms, paid placements and unsolicited messages.

Without the ability to buy eyeballs in this space, brands need to think about how they earn their place and provide value to the communities they want to facilitate and nurture.

As specialists in the Art of Conversation, M&C Saatchi TALK help brands navigate, create and lead the conversations that matter, bringing together audience, platform and cultural expertise to help brands earn their place in spaces that cannot be bought into. You can contact alex.michael@mcsaatchi.com or shelley.portet@mcsaatchi.com to find out more.

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