
How Users Choose a Face Lens on Snapchat

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Abstract

Snapchat has quickly brought innovative features to the area of social media interactions, one being their Face Lenses, which are digital masks that add a different form of interaction to everyday pictures and videos using augmented reality. In this study, we interviewed 18 Snapchat users to understand their behavior with these Face Lenses, specifically, how they decide on one. We found that participants chose based on goals, personality, and a scroll-first mindset. We contribute one of the first studies on this new feature that has quickly expanded to various other social media applications.

Author Keywords

Snapchat; face lens; selfies; face filters; social media; augmented reality

Introduction and Related Work

Snapchat remains one of the most popular applications, especially among users between the ages of 18 through 24. Most research on Snapchat has revolved around the topic of ephemerality e.g., [1,2,4]. However, Snapchat continues to add engaging features that sets it apart from other applications. One of those features being their Face Lenses, which are essentially "masks" that apply a filter to the users' face using augmented reality. Some of these "masks" include giving the user bunny

Snapchat Face Lenses

Users can access the Face Lenses by holding down on their face and the application will instantly scan the users face and provide them with a list of Face Lenses at the bottom. The user then has the option to scroll through this list and apply the Face Lens synchronously, meaning the user does not have to take the picture first, they are free to click on one, see how it looks, move their head around, perform an action to access animations, and much more. A big part about Face Lens is that every Lens is different, meaning some change your voice, some will add an effect to your face, and some will change your face all together.

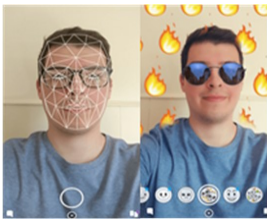


Figure 1: Face Lenses

ears or changing the users' voice to be higher pitched. Because there are a variety of Face Lenses available to users, it brings us to our main research question:

RQ: *How do users decide which Face Lens to use?*

Methods

We conducted in-depth interviews with 18 participants and conducted thematic analysis. We recruited participants by using Snapchat Stories [3] as well as word-of-mouth; 10 were male. We recruited participants around Snapchat's age demographic of 19 – 34. Participants were diverse in race: 5 White, 3 Black/African American, 5 Asian, 4 Mixed, and 1 Native American. 5 identified as Hispanic/Latino.

Results

To examine how users decide on a Face Lens we asked participants to recall their most recent experience with them as well as their general decision-making process. We also asked participants to provide us with their most used Face Lens as well as an explanation for the choice. We found that some participants had goals in mind when deciding on a Face Lens, some projected their personality to their choice, and others had a scroll-first decide later mentality. These findings helped us uncover user behavior with this new feature.

Having a goal in mind

We found that participants had a goal in mind both before entering the application and when viewing the list of Face Lenses available. Participants commented on choosing a Face Lens to achieve goals of looking better or making their friends laugh. A common point when participants were asked to describe what Face Lenses were, was that they transform your face in both

funny and cute ways. P9 (F, 28) was one of the participants that mentioned always using Face Lenses and recalls the last time she used one, "Last night. I was doing a sweaty gym selfie and I wanted it to look nicer and prettier than what I look like in real life." (P9) She later adds what exactly these cute Face Lenses are doing to her face when she describes her most used one:

The heart one because it lightens my face, it brightens my teeth, and it makes me look nicer and thinner, like it gives me higher definition of cheek bones. (P9)

P14 (F, 24) echoes a similar deciding factor, "I usually use the one with the hearts around your head or the flower crown. I like to look good in the selfies that I send to other people because I don't want to look ugly." P9 and P14's reasoning shows that they decide on a Face Lens based on how cute it will make their selfies look but they have made this decision before entering the application. They know that these Face Lenses are going to make them look better and choose them when they want to accomplish this goal.

Other participants add to this theme, however, through a different goal – making their friends laugh by using the funny ones. P8 (M, 24) specifically talks about finding ones that will have his friends laughing and states that it's usually the "funny or goofy looking ones" and when he sends them out he's "expecting [his friends] to laugh, which they probably would." P18 (M, 25) echoes similar thoughts when he is trying to decide on a Face Lens to use.

I'm usually talking to my friends on Snapchat and I usually stick with the funny ones, so I can make them

User definitions of Face Lens

Users referred to the Snapchat Face Lenses as face-filters even though the official term is Face Lens.

We asked participants to describe to us what exactly they thought a Face Lens was on Snapchat to get a more user-defined, concrete definition for this fairly-new feature. P16 (M, 26) describes Face Lens as a "digital mask" while P18 (M, 25) describes Face Lens as a "tool":

It's a tool that modifies facial features or adds virtual masks on to people. It's an easy way to change things for a few moments about yourself. (P18)

From this information, we properly define Face Lens as a unique interaction in the form of a digital mask applied to the user's face that enhances or changes the image.

laugh, so like I used the one with the big mouth one. It like shrinks your face and then magnifies your mouth and then it also adds like a pitch to your voice and it ended up making some people laugh. (P18)

These findings allow us to further suggest that on top of having a goal when picking a Face Lens, participants also have a preferred type of Face Lens that they lean towards. In general, participants put Face Lenses into categories of "pretty/cute" (Figure 2) or "funny" (Figure 3), with more participants preferring the funny ones over the rest and some participants preferring both. The pretty/cute lenses have been known to clear the users' skin, brighten the users' face, and add a pretty or cute animation. P5 (F, 34) mentioned preferring this style of filter to "cover up some marks" while P3 (F, 31) says, "it makes you feel beautiful even when you know you aren't". On the other side, the funny Lenses have been known to deform or animate the users' face in various ways. P8 (M, 24) mentions the rainbow throw up Lens, "the face looks funny...you open your mouth and a rainbow just comes down like a waterfall." While the idea of preference may not be novel, we feel the reasoning behind some of the participants preferences is important.

Wanting to project aspect of personality
Furthermore, we found that participants were choosing a Face Lens based on their own personality, mainly when it comes to having a "goofy" or "funny" personality. P8 (M, 24) talks about how the personality he wants to project influences the Face Lens that he ultimately chooses:

Some filters are really cool. Some filters they look really funny. If I see something really funny I'll use it

because I know, like my character plus the funniness of the face-filter and it will just make it hilarious for people to look at. And you know it makes it cool because it's funny. (P8)

Similarly, P16 (M, 26) also adds to this theme by noting how his personality is involved in his decision:

I would say I'm kind of a goofy guy. So whatever filter makes me look the funniest or weirdest. That's usually the one that I use... If I take a picture for the most part I want it to be the most goofy picture. I've always been like that. I would say I'm goofy. I like things that are funny, that'll make me laugh or giggle. (P16)

This theme suggests that throughout their experience with Face Lenses, these participants have developed relationships with certain ones where their decision is based on finding and choosing ones that they think are congruent with the personality they are trying to convey to others, especially their friends.

Scroll first, decide later

Finally, we found that on top of all the other deciding factors, a few participants also added sometimes not having a process but instead employing a try-all method to picking one. After scrolling through all of them, they decide based on what works in that exact moment. Whether it's making them look cute or look silly, all of this is determined post hoc or after seeing all of them. P15 (M, 26) notes that he actually "tries all of them" before deciding on one. P17 (M, 28) further explains the use of this method when asked about his process:



Figure 2: A Face Lens that is considered "cute" to users via Snapchat.com



Figure 3: A Face Lens that is considered "funny" to users via Snapchat.com

I really don't have one. I usually will scroll through the first few filters to see what is offered that day and just choose one that I like usually one that appears to be the funniest looking. (P17)

This type of decision-making process brings up an important distinction about Face Lenses. Because the list of Face Lenses is consistently being updated with additions and deletions, some users have opted for a try all approach before finding one that fits the moment.

Discussion

This research draws light on user behavior with Face Lenses, which has quickly expanded across other popular social media applications. Specifically, we examined participants' decision-making process when picking a Face Lens. Previously, users would use outside tools to edit and enhance their pictures. Now, Snapchat provides all that in one convenient feature. This adds to the interactions between users in an entertaining and comical way, however, one that is different from reality. It is clear when it comes to Face Lenses that there is not an ideal decision-making process. Furthermore, based on the analysis from our data, we offer some design suggestions on the feature of Snapchat Face Lenses.

Our findings suggest design recommendations for how Face Lenses are presented to users, specifically their order and how they are presented. Participants noted liking/disliking Face Lenses for various reasons and from this, we suggest a way for users to favorite or non-favorite Face Lenses with their favorite ones being presented first. This type of feedback can be beneficial to all parties involved. Users will have quick access to

their favorites and designers will gain valuable feedback on their designs in the form of metrics. We also suggest for a design where users' favorite Face Lens is automatically applied when the front camera is accessed. Currently, the user must scan their face and slide to a Face Lens, so this step would be automated. Our findings help designers gain a general idea of the types of Face Lenses that users are looking for, prefer, and use, which we feel is important for them to remain engaging.

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