

# “You Have to Ignore the Dangers”: User Perceptions of the Security and Privacy Benefits of WhatsApp Mods

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## Motivation and Research Questions

WhatsApp is the most popular messaging app and mods are common



Mods offer features that have clear security and privacy implications



## Main Research Questions

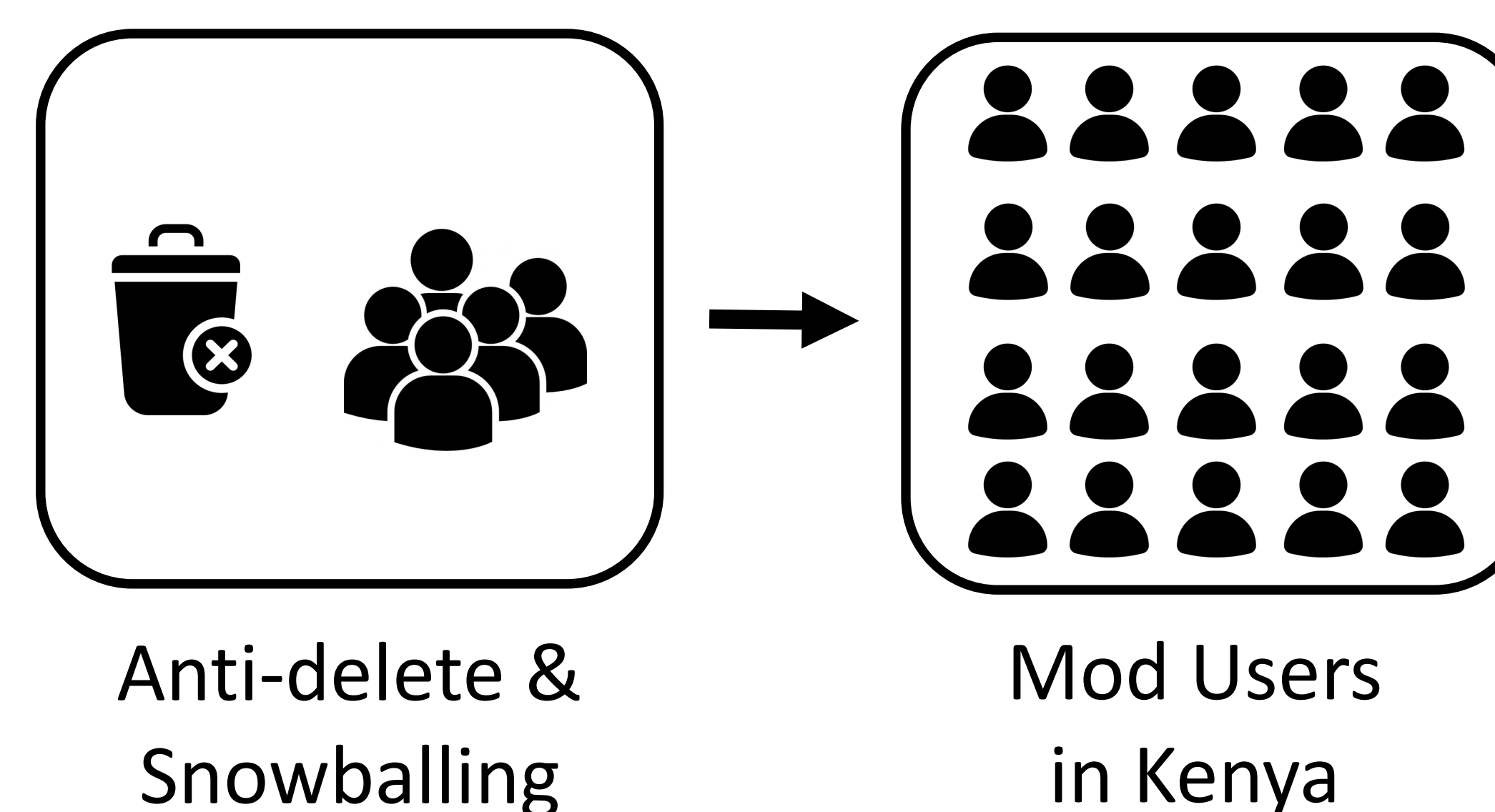


1. Why do mod users in Kenya choose to use mods?
2. How do user expectations align with mod behavior?

## Methods, Results, and Takeaways

We interviewed mod users in Kenya and analyzed common mods to contextualize user sentiments

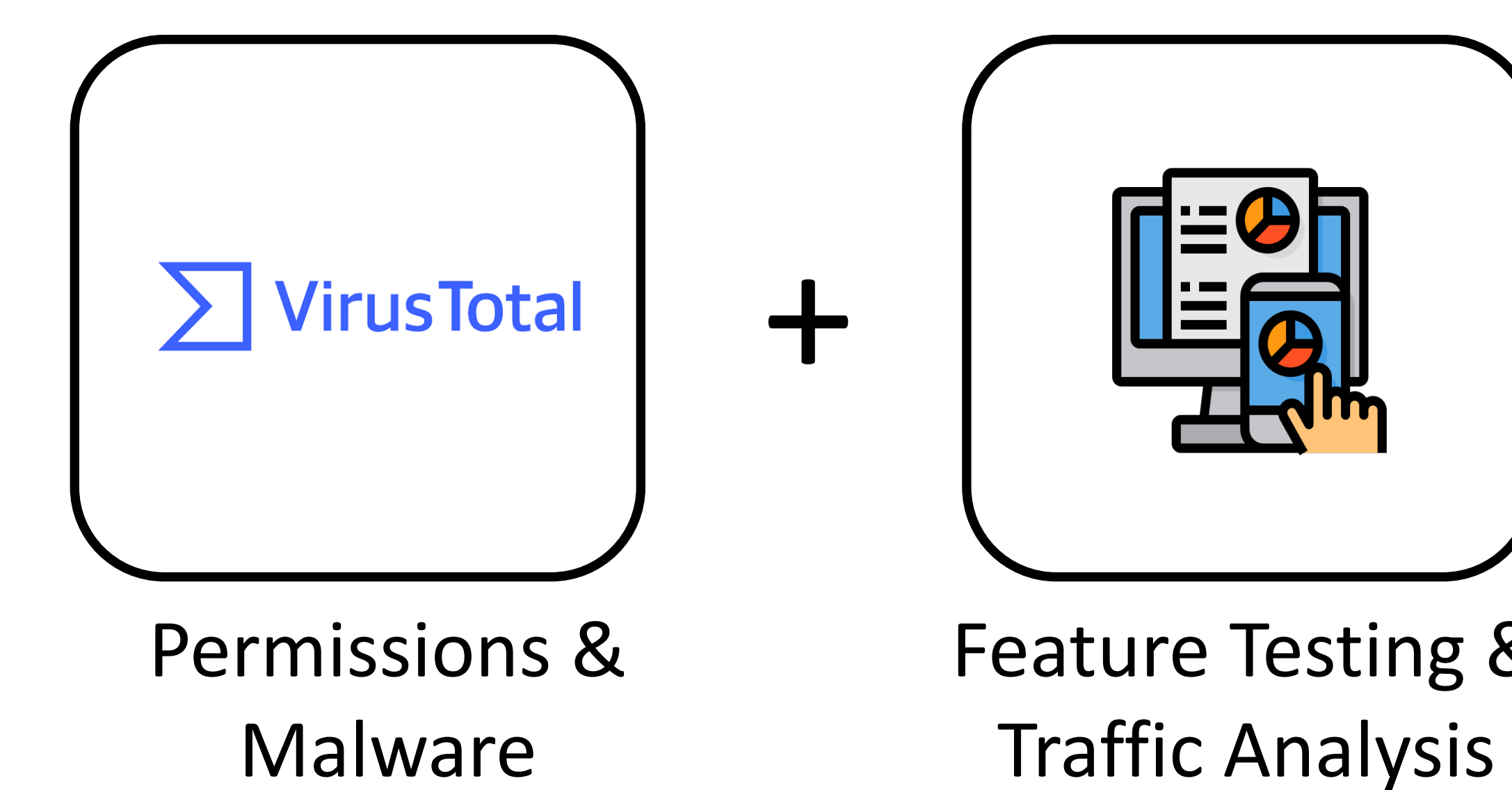
### Interviews (N=20)



### Interview Results

- Participants learn about and get mods directly from their friends, family, and colleagues.
- Participants use mods to protect their privacy while undermining the privacy of other people.
- Participants view WhatsApp mods as more trustworthy than the official WhatsApp.

### App Analysis (N=10)



### App Analysis Results

- Mods request 7 additional permissions, including ability to edit settings and draw on apps.
- Two WhatsApp mods were found to be malicious by Virus Total (i.e., by at least 10 AVs).
- WhatsApp mods contact 52 additional advertising and tracking domains.

## Takeaways and Conclusions



Mod users vulnerable to malware and advertisers.



Users of official app have misplaced trust.



Mods introduce a power imbalance.