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The effects of social media use on young peoples' well-being

Dr. Tobias Dienlin, EPRA Workshop 2021, November 24



Agenda

- **Background:** What's the problem?
- **Theory:** Social media use, mental health & young people?
- **Data:** What do studies show?
- **Implications:** What and how should we regulate?

Background: Whats the problem?





Have Smartphones Destroyed a Generation?

More comfortable online than out partying, post-Millennials are safer, physically, than adolescents have ever been. But they're on the brink of a mental health crisis.

EPRA Workshop Youth Engagement in the Digital Environment



the facebook files 📁

Facebook Knows Instagram Is Toxic for Teen Girls, Company Documents Show

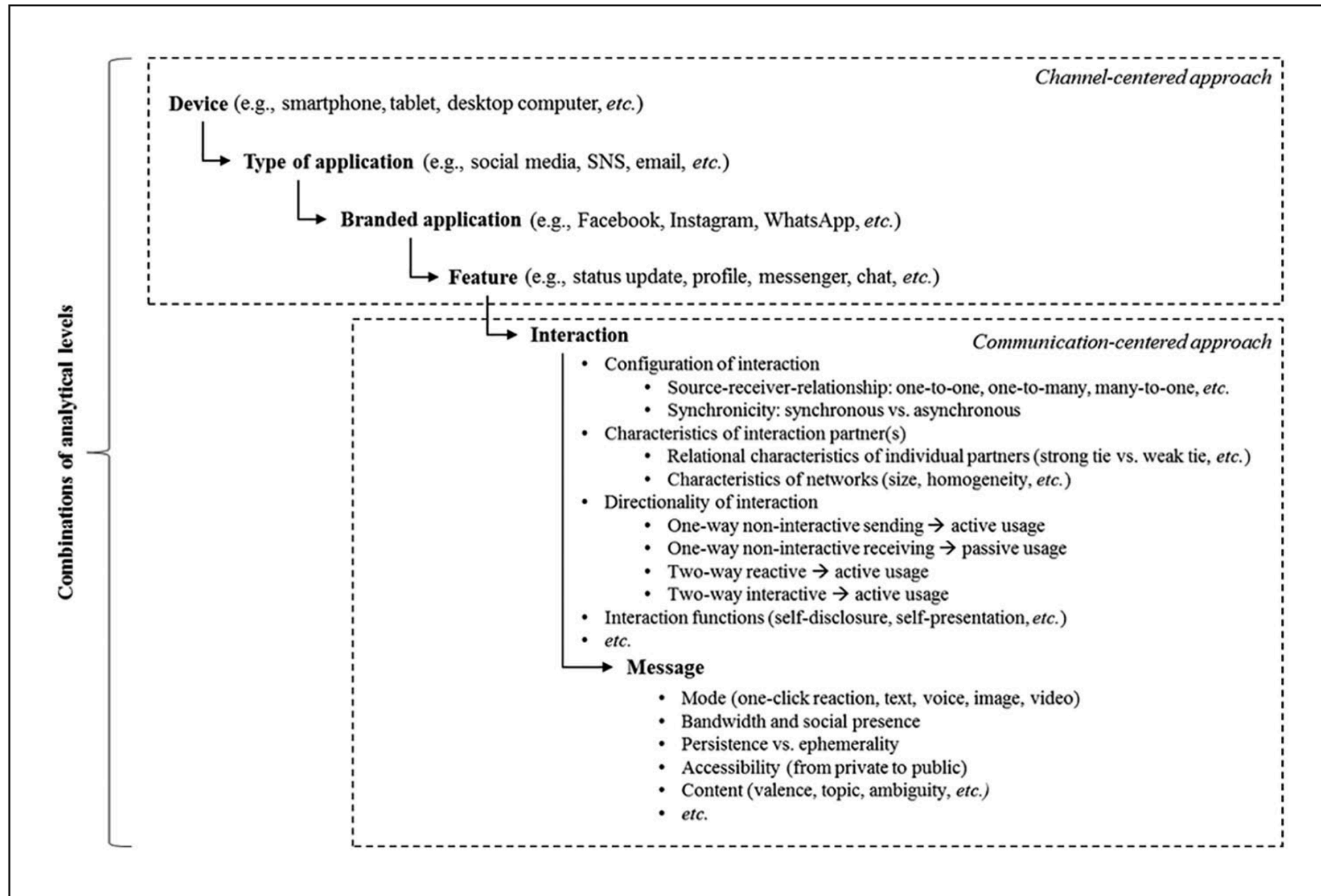
Its own in-depth research shows a significant teen mental-health issue that Facebook plays down in public



Theory: Social media use, mental health, & young people



There are many different ways to analyze social media use



Mental Health

Psychopathology (DSM-V)

Affect

*Depression
Bipolar
...*

Personality

*Narcissistic
Antisocial
...*

Neurological

*Schizo.
Autism
...*

Addiction

*Substances
Behavior
...*

Well-Being

Life Satisfaction

Subjective Well-Being

*Positive Affect
Negative Affect*

Psychological Well-Being

*Meaning
Social Support, ...*

Young people: Same same but different

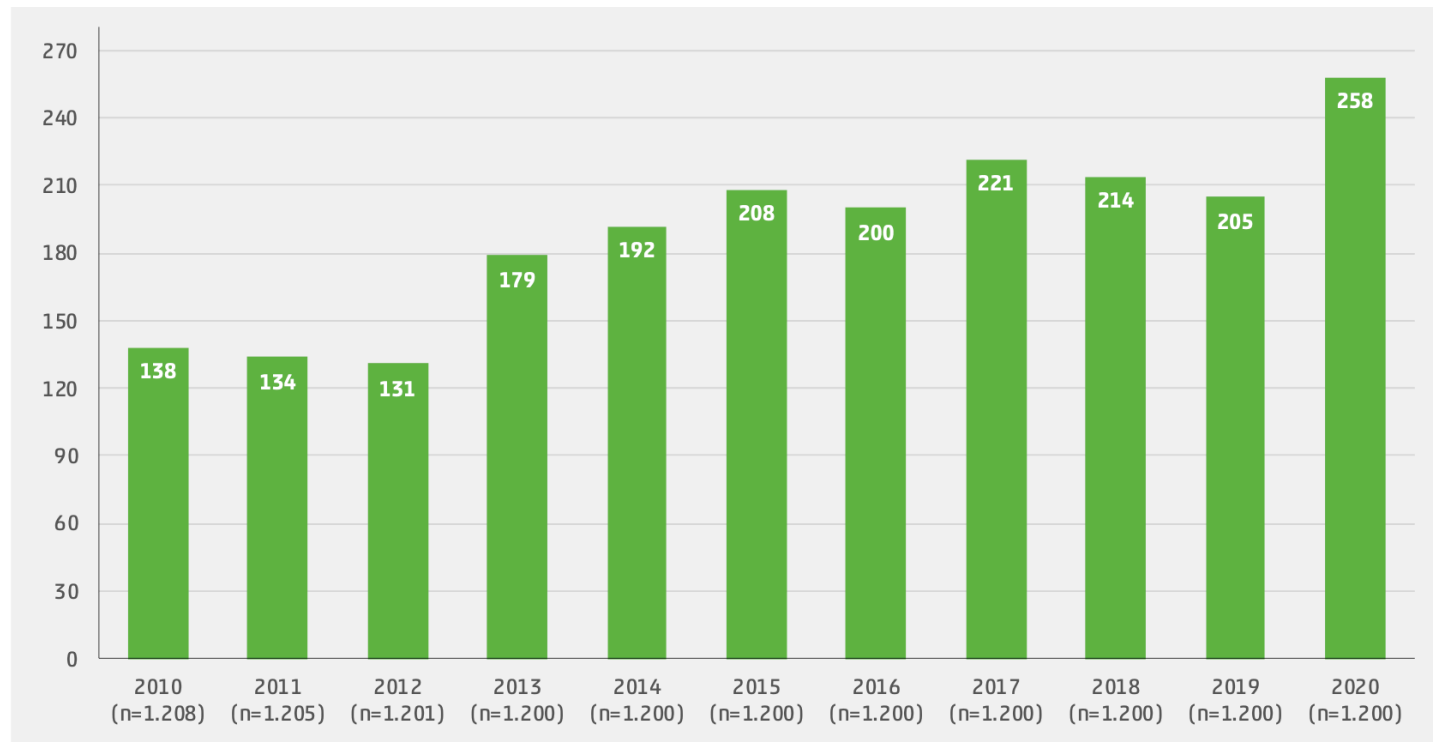
- General situation **comparable** to adults
- Specific situation of youths
 - Time of expansion and experimentation
 - Friends and social integration even more important
 - Heightened insecurity
 - Social status increasingly important
- Social media both address and challenge those needs



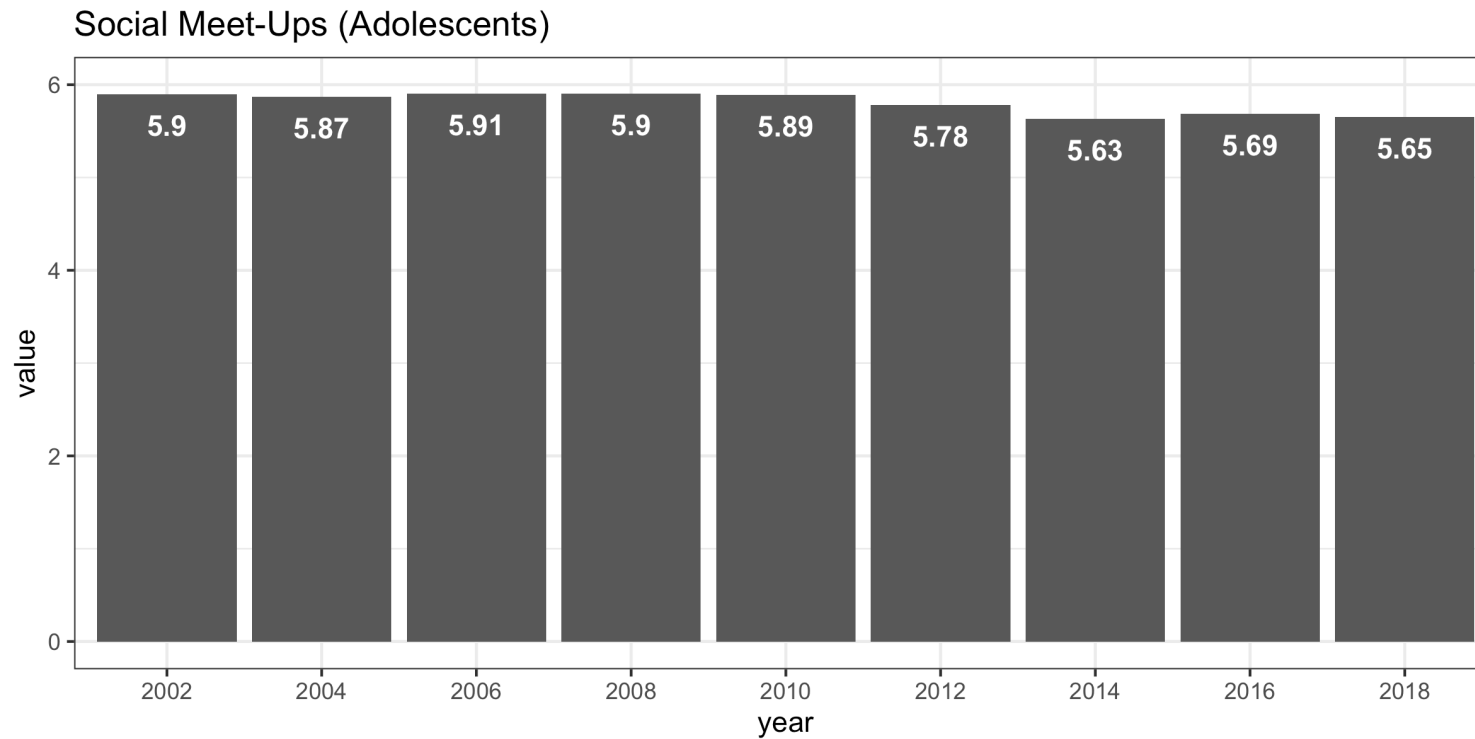
Data: What do studies show?



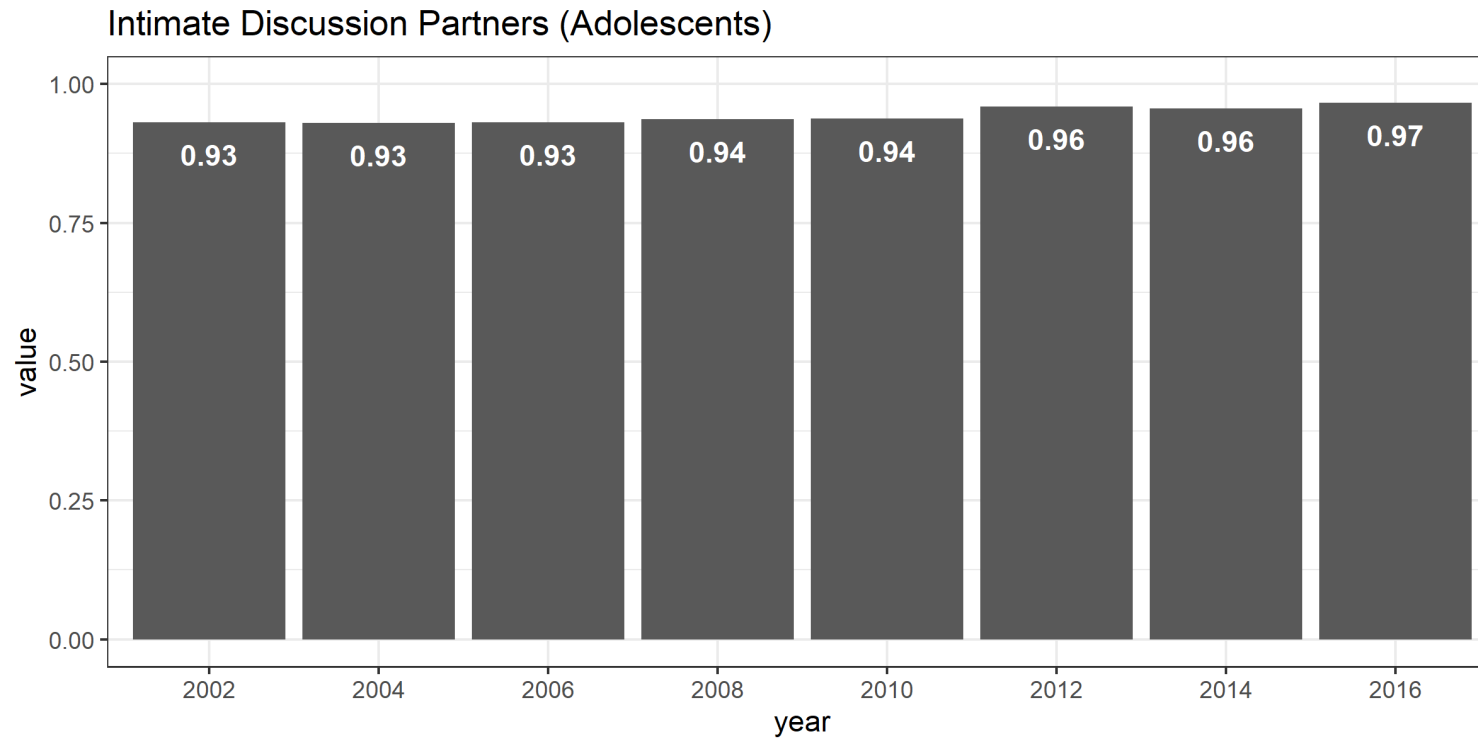
Germany: Time spent online of youths increases strongly



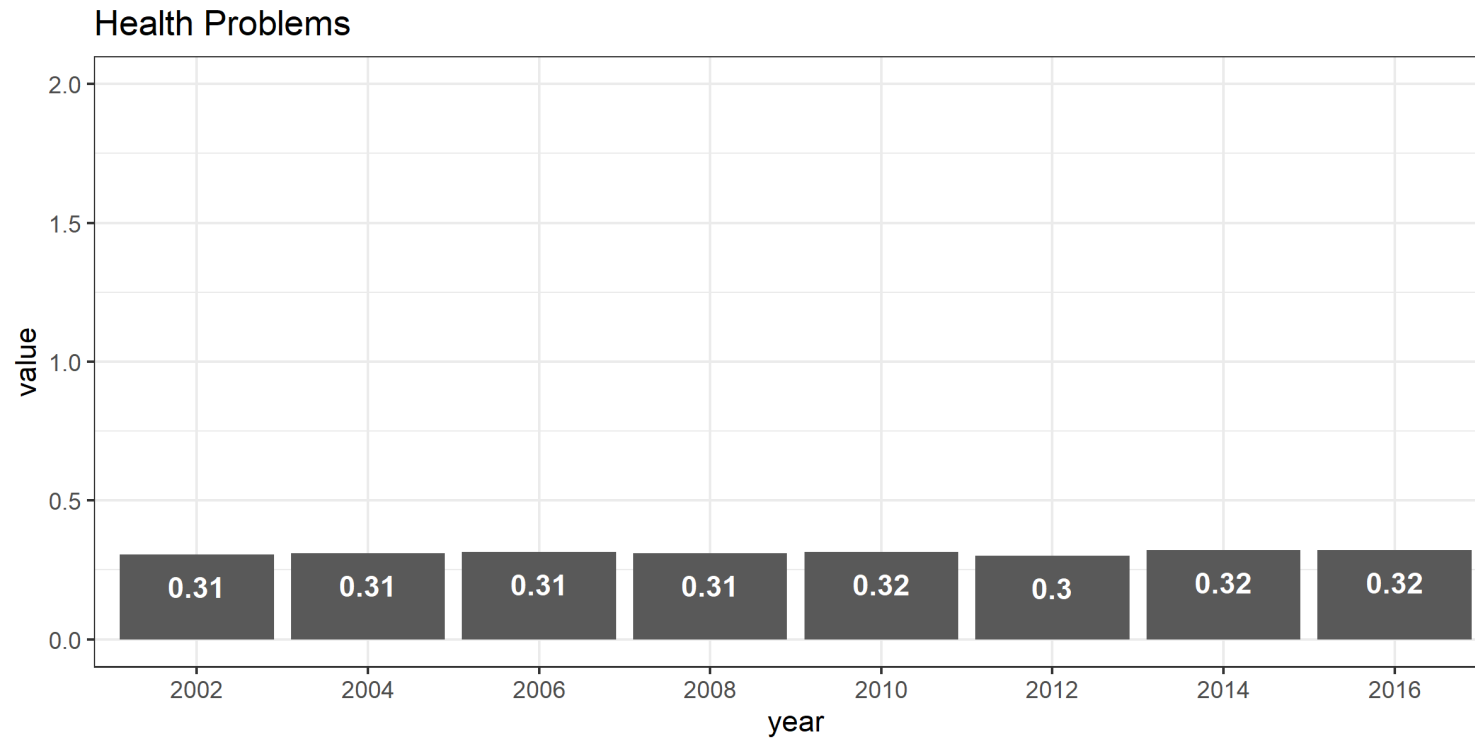
Europe: Face-to-face contact of youths decreases



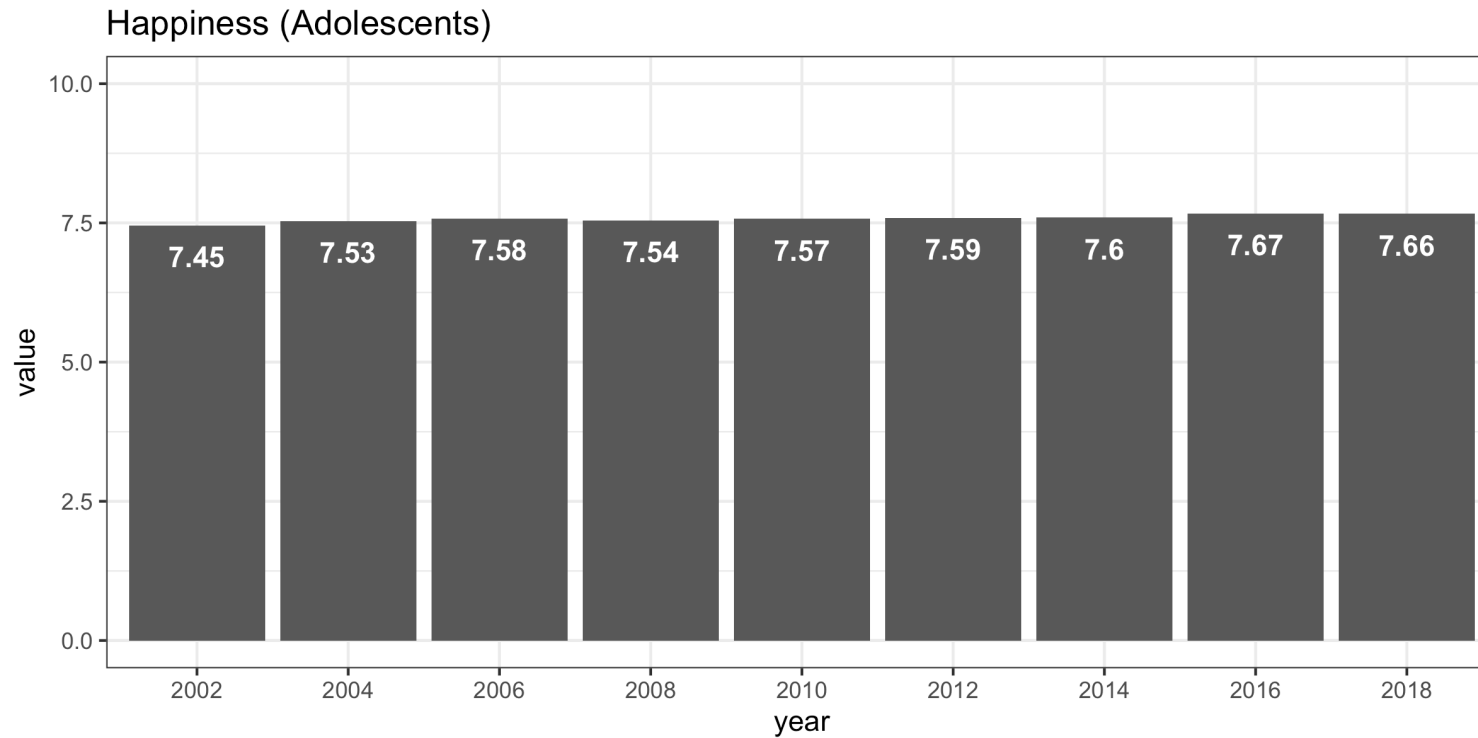
Europe: Discussion partners of youth increases slightly



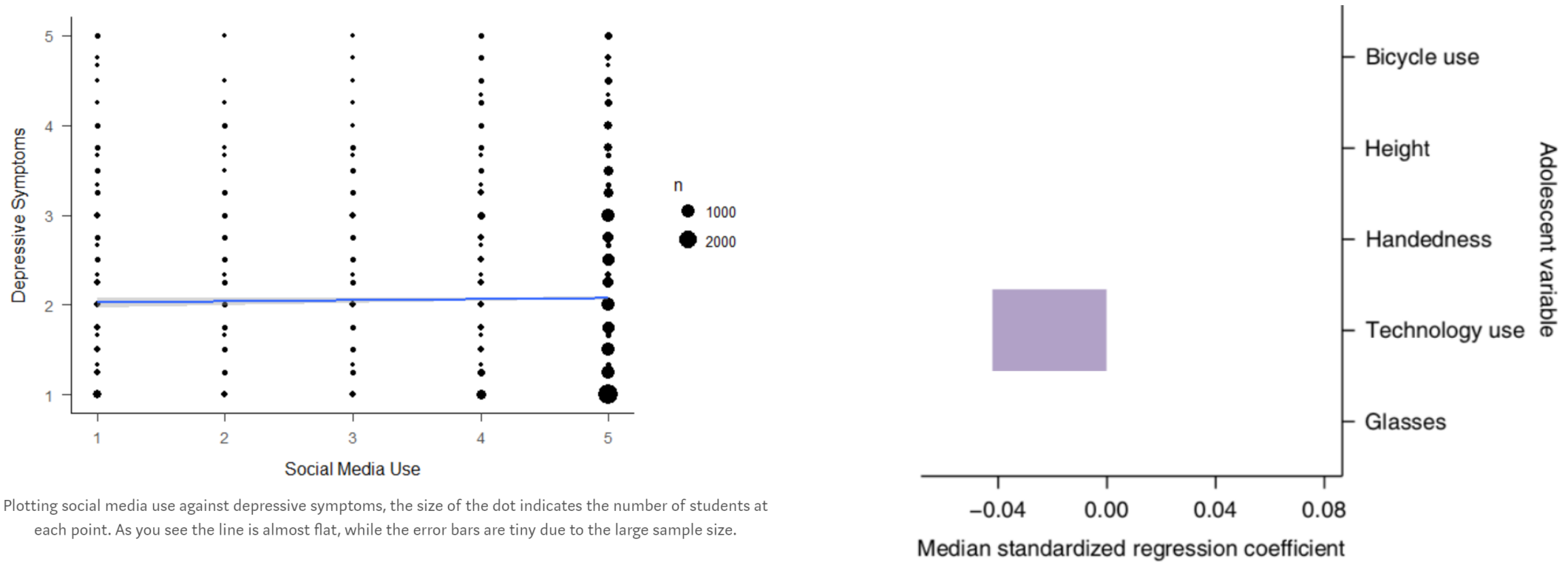
Europe: Health problems of youth stay the same



Europe: Happiness of youth increases slightly



Correlation between social media use & mental health is marginal



Plotting social media use against depressive symptoms, the size of the dot indicates the number of students at each point. As you see the line is almost flat, while the error bars are tiny due to the large sample size.

Highest levels of well-being when use is moderate

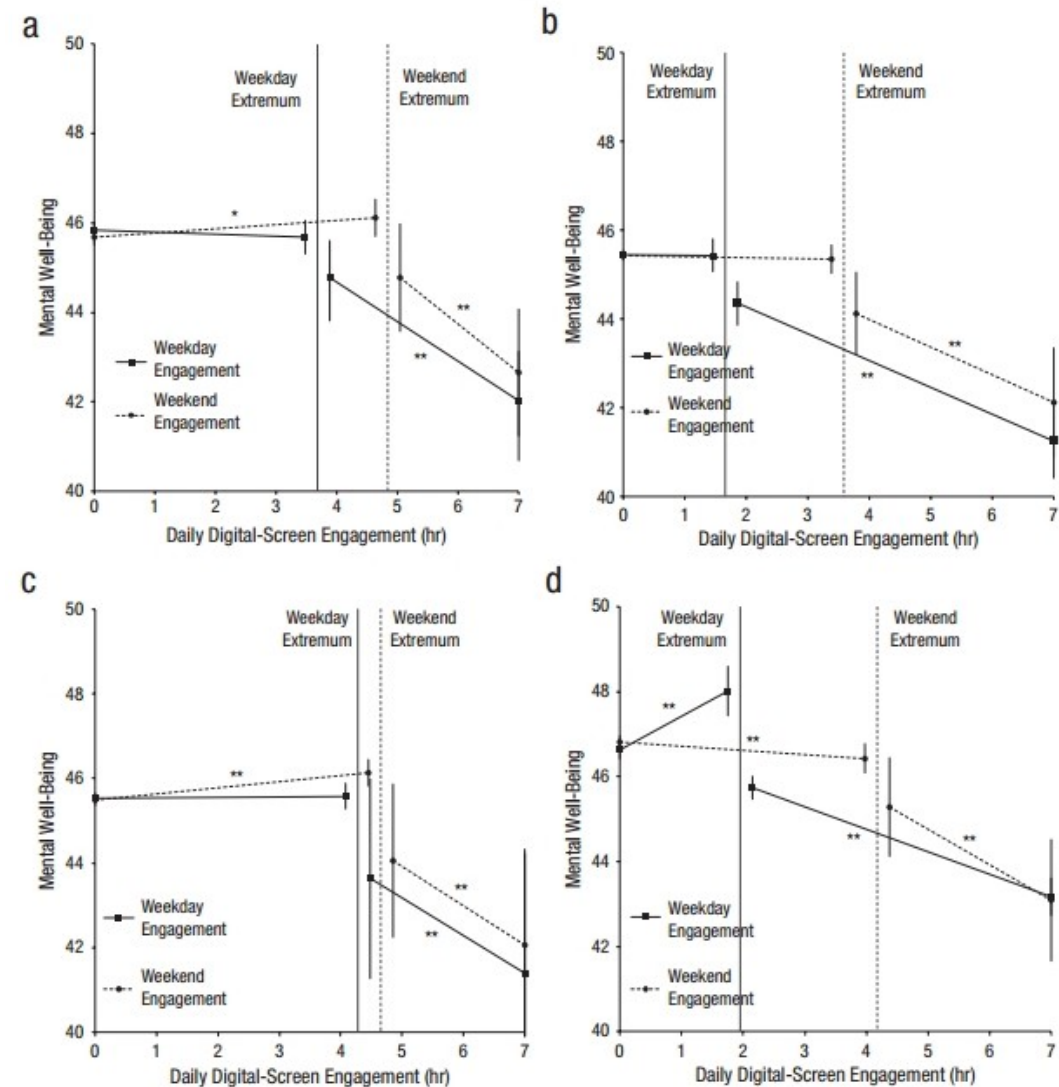
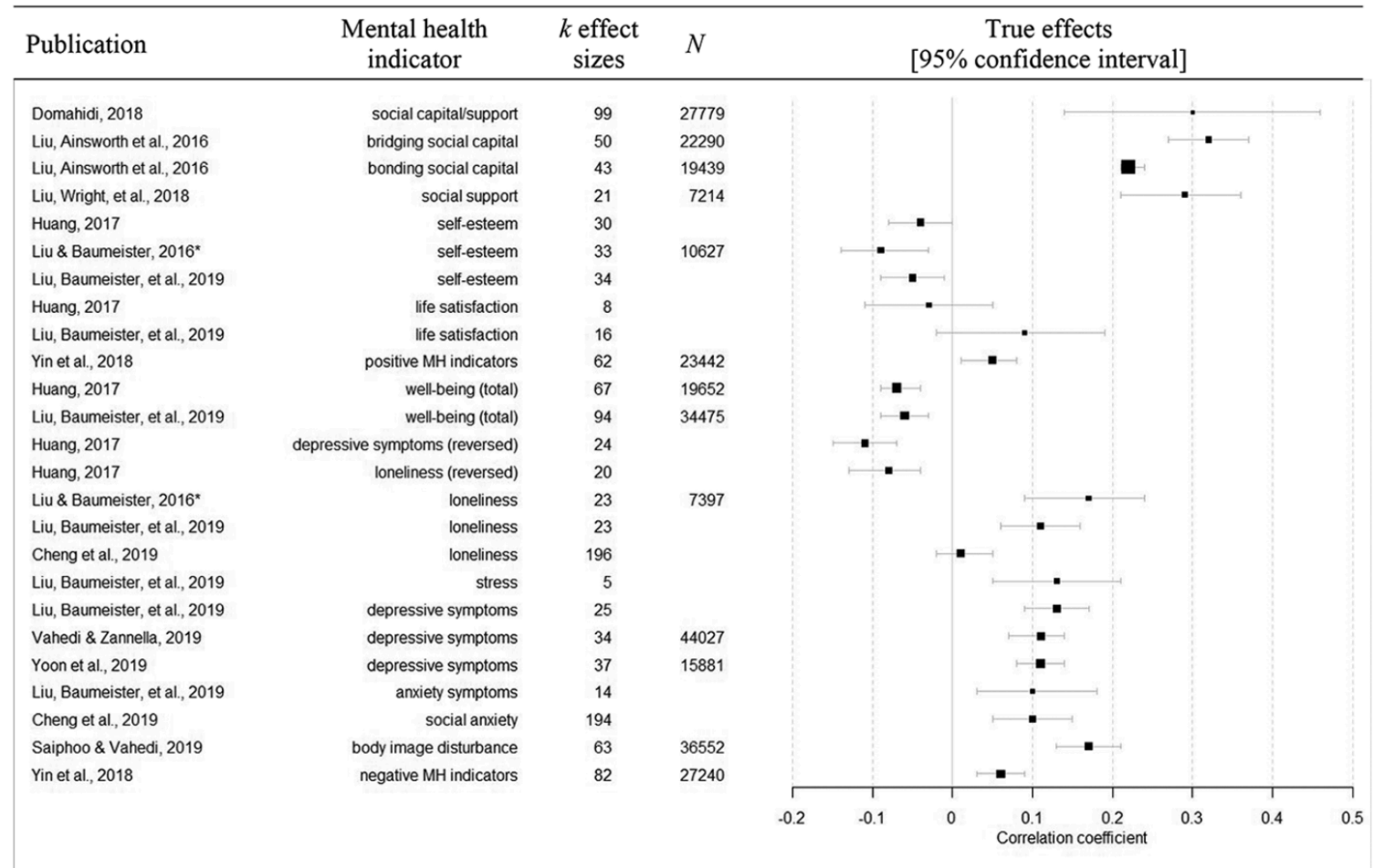


Fig. 3. Linear trends in the relation between daily digital-screen time and mental well-being for values of screen time falling below the local maxima and for values of screen time falling above the local maxima. Results are shown separately for time spent (a) watching TV and movies, (b) playing video games, (c) using computers, and (d) using smartphones on weekdays and on weekends. Error bars denote the 95% confidence intervals for the observed slopes. Asterisks indicate slopes significantly different from zero (* $p < .001$, ** $p < .001$).

Meta-analyses find mixed results: Results depend on type of use and outcome



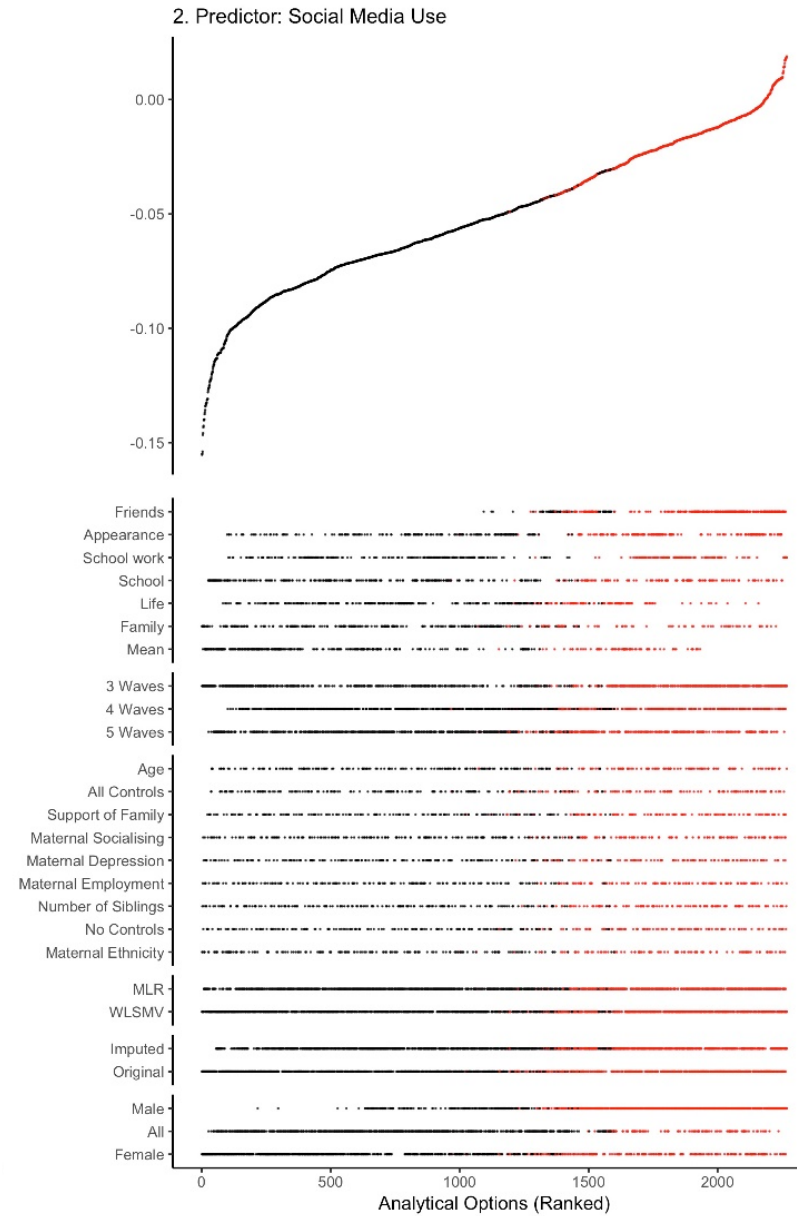
Behavioral
data of media
use show even
smaller effects

Table S16

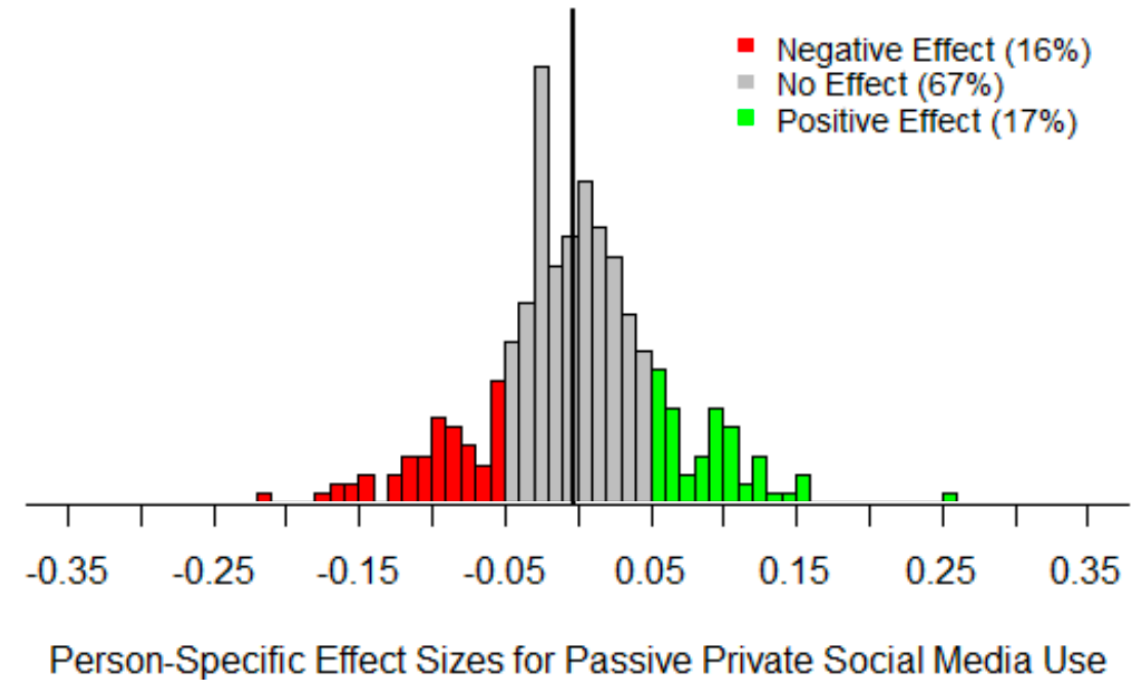
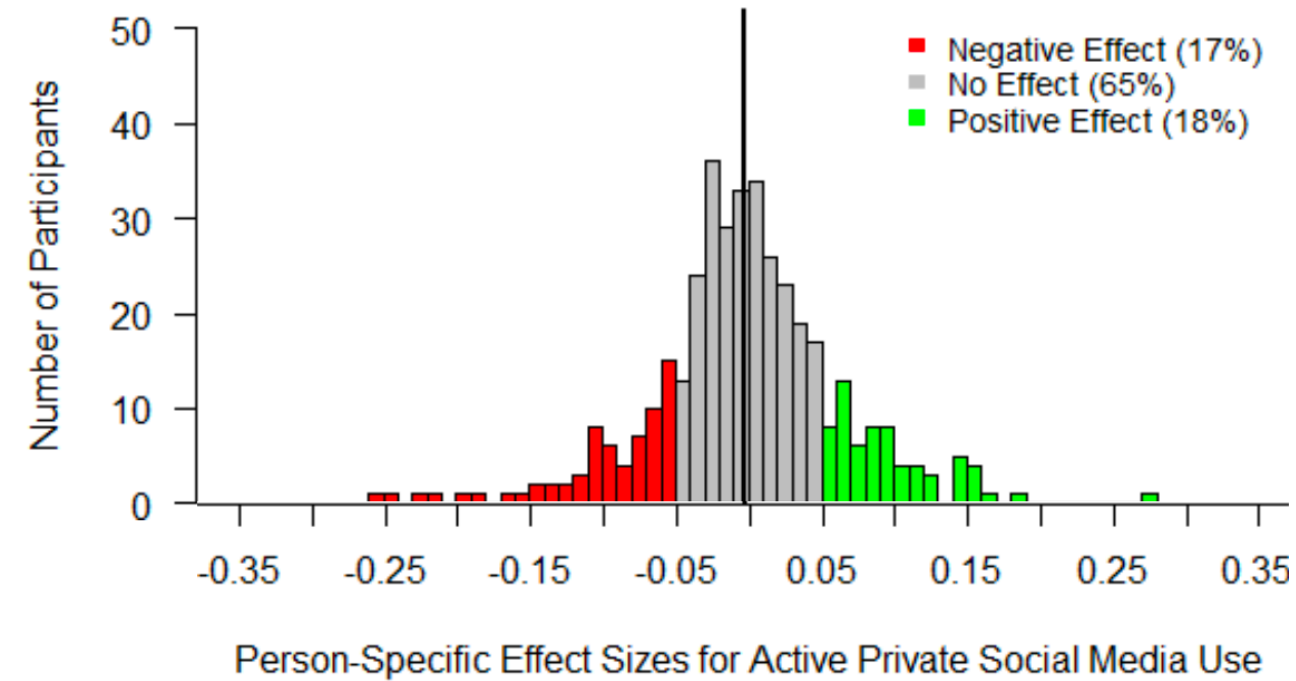
Partial Correlations Between Reports of SNS Use and Well-being

	Life Satisfaction	Self-Esteem	Depressive Symptoms
Facebook			
Open	.02 (.02)	-.02 (-.02)	.04 (.01)
Close	-.04 (-.02)	-.07* (-.05*)	.07* (.04)
Device	.02 (.03)	.00 (-.01)	-.01 (-.01)
Instagram			
Open	.02 (.03)	.00 (-.02)	.04 (.04)
Close	-.01 (.00)	-.03 (-.04)	.09** (.08**)
Device	.07* (.07**)	.04 (.02)	-.04 (-.02)
Twitter			
Open	-.04 (-.02)	-.07* (-.08**)	.10** (.11**)
Close	-.08* (-.05*)	-.08* (-.09**)	.12** (.12**)
Device	.01 (.00)	.00 (-.05)	.02 (.07*)
Snapchat			
Open	.04 (.05)	.01 (-.01)	.01 (.02)
Close	-.01 (.01)	-.02 (-.02)	.06* (.06*)
Device	.06* (.07**)	.02 (.01)	-.02 (-.01)

Small long-term „causal“ effects of social media use on life satisfaction



Effects differ across persons



Implications: What and how should we regulate?



Implications

- No need to ring the „general alarm“
 - Let's not pathologize common cultural practices
 - No need to propagate **general or complete** abstinence
- Adopt **focused** approach
 - Identify risk groups
- Useful general approach
 - Increase social media competence for everyone
 - Aim not to eliminate risks, but to optimize them



Foster digital media competence

- Social media aren't problematic because they're bad → they're problematic because they're too good
- Strategies
 - Actively reflect upon use
 - Develop skill to say no
 - Say no at specific times
 - Say no to specific content
 - „Know your limit“



Future steps

- Experience sampling of mental health
- Behavioral data on smartphone use
- Within-person data to understand causality
- Multinational samples
- Data-generating research infrastructure
- Identity risk groups and situations



Literature

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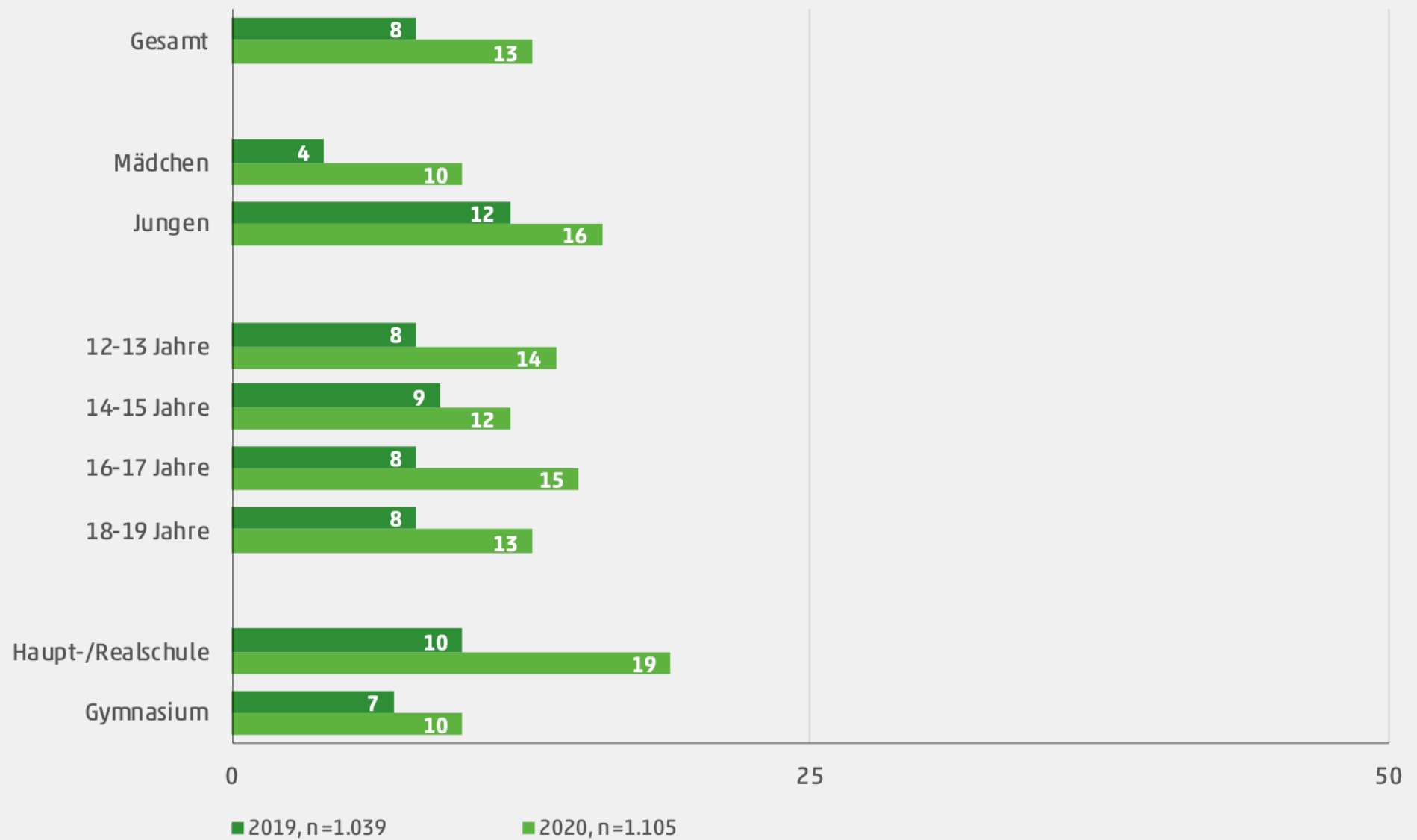
Thank you for your attention





Versehentlicher Kauf/Abonnement bei Spielen 2020 – Vergleich 2019

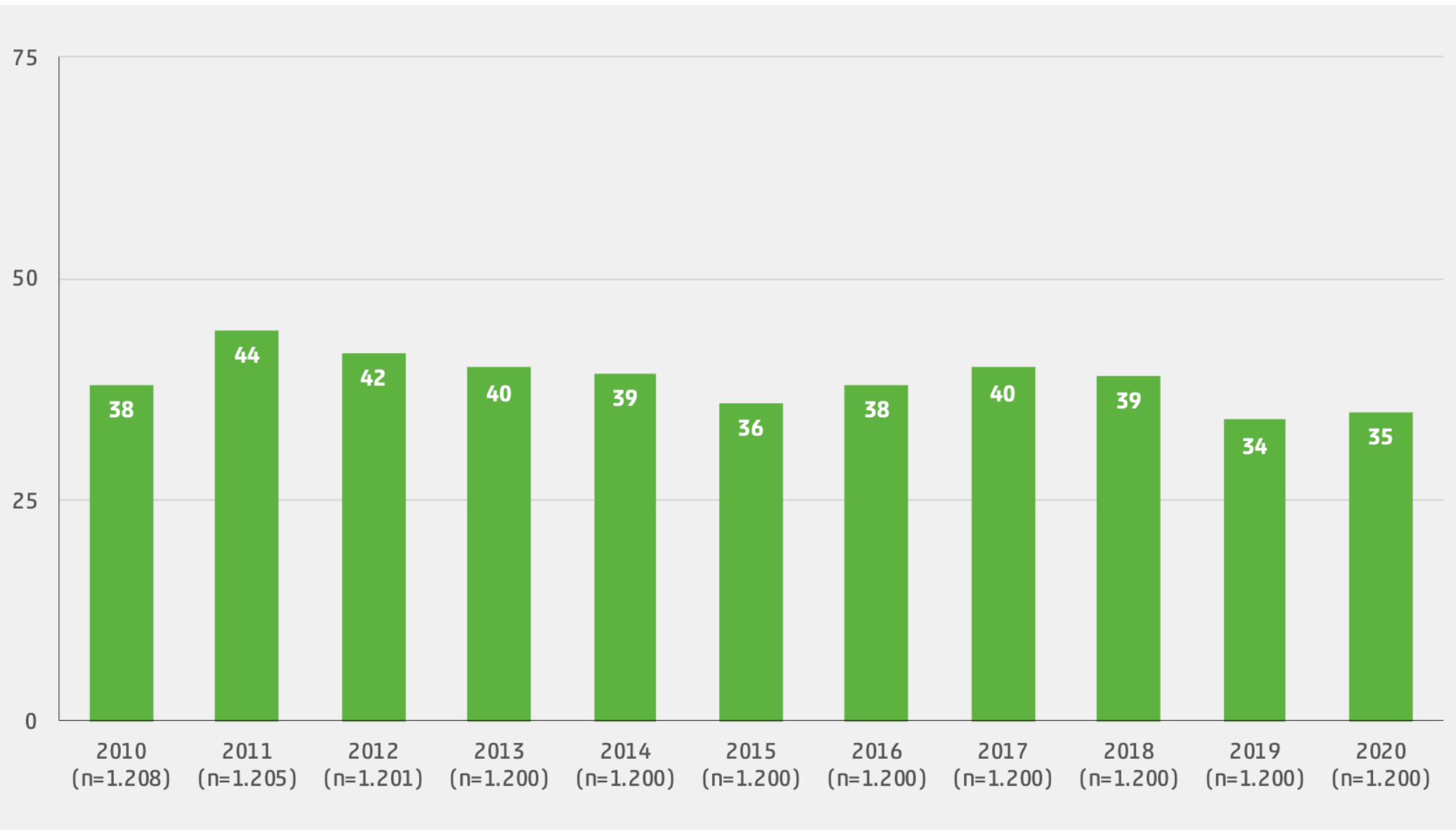
– Habe schon mal versehentlich etwas beim Spielen gekauft/abonniert –





Bücher lesen* 2010–2020

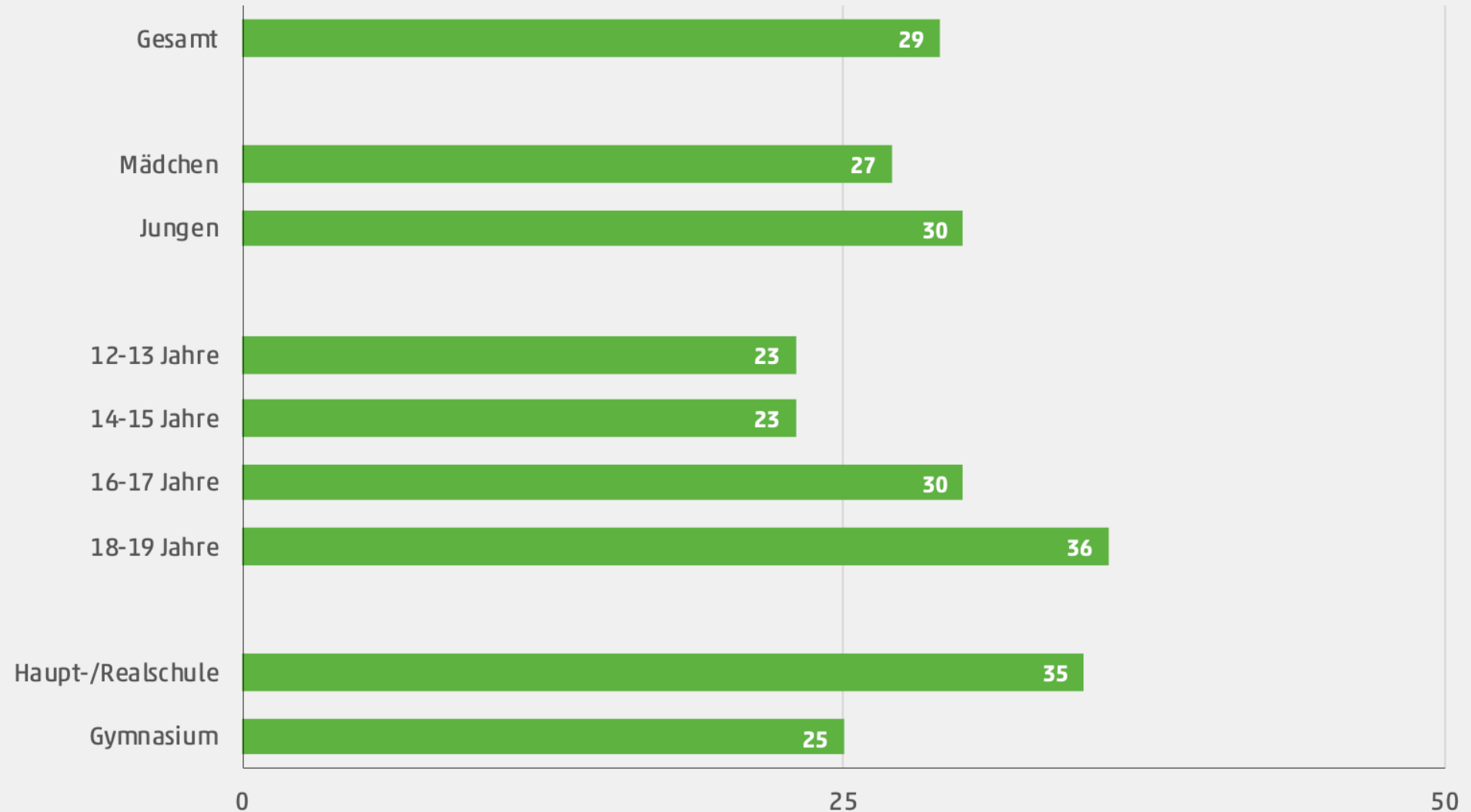
– täglich/mehrmals pro Woche –





Verbreiten von falschen/beleidigenden Informationen 2020

– „Es hat schon mal jemand falsche oder beleidigende Sachen über mich per Handy oder im Internet verbreitet“ –



Germany: Development of suicides

