



MRC Cognition
and Brain
Sciences Unit



UNIVERSITY OF
CAMBRIDGE



Digital Mental Health
Orben Group

Social Media Use and Youth Mental Health: Evidence, Gaps, Solutions

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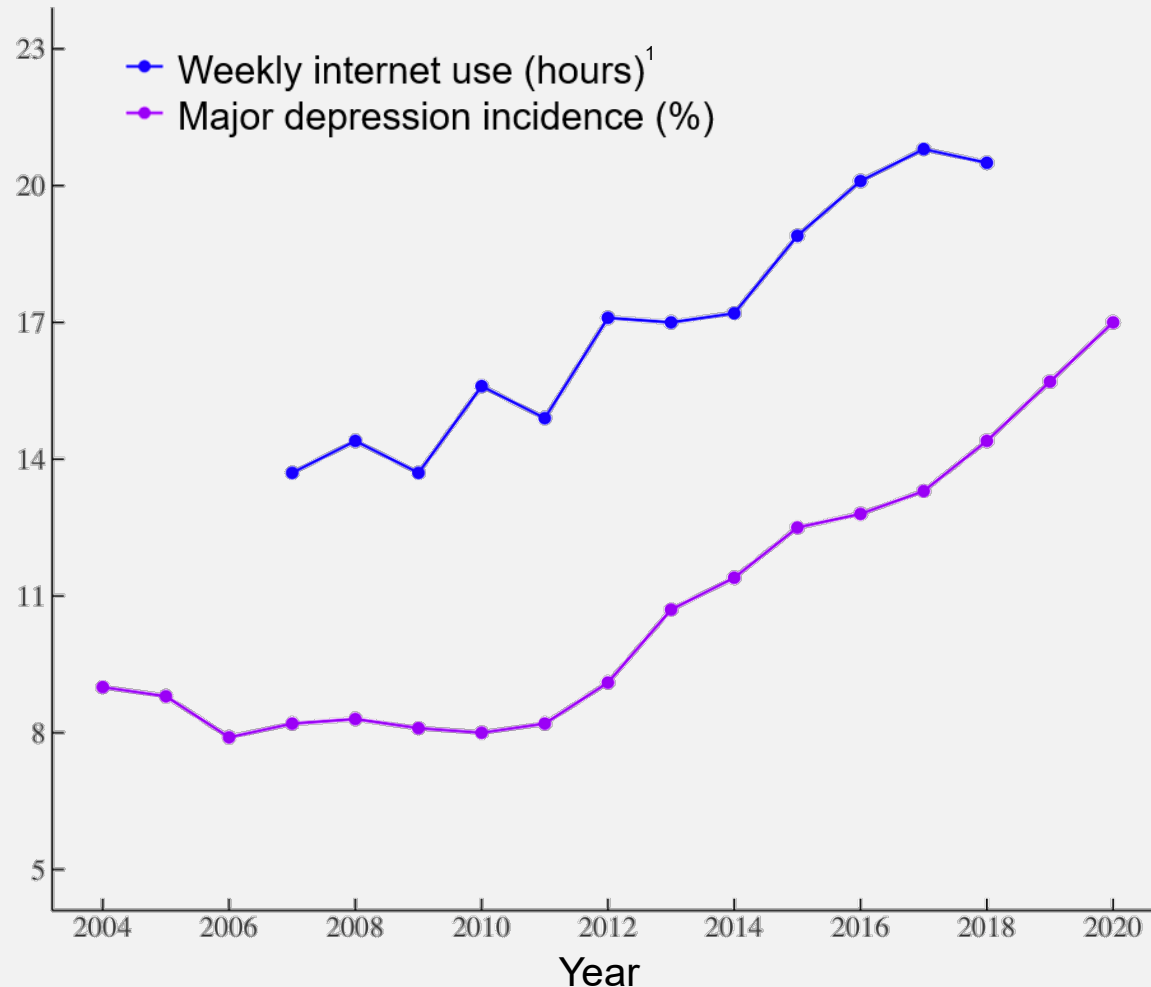


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Two parallel trends



Social media use:

When using the internet, 84% of young people in the EU report being on social media.²

Mental health:

Almost one in two young people in the EU report having unmet mental healthcare needs.³

Key takeaway

There is still a lack of clear research that can inform evidence-based policies.

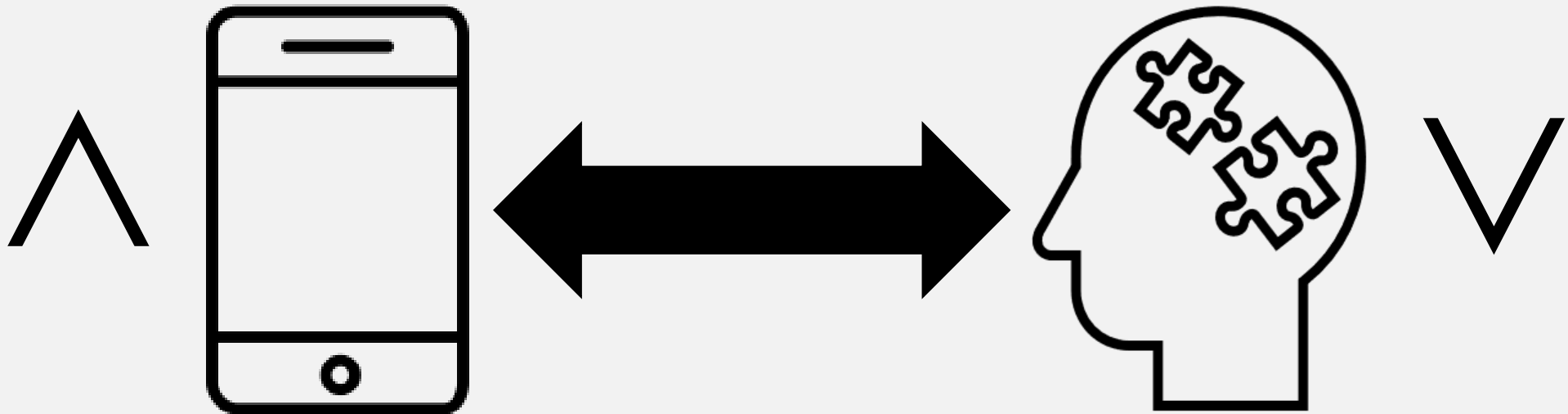
Issue 1: Lack of causality

Issue 2: Poor measures

Existing evidence

Issue 1: Lack of causality

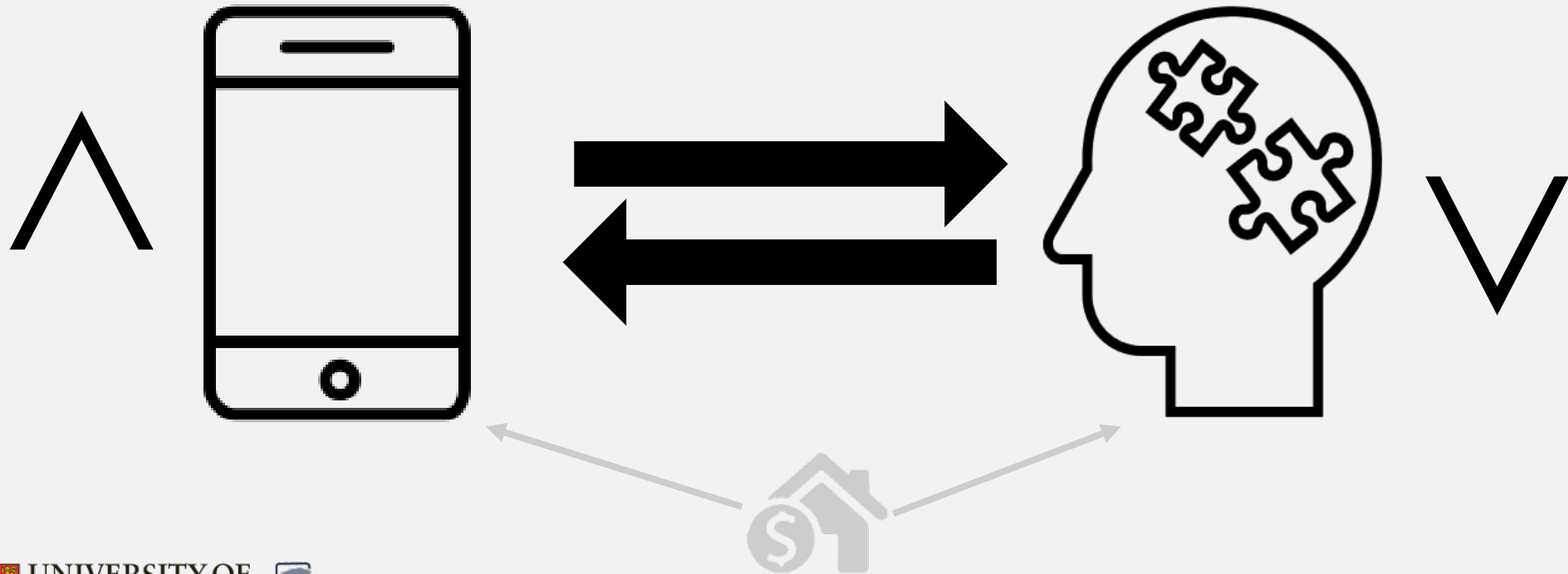
- Small negative correlations.⁴
- Differences based on gender and age.⁵



Gaps

Issue 1: Lack of causality

Does social media use have a negative effect on the mental health of children and young people?



Solutions

Issue 1: Lack of causality

- Funding EU longitudinal studies and natural experiments.
- Transparent reporting and external researchers' input into A/B testing run by social media companies.

Key takeaway

There is still a lack of clear research that can inform evidence-based policies.

Issue 1: Lack of causality

Issue 2: Poor measures

Existing evidence

Issue 2: Poor measures



Review studies on more than 1 million young people:⁴

- 92% rely on self-reported social media data.
- 47% measure only “time spent” on social media.

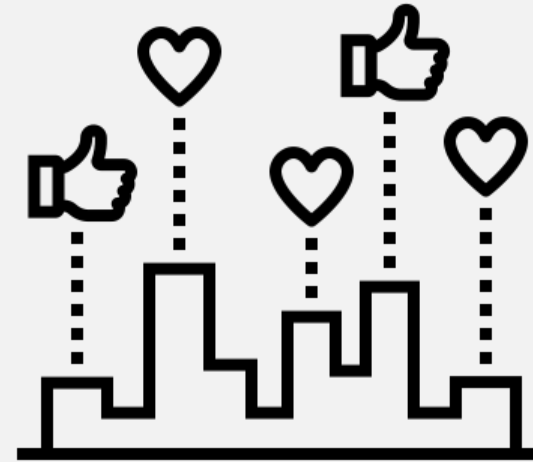
Gaps

Issue 2: Poor measures

Objective social media data:



Content



Design features

Solutions

Issue 2: Poor measures

- **Promote access to objective social media data** (e.g., Digital Service Act, data donation, social media companies)
- **Regulate harmful content** (e.g., pro self-harm, suicide, eating disorders).



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Thank you for your attention

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Acknowledgments



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