Adolescents' Intense and Problematic Social Media Use and Their Well-Being in 29 Countries

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## Topics

## Sample

"The present study used the 2017/2018
data, which included nationally representative data of adolescents from 47 countries/regions. Countries were excluded from
the present study when individual-level data on SMU (ncountries ¼
3) or country-level data on mobile Internet accessibility were
unavailable (ncountries ¼ 13) or when data were not submitted by
the time of current analyses (ncountries ¼ 2). Adolescents who
responded that the SMU questions did not apply to them were
also excluded (nindividuals ¼ 6,174). The analysis sample consisted
of 154,981 adolescents within 29 countries/regions (51% girls;
meanage ¼ 13.54; standard deviationage ¼ 1.61)" (Boer et al., 2020, p. 91)

## Implications For Policy Makers About

Creating a safe environment for children online

# Abstract

Purpose
This study examined (1) whether intense and problematic social media use (SMU) were independently associated with adolescent well-being; (2) whether these associations varied by the country-level prevalence of intense and problematic SMU; and (3) whether differences in the country-level prevalence of intense and problematic SMU were related to differences in mobile Internet access.

Methods
Individual-level data came from 154,981 adolescents (meanage = 13.5) from 29 countries that participated in the 2017/2018 Health Behaviour in School-aged Children (HBSC) survey. Intense SMU was measured by the time spent on social media, whereas problematic SMU was defined by symptoms of addiction to social media. Mental (life satisfaction and psychological complaints), school (school satisfaction and perceived school pressure), and social (family support and friend support) well-being were assessed. Country-level data came from aggregated individual-level data and data from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) on Internet access.

Results
Two-level regression analyses indicated that in countries with a lower prevalence of intense SMU, intense users reported lower levels of life satisfaction and family support and more psychological complaints than nonintense users. In contrast, in countries with a higher prevalence of intense SMU, intense users reported higher levels of family support and life satisfaction than nonintense users, and similar levels of psychological complaints. In all countries, intense users reported more friend support than nonintense users. The findings regarding problematic SMU were more consistent: In all countries, problematic users reported lower well-being on all domains than nonproblematic users. Observed differences in country-level prevalence rates of intense and problematic SMU could not be explained by mobile Internet access.

Conclusions
Adolescents reporting problematic SMU are particularly at risk of lower well-being. In many countries, intense SMU may be a normative adolescent behavior that contributes positively to specific domains of their well-being.

# Outcome

"Two-level regression analyses indicated that in countries with a lower prevalence of intense SMU, intense users reported lower levels of life satisfaction and family support and more psychological complaints than nonintense users. In contrast, in countries with a higher prevalence of intense SMU, intense users reported higher levels of family support and life satisfaction than nonintense users, and similar levels of psychological complaints. In all countries, intense users reported more friend support than nonintense users. The findings regarding problematic SMU were more consistent: In all countries, problematic users reported lower well-being on all domains than nonproblematic users. Observed differences in country-level prevalence rates of intense and problematic SMU could not be explained by mobile Internet access." (Boer et al., 2020, p. 89)