

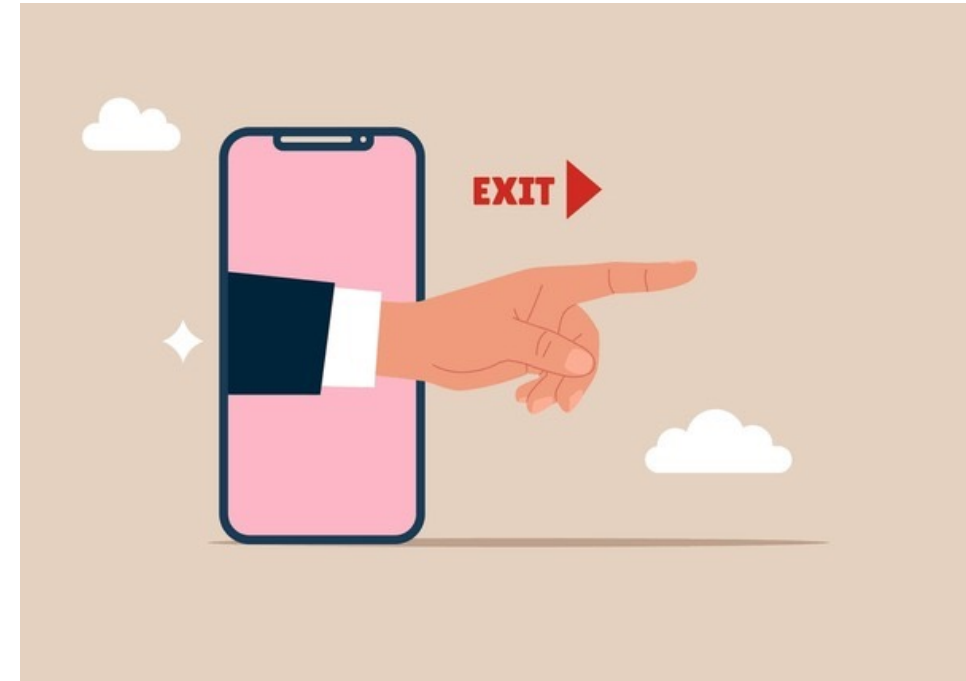
24.09.2025

CHI Greece 2025 | University of the Aegean | Ermoupoli, Greece

101 reasons to stop

A systematic review of media cues for disengagement

*Alicia Gilbert, Frauke Schöne, Rebekka Kreling,
Felix Dietrich, & Leonard Reinecke*



**Media communication and content
today are permanently available,
algorithmically curated, designed to
be frictionless.**



Users love it.



Users love it.

And hate it.





Users love it.

And hate it.



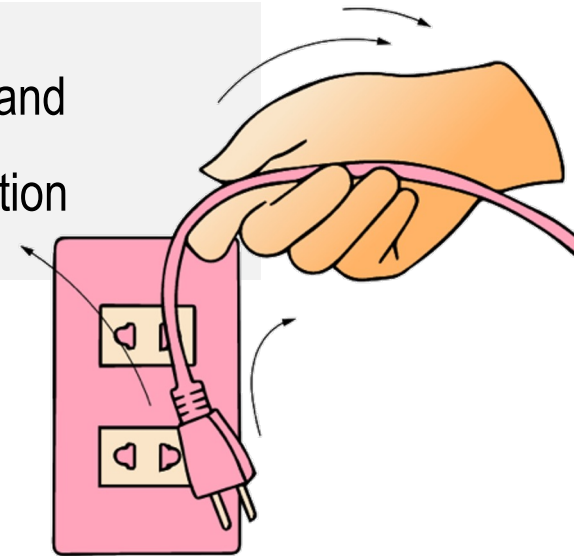
Defining media use disengagement

Situational

Interventive

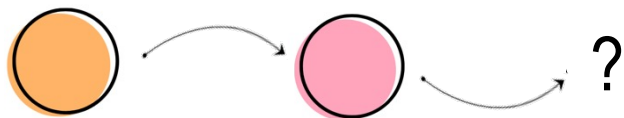
Behavioral adjustment

the act of **intervening** with media use and
terminating exposure in a given situation



A case for studying disengagement

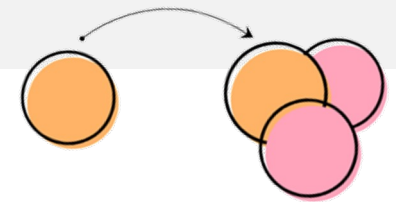
Holistic media **process** models



User experience design



Self-regulation interventions



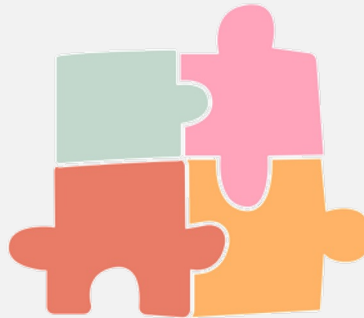
Predictors of disengagement

Media cues



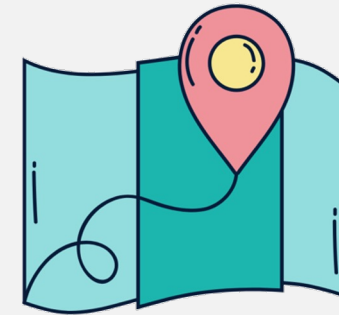
e.g., immersiveness

Internal cues



e.g., needs

External context cues



e.g., location

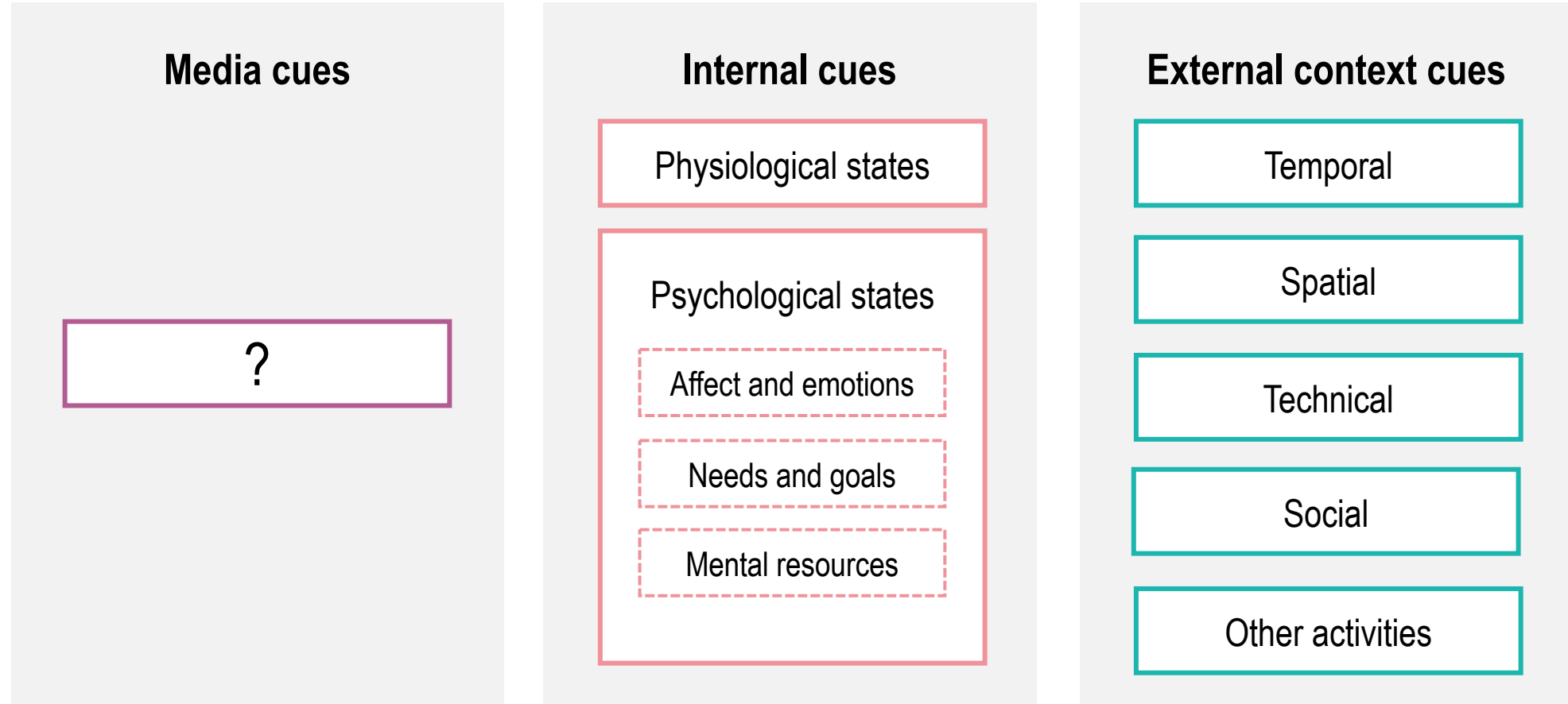
Situational cues: environmental information serving as input to the perception of a situation
(Magnusson & Magnusson, 2013; Rauthmann, 2015)

Magnusson, D., & Magnusson, D. (Eds.). (2013). *Toward a psychology of situations: An interactional perspective*. Psychology Press. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203780886>

Rauthmann, J. F. (2015). Structuring situational information. *European Psychologist*, 20(3), 176–189. <https://doi.org/10.1027/1016-9040/a000225>

Schnauber-Stockmann, A., Bayer, J. B., Harari, G. M., & Karnowski, V. (2025). The situation in media and communication research. *Communication Theory*, 35(1), 25-36. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ct/qtae021>

Predictors of disengagement



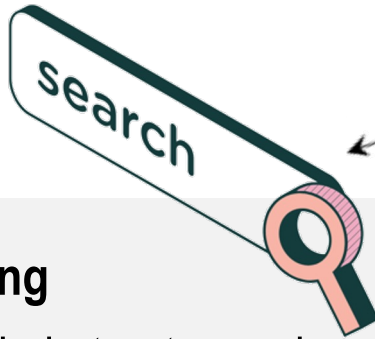
(adapted from Schnauber-Stockmann et al., 2025)

Schnauber-Stockmann, A., Bayer, J. B., Harari, G. M., & Karnowski, V. (2025). The situation in media and communication research. *Communication Theory*, 35(1), 25-36. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ct/qtae021>

Systematic review

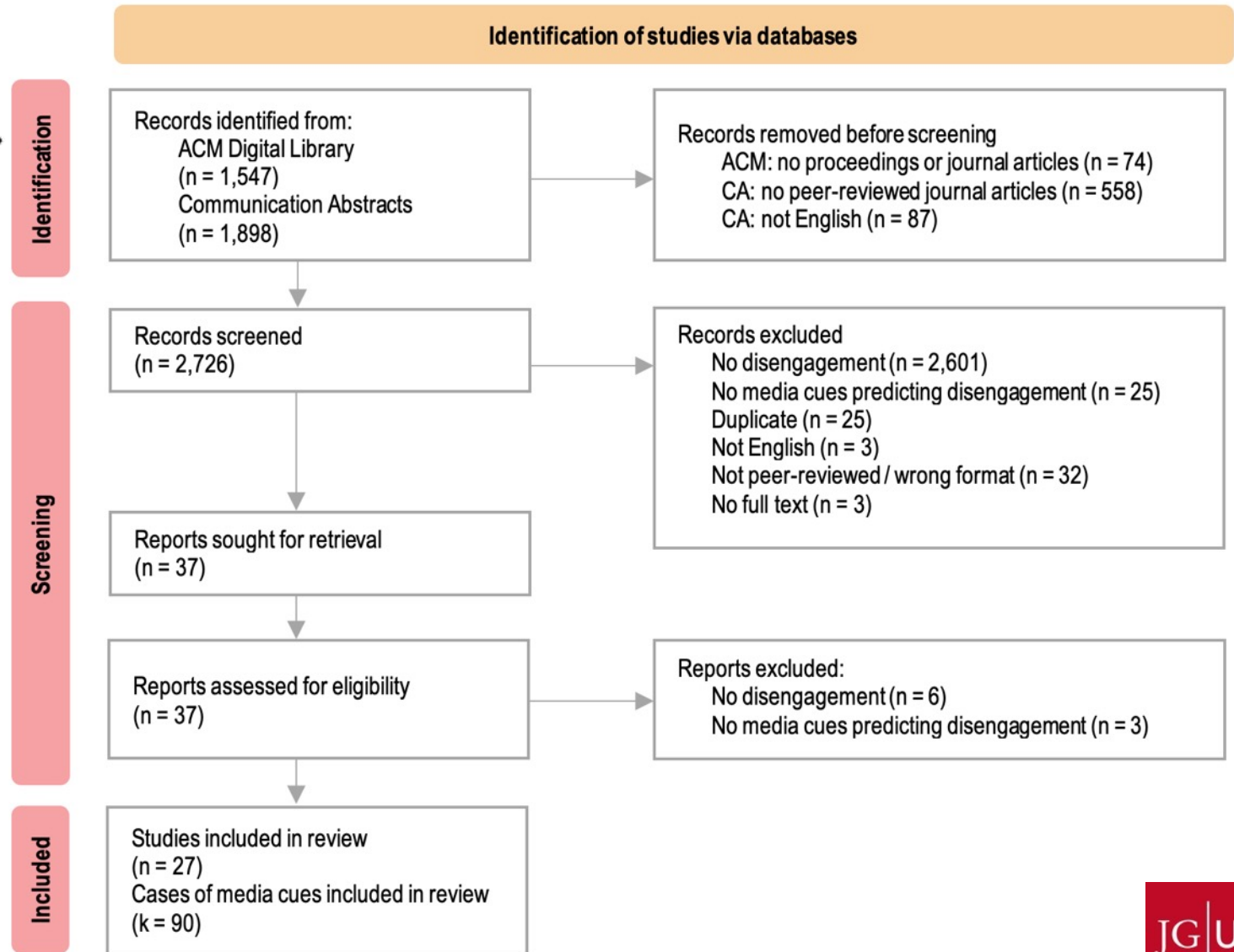
- 1 Overview structural properties of the research field
- 2 Systematize media cues by levels of analysis
- 3 Evaluate relevance of media cues for disengagement

Systematic review



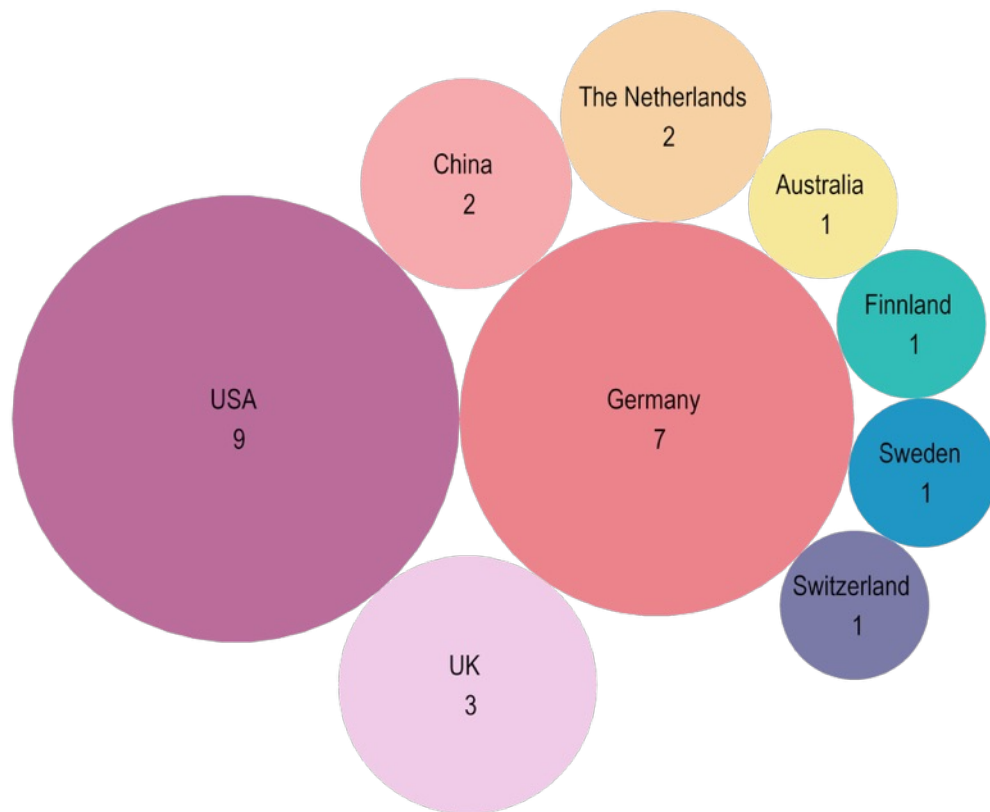
Search string

- Title and abstract search
- Media agnostic
- Disengagement terms:
(disengage* OR stop* OR
terminat* OR exit* OR
discontinu* OR "turn* off"
OR avoidance OR friction*
OR scroll*)

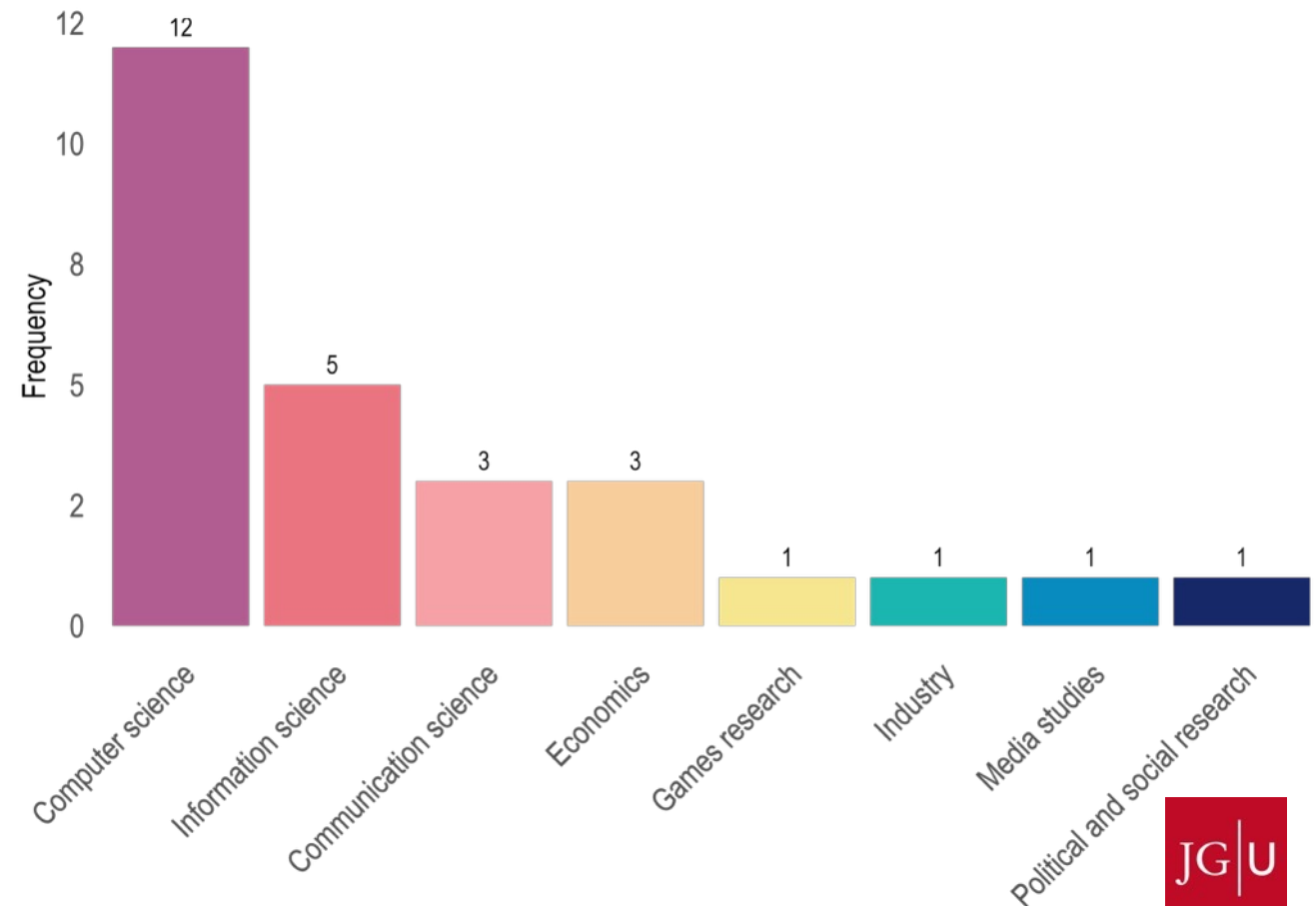


The research field

Countries

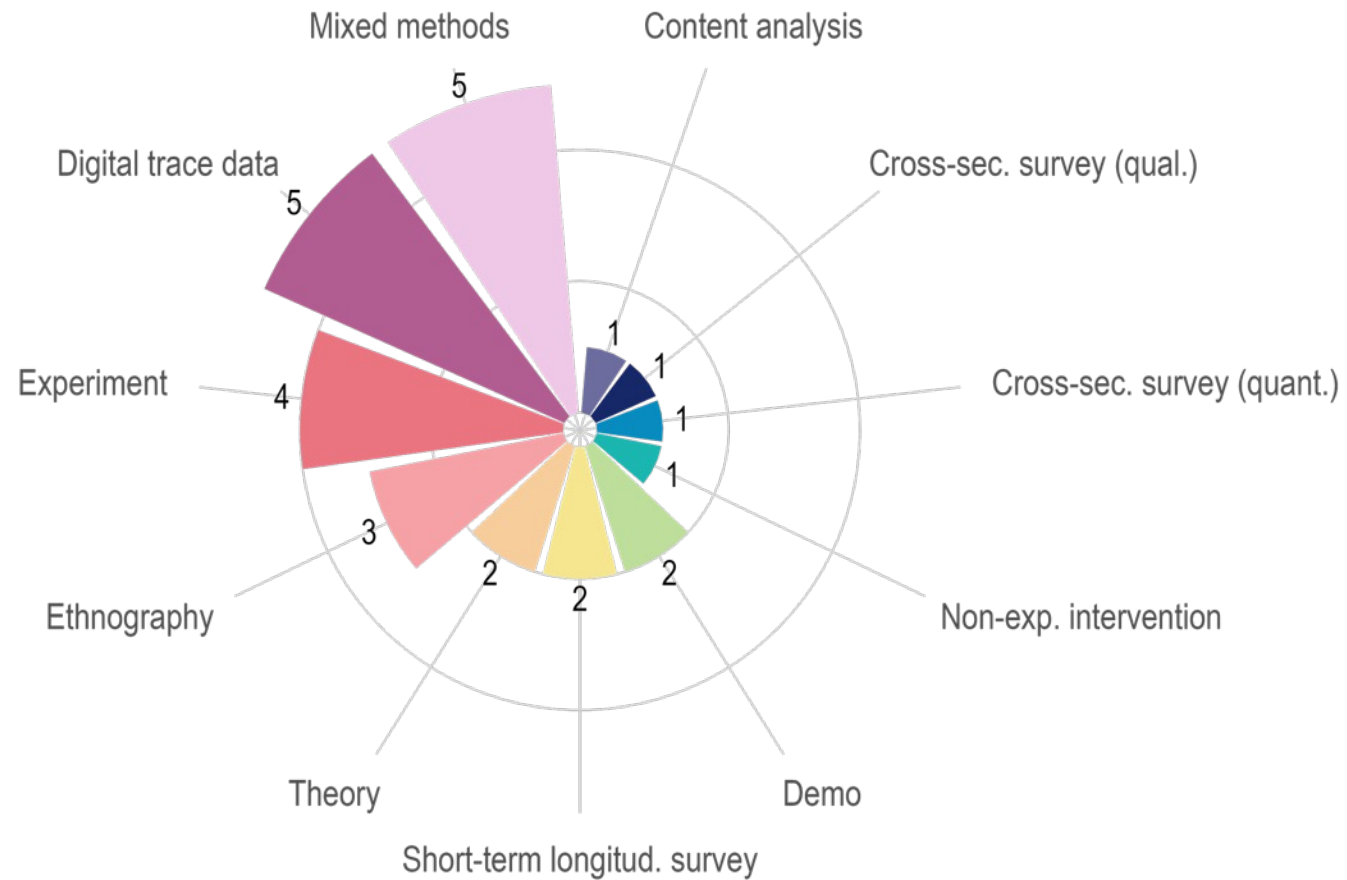


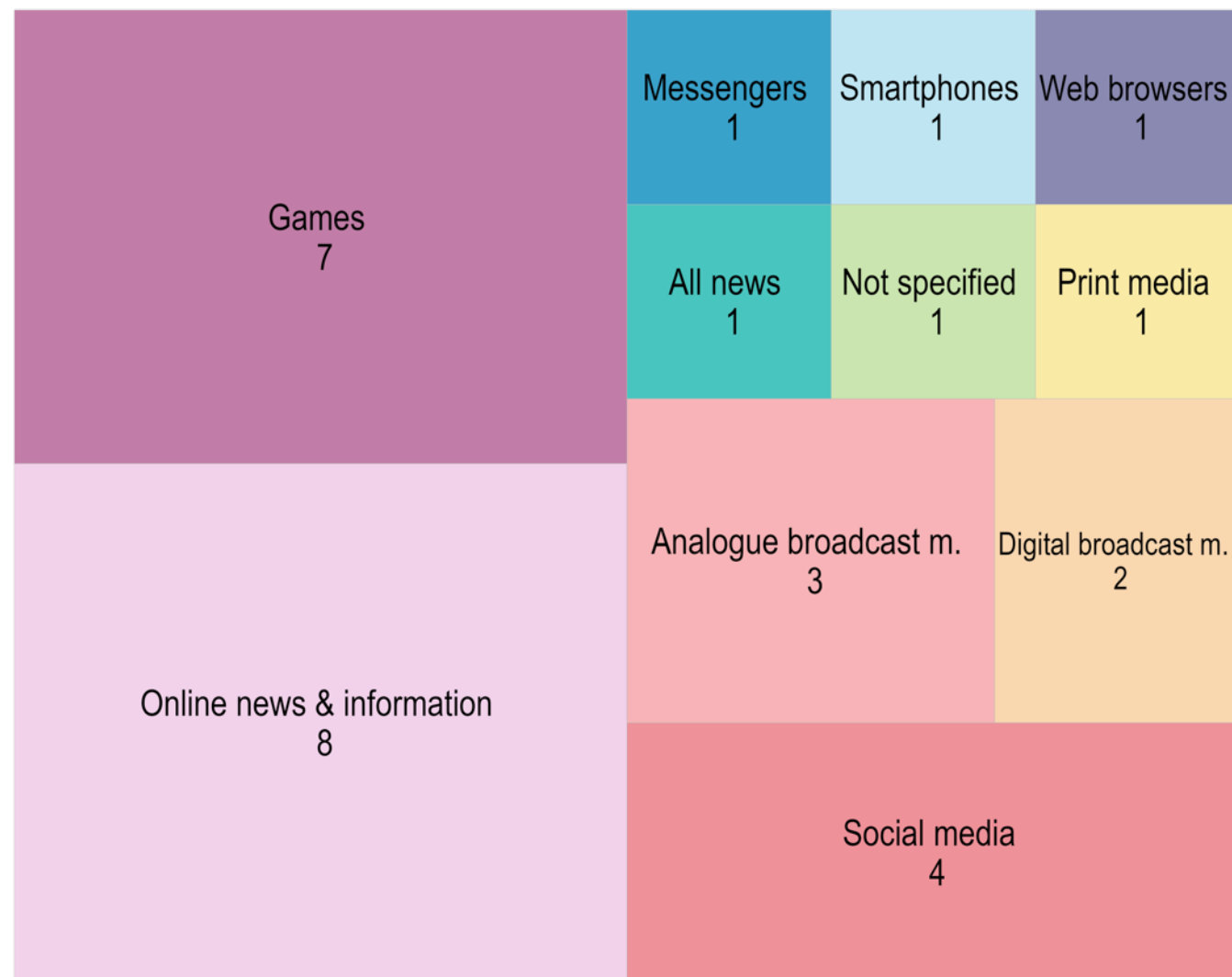
Disciplines



The research field

Methods



The research field**Media**

Media cues at different analysis levels

Device	5
Application	14
Feature	20
Interaction	7
Message	48

- Hierarchical Taxonomy of Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC)
(Meier & Reinecke, 2021)
- **$k = 43$ unique media cues**
- Most common:
 - Technical problems
 - Closure cues
- Most media cues
 - Are **idiosyncratic**
 - Apply to only **one level of analysis**



Media cues at different analysis levels

Device	5
Application	14
Feature	20
Interaction	7
Message	48

Examples

- Hidden notifications
- Feed separation
- Opportunity to save game progress

→ only investigated for
digital media types



Media cues at different analysis levels

Device	5
Application	14
Feature	20
Interaction	7
Message	48

Examples

- Disagreements with other players
- Harassment
- Strong opponents / skill mismatch

→ exclusively studied in
the **gaming** context

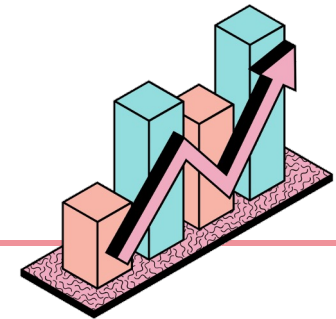


Media cues at different analysis levels

Device	5
Application	14
Feature	20
Interaction	7
Message	48

Examples

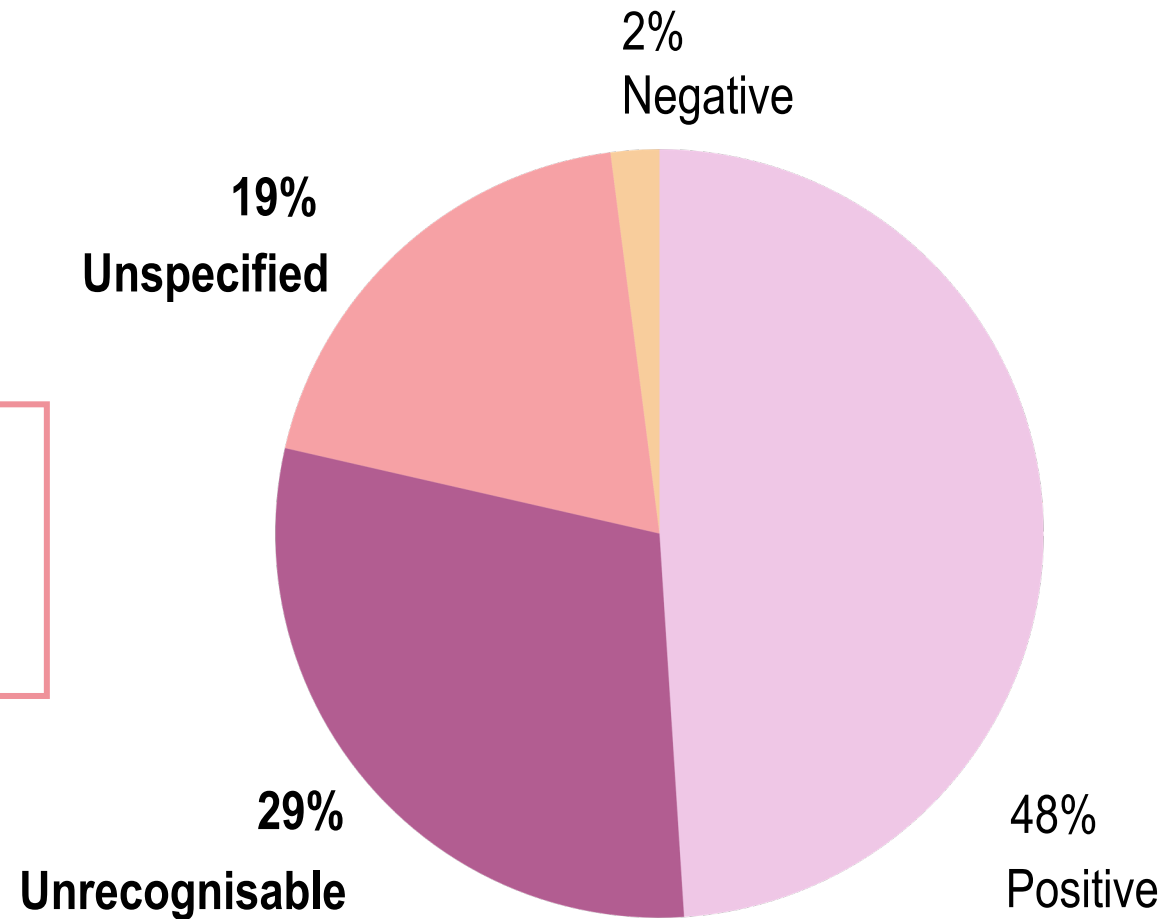
- Closure, e.g., end of a story
- Negative valence
- Redundancy



→ **most common** level of analysis

Relevance of cues for disengagement

→ **Inconclusive** findings for **58% of cues**



Limitations

Lack of theory

- Eclectic selection of cues
- Broad concepts
- Inconsistent terminology

Sampling

- Likely underrepresenting certain media
- No engagement studies



Implications

For theory

- Clearly **define** disengagement and situational cue categories
- **Appraisal process**
- Independence of specific **media types**

For empirical research

- Cues relevant to **other non-use behaviors** might transfer
- **Systematically compare** different media use types
- Leverage **in-situ methods**

For design

- Preliminary
- Implications depend on
 - **Goal directedness** of the media type
 - **User motivations**
- Mitigate **friction**

**Positive, agentic experiences of
disengagement are important to the
user experience.**



**Negative disengagement experiences
can drive users to adopt
disconnective practices of non-use.**




Thank you for the attention!

101 reasons to stop:

A systematic review of media cues
for disengagement

*Alicia Gilbert, Frauke Schöne, Rebekka Kreling,
Felix Dietrich, & Leonard Reinecke*

gilbert@uni-mainz.de
 [aliciagilbert.bsky.social](https://bsky.social/alicagi Gilbert)



Full search string (for Communication Abstracts)

TI ((disengage* OR stop* OR terminat* OR exit* OR discontinu* OR "turn* off" OR avoidance OR friction* OR scroll*))

AND (media OR internet OR web* OR "online communication" OR "online social network" OR texting OR chat OR email OR messaging OR "instant mess*" OR "mobile mess*" OR "social networking site" OR gam* OR "mobile device*" OR "mobile phone*" OR smartphone* OR TV OR television OR movie* OR streaming* OR "binge* watching" OR radio OR book* OR news* OR "online search" OR "information search" OR Facebook OR Instagram OR TikTok OR Snapchat OR Twitter OR BeReal OR WhatsApp OR WeChat OR Weibo OR Netflix OR Twitch OR YouTube)

NOT (family OR school* OR security OR infrastructure OR attack OR detection OR industry OR robot* OR vehicle OR car OR energy OR mobility))

OR AB ((disengage* OR stop* OR terminat* OR exit* OR discontinu* OR "turn* off" OR avoidance OR friction* OR scroll*))

AND (media OR internet OR web* OR "online communication" OR "online social network" OR texting OR chat OR email OR messaging OR "instant mess*" OR "mobile mess*" OR "social networking site" OR gam* OR "mobile device*" OR "mobile phone*" OR smartphone* OR TV OR television OR movie* OR streaming* OR "binge* watching" OR radio OR book* OR news* OR "online search" OR "information search" OR Facebook OR Instagram OR TikTok OR Snapchat OR Twitter OR BeReal OR WhatsApp OR WeChat OR Weibo OR Netflix OR Twitch OR YouTube)

NOT (family OR school* OR security OR infrastructure OR attack OR detection OR industry OR robot* OR vehicle OR car OR energy OR mobility))

Table 1: Media cues for disengagement

<i>Analysis level</i>	<i>Media cue</i>	<i>Explanation and examples</i>	<i>Media context</i>	<i>Relevance</i>	<i>References</i>
Device	Media availability	Availability of other media and technologies in a situation	Not spec.	Not spec.	[54]
	Technical problems	Device crash, loss of internet connection	Online news and information, social media	+, Not spec.	[37, 50]
	Timer	Reminder that a time budget is up	Games	+	[1, 61]
Application	Friction	Design element interrupting automatic use, e.g., app presenting breathing exercises or a black screen	Smartphones	Unrecog.	[25]
	Media availability	Availability of other media and technologies in a situation	Not spec.	Not spec.	[54]
	Notifications	Incoming push notification from competing medium	Newspaper, social media	+	[23, 50]
	Technical problems	Application crash, bugs in games, results not loading, slow data transmission	Online news and information, social media, games, web browsers	+	[1, 2, 37, 50, 52]
Feature	Access to data download	Ability to download the searched data, e.g., in a data repository	Online news and information	+	[34]
	Blocked autoplay	No automatic start of a next piece of content after finishing the other	Social media	Unrecog.	[36]
	Colour desaturation	Black and white screen to lower aesthetic appeal	Social media	Unrecog.	[36]
	Compact layout	Removed sidebar and peripheral content, “de-cluttering”	Social media	Unrecog.	[36]
	External link	Hyperlinks to other applications and websites	Social media	+	[50]
	Feed separation	Home feed separated into sections instead of infinite scroll, e.g., “load more” button or pagination	Digital broadcast media, messengers, social media	Not spec., Unrecog.	[26, 36]
	Forced interaction	Engagement (like, comment, share) required to proceed to the next piece of content	Social media	+	[51]
	Hidden homepage feed	Removed posts on the homepage	Social media	Unrecog.	[36]
	Hidden notifications	Muted notifications about updates and messages	Social media	Unrecog.	[36]
	Meaningless choices	Game actions without impact on subsequent in-game events	Games	Unrecog.	[5]
	Opportunity to save game progress	At the end of a level or challenge	Games	+	[1]
	Practical support of exiting play	Explicit menu option	Games	+	[1]

	Restricted avatars	Restriction to certain play styles or identities, point deduction for other game actions	Games	Unrecog.	[5]
	Technical problems	Feature freezes	Online news and information	+	[37]
Interaction	Arrangements with other players	Communication about time budget and preferred exit points	Games	+	[1]
	Disagreements with teammates	Disagreements on game strategy	Games	Unrecog.	[5]
	Harassment by other players	Insults, misogyny	Games	Unrecog.	[5]
	Matchmaking	With team members and opponents, system based on player rank	Games	+	[32]
	Skill mismatch	Between team members	Games	Unrecog.	[5]
	Strong opponents	AI opponents	Games	Unrecog.	[5]
Message	Advertisement	Ad break, e.g., on the radio or television	Analogue broadcast media	+, Unrecog.	[40, 41, 56]
	Boring content	Low stimulus frequency, low production value	Social media	+	[50]
	Closure	End of an episode, game completed	Games, digital broadcast media, analogue broadcast media	Mostly +, not spec., unrecog.	[1, 45, 54, 56, 57]
	Content rank position	Position of search results on the results page	Online news and information	+, –	[4, 63]
	Educational content	Learning segment, in-game test sequence	Games	+	[13]
	Error messages	Failed log in, page not found, no access to information source	Online news and information	+	[34, 37]
	Game pace slowing down	After completion of a game challenge, less interaction	Games	+	
	High difficulty	Game challenges	Games	+	[1]
	Irrelevant information	Bad quality of search results	Online news and information	Mostly –, +	[16, 67]
	Issue / actor presence	Presence of certain political actors or of certain news issues	News	+	[24]
	Key information withheld	Information necessary to complete a challenge or level unavailable	Games	Unrecog.	[5]
	Negative content	Negative valence, e.g., violence, sadness	Digital broadcast media, messengers, social media	+	[26]
	Obvious game structures	Information about game structure and environment	Games	+	[1]

Message	Advertisement	Ad break, e.g., on the radio or television	Analogue broadcast media	+, Unrecog.	[38, 39, 54]
	Boring content	Low stimulus frequency, low production value	Social media	+	[48]
	Closure	End of an episode, game completed	Games, digital broadcast media, analogue broadcast media	Mostly +, not spec., unrecog.	[1, 43, 52, 54, 55]
	Content rank position	Position of search results on the results page	Online news and information	+, –	[4, 61]
	Educational content	Learning segment, in-game test sequence	Games	+	[12]
	Error messages	Failed log in, page not found, no access to information source	Online news and information	+	[32, 35]
	Game pace slowing down	After completion of a game challenge, less interaction	Games	+	
	High difficulty	Game challenges	Games	+	[1]
	Irrelevant information	Bad quality of search results	Online news and information	+, mostly –	[15, 65]
	Issue / actor presence	Presence of certain political actors or of certain news issues	News	+	[22]
	Key information withheld	Information necessary to complete a challenge or level unavailable	Games	Unrecog.	[5]
	Negative content	Negative valence, e.g., violence, sadness	Digital broadcast media, messengers, social media	+	[24]
	Obvious game structures	Information about game structure and environment	Games	+	[1]
	Purposeful content variation	Display of different content types	Digital broadcast media, messengers, social media	+	[24]
	Redundancy	Old or no new content, similar information across articles or search results	Digital broadcast media, messengers, news, online news and information, social media	Mostly +, not spec., unrecog.	[9, 22, 24, 48]
	Result relevance	High or diminishing relevance of results to the search task	Online news and information	+, –	[4, 35, 61]
	Result type	Type of search results, e.g., ads, websites, news, images	Online news and information	+, –	[4]
	Sufficient useful information	Enough information found within a search task	Online news and information	+	[9, 35, 65]
	Timer	Reminder that a time budget is up, e.g., pop-up message	Digital broadcast media, messengers, social media	+	[24]
	Unskippable segments	Forced exposure to content, e.g., tutorials, story lines	Games	Unrecog.	[5]

Notes: + = Positive influence in disengagement, – = Negative influence on disengagement, Not spec. = Not specified, Unrecog. = Unrecognisable.