



MASARYK UNIVERSITY

# RISKY ONLINE COMMUNITIES IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC

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INVESTMENTS IN EDUCATION DEVELOPMENT

# Online communities

- Specific online platform(s) through which a group of people interact
- Group-centred (not person-centred)
  - Shared norms, values, goals
  - Sustained bonds and support
  - Sense of (virtual) community
  - (At least partly) online interaction

(Blanchard & Markus, 2004; Lee, Vogel & Limayem, 2003; Rheingold, 2008; De Souza & Preece, 2004)



# Online communities

- „**Virtual**“ communities, but **real** social environment
  - Resources (social, information, material)
  - Social identity ↔ membership, group perception
  - Attitudes and behavior ↔ community norms, values
- Many benefits, but also potential risk

# Risky online communities

Many benefits, but also potential risk

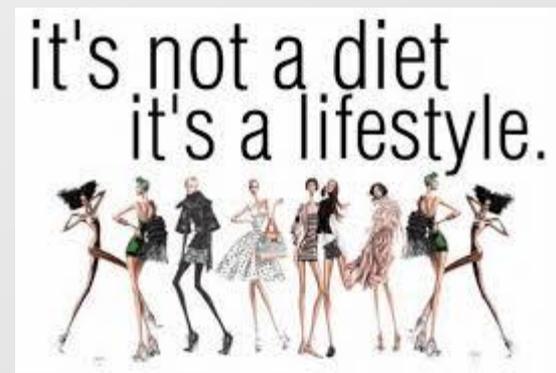
- Generated content
  - E.g. hate groups



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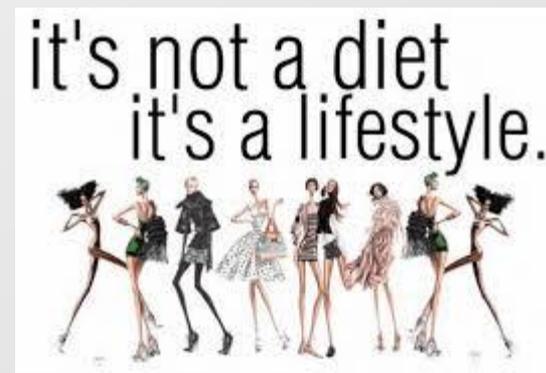
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  - E.g. pro-ana communities



# Risky online communities

Many benefits, but also potential risk

- Generated content
  - E.g. hate groups
- Norms and values
  - E.g. pro-ana communities
- Abuse of published information



# Our project – online risks

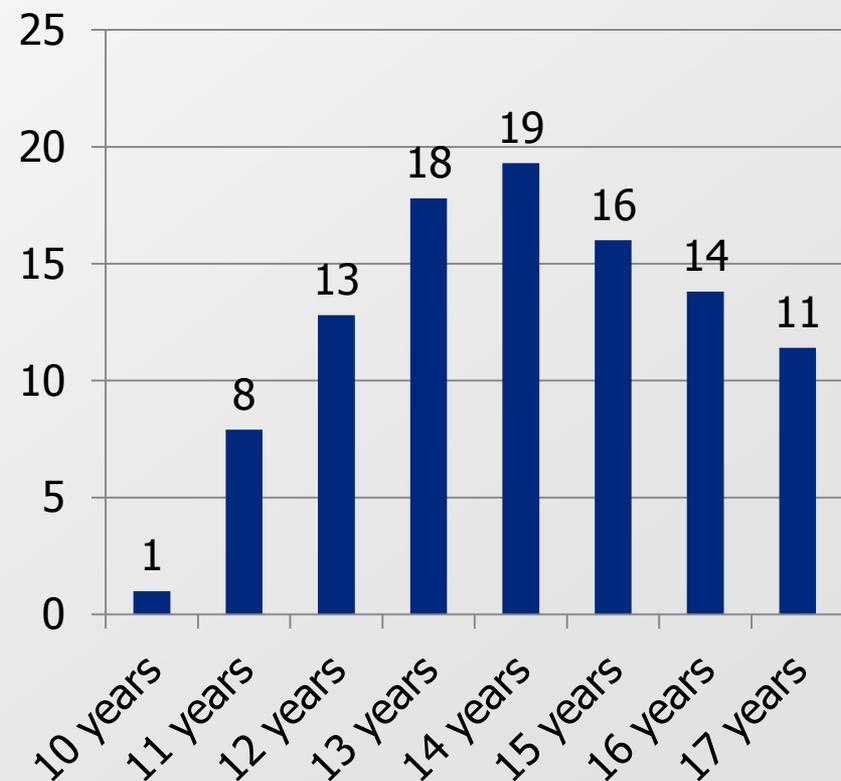
- One topic: online communities of Czech adolescents
- June 2012
- Online questionnaire, filled in during classes
- 3,032 respondents aged 10-17 ( $M = 14.03$ ,  $SD = 1.90$ ),  
52 % girls

# Results – online community members

16 % of sample visit  
**pure** online  
community  
( $n = 493$ )

43 % girls ( $n = 210$ )  
56 % boys ( $n = 274$ )

Peak at middle  
adolescence

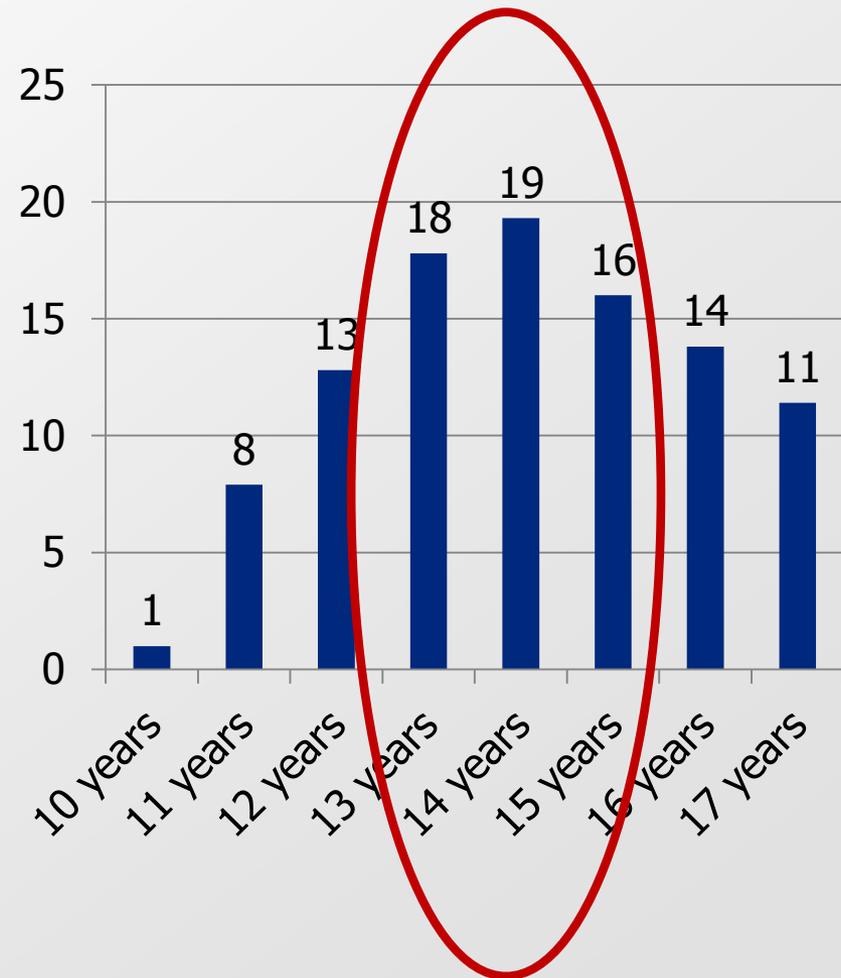


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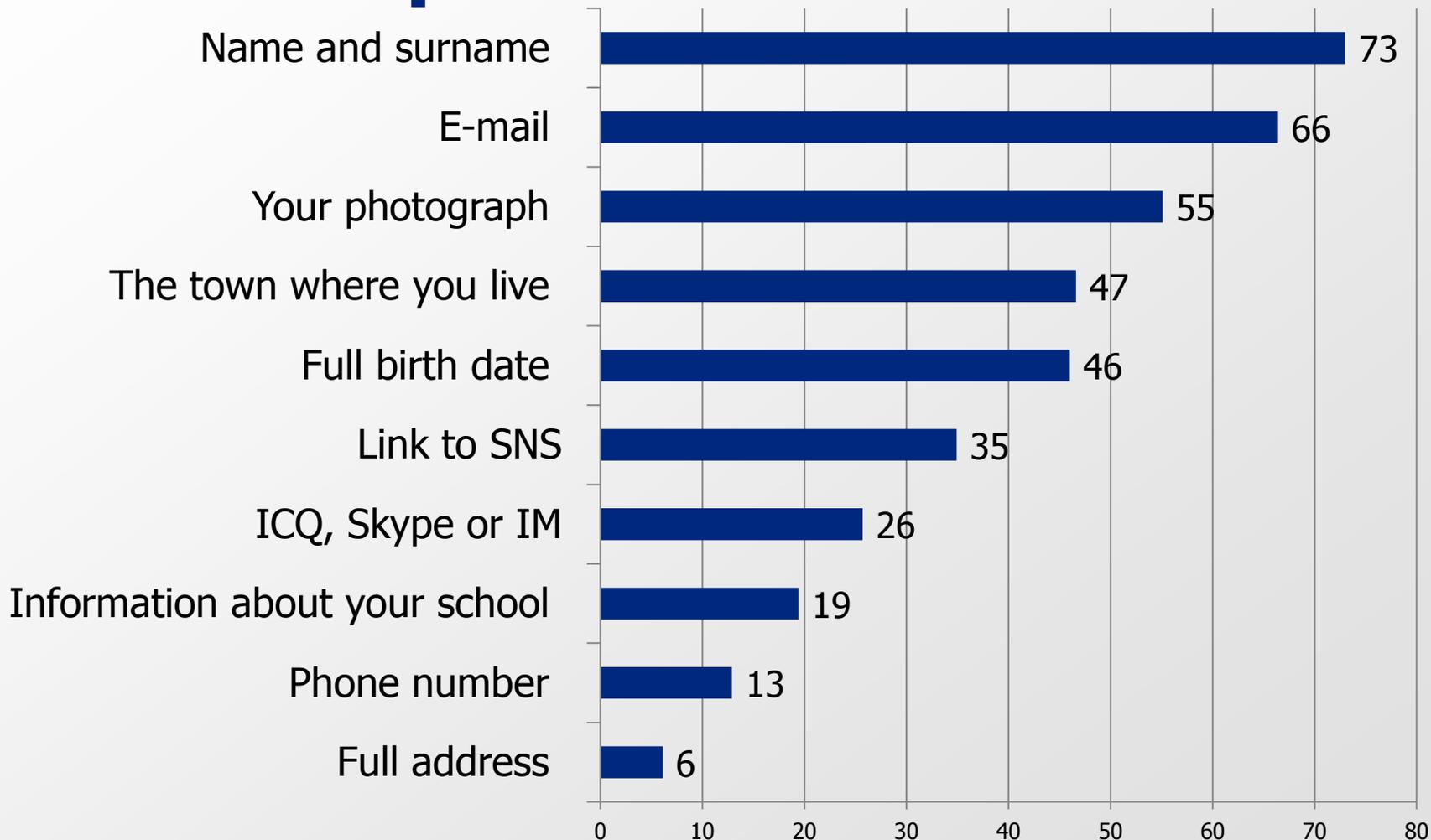
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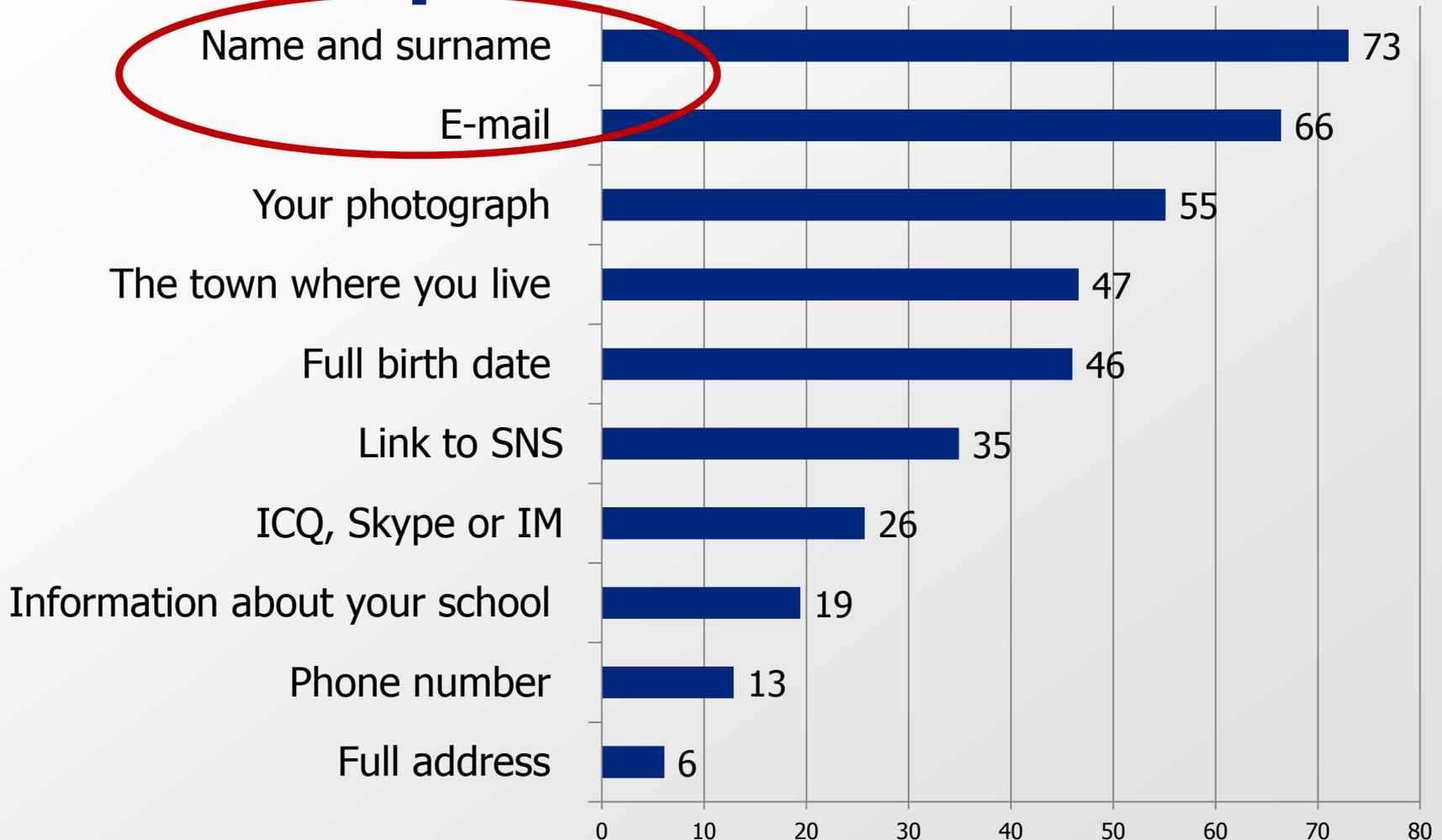
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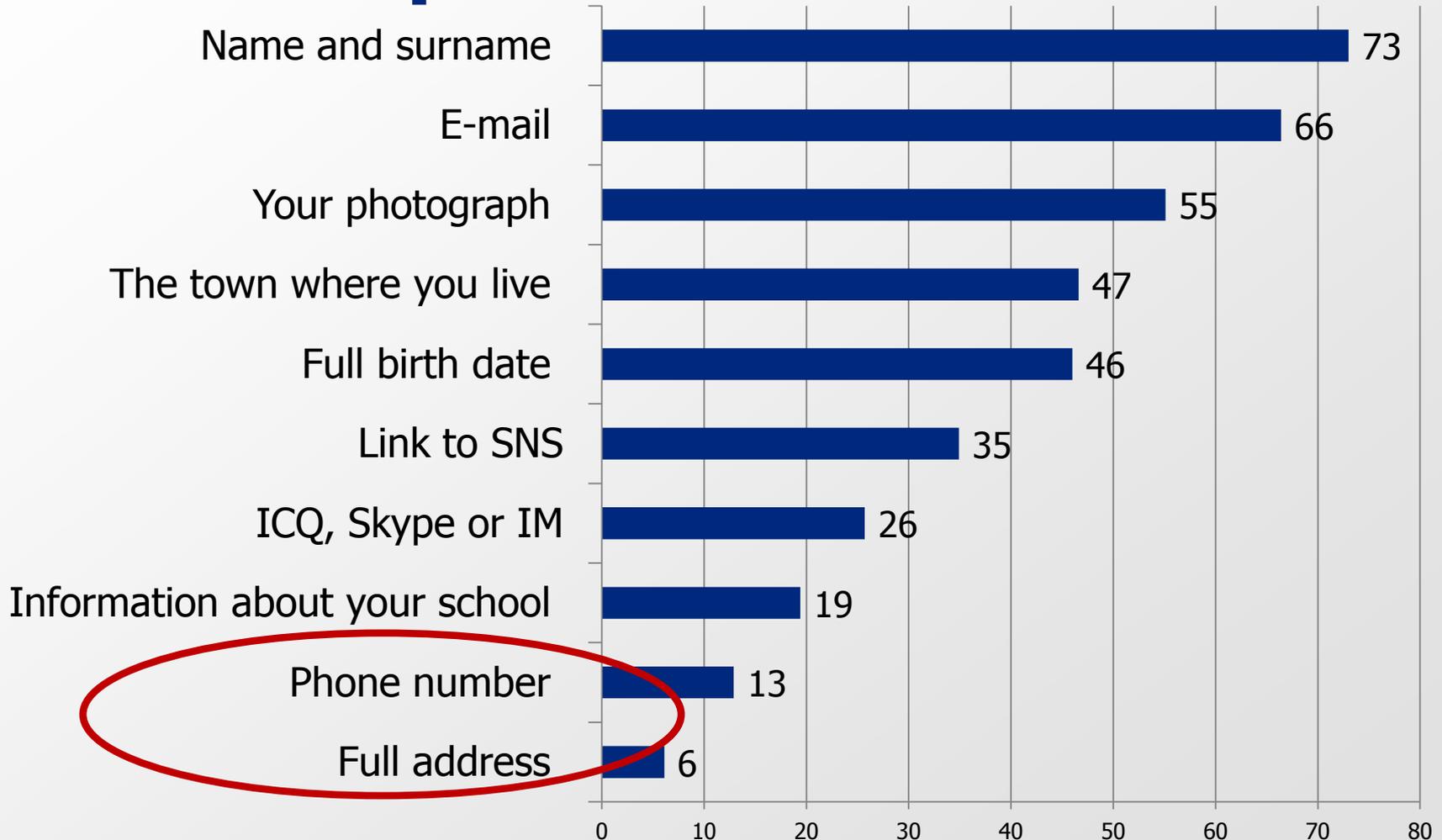
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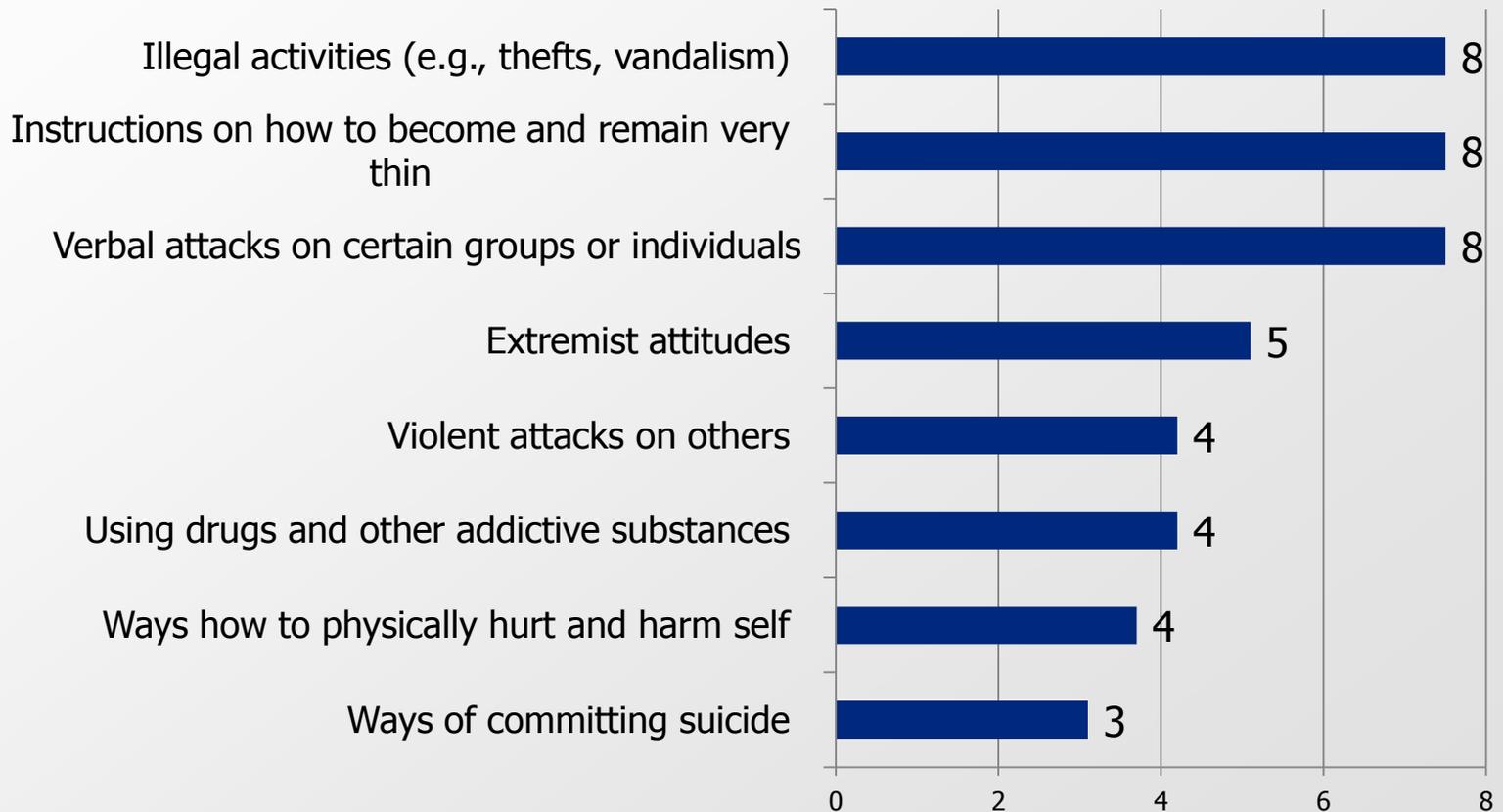


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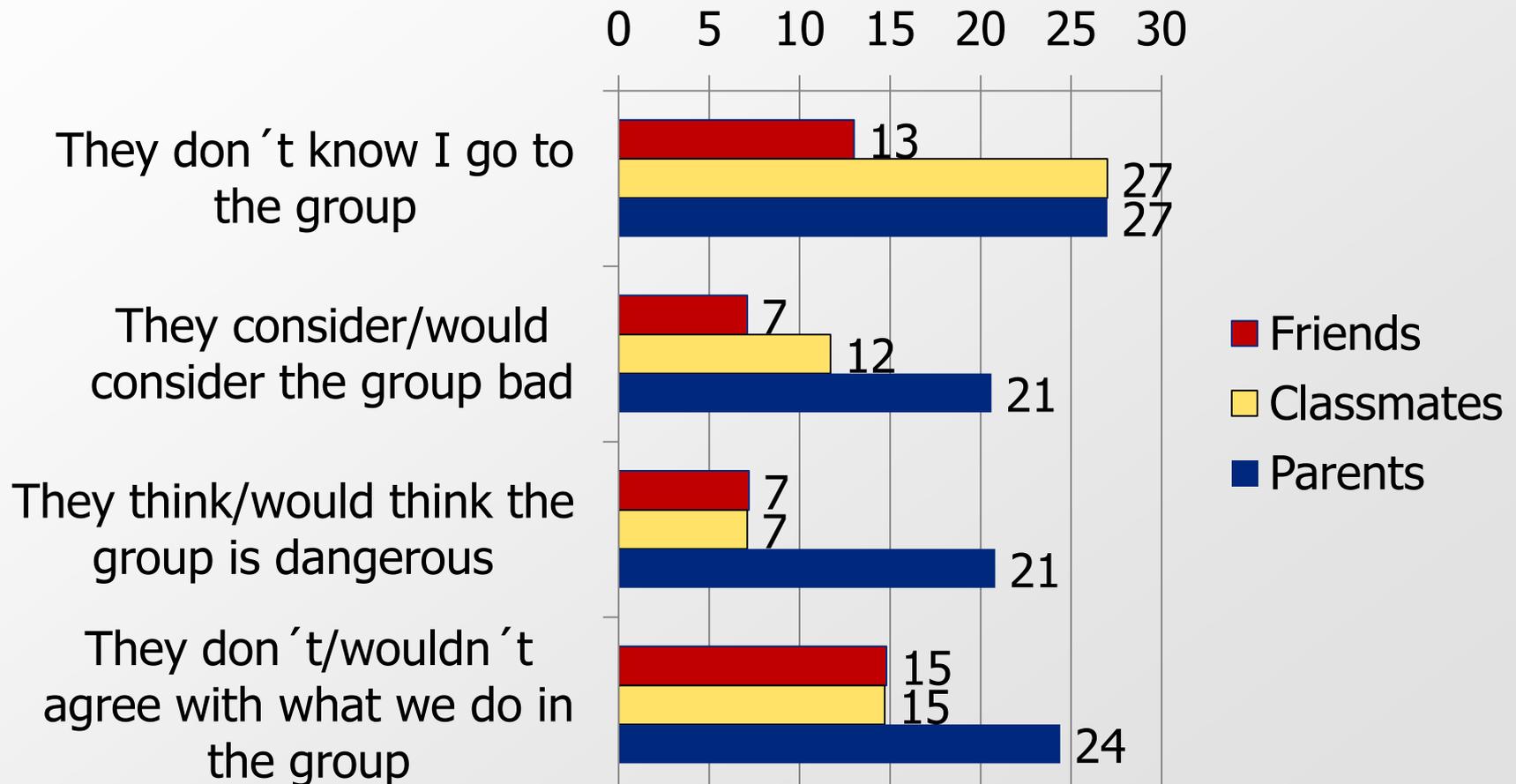
Abuse of information published in the group: 6 %

☒ On SNS: 10 %

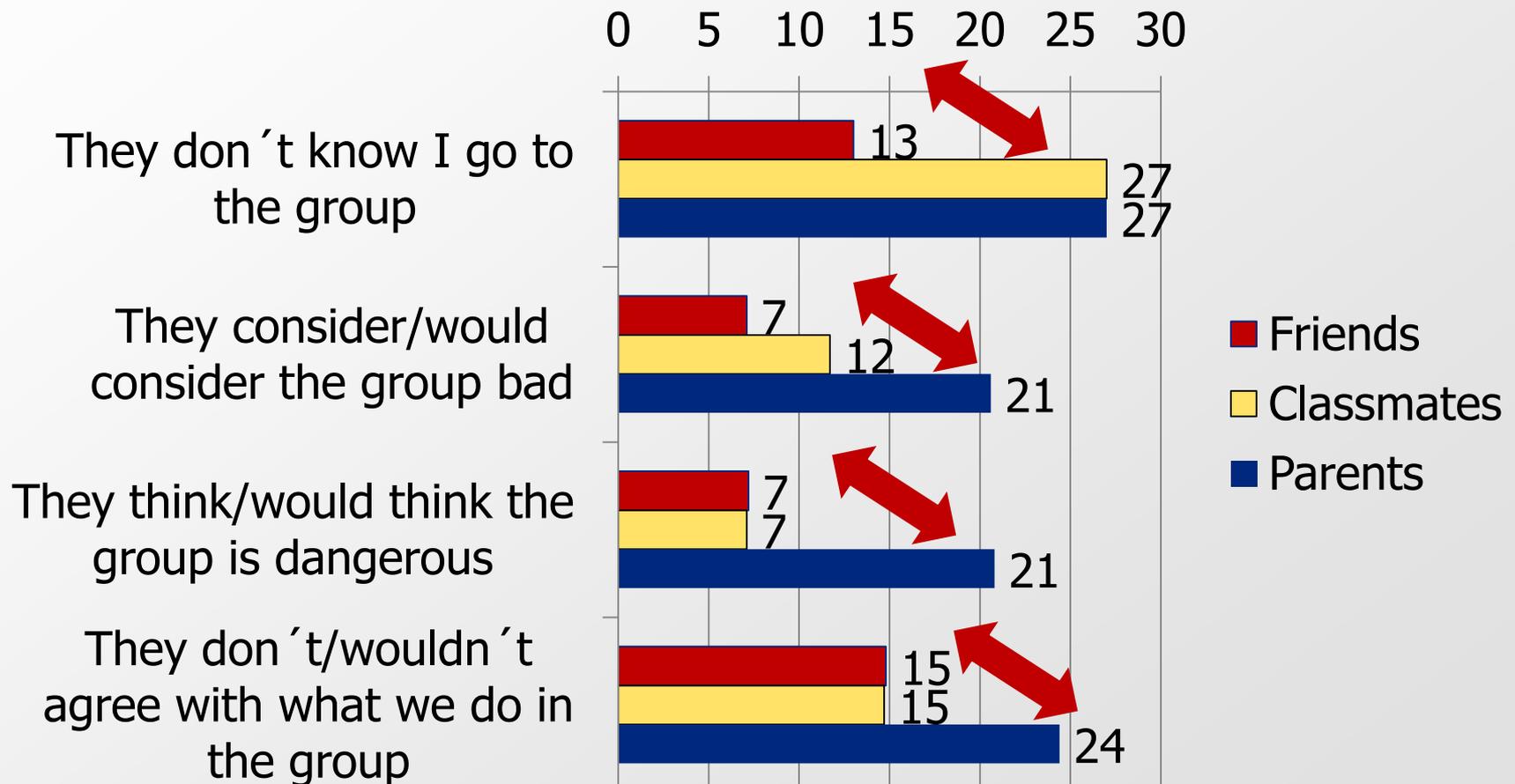
# Results: supported negative topics



# Results: perception of online community by social environment



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# The perceived community influence on behavioral change

- Scaled from averaged items, alpha = .745
  - E.G.:
  - I changed a lot thanks to the group.
  - In everyday life I started behaving differently from before thanks to the group.

## Predictors

- Sex, age
- Peer rejection, sensation seeking
- Problem behavior offline, life satisfaction

# The perceived community influence on behavioral change

## 3-step hierarchical regression

	Beta	p-value	Beta	p-value	Beta	p-value
Sex	-.043	.358	-.064	.166	-.079	.101
<b>Age</b>	-.14	.003	-.135	.004	<b>-.155</b>	<b>.001</b>
<b>Peer rejection</b>			.185	.000	<b>.151</b>	<b>.002</b>
<b>Sensation seeking</b>			.135	.004	<b>.104</b>	<b>.032</b>
<b>Problem behavior offline</b>					<b>.122</b>	<b>.015</b>
Life satisfaction					-.054	.259

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- By those rejected by peers
  - Community as a safe place?
  
- By children with problem behavior
  - Possible exacerbation of problematic attitudes?
  
- By children seeking sensation
  - Online community as a source of excitement?

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  - Not very frequent abuse of information
  - Low percentage of negative content (3 - 8 %)

## Conclusions

- About 16 % of children visit strictly online communities
- Community environment mostly perceived as congruent with norms of offline one
- Most online communities are not evaluated as risky
  - Not very frequent abuse of information
  - Low percentage of negative content (3 - 8 %)
- But despite the marginal occurrence these should not be ignored

**Thank you for your attention.**

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## Literature

- ❏ Blanchard, A.L., & Markus, M.L. (2004). The experienced “sense” of virtual community: Characteristics and processes. *The Data Base for Advances in Information Systems*, 35(1), 65–79.
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- ❏ Rheingold, H. (2008). Virtual communities - exchanging ideas through computer bulletin boards. *Journal of Virtual Worlds Research*, 1(1), 1–5.
- ❏ Lee, F., Vogel, D., & Limayem, M. (2003). Virtual community informatics: A review and research agenda. *Journal of Information Technology Theory and Application*, 5(1), 47–61. Retrieved from <http://aisel.aisnet.org/jitta/vol5/iss1/5/>

# Our project – online risks

- *On the Internet places there are a lot of places where people of similar interests or opinions meet. Sometimes these people make groups to which their members come back regularly, they often use a nickname, know each other, talk to each other or exchange information or materials. They can meet e.g. on discussion forums, blogs, chats or in games. When you are e.g. on Facebook, you may be a member of such a group, but you may be not.*
- Those who personally visit such a place or group regularly
- Those who indicated predominant online contact