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CAN PEOPLE PREDICT WHAT ONLINE CONTENT THEY'D ENJOY?

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Introduction

- We spend hours scrolling through TikTok and Instagram.
- **Recommendation systems (RS)** don't even have to ask what we enjoy. They **extract implicit interests from our behaviour.**
  - How strongly such behaviour is aligned with people's explicit interests (= say what you like!) is an old question in psychology.
- Tested this on an entertainment platform (Appinio)

RESEARCH QUESTION

How strongly are people's explicit and implicit interest correlated?

Methods

- Investigated using Appinio app (= like TikTok but with fun opinion polls)
- **Explicit interests** = topics users said they want to see content on
- **Implicit interests** = topics they've engaged with (by liking/disliking polls on the app)
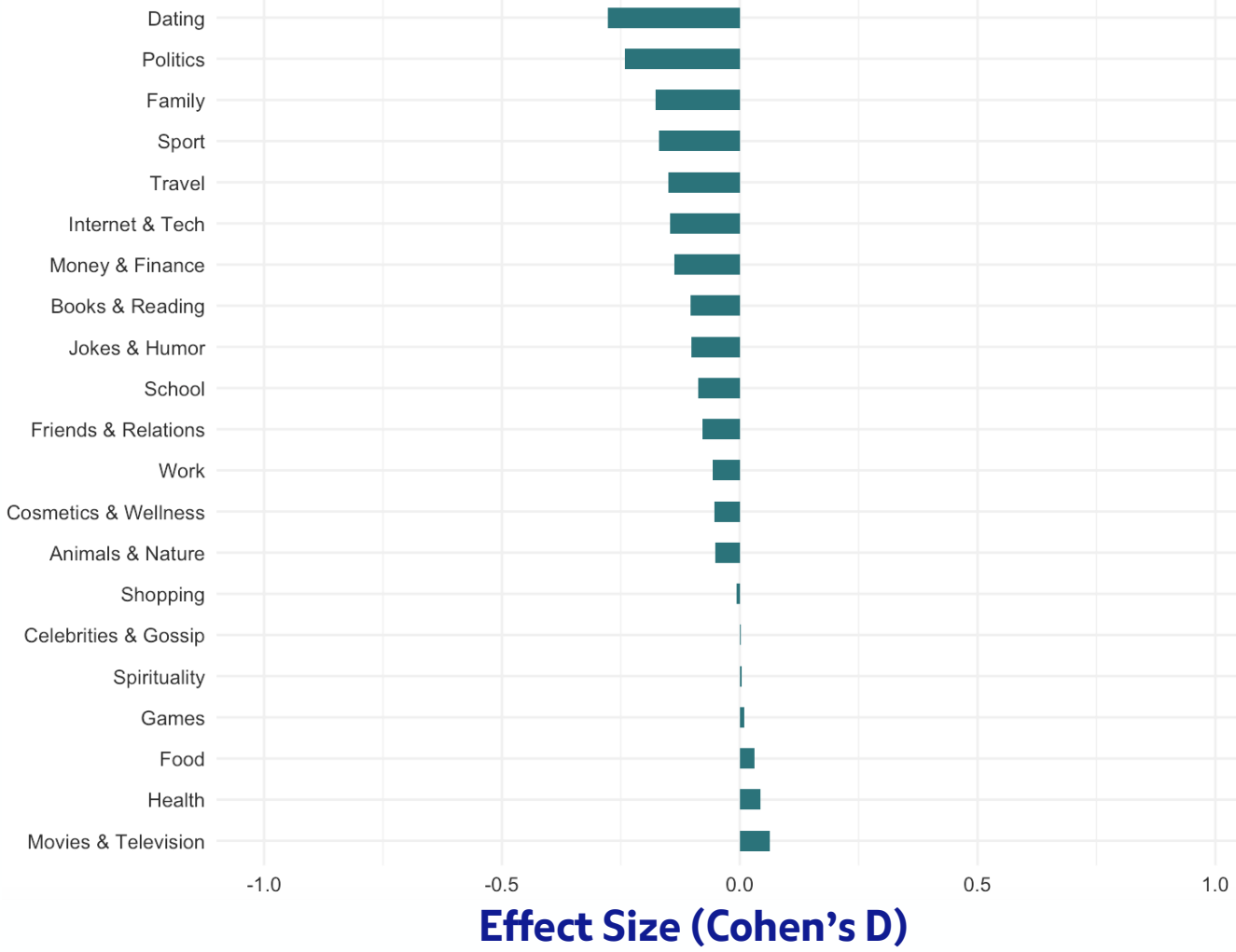- Analysed whether explicit & implicit interests are correlated **(regression)**

Results

	+	Explicit	−
Implicit +	0.025		−0.039
Implicit −	−0.017		0.031

The **table** (above) shows the **average regression coefficients** (over all topics like work/politics/health) for each of the 4 analyses.

Plot (left): Analysis 1 is the main analysis, the others are conceptual replications. Other analyses have similar results:
- **small effect sizes**
- **no significant relationship**

Analysis 1: Positive Implicit x Positive Explicit interest

(Y-axis categories, top to bottom: Dating, Politics, Family, Sport, Travel, Internet & Tech, Money & Finance, Books & Reading, Jokes & Humor, School, Friends & Relations, Work, Cosmetics & Wellness, Animals & Nature, Shopping, Celebrities & Gossip, Spirituality, Games, Food, Health, Movies & Television)

X-axis: Effect Size (Cohen's D), range −1.0 to 1.0

People cannot accurately predict what content they would enjoy!

Discussion

- For **psychologists**:
  - Explicit and implicit **attitudes** differ, we see this when:
    - Social desirability bias when reporting explicit attitudes
    - Implicit societal biases and prejudices (e.g., racism)
- For **businesses/practitioners**:
  - Explicit interests may not be very useful in suggesting content
  - Could explore other implicit interest measures (e.g., scrolls/clicks/watch time, etc.) to better judge how useful explicit interests can be

Questions & report