



Press release

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Bundesnetzagentur publishes report on online communications services

Jochen Homann: "Rapid spread of services like Skype, WhatsApp and Threema"

The Bundesnetzagentur has today published its report on the use of online communications services in Germany.

"Services like Skype, WhatsApp and Threema have spread rapidly in recent years and are now being used by large parts of the population. However, traditional telecommunications services still play an important role for consumers," said Jochen Homann, Bundesnetzagentur President. "Our survey shows that the three most popular services – WhatsApp, Facebook Messenger and Instagram – all belong to the Facebook company."

Clear picture of use of OTT communications services

The results of a representative consumer survey show that around 83% of those surveyed regularly use over-the-top (OTT) communications services – services provided over the open internet – especially with their smartphones. OTT services are particularly popular among the younger generation, with as many as 98% of 16 to 24-year-olds using the services.

The most frequently used services in Germany are WhatsApp (96%), Facebook Messenger (42%), Instagram (30%), Skype (18%) and Snapchat (12%). Many people use two or more different OTT communications services in parallel. In fact, almost two thirds (65%) of those surveyed "multi-home".

Bundesnetzagentur
Tulpenfeld 4
53113 Bonn

[bundesnetzagentur.de](https://www.bundesnetzagentur.de)
twitter.com/bnetza

Press contact person
Fiete Wulff
Head of Press and Public
Relations

Tel. +49 228 14 - 9921
pressestelle@bnetza.de



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There are clear differences in the use of the different types of OTT services. While 95% of those surveyed regularly send text and picture messages, only 48% regularly use internet telephony. Also, while 81% send texts on a daily basis, other functions are used significantly less often.

The findings relate to the personal use of OTT communications services. Use of the services for job-related purposes is considerably less widespread.

Traditional telecommunications services still in demand

The new opportunities provided by electronic communications have had an overall impact on communication patterns. A total of 61% of those surveyed stated that they generally communicated more than before because of the spread of OTT communications.

Traditional telephony is still far more popular than internet telephony from an OTT service provider. OTT users still make more frequent and extensive use of mobile (75%) and fixed (59%) telephony services when they want to make a call. Only 22% regularly use the internet telephony service from their OTT provider. Mobile telephony plays a particularly important role for OTT communications service users. Of those surveyed, 74% stated that they could not imagine doing without mobile telephony completely.

On the one hand, OTT communications services have the potential to largely replace traditional telecommunications services, as is the case with short messaging services. On the other hand, there also seems to be a trend towards using both types of service to complement each other, as many users are actually communicating more than before thanks to the availability of OTT communications services.





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Comprehensive consumer survey

The consumer survey has provided the first representative findings on the actual use of OTT communications services, which in future will be partly subject to telecommunications regulation. The findings are therefore highly relevant for the Bundesnetzagentur's market monitoring and consumer protection activities.

The results presented in the report are based on a representative consumer survey. A total of 2,210 people across Germany took part in the Bundesnetzagentur's survey. The survey was conducted at the end of 2019 in cooperation with INFO GmbH, a Berlin-based market and opinion research institute.

Background to OTT communications services

In the past, telecommunications services such as telephony or short messaging services were intrinsically linked to the telecommunications infrastructure provider. The increasingly popular online communications services, by contrast, are characterised by the fact that they are provided over the open internet, or "over-the-top", and are therefore known as OTT communications services. These internet-based services offer various features such as telephony, video telephony, and text, picture and voice messaging.

The Bundesnetzagentur's report (in German) has been published online at www.bundesnetzagentur.de/ott-bericht.

The Bundesnetzagentur is an authority under the responsibility of the Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and Energy. Its core tasks include supervising the energy, telecommunications, postal and railway markets.

As part of its mandate, the Bundesnetzagentur ensures that as many undertakings as possible can use the infrastructure in these sectors so that consumers benefit from competition and favourable prices.

The authority employs over 2,900 people at its headquarters in Bonn and Mainz and its 46 regional offices.