

Interview Guide

"Social Media Influencers' Role in Shaping Political Opinions & Actions of Young Audiences"

FF1: What role do influencers* play in the political opinion-forming process of young people of voting age?

- 1) How do adolescents and young adults encounter political information via social media influencers?
 - 2) What influence do they attest to social media influencers on themselves and others in the political sphere?
 - 3) What potential do social media influencers have when it comes to the political mobilization of adolescents and young adults?
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Entry

Thank you very much for taking the time for this interview! It will take about **three quarters of an hour**.

In addition to you, we will be conducting about nine other interviews. Your information helps us a lot to shed light on the topic. It's all about your personal assessments and experiences. So there are no right or wrong answers.

I would **like to record the conversation** so that I don't have to take notes. Of course, everything we talk about will be **treated confidentially** and will only be used **pseudo-anonymously in the context of this research project**. We may **quote** your statements in the process. However, these quotes will not be attributed to you. You can stop the interview at any time if you want to. Did you understand everything so far and is that okay for you?

If it works for you, I would **start the recording now**.

Media use in general and for opinion formation

1. Let's start in a general way. If you look at your cell phone on a normal day. What media and social platforms do you use?

- For what purpose do you use each of the media and platforms you mentioned?
 - *For inquiries*: for communication, information, entertainment

2. Let's take a look at the media you use to keep yourself informed about current events. Generally speaking, which platforms do you use to keep yourself informed about what's going on in the world?

- *If you don't inform yourself politically*: how do you inform yourself, e.g., if you have to research something for school/university on a current topic?
- Do you also use influencers to inform yourself about political issues?
 - *If so*, do you consciously use them for political information, or does it happen more by accident?
 - *If not*, does it happen by chance that the influencers you use talk about political issues?
- How do you feel about influencers being political or making political statements?

Influencer usage and definition

3. Now we've already touched a bit on influencers. Which influencers do you use?

- Do you follow these influencers too, or do you use their content without following them?
 - *If without following them*: Then how do you become aware of their posts?
- Why exactly are you using these influencers?
 - *In case of inquiries*: for reasons of sympathy, information, orientation, because everyone uses them, they are authentic...
- Approximately how often do you use the content of these influencers per week?

4. How would you actually define influencers?

- *When asked*: At what point is a person an influencer for you?

5. How would you define political influencers then?

- Do they just have to talk about political issues or get politically involved?

6. What topics do the influencers you watch talk about?

- So what subject area could you roughly assign them to?
- Do the influencers you watch speak out on political issues from time to time?
- What do you find particularly good about the information provided by influencers?

- How do you find the information from influencers compared to traditional media, such as television, radio or newspapers?

Credibility of media and influencers

- 7. Let's go back to the traditional media, i.e. radio, television or newspapers. In your opinion, are their reports and information about current events credible and transparent?**
 - *Why yes/ Why partly/ Why not?*
 - So do you believe that the reports of media like Tagesschau, Sueddeutsche Zeitung, der Spiegel or news on the radio are true?
 - *Why yes/ Why partly/ Why not?*
- 8. On the other hand, how do you rate Influencer XY? Do you believe that what she/he says in her/his posts and videos is true?**
 - *Why yes/ Why partly/ partly/ Why not?*
- 9. When do you find Influencer XY's information particularly credible?**
 - If you find them likeable or your circumstances/interests align with theirs?
 - When they talk about certain topics?
 - *If yes:* what topics?
- 10. What influence do you think influencers who speak out on political issues have on the opinions of their users?**
 - *If large:* Why do they have a large influence? Could this influence also have an impact on the voting decisions of users/young people?
 - *If small:* Why do they have a small influence? Do you think influencers could have a bigger impact in the future?

Influencing voting decisions through influencers

- 11. If you've been able to vote before: How did you inform yourself before the election?**
 - **Did you consider the statements of e.g. Rezo, MrWissen2go, Influencer XY or other Influencers e.g. in the last European election in your election decision?**
 - *If yes/not:* why and to what extent?
 - *If you haven't had a chance to vote yet,* would you consider what influencers say in your voting decisions in the future?
- 12. Now we want to talk about your political interest. By political interest I mean interest in current affairs and socially relevant issues. So something like climate protection, LGBTQI+ rights or the US elections. Would you describe yourself as politically interested or active?**
 - Which party do you feel most closely affiliated with?
- 13. Now we've already talked a lot about your political interest. Let's move on to those who do politics. In general, do you think that politicians or activists tell the truth?**
 - When do you believe the statements of politicians or activists and when do you not?

- What qualities do politicians or activists need to have in order for their statements to be credible to you?
- In comparison, do you believe the statements of influencer XY more than those of politicians or activists?
 - *Why yes/ why not?*

General information

- 14. That's all the questions about influencers and opinion formation. Finally, can I ask you about your age, gender and profession?**
- 15. Now you're almost done. At the end, is there anything else you would like to address that we haven't talked about yet?**

That brings us to the end. Thank you very much for the interview and your participation in the study! You were a very big help for our research project!