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**Civic Education in the 9:16 Aspect Ratio: Success Mechanisms Behind Videos with Political  
Topics on the Short Video Platform TikTok**

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## Abstract

For young people in Germany, TikTok has evolved from a dance app into a highly frequented source for political information. This dynamic necessitates critical reflection, particularly in light of the spread of misinformation on TikTok, the increasing spread of right-wing ideologies on the app, and the dwindling attention spans of its users. Therefore, this study is guided by the research question: How must political content in short videos be communicated on the social media platform TikTok to achieve thematic follow-up actions among 13- to 25-year-old users in Germany? Although specific video attributes have been identified as success factors in social media research on TikTok, videos with political content have been entirely neglected in literature. Additionally, research has missed to incorporate the perspectives of app users into the research, despite their engagement being crucial to video success. To address this research gap, a mixed-methods study consisting of a quantitative content analysis of 100 successful political TikTok videos and a focus group with TikTok users aged 14 to 25 was conducted. This research design allowed for making specific statements about the success factors of political TikTok videos through the quantitative content analysis, which were ultimately qualitatively analyzed and discussed for motivating informative follow-up actions by the focus group. The findings of this study revealed that TikTok users expect political content on the platform to exhibit seriousness and credibility. As a result, the success of videos is enhanced when male hosts aged 27 to 35 present content in a professional manner, employing a captivating but not overly dramatized tone, and when the video is enriched with textual elements and visual effects during post-production. To facilitate follow-up information searches by app users, information should be presented as accessibly as possible, for example, by providing additional facts in the video description, in the comment section, or through a well-structured and regularly updated link in the bio. While this work provides valuable insights for both social media research and journalistic practice, it is important for further research to address right-wing tendencies on TikTok and conduct a quantitative analysis of the success factors for videos with right-wing content. The follow-up information search behavior of TikTok users, as addressed in this study, could be actively observed and evaluated through experiments in future studies.

Key words: *TikTok, Social Media Journalism, Civic Education, Virality, Follow-up Information*

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# 1 Introduction

*“over half of the 14-19-year-olds in Germany consume TikTok, averaging 90 minutes a day, which means you essentially have a window of 90 minutes a day into their minds where you can broadcast.”<sup>1</sup>*

- Erik Ahrens, right-wing activist of the “Identitäre Bewegung” and TikTok strategist for AfD European Parliament top candidate Maximilian Krah

From collective dance challenges to a controversial platform in political debates – the short video platform TikTok finds itself at the center of social, political, and technological controversies in the year 2024. While the app owned by the Chinese tech giant ByteDance first entered public discourse during the COVID-19 pandemic due to its significant addictive potential for minors, dissemination of fake news, and inadequate privacy measures, TikTok's role has also gained relevance in the political context (cf. Cobbe, 2021; Duffy & Meisner, 2023; Lin, 2023; Southwick et al., 2021). Fake news spread rapidly on TikTok, right-wing ideologies are increasingly infiltrating the app, and social media phenomena such as filter bubbles and echo chambers are fueling the one-dimensionality of debates within the app (cf. Franke & Hajok, 2023; Grandinetti, 2023; Kaluža, 2022; Vodafone Stiftung, 2020). However, the app's risk potential and negative headlines have not harmed its popularity: in Germany, TikTok was the app with the highest usage time in 2023 (cf. DataReportal, 2023). According to TikTok (2023) nearly one in four people in Germany use the app, and among 12 to 19-year-olds, it is even the most popular social media application after Instagram and WhatsApp (cf. Feierabend et al., 2023). The extraordinary popularity of TikTok within this young target audience has even led the short video service to establish itself as the third most frequented source of information on world events in Germany (cf. *ibid.*; Feierabend et al., 2022). Particularly the latter development poses unprecedented challenges for social and political spheres.

In 2024, which is considered a "super election year" due to the European, regional and US presidential elections, political education could be pivotal for the future of democracy. The convergence of several factors, including the first-time participation of 16-year-olds in the European elections, the utilization of TikTok as one of the primary educational channels, and the challenges surrounding fake news and lack of fact-checking within the app, could be emblematic of the challenges facing political communicators on social media in 2024. The opening quote from Erik Ahrens' lecture "TikTok from the Right<sup>2</sup>" at the extremist Institute for State Policy in 2023 (Kanal Schnellroda, 2023) underscores the issue: TikTok is regarded by antidemocratic communicators as a suitable channel for

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<sup>1</sup> Translated by the author

<sup>2</sup> ger. "TikTok von rechts"

infiltrating the young audience with manipulative and opinion-shaping messages. According to Correctiv investigations, right-wing populist politicians also plan to collaborate more extensively with right-wing influencers to disseminate their ideologies ahead of the regional elections, thereby securing the AfD's strongest position among all German parties on TikTok (cf. Bensmann et al., 2024; Metzger, 2024).

The reactions to the polarization of political debates on social media stem from both the platforms themselves and the dynamics within the population. For instance, Instagram now allows users to decide for themselves whether they want to consume political content on their account (cf. Meta, 2024a). Simultaneously, a movement has formed on TikTok under the hashtag *#reclaimtiktok*, where users actively position themselves against the right-wing trend of the app (cf. Klein, 2024). Another response could be to counter polarizing and incorrect content with serious political reporting on social media. This requires a consistent engagement of social media research with the preferences of the young audience regarding political content on TikTok. In order to articulate practical implications extending beyond theoretical facts for media houses, democratic parties, or other journalistic outlets, this research focuses on the success factors of political short videos on TikTok. Through a content analysis of successful political TikTok videos and a focus group with TikTok users, it aims to explore the mechanisms through which young people can be reached, informed, and motivated for thematic follow-up action in the online-typical 9:16 format.



## **2 Political Communication on Social Media**

The role of social media in the dissemination of political discourse has undergone a profound evolution. With the growing popularity of platforms such as TikTok, journalism finds itself amidst a rich tapestry of opportunities, while communicators devise innovative ways to communicate political news. The following chapter describes how journalism is being transformed by this evolution and how viral mechanisms are utilized to engage the audience on social media. Special attention is given to the emergence of TikTok as an educational-political medium and the controversy stemming from TikTok's increasing role as a news channel. Chapter 2 thus sheds light on political communication on social media from the perspective of both senders and platforms.

### *2.1 Journalism in the Digital Transformation*

With the transition to digital information consumption, both journalistic practices and the products themselves undergo transformation. This chapter elucidates the trend towards a mobile-first approach in journalism, while also highlighting new challenges in political communication within this evolving professional landscape. Furthermore, the concept of viral content on social media is examined.

#### **2.1.1 Digital Journalism in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century**

A changing job profile – digital innovations are currently putting many media companies to the test (cf. Fernandes et al., 2023). While author and network researcher Clay Shirky formulated as early as 2008 (71) “If anyone can be a publisher, than anyone can be a journalist“, this quote is emblematic of the journalistic work of the current era. The possibilities of Web 2.0. go beyond the passive consumption of content; today, internet users can become creators themselves within a few clicks (cf. Dolunay et al., 2022). The job title "journalist" is not protected in Germany, so it is correspondingly challenging to understand what the term journalism actually describes nowadays, due to the immense range of digital solutions available to content producers (cf. von Studnitz, 2019). In addition, journalistic genres are currently undergoing constant transformation, media houses are trying to break new ground and explore innovative ways of reporting news. (cf. Lopezosa et al., 2023) Already since the shift from print to online publishing, it almost seems as if journalism is caught in a constant race with technological changes and one of the main tasks of a journalist is to integrate new, innovative design possibilities in their own work (cf. Reyes-de-Cózar et al., 2022).

This technological influence can be illustrated in a particularly symbolic way by the new professions within journalism. Under the umbrella term of journalism, audience-centered sub-concepts

such as participatory journalism, in which journalists and users produce content together, or viral journalism, in which news is prepared for the broadest possible public on social networks, have established themselves (cf. Denisova, 2023; Vos & Thomas, 2023). On the other hand, new journalism professions such as data journalism and robot journalism are based on technology and are dedicated to working with large data sets, respectively using Artificial Intelligence in the content creation process (cf. Deuze & Beckett, 2022). Ultimately, the ever-increasing risk around fake news and deep-fakes<sup>3</sup> has given rise to fact-check journalism, in which journalists cross-check sources and challenge misleading information (cf. Soo et al., 2023).

Given the entrenchment of these new types of professions, it is hardly surprising that new job titles have emerged from traditional, journalistic roles such as editor and writer. For example, social media journalists produce content for social networks, visual journalists transform content into (audio) visual experiences, and transmedia journalists prepare content for multiple journalistic forms of presentation (cf. Khan et al., 2023; Moloney, 2012; Neilson & Gibson, 2022). This pace of change in journalism is also evident in forecasts for the future of this profession. While there are journalistic factions that would like to return to the traditional values of the profession and fight against the practice of clicks and speed with the profession of slow journalism, it is certain: there will be no future in journalism without Artificial Intelligence (cf. Li et al., 2020). Today, journalistic products are already generated by automated programs using Natural Language Processing (NLP) algorithms and machine learning (cf. Dhiman, 2023). The pik of automation possibilities in journalism is far from being reached: the German media company Studio 47, for example, promises to be able to automate TV news with its digital product BotCast (cf. Studio 47, 2023). Also, the Open AI program ChatGPT with its possibilities like the simplification of research activities found its way into the newsrooms (cf. Lund & Wang, 2023).

As a result of the now large presence of technology in a subject that is ultimately based on human creativity, discussions arose around the possible displacement of journalists due to Artificial Intelligence and the much-debated question of whether technology can replace human labor, is omnipresent (cf. Broussard et al., 2019; Dhiman, 2023). However, studies already show that the creativity and quality of AI bots can even surpass that of human journalists in some cases (cf. Ravichandran & Ilango, 2023). Aitamurto et al., (2023: 401) predict the future of journalism in

*“creating a blend of human and AI expertise in specific journalism contexts, exploring new design methods based on participatory and value-sensitive design principles.”*

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<sup>3</sup> “Deepfake videos are the product of artificial intelligence or machine-learning applications that merge, combine, replace and superimpose images and video clips onto a video, creating a fake video that appears authentic.” (Maras & Alexandrou, 2019: 1)

News consumers may find it difficult to follow the establishment of technology in the day-to-day work of journalists, but they do see the shift in how content is prepared. While the now established multimedia reportage has combined elements such as audio, video and text, the latest innovation in storytelling is immersive journalism (cf. Esser & Neuberger, 2019; Haarkoetter, 2016). With the help of technologies such as virtual reality and augmented reality, the audience is transported into a virtual environment where they can experience news "on the spot" (cf. Bujić & Hamari, 2020). Uskali et al. (2021: 1) describe immersive storytelling as "journalistic maneuverings between reality and virtual reality". International media houses such as The New York Times, The Guardian and *Süddeutsche Zeitung* have already experimented with 360-degree and VR videos (cf. Greber et al., 2023).

One of the triggers for the popularity of VR applications in journalistic forms of presentation is the keyword: user engagement. The industry is trying to employ new and innovative strategies to further engage audiences with content and motivate longer dwell time on offerings (cf. Min, 2020). One of the audience-centric professions in journalism is social media journalism, which is steadily gaining relevance due to the lack of visual entertainment in print and traditional online journalism (cf. Crilley & Gillespie, 2019; Wunderlich et al., 2022). On the one hand, the relevance of digital news products can be seen in the fact that publishing today is characterized by the mobile-first approach, in which content is first prepared for digital applications on smartphones or tablets (cf. Zayani, 2021). On the other hand, investments are made in content that works for social media in addition to publication in traditional media (cf. Crilley & Gillespie, 2019). This situation makes it possible for content to be consumed near-time by audiences in distant countries (cf. Boholano, 2017). In the past, media outlets used to have to send investigative reporters on site to inform people about current world events, today social media also features footage from eyewitnesses, making news accessible to a wide audience in seconds (cf. Appel et al., 2020; Dolunay et al., 2022). While the possibility of location-independent reporting can be seen as the greatest advantage of integrating technology into journalism, this wealth of accessible information also brings risks. On social media, users can become publishers, which makes the boundaries between professional and non-professional content blurry, especially for users (cf. Loosen, 2015). For content producers, too, journalism is currently experiencing perhaps the most challenging time in its history.

### **2.1.2 Challenges of Social Media Journalism**

Economical pressure on print products (cf. Zimmermann, 2022), the change in news consumption (cf. Boczkowski et al., 2011) and the deterioration of press freedom in Germany (cf. Reporter ohne Grenzen e.V, 2023) show multi-layered challenges that print and online journalism currently have to face. Certainly, these emerging demands also have an impact on social media journalism, but this

domain of digital reporting encounters distinctive challenges. In order to be able to grasp these problems in depth, it is beneficial to illustrate these challenges based on the functional understanding of journalism in society:

*“A well-functioning democracy requires free and diverse news media capable of keeping people informed, holding powerful actors to account and enabling public discussion of public affairs.”*

The European Council published this statement in a journalism study in 2016 (Nielsen et al., 2016: 7). In this context, journalism serves as a vehicle for fostering democracy, while news media acts as an intermediary between the public and society. Looking at the history of journalism, this understanding of news media can be classified as a comparatively liberal one. Thus, the discussion around the goal of journalism changed greatly since the 20th century. In his 1948 communication theory, Harold Lasswell attributed the task of surveil the environment to journalism (cf. Lasswell, 1948). This functional description is still present in the 21st century. However, Christians et al. (2010) transform the term "surveillance" into the slightly weakened version "monitoring," yet they still see journalism in a "radical role" in which the profession contributes to democracy promotion due to its criticism of authority, because "partisanship cannot operate without strong and opposed critical voices." (Christians et al., 2010: 135) This so-called "watchdog function" of journalism is still a much-discussed description of the purpose of journalism – especially in normative models of democracy (cf. Drüeke, 2018).

Nevertheless, this understanding of journalism has not become universally accepted. The German sociologist Jürgen Habermas, for example, attributes to journalism a more audience-centered function and describes journalism as an open platform for public discussion and the formation of political opinions (cf. Habermas, 1962). Hanitzsch and Vos have taken this diverse understanding of journalism roles as an opportunity to develop a model that represents the different roles of the profession.

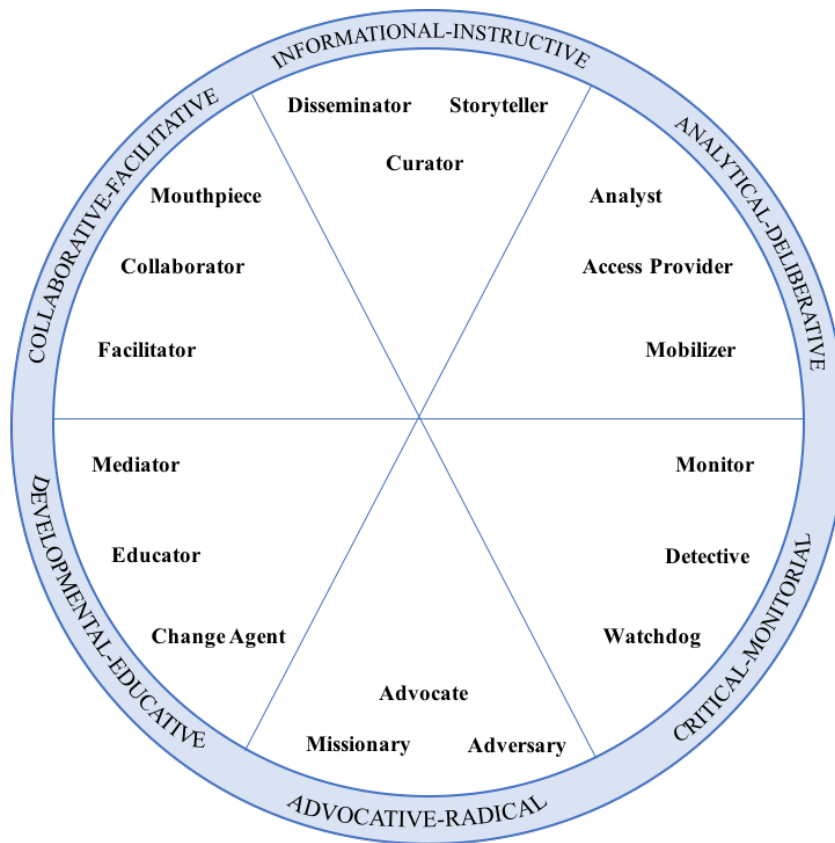


Figure 1 Journalistic Roles in the Domain of Political Life after Hanitzsch & Vos (2018: 153)

The subsequent part will utilize this conceptual framework of journalistic roles to illustrate the challenges encountered by the six categories on social media, delineate which roles are presently impacted by specific changes, and explain how their interpretation is evolving or will evolve.

In the understanding of the *informational-instructive function* of journalism, media reporting serves to convey information to citizens with the aim that they thereby receive the necessary information to actively form an opinion, make decisions and thus actively participate in political life (cf. Hanitzsch & Vos, 2018). Accordingly, it is important in this role to engage in appealing storytelling and to prepare the content for social media users in a way, that they are interested in consuming it and do not click away. The manner of this processing poses a serious challenge to social media journalism. Empirical research by the Technical University of Berlin, the Max Planck Institute for Human Development, University College Cork, and the Technical University of Denmark has found that the collective attention span of media consumption is increasingly shrinking (cf. Lorenz-Spreen et al., 2019). However, the authors add that this change is not necessarily caused by the logic of social media, journalistic offerings must adapt to this changed attention span in order to remain viable. For the praxis this means, “they distil complex data into smart infographics, employ catchy images, quote cards, maps, looped clips, transform written features into short videos – often with captions – for

mobile-first audiences” (Denisova, 2023: 1932). The intense competition in content offerings on social media not only leads to changes in presentation styles but also shortens the time span for research and publishing. The challenge is to be able to deliver faster and more frequent updates with a captivating effect while still maintaining editorial standards to keep up with the competitive intensity in terms of content (cf. Vlasiuk, 2023). The danger with such an approach is, therefore, risking a professional manner (cf. Denisova, 2023). Fact-checking journalism aims to counter the spread of fake news resulting from insufficient research, which is urgently needed as society's trust in media continues to decline. Therefore, for the informational-instructive function of journalism, especially in content production on social media, it is important to consciously identify fake news or deepfakes and counter them with accurate information (cf. Weikmann & Lecheler, 2023). This results in the challenge for journalism to identify deepfakes through automated detection mechanisms such as eye-blinking rate, head postures, or changes in light and contrast. It is crucial to avoid inadvertently spreading fake news and, in turn, further damaging the reputation of the respective journalistic offering and the credibility of the media (cf. Godulla et al., 2021).

With challenges similar to the informative-instructive role of journalism, the *critical-monitorial* function also struggles. However, this role of journalism must engage more with the societal perception of journalism and media reporting rather than focusing on the appealing and truthful conveyance of information. The critical-observational role is based on the concept of journalism as the "Fourth Estate" (cf. Hanitzsch & Vos, 2018). When considering the inclusion of media reporting in the system of checks and balances, journalists express criticism, hold those in power accountable, and thereby foster a critically thinking and questioning citizenry (cf. Christians et al., 2010). However, this presupposes that society places trust in media reporting. The Edelman Trust Barometer annually measures trust and credibility in German society towards public institutions, including the media landscape, through a survey (cf. Edelman, 2023). In 2022, trust in the media, with a Trust Score of under 50 index points, fell into the realm of distrust for the first time – 47 percent of Germans had thus lost their trust in the media. In 2023, it remained in the realm of distrust as well (cf. *ibid.*; Edelman, 2023).

The loss of trust in the media landscape and, consequently, in journalism can, among other things, be explained by the polarization of sociopolitical issues in the 21st century. A study by Fabian Prochazka (2020) examined the reasons for the reduced credibility of journalism in the population and found, using guided interviews, that media skeptics are primarily found in politically alienated and right-wing populist circles. Furthermore, they have a strong desire for a clear distinction between "right" and "wrong." In recent years, for citizens who are highly critical of political institutions and decisions, there have been many political events characterized by a great deal of populism, with strong

criticism directed at institutions, decision-makers, and the media. For instance, the Trump administration (cf. Lee & Hosam, 2020), the COVID-19 pandemic (cf. Apuke & Omar, 2021), Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine (cf. Babacan & Tam, 2022) and most recently, the escalation in the Middle East conflict (cf. Kirchner, 2023) were events marked by societal polarization, the spread of fake news, and populist rhetoric. Certainly, populism and fake news pose challenges for both print and online media, but in this regard, social media journalism, in particular, is under significant pressure. So argues Bergmann (2022: 4):

*“The new media provide populists with the oxygen of attention that they desperately need to succeed. (..) In the new media environment, sensational stories travel much faster and further than the more serious and traditional news.”*

The challenge of increasing power loss can be illustrated through the *advocative-radical* and *analytical-deliberative* dimensions of journalism. In these roles, journalism serves as an independent participant in political discourse, as a voice of the people, and as a means for citizens to engage in political participation (cf. Hanitzsch & Vos, 2018). In particular, social media journalism faces challenges when it comes to independence and systemic criticism. While traditional journalistic outlets only needed to tailor their content to meet the readers' needs within their own publications, the distribution channels on social media are provided by corporate entities such as Meta Platforms, Inc. with Instagram and Facebook, the Chinese technology company ByteDance with TikTok, and X Corp. with the short messaging service X. These platforms wield significant influence over how content is presented, who it is delivered to, and they establish rules governing what social interactions are allowed on the platform. Jarren & Fischer (2021) even refer to this development as the "platformization" of journalism, where news production must adhere to the logic of social media. Through personalized, algorithmic selection, these platforms determine which content – and therefore, which topics and opinions – the audience on the social media channel is exposed to (cf. Oertel et al., 2022). In practical terms, this signifies that “news organizations can no longer “force feed” readers the content they believe is important, and may in some instances find their understanding of newsworthiness being more reactive to what their audience will and will not engage with.” (Peterson-Salahuddin & Diakopoulos, 2020: 35) In the context of need for media coverage on social media to adapt to the specific platform dynamics in order to reach an audience, it raises the following controversial question: Can journalism, as envisaged by the *advocative-radical* role, still be described as an independent mouthpiece? The *analytical-deliberative* perspective must also consider new aspects. It portrays journalism as a forum for political expression – while journalistic content on social media is used to stimulate discussions, the platform for the discussion is actually provided by the respective social media platform itself.



The *developmental-educative* dimension of journalism, as outlined by Hanitzsch & Vos (2018) involves reporting from an interventionist perspective in which journalism actively intervenes in political events and aims to, among other things, reduce social tensions. Algorithms on social media and the trend towards viral journalism pose challenges to this journalism perspective as well. Social media algorithms create a clickbait<sup>4</sup> media environment that has become widespread in journalism (cf. Lischka & Garz, 2023). This means, the more attention-grabbing the content appears at first glance, the more frequently it is consumed. Regarding the overall tone of this content, a study by Mousavi et al., (2022: 9) found that “virality of messages on social media is increased with the use of negative terms, causal arguments, and threats to core values.” Hence, it can be observed that content that incites anger in consumers is shared more frequently and therefore has a higher chance of going viral and reaching a large audience (cf. Berger & Milkman, 2012). Additionally, the traffic in the comment section also influences whether the platform algorithm suggests the post to an even larger audience – the more extensive the discussion under the post, the better it is for the algorithm (cf. Karagür et al., 2022). Journalism from the developmental-educative perspective finds itself in a dilemma: on one hand, it aims to promote change through its content and reduce social tensions within society, but on the other hand, polarizing negative content generates more clicks, encourages more intense discussions in the comment section, and ultimately builds a larger readership or following in the long run.

Finally, the challenges for the *collaborative-facilitative* dimension will be addressed. This role can be seen as controversial compared to the other perspectives because, in this understanding of journalism, media professionals act as partners of the government, lending legitimacy to their decisions and steering public opinion in favor of the decision-makers (cf. Hanitzsch & Vos, 2018). Even though this understanding of journalism doesn't endorse the notion of media reporting as the fourth estate, the challenges for this perspective should still be addressed. To act as a mediator between politics and society, the journalist must set aside personal beliefs and fully commit to the goal of maintaining a neutral, or in the case of the collaborative-facilitative role, a paternalistic relationship with the government (cf. *ibid.*). Through social media, journalists now have the opportunity to express themselves independently of their media organizations. Once they create an account on a platform, they can reach a wide audience and are no longer reliant on the infrastructure of their employer. In many cases, it can be observed that journalists also express themselves on social media independently of their media outlets, present themselves as private individuals, and sometimes leverage the authority gained through their employers to their advantage (cf. Mellado & Hermida, 2022). An example of the seamless transition between being a journalist and a private individual is the reporter Sophia Smith

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<sup>4</sup> The term clickbait is defined in detail in the following chapter 2.1.3.



Galer. The investigative journalist works for the BBC, won the Journalism Award for Innovation of the Year 2021, and worked for VICE until September 2023, all while maintaining a private TikTok account where she has garnered over 530,000<sup>5</sup> followers by regularly posting videos on sociopolitical topics (cf. Smith Galer, 2023a; Smith Galer, 2023b).

Also on the short messaging platform X, it can be observed how journalists polarize regardless of their employers' media channels. For example, Ulf Poschard, the editor-in-chief of the national German private broadcaster WELTN24, regularly shares his thoughts on political debates with his over 122,000 followers on X. For example, on October 26, 2023, he posted video footage of Canadian students taking down posters of kidnapped Israeli civilians and Poschardt commented without explaining the context of what's depicted: "I've seen a few dozen of these videos now, and I find it funny that the old white man is supposed to be the problem of the free Western world." (Poschardt, 2023: translation by author) In reference to the collaborative-facilitative role of journalism, such a trend of personal social media presence presents a challenge. Journalists position themselves, sometimes even in a system-critical manner, as individuals on social media and do not consider it their duty to convey the government's objectives to their followers.

### 2.1.3 Mechanisms behind Virality on Social Media

With the shift from print to social media journalism, not only have the modes of presentation changed, but also the methods of audience engagement. While headlines in print journalism were traditionally clear and unambiguous, it has now become a popular practice to maximize clicks on articles by using cryptic or exaggerated headlines (cf. Molyneux & Coddington, 2020; Munger, 2020). The deliberate withholding of information in a text headline is referred to as clickbait and is defined by Mukherjee et al., 2022 (483: translation by the author) as follows:

*"A headline that strategically withholds information to entice the reader to click on a link."*

When using clickbait, the author employs framing techniques into the phrasing, emphasizing certain aspects of the text that are more meaningful and memorable for the audience, thus motivating a specific interpretation of the headline (cf. Entman, 1993). Authors of clickbait have achieved their goal once a user clicks on the headline – further engagement with the website content becomes secondary (cf. Fraser & Conlan, 2020). Clickbaiting thus has a psychological background: particularly striking headlines increase the likelihood of perception, processing, and retention of information by the reader (cf. Molina et al., 2021). Jodlowiec (2022: 6) describes how the curiosity triggers in clickbaiting serve

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<sup>5</sup> All statements regarding specific social media numbers in this paper are from March 2023 (except for the videos processed in the quantitative analysis).

to “feed on the intrinsic Freudian ego-based need to know”. In a study by Pengnate (2019), the emotional arousal of participants when reading clickbait headlines was measured using eye-tracking technology. The following clickbait headlines were found to be particularly attention-grabbing by the participants (cf. *ibid.*: 6)

- (1) *Road workers found this mysterious box underground. They decided to look inside and...*
- (2) *This is the personality trait that most often predicts success...*
- (3) *Why Apple should kill off the Mac...*

These headlines can be seen as exemplary of the clickbaiting mechanism. They sometimes cut off in the middle of a sentence (1), tease information that is not further elaborated (1, 2, 3), and even involve the reader's personality (2). Furthermore, it is noticeable that the headlines convey a certain negativity. In (3), the phrase “kill off” is used, whereas the more positive term like “remove from the product range” could have also been effective. To explain the phenomenon of clickbait, which also shares relevant similarities with communication mechanisms on social media, it is worth examining the psychological effects behind curiosity triggers (cf. Dan et al., 2020; Scott, 2021; Fraser & Conlan, 2020). Loewenstein (1994: 87 [emphasis in original]) elucidates the desire to actively engage with information out of curiosity through the Information Gap Theory:

*“the information-gap theory views curiosity as arising when attention becomes focused on a gap in one’s knowledge. Such information gaps produce the feeling of deprivation labeled **curiosity**. The curious individual is motivated to obtain the missing information to reduce or eliminate the feeling of deprivation.”*

Information gaps, as exemplified by the abrupt cessation of a sentence in example (1), prompt readers to form opinions on the answer to the knowledge gap even before reading the article and to speculate on its likelihood (cf. Golman & Loewenstein, 2018). This intense and impulsive urge to discover the truth increases the likelihood of clicking on the corresponding link (cf. Scott, 2021). However, it cannot be generalized that every knowledge gap motivates the same subsequent response.

Aart et al. (2008), in a study on boredom and curiosity as triggers for decision-making, examined the activation through emotions and used the schema of the Zone of Curiosity, introduced by Day (1982):

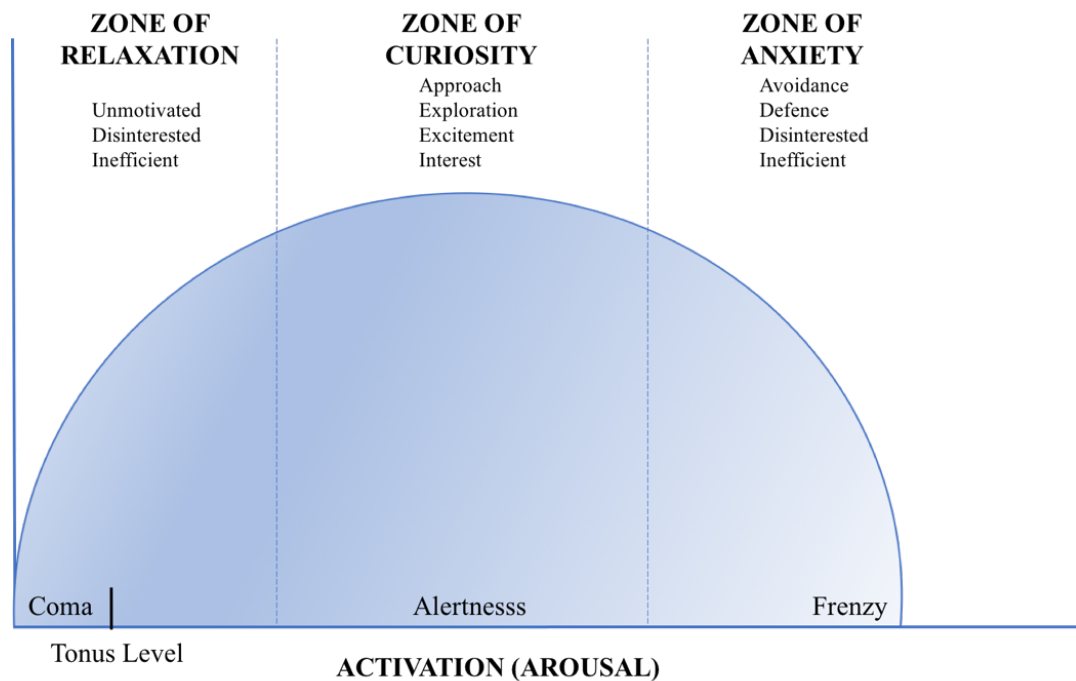


Figure 2 The Effects on Behaviour and Affect of Changes in Activation Level in an Organism after Day (1982: 20)

In the context of clickbaiting, this schema suggests that a subsequent action can primarily be expected within the Zone of Curiosity, where readers experience interest and excitement. As soon as the headline triggers negative emotions, it may instead target the Zone of Anxiety, leading the reader to intentionally avoid clicking on the article. Supporting this conclusion, Goldman & Loewenstein (2018) also found in follow-up research on the Information Gap Theory that people tend to gravitate towards positive information. They also posit that individuals are more inclined to seek information acquisition when they anticipate finding something pleasant rather than something negative (cf. *ibid.*). These statements of Goldman & Loewenstein and Aart et al. stand in contrast to the clickbaits presented in the study by Pengnate (2019), which could be considered rather negatively connotated, yet still received the most attention from readers. The continued relevance of the editorial phrase “if it bleeds, it leads” is also confirmed by a study conducted by Robertson et al. (2023) – participants were already more inclined to click on the corresponding article simply due to a negative keyword in the headline. This disagreement suggests that the Zone of Curiosity defined by Aart et al. may not only refer to the positivity of the news itself but particularly to the positive emotion of the reader towards the news. This emotion could also pertain to speculation within the information gap. If readers feel that the news could confirm their existing opinion or attitude, they perceive the headline as positive and thus find themselves in the Zone of Curiosity.

While the mechanism of clickbaits was concluded with the click on the article in the pre-social media era, social media users today can like, comment, and share the news. Here too, the emotional state of users within the Zone of Curiosity plays a significant role, as emotional engagement from readers is one of the main reasons why content on social media goes viral (cf. Brady et al., 2020; Dafonte-Gómez, 2018; Dianthe & Iskandar, 2016; Guerini & Strapparava, 2016).

The term virality can be understood as the way content spreads from user to user on social media, akin to how a virus spreads from person to person (cf. Wold, 2023). This sharing behavior (posting and sharing content) gives social media users access to news content that they might not have found through their own initiative (cf. Kümpel et al., 2015). The virality of news is thus no longer solely determined by the work of the editor, but rather by the users who interact with it and make it go viral. Despite understanding the mechanisms of news sharing, it is not possible to predict which content will go viral and which will not. Virality is still considered as “one of the mysteries of the Internet era“ (Al-Rawi, 2019: 2). Nonetheless, mechanisms behind viral content on social media can be observed. A study by Berger & Milkman (2012) suggests that, much like the nature of clickbaiting, emotions serve as triggers for the dissemination of news. Over 7,000 articles from The New York Times were examined in the study for their frequency of sharing, leading the authors to conclude:

*“Content that evokes high-arousal positive (awe) or negative (anger or anxiety) emotions is more viral.” (cf. ibid.: 1)*

Dobele et al. (2007: 300) further specify the emotions experienced by individuals when sharing content and define six key emotions as drivers for sharing behavior: surprise, joy, sadness, anger, fear, and disgust. The following table illustrates these emotions in relation to their effect on sharing behavior and thus the virality of news.

<b>Surprise</b>	Unexpected and unusual events motivate readers' desire to fill the resulting knowledge gap (cf. Al-Rawi, 2019). Unexpected news are more likely to be shared by users (cf. Bednarek, 2016; Berger & Milkman, 2012).
<b>Joy</b>	Emotional content that evokes joy among users - often also in conjunction with the key emotion of surprise - is frequently shared by users (cf. Dafonte-Gómez, 2018). The motivation for sharing positive content is also related to self-presentation (cf. Sulaiman & Puteh, 2021).
<b>Sadness</b>	Catastrophic events can evoke personal involvement among users, leading to a need for discussion and contextualization (cf. Bright, 2016). Sharing tragic news provides users with the opportunity to collectively express their sorrow and show empathy towards those affected (cf. de León & Trilling, 2021). Here, a connection to the hyperboles known from clickbaiting can also be observed: as soon as authors add the word "tragic" to a negative headline, the negative emotion on the part of the readers can be further heightened (cf. Welbers & Opgenhaffen, 2019).
<b>Anger</b>	As anger is perceived as an active, intense emotion, this feeling “encourages retribution through approach behavior” (Nabi, 2003: 230) and thus motivates subsequent information processing, which can also manifest in the sharing of content on social media (cf. Kim & Cameron, 2011).
<b>Fear</b>	News containing a perceived threat to the personal or societal values of social media users increase the likelihood of the content going viral (cf. Mousavi et al., 2022). This fear response is particularly observable in crisis situations that directly affect large masses of people, such as the COVID-19 pandemic or the

	outbreak of the Zika virus in 2016 (cf. Ng, 2023; Ali et al., 2019). In such situations, people may feel the need to address their feelings of helplessness regarding the crisis through expression of opinions, for which social media provides suitable platforms (cf. Witte & Allen, 2000). However, instinctive behaviors and fear-driven reactions can also trigger the spread of fake news when emotions take precedence over the content itself due to anxiety during news consumption (cf. Salvi et al., 2021).
<b>Disgust</b>	Sharing disgusting content on social media can be motivated not only by an interest in sensationalism but also by a desire to "protect" others (cf. Rubenking, 2019). Moreover, news that triggers "disgust" as an emotion also works well in a political context when communicators seek to polarize with populist statements (cf. Fine & Hunt, 2023).

Table 1 Classification of Key Emotions as Drivers for Sharing Behaviour after Dobele et. al (2007: 300)

There is a form of journalism that deliberately aims to evoke these emotions in readers to achieve virality of content. This journalistic character can be referred to as "viral journalism" and, due to its relatively young practice, does not yet have a universally accepted definition. Batubara & Fotaleno (2023: 27) emphasize the high reach of the content in their definition and describe viral journalism as "the strategy and tactic of promoting quality media stories online for maximum exposure." Bebić & Volarević (2016: 112) focus on the relevance of consumers and their sharing behavior, defining the role of viral journalism as "complete and fundamental change in content creation and consumption provoked by the popularisation of social media and the user's role in content distribution." As a contextual framework, Denisova's (2021: 276) definition serves, where the similarity to clickbaiting practices is also acknowledged:

*"Viral journalism is a delicate balancing act. When done meaningfully, it can bring traffic and public interest. Yet, when geared towards provocation and clickbait, viral storytelling can harm the reputation"*

The contextualization of viral journalism against the background of clickbaiting practices and the various emotional trigger points for users to share content and make it go viral provides an understanding of the psychological mechanisms of virality. However, viral journalism cannot be viewed independently from the challenges of social media journalism outlined in Chapter 2.1.2 – the journalistic form also has to contend with these problems. Legacy media outlets' news offerings do not receive preferential treatment on social media; even less elaborate user-generated content can go viral on social media as long as it resonates with the emotional trigger points of users mentioned (cf. Oertel et al., 2022). The question "How can I make my content go viral on social media?" is asked by both individuals and established media outlets. In the following, a focused look will be taken at the platform TikTok to better assess the characteristics of viral videos.

## *2.2 TikTok as a Political Medium*

The aim of this chapter is to illustrate the transformation of TikTok from a perceived dance app to an educational and political entity. Furthermore, the controversial perspectives of the app, including allegations of censorship and a climate of misinformation, will be addressed.

### **2.2.1 TikTok: Dynamics and Audience**

#### *Historical Background*

Never before has the growing popularity of an app been so intensely discussed as in the case of TikTok. Launched by the Chinese technology company ByteDance in 2016 under the name "Douyin" it was adapted for the international market as "TikTok" in 2017 (cf. Kaye et al., 2020). Thus, ByteDance was able to test the functionality of the "Short Video App" business model on the domestic market before expanding abroad (cf. Ma & Hu, 2021). ByteDance gained increased relevance in the App Store with TikTok following the merger with the short video app Musical.ly in 2018. Musical.ly was primarily used by teenagers for lip-syncing to music and already had over 160 million users in Europe and the USA at that time (cf. Mhalla et al., 2020). The success story of TikTok can therefore also be traced back to the merger with Musical.ly. Teenagers between 2014 and 2018 lacked a video platform where they felt represented or could creatively express themselves (cf. Savic, 2018). While Instagram introduced the TikTok-comparable video feature "Reels" only in 2021, video-focused platforms like YouTube and Vine primarily targeted millennials rather than teenagers (cf. Birke & Bush, 2022; Frydenberg & Andone, 2016; Menon, 2022). Thus, after the acquisition and rebranding of Musical.ly, ByteDance benefited from the rapidly growing popularity of TikTok in the American, Asian, and European markets, while at the same time, the target audience was still primarily teenagers (cf. Waechter, 2021).

COVID-19 marked a crucial moment in TikTok's history. During the multiple lockdowns, "social media platforms such as TikTok were used for a variety of purposes: communicating with friends and family, information about the current status of corona infections and hygiene measures, and entertainment." (cf. Hovestadt et al., 2021: 76) The leisure time spent at home and the escapism options offered by social media platforms increased the time spent in the online environment, leading even older users to turn to TikTok during this period (cf. Frățilă, 2021). The increasing popularity of TikTok can also be observed in its downloads: in the first quarter of 2020, TikTok downloads reached a record high of over 318 million worldwide, marking a 69 percent increase compared to download figures in the first quarter of 2019 (cf. Iqbal, 2023). In 2023, TikTok boasts 1.5 billion active users

worldwide, with 20.9 million of them from Germany as reported by TikTok in October 2023 (cf. *ibid.*; TikTok, 2023).

### *App Functions*

Consuming video content like on YouTube, scrolling through a feed like on Instagram, and communicating with other users like on Snapchat: TikTok combines established social media business models into one application, creating a blend of social network and video-sharing platform (cf. Ma & Hu, 2021). By combining the existing functional mechanisms of social media platforms, TikTok has created its own logic and user experience that sets it apart from competing apps like Instagram, YouTube, or X. Instead of primarily displaying the most recent and newest content to the user, TikTok presents users with a continuous stream of videos curated by the platform algorithm based on the user's behavior, accessible through vertical scrolling (cf. Negreira-Rey et al., 2022). Another difference from Instagram or Facebook lies in the origin of video suggestions. While Facebook or Instagram primarily display content from accounts the user follows, TikTok's video suggestions are based on the user's activities and preferences within the app – as a result, the ForYou page<sup>6</sup> looks different for each user (cf. Cervi, 2021). If a user mainly consumes cooking videos and interacts with similar content on TikTok, this will result in the ForYou page of this user mainly consisting of cooking videos. Videos on TikTok can range from 15 seconds to up to 10 minutes in length, but the trend leans towards short videos of user-generated content (cf. Kaye et al., 2020). In addition to simply consuming videos, users also have the option to respond to videos themselves using the "Duet" feature, start a live stream, or integrate parts of other creators' videos into their own videos using the "Stitch" feature (cf. Bhandari & Bimo, 2022). Furthermore, the platform offers a variety of options to edit, add effects, and modify videos within the app (cf. Neyaz et al., 2020). Therefore, no third-party tools need to be used to produce a video for TikTok, which further increases user engagement and time spent on the app (cf. Miltsov, 2022).

In addition to the visual component, sounds are an integral element of the TikTok ecosystem. Users can utilize music provided by the platform, upload their own sounds, or use sounds from other creators (cf. Radovanović, 2022). The more users use a particular sound, the more frequently videos featuring that sound are displayed to other users on their ForYou page, potentially triggering a global trend (cf. Ling et al., 2021; Pilipets, 2023). The significant influence of TikTok on the entire music industry, including the promotion of new music and its placement in chart lists, is undisputed today (cf. Coulter, 2022). The strong focus on music can still be traced back to the app's past as Musical.ly. However, today, the platform offers a wide range of thematic orientations, from humorous sketches and cooking tutorials to political explanation videos (cf. Bhandari & Bimo, 2022). Aside from the

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<sup>6</sup> The app interface, where the videos are displayed, is titled ForYou Page.



diverse content, the core of TikTok is its community. When creators with a large following initiate or participate in a trend (such as a dance challenge, showcasing specific moments from their daily lives, or participating in a protest with a hashtag like #BlackLivesMatter), other users can join in and become part of the trend with their own videos (cf. Robson & Tsou, 2023; Bhandari & Bimo, 2022). This participation in public events by sharing their own videos encourages and enables users “to be relevant during “live” cultural moments as “everyone” is doing them.” (Zulli & Zulli, 2022: 11)

### *Characteristics and Behaviour of Users*

While TikTok's predecessor, Musical.ly, was considered a platform for “preteens and teens“ (Rettberg, 2017: 1), TikTok is also highly frequented by older users. According to a study by DataReportal (2023) conducted in collaboration with Kepios, Meltwater, and We Are Social, with participants over 18 years old, the global TikTok audience in October 2023 consisted of 36.2 percent of users aged 18 to 24. In addition to its popularity among Generation Z, TikTok has also gained fame among Millennials: 32.1 percent of the global audience consists of users aged 25 to 43 (cf. *ibid.*). However, children and teenagers also regularly use TikTok. According to a study by Vogels & Gelles-Watnick (2022), 67 percent of American 13 to 17-year-olds used the app in 2022. A similar trend can be observed in Germany. The following graphs illustrate the demographic breakdown of German TikTok users by gender, age, and level of education.

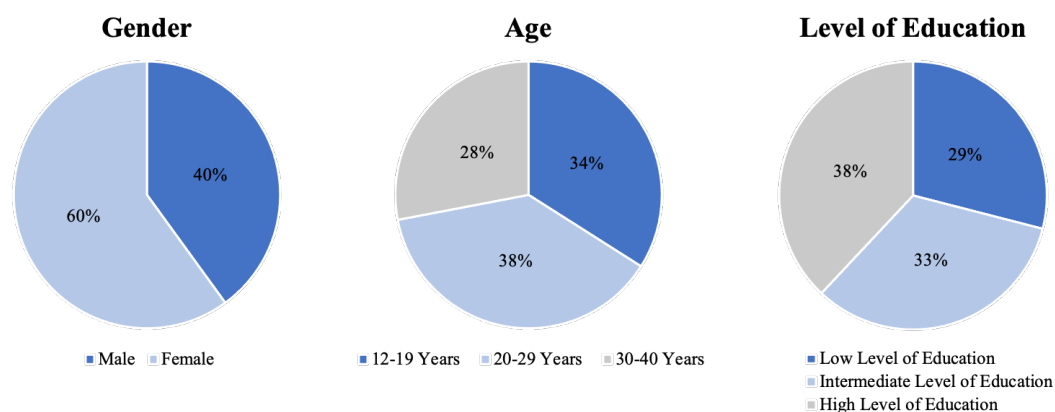


Figure 3 Structural Shares of TikTok Users after Granow and Scolari (2022)

For users, TikTok offers an unprecedented variety of consumption possibilities. Users utilize the app to feel part of a community, to escape from their offline lives, to educate themselves on specific topics, or simply for entertainment purposes (cf. Boffone, 2022). The "never-ending" ForYou page with its “unpredictable flow and potential eventfulness” (Lupinacci, 2021: 2) motivates users to keep scrolling endlessly. An origin of user behavior can be demonstrated by a quote from a study by



Bhandari & Bimo (2022) involving 18 to 24 year old college students. One participant explained the particular allure of TikTok by

*“[TikTok] just continuously recommends me content that I enjoy, like Netflix will recommend shows. I never really like any of the shows Netflix recommends me, I usually hate them (...). But on TikTok, the material that is recommended to me is always really good, even though it recommends such a bulk amount.”* (cf. *ibid.*: 7)

While "Instagram Reels" and "YouTube Shorts" now offer similar features, TikTok was the first to create a highly immersive online environment that motivates users to engage in hours of video consumption and interaction (cf. Miltsov, 2022). In Germany, TikTok is used an average of 23.4 hours per month in 2023, compared to WhatsApp (11 hours), YouTube (10 hours and 48 minutes), Facebook (10 hours and 36 minutes), and Instagram (8.5 hours), which are significantly less utilized by Germans (cf. DataReportal, 2023). Thus, TikTok boasts the highest user engagement duration among all social networks in Germany. Zuo and Wang (2019) categorize users into three groups based on different production forms and goals in app usage: ordinary individuals, opinion leaders, and businesses. While the motivations of regular TikTok users will be further discussed in Chapter 3.2, the unique position of opinion leaders and businesses will be briefly touched upon here.

The TikTok era has ushered in an unprecedented form of popularity. The platform Instagram, which is also highly frequented by young users, is associated with attributes such as “social comparison” (Yang, 2016: 707) or “the pressure to look perfect” (Pedalino & Camerini, 2022: 2). On TikTok, the first opinion leaders gained attention with seemingly spontaneously recorded videos from their "bedrooms" or their family's gardens, featuring self-made dances that even non-professionals could easily imitate (cf. Kennedy, 2020). This principle allowed, for example, 19-year-old US-American Charli D’Amelio to build a follower base of over 133 million TikTok followers and establish herself as an influencer with partners like Delta Air Lines, Starbucks, Dunkin Donuts, or her own clothing line (cf. Dagher, 2023; Chen, 2023). The relatable and authentic video settings and demeanor of the creator particularly resonate with young girls of similar age, prompting them to identify with Charli and can lead to the question: “if we are living in similar houses, dressing in similar clothes, speaking similar languages and listening to similar music, why can’t we also become popular TikTok creators like Charli D’Amelio?” (Lin et al., 2023: 13)

This relationship with the role models on the app can consequently serve as a trigger for users to become part of the TikTok ecosystem with their own content and aspire to emulate their idols. The platform's logic also enables users without social media background to build a large following. Whether a video goes viral on TikTok is not determined by the sender's prominence but rather by the significance of the video itself (cf. Oertel et al., 2022). The rise of "ordinary" people to highly viewed

accounts, coupled with the authenticity of creators, makes TikTok an optimal platform for advertisers (cf. Lin et al., 2023). The young age of the TikTok audience also makes users particularly receptive to advertising on the platform (cf. Haenlein et al., 2020). Unlike in a commercial where the company is the sender, in the case of advertising in user-generated content (UGC<sup>7</sup>), the creator can position themselves as a genuine user of the product or service and provide a personal recommendation to their community (cf. Ansari et al., 2019; Kim & Song, 2017; Wang, 2021). In a collaboration between companies and creators, advertisers typically pay platforms for distributing the content to viewers and compensate video creators based on the number of views the content receives (cf. Nguyen & Veer, 2024). Product links can be clicked under the respective video, however, promotional content on TikTok must be labeled as such (cf. Yuan et al., 2022). Due to TikTok's authentic and entertainment-based nature, companies are also compelled to adapt advertising messages on their own channels to the platform's logic, relying more on testimonials and creative strategies rather than elaborate product videos (cf. Araujo et al., 2022).

### **2.2.2 Knowledge Transfer on TikTok**

The young audience, the short video format, and its origin as a former dance app may suggest that only entertainment content thrives on TikTok. However, educational content is actually a significant component of the app, providing ideal tools for users to publish short learning videos (cf. Fiallos Ordoñez et al., 2021). The educational aspect of TikTok evolved from the COVID-19 pandemic (cf. Ling et al., 2023; Literat, 2021). Children and young adults had to stay at home and access to education was hindered by the online environment. As a consequence, TikTok responded with the #Learn-WithTikTok initiative, for which a \$50 million Creative Learning Fund was established to provide support for creators in producing educational content and to offer resources for students (cf. TikTok, 2019). According to the Federal Agency for Civic Education<sup>8</sup>, videos with the hashtag #Learn-WithTikTok had been viewed 23.4 billion times as of August 2023, while the German equivalent hashtag #LernenmitTikTok garnered 16.7 billion views (cf. Bösch, 2023).

This initiative and the increase in educational content on TikTok motivated numerous individuals from the fields of science and education to publish their content on the platform as well (cf. Ruth, 2022). On the learners' side, the response to knowledge dissemination on TikTok was also positive. For instance, students participating in a biological research program at Binghamton Univer-

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<sup>7</sup> “User-generated Content is any kind of text, data or action performed by online digital systems users, published and disseminated by the same user through independent channels, that incur an expressive or communicative effect either on an individual manner or combined with other contributions from the same or other sources.” (Santos, 2022: 13)

<sup>8</sup> ger. “Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung”

sity were encouraged to create TikToks during lab work and to watch videos produced by other students (cf. Radin & Light, 2022). The students indicated in the project evaluation, that “teaching TikToks were helpful for learning new content remotely before entering the lab.” (cf. *ibid.*: 2) A study by Jacobs et al. (2022) on the effectiveness of TikTok tutorial videos in a statistics course yielded similar results: here, too, the short videos positively influenced the performance of the learners.

TikTok is not only used for academic content – it has also become essential for staying up-to-date on political issues. Serrano et al. (2020), through a hashtag analysis focusing on differences between US Republican and Democratic party members, concluded that TikTok sees more usage of political hashtags compared to Instagram. However, among young German social media users, YouTube appears to be more frequently used for political information gathering, though TikTok is nearly catching up. The JIM Jugendstudie 2023 reveals that among 12 to 19-year-olds, TikTok is the third most frequented source of information<sup>9</sup> on global events.

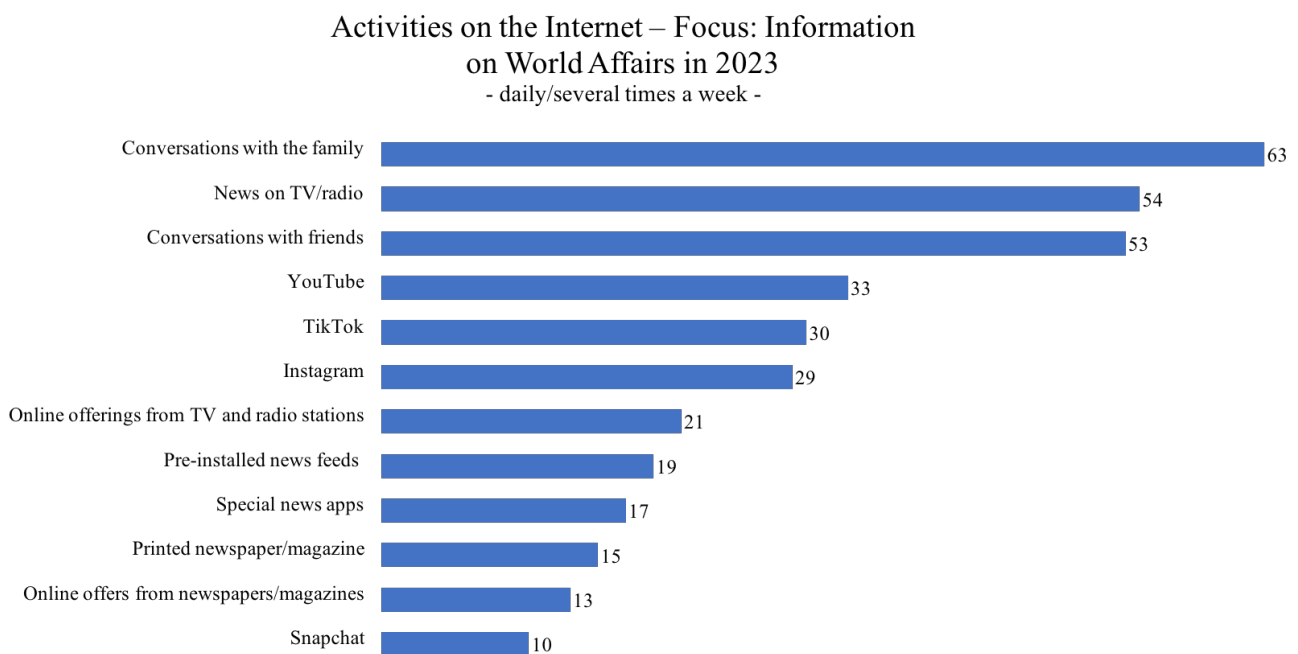


Figure 4 Frequency of Use of Information Sources on Current World Events after Feierabend et al. (2023: 44)

The JIM study also illustrates a future trend for political education on TikTok: in 2022, TikTok usage stood at 25 percent, while Instagram had a share of 30 percent (cf. Feierabend et al., 2022). Within a year, TikTok has surpassed Instagram and is now the second most frequently used online source for obtaining information about current events, following YouTube. It is therefore conceivable that TikTok's strong position in this ranking will continue to improve in the future. The apparent significance of TikTok for (political) knowledge transfer has led to large media organizations no longer being able to ignore the power of TikTok, and they have consequently established their own channels on the

<sup>9</sup> In 2023, for the first time *Coversations with friends/family* were also included in the survey on information procurement for word events as part of the JIM study. Since conversations with attachment figures cannot necessarily be rated as adequate sources of information, TikTok (as in the JIM Study 2022) can still be rated in third place as a source of information.

platform (cf. Vázquez-Herrero et al., 2020). This increasing activity does not primarily result from economic goals, as TikTok and Instagram are private networks without direct profit-maximizing opportunities for companies. Rather, it is aimed at maintaining brand diversity and keeping the offering attractive for younger target groups (cf. Hendrickx et al., 2022). The rapid evolution of media houses' presence on TikTok and their acceptance among users can be illustrated by the TikTok account of the Washington Post in the United States. While the Washington Post's channel had around 644 thousand followers in October 2020 (cf. Klug, 2020) already ranking among the more successful media outlets on TikTok, the channel's reach doubled to over 1.4 million followers by June 2022 (cf. Klug & Autenrieth, 2023). In terms of content, TikTok presents news media outlets with unprecedented challenges in format development: topics must be presented in a short, understandable, and factually accurate manner for a potentially non-academic audience, in a way that captures viewers' interest within the first few seconds and prevents them from swiping away (cf. Titze, 2023). Vázquez-Herrero et al. (2020: 13) characterize the work of news media outlets on TikTok as: "They do not literally dance the news, but they position the brand and show work behind the scenes in a casual and musical atmosphere that seems appropriate for the TikTok audience." To provide some specific examples of channels aimed at the transfer of political knowledge, the following will delve deeper into six German-speaking TikTok channels. First, the work of German media is presented through channels of public-service organizations. Subsequently, three journalistic channels run by private individuals are introduced. This examination will highlight the distinct approaches and contributions of each channel to the political discourse.



Figure 5 @tagesschau on TikTok



Figure 6 @br24 on TikTok



Figure 7 @diedaoben on TikTok

*@tagesschau*: The news channel *@tagesschau* is the TikTok presence of ARD's national news broadcast and counts over 1,4 million followers. The channel is considered a prime example of news dissemination on TikTok and won the Digital Media Award from the Federal Association for Digital Media in 2023 (cf. NDR, 2023; Titze, 2023). The channel features four hosts who report daily on news, show behind-the-scenes content from TV production, and summarize the day's events with the “News der Woche<sup>10</sup>” format.

The channel offers frontal explanations and thematic contextualizations by its hosts, complemented by video and image inserts – interviews are not featured on the channel. In contrast to the highly objective reporting of the television based Tagesschau (cf. Lohs, 2020), the topics on TikTok are broken down in colloquial language, presented in an entertaining manner, and the choice of topics is also geared towards young people, as seen in the exemplary video discussing the potential change in the age limit for beer (see Figure 5; NDR, 2023; Tagesschau, 2023; cf. Titze, 2023).

*@br24*: Compared to Tagesschau, the *@br24* account on TikTok, with over 415 thousand followers, belongs to Bayerischer Rundfunk and thus to a regional broadcasting corporation. The regional focus of the account is also evident in its choice of content topics. Regional news items are featured on *@br24* alongside national and international news (see Figure 6; BR24, 2023). The account is predominantly managed without hosts, instead relying on voiceovers and subtitles. However, when national or international topics require detailed thematic contextualization, a host steps in front of the camera to provide background information.

*@diedaoben*: The account belongs to the content network funk, a collaboration between ARD and ZDF, and has established itself on Instagram as a successful, youthful news channel with updates from the Bundestag, boasting 318 thousand followers. On the TikTok account, which has a smaller following of 13 thousand compared to its Instagram counterpart, three hosts regularly appear to provide insights into political developments (see Figures 7; DIE DA OBEN!, 2023). However, the primary function of the account is to share relevant statements from Bundestag speeches. While these are often shared without specifying the exact debate or the context of the speech, the channel includes source references in the videos.

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<sup>10</sup> engl. News of the Week



In addition to these three channels, all publicly funded, there are also several successful independent channels aiming to transfer political knowledge on TikTok.

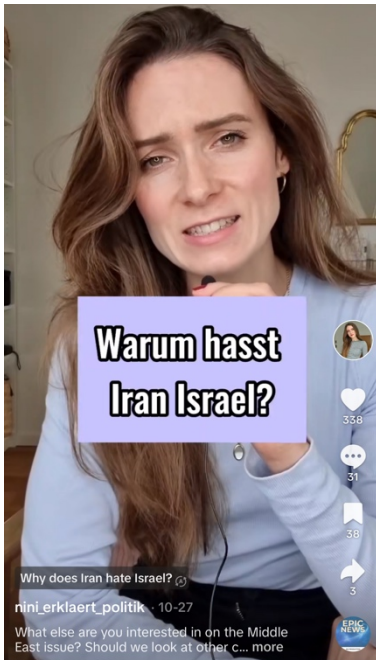


Figure 8 @nini\_erklaert\_politik on Tiktok



Figure 9 @matthiasrenger on Tiktok

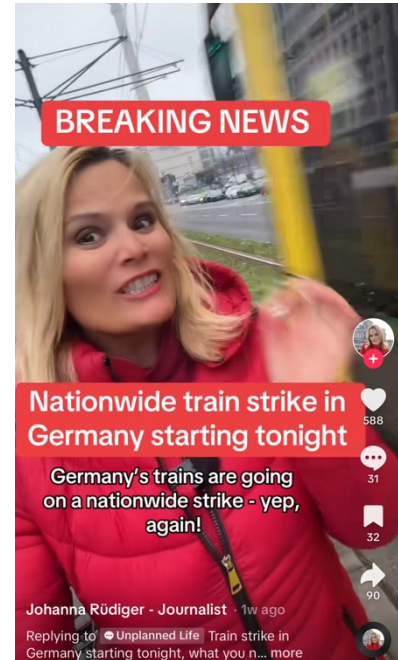


Figure 10 @johannaruediger on Tiktok

*@nini\_erklaert\_politik*: The political scientist, journalist, and moderator Nina, with over 142 thousand followers on her TikTok account, explains current political news and provides context for global events. Additionally, she occasionally shares thematic background information, such as on the Middle East conflict (see Figure 8; nini\_erklaert\_politik, 2023). The content creator managed her account in collaboration with Südwestrundfunk for a year, but since July 2023, she has been running the channel independently.

*@matthiasrenger*: Matthias Renger, primarily known as an actor, author, and podcaster, showcases political sketches on his TikTok account, adopting the role of a PR advisor to political figures. By incorporating real quotes from politicians into his videos, he creates virtual conversations, such as with Bavarian Minister President Markus Söder in "preparation" for the state election in Bavaria (see Figure 9; Renger, 2023). While he presents current debates and political news, his content primarily focuses on entertainment, lacking in-depth analysis and without citation of sources.

*@johannaruediger*: Johanna Rüdiger exemplifies the phenomenon described in Chapter 2.1.2, wherein journalists establish their own channels and produce content independently of their affiliated media outlets. While serving as the Head of Social Media Strategy at Deutsche Welle (DW), she has built her own political TikTok channel with over 223 thousand followers (cf. republica, 2023). In her videos, Johanna regularly shares news updates from Berlin, focusing thematically on information from Germany, such as regional railway strikes (see Figure 10; Ruediger, 2023). She communicates in English in her videos, thus engaging with an international community within Germany.

These six examples are representative of many others, both public-service and private channels, which are following the trend of consuming news via social media, heralding a new era of knowledge dissemination. Nevertheless, consuming political content on TikTok also poses significant risks.

### **2.2.3 TikTok in Controversy**

Since its inception to the present day, the app TikTok has been consistently embroiled in significant controversies (cf. Miltsov, 2022). The following points briefly touch upon some of these discourse points. However, the primary focus of demonstrating the risks of TikTok lies in the controversies surrounding censorship accusations and disinformation, thus warranting detailed elaboration.

**Lack of privacy policy:** Despite TikTok being privately owned by the technology conglomerate ByteDance and operated exclusively outside of China, there is suspicion that the app and the personal data of its users are still subject to control by the Chinese government (cf. Liu, 2021). Furthermore, TikTok's terms of service include a disclaimer clause that absolves the app from responsibility for the risk of data sharing (cf. Kaye et al., 2020). The relatively young target audience is still willing to overlook security concerns and accept the terms and conditions without prior engagement with the content (cf. De Los Santos & Klug, 2022).

**Psychological effects:** To increase user engagement, TikTok employs addictive, sophisticated designs and hides the passage of time within its interface, which can lead to addiction, particularly among young users (cf. Lin, 2023). The immense time distortion on TikTok makes the app the most addictive platform among all social networks (cf. Roberts et al., 2021). The so-called TikTok Use Disorder (TTUD) can also lead to memory loss, depression, anxiety, and stress (cf. Sha & Dong, 2021). The constant stimulation on TikTok also has profound effects on users' attention spans, which can negatively impact their ability to concentrate (cf. Bulut, 2023).

**Algorithms and filter bubbles:** The platform algorithm on TikTok curates content tailored to the user's app usage behavior (cf. Negreira-Rey et al., 2022). This personalized content curation supports the formation of filter bubbles, wherein users are served information filtered according to their personal preferences. Consequently, they only interact with content that aligns with their own beliefs, without exploring other perspectives (cf. Grandinetti, 2023). As users spend more time on the app, the diversity of available content for them decreases (cf. Dahlgren, 2021). This can lead, among other

things, to the radicalization of political opinions (cf. Kaluža, 2022) or participation in conspiracy theories (cf. Lim, 2022).

**Copyright infringements:** The authorship on TikTok, especially regarding audio usage, is particularly opaque. TikTok users can create viral videos by utilizing audio, where the corresponding audio is then attributed to the TikTok creator instead of the original artist (cf. Kaye et al., 2020). Users can easily upload works from artists without permission, and these uploads rarely occur with the proper licensing from the creators (cf. Gräfe & Kunze, 2020). The same principle applies to videos on TikTok: many users re-upload YouTube videos on TikTok, thereby committing clear copyright infringement. Due to the vast amount of in-app content and the challenges in tracing intellectual property, many violations go unpunished (cf. Gagliardi, 2022; Rahma & Mahmudah, 2022; Yuan, 2022). Of course, copyright infringements and filter bubbles also play a significant role in the discussion of political content on TikTok. However, a particularly relevant criticism of the app for this work is the access to information.

**Censorship:** TikTok, owned by the Chinese company ByteDance, is operated under a government known for strict censorship against foreign websites and social media platforms such as Instagram, YouTube, or Twitter. Instead, it offers state-regulated Chinese alternatives (cf. Wei, 2017). Chinese citizens may not have access to the app TikTok, but they can use the Chinese version called "Douyin", which was launched in China in 2016 (cf. Zhao, 2021). In contrast to TikTok, Douyin is subject to Chinese internet regulations and is therefore obliged to adhere to government-mandated information control guidelines (cf. Lu & Pan, 2022). And although Douyin presents itself as an objective platform, the platform “treads a fine line in balancing multiple intersecting and sometimes conflicting principles including state policies, the authorities’ administrative power at different levels, its own economic interests, as well as the highly heterogeneous complementors.” (Yu et al., 2023: 9f.) The international counterpart of Douyin, TikTok, officially falls under the ownership of ByteDance. However, the United States has expressed concerns that TikTok may be influenced by directives from the Chinese government, potentially allowing manipulation of public opinion through censorship or content promotion (cf. Miao & Huang, 2021).

Due to its proximity to the Chinese government, coupled with controversies surrounding data privacy violations, a TikTok ban in the United States has been widely discussed. Since early 2023, the app has been unavailable on devices issued by the federal government, and some universities have blocked TikTok on their campus Wi-Fi networks (cf. Maheshwari & Holpuch, 2023; Scherr & Wang, 2021). Regardless of potential governmental influence on TikTok, the platform algorithm is also discussed as a trigger for potential censorship. Within its content moderation framework, the app can



regulate user-generated content by simply adjusting the relevance of the content, thus influencing its visibility (cf. Chen et al., 2020; Gillespie, 2017, Hearn, 2020; Zeng & Kaye, 2022). The TikTok algorithm is designed not only to provide personalized recommendations but also to detect and block inappropriate content (cf. Weimann & Masri, 2020). In a study on content moderation using the TikTok algorithm, Steen et al., (2023: 12) conclude that "TikTok's algorithmic content moderation system further traces, restricts, and suppresses user communication about unwanted themes, even when they are mentioned in harmless contexts." Furthermore, it can be argued that on an algorithm-based platform like TikTok, "algorithmic censorship" occurs by design, as the power over the content shown to each user lies with the platform rather than the user themselves (cf. Cobbe, 2021; Duffy & Meisner, 2023).

**Desinformation:** One of the greatest challenges of social media platforms, and therefore the second criticism particularly relevant to this work regarding TikTok, is the identification and containment of fake news. A study conducted by Global Witness and the Cybersecurity for Democracy Team at New York University hid election-related misinformation within advertisements on TikTok and examined whether the platforms YouTube, Facebook, and TikTok would detect these fake news items (cf. Global Witness, 2022). Of the total ten tested ads, the TikTok algorithm classified 80 percent as appropriate, with only 20 percent being blocked (cf. *ibid.*). Particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic, the platform faced a significant issue with fake news. In a study by Southwick et al. (2021), 750 videos with the hashtag #coronavirus were analyzed, and 27% of the videos contained misinformation. TikTok not only struggles with fake news in the healthcare sector but also regarding political information. Especially since the 2020 United States presidential election, it is evident that fake news on TikTok also influences political opinion formation (cf. Alonso-López et al., 2021).

Technologies like deepfakes further complicate differentiation and can attribute fake news to political figures. For instance, in the context of the Russian invasion in Ukraine in 2022, a deepfake video of Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky was released, depicting him formulating a capitulation to Russia (cf. Broinowski, 2023).

This development poses an immense challenge for the platform with its relatively young target audience. Children and young adults, who have limited experience in critically evaluating media content and sources, are consequently vulnerable to fake news (cf. Loos et al., 2018). The app attempts to address these issues by introducing a "Restricted Mode" which blocks inappropriate content (cf. Anderson, 2020) and the "Guided Mode," allowing parents to access their children's accounts to control usage time, monitor contacts, and manage the filtering of the "For You" page (cf. TikTok, 2020). Nevertheless, TikTok continues to face criticism for not showing sufficient commitment to youth protection (cf. Johnson, 2022).

### 3 Media Usage Behaviour on Social Media

To understand how social media platforms like TikTok contribute to the political opinion formation of adolescents and young adults, it is necessary to first understand their media usage behavior, including their diverse needs and expectations. The aim of this chapter is, in contrast to Chapter 2, to illuminate the perspective of users through the Uses & Gratification approach and to present the influence of media, particularly social media apps like TikTok, on the political opinion formation process along with its risks.

#### 3.1 Motives and Needs in Digital Media Use

An understanding of the individual motivations of users of digital media is not only relevant from a scientific perspective but rather essential for implementing the right strategies and tools in practice to reach users (cf. Karahanna et al., 2015). From the characterization of TikTok in Chapter 2.1.1., a variety of user motivations such as information-seeking, escapism, or relaxation can already be inferred, which have been scientifically categorized as such (cf. Hollenbaugh, 2011; Stone et al., 2022; Whiting & Williams, 2013). Schweiger (2007) divides the plethora of theoretical approaches to media usage into three perspectives: the functional perspective explores reasons behind media usage, the processual perspective delves into the course of media usage, and the structural perspective examines the framework conditions of media usage (see Table 2).

	<b>Functional Perspective</b>	<b>Processual Perspective</b>	<b>Structural Perspective</b>
<b>Guiding Question</b>	Why do people use media?	How do people interact with media?	Under what conditions do people use media?
<b>Causes</b>	Individual needs <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cognitive</li> <li>• Affective</li> <li>• Social</li> <li>• Identity</li> <li>• Time</li> </ul>	Situation influences: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Medium (content, presentation, usability, credibility, etc.)</li> <li>• Recipient (emotions, moods, needs, expectations, etc.)</li> <li>• Context (time, location, social environment, weather, etc.)</li> </ul>	Different conditions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Individual</li> <li>• Social environment</li> <li>• Society</li> <li>• Media system</li> </ul>
<b>Effects</b>	Media preferences and media usage patterns	Typical media usage episodes involving selection and reception processes	Media diffusion, media appropriation, media usage, audience structure

Table 2 Perspectives of Media Usage after Schweiger (2007: 21), translated into English by the author

Regarding the examination of knowledge transfer on the social media platform TikTok, primarily the functional perspective and the processual perspective are relevant for this work and will be addressed

accordingly. In terms of individual needs in media usage, the Uses & Gratifications model can be employed (cf. Nabi & Oliver, 2009). The model is used when motives behind media usage are to be explored and despite its long tradition, it “has proven its longevity and remarkable ability to attract new research and explorations over the past four decades.” (Al-Menayes, 2015: 43) Thus, the U&G approach<sup>11</sup> is used in current studies such as research on augmented reality filters (cf. Ibáñez-Sánchez et al., 2022), live-stream shopping (cf. Ma, 2021), podcast consumption (Perks et al., 2019) and also on TikTok usage (cf. Falgoust et al., 2022; Vaterlaus & Winter, 2021; Yang & Ha, 2021). The U&G approach is an audience-centered theory that explains communication behavior based on individual media usage and media selection (cf. Rubin, 2000). Whereas previously, "What does the media do to people?" was the fundamental consideration of effect research, it evolved with the U&G approach to include the question: "What do people do with the media?" (cf. Katz et al., 1973).

Before this approach prevailed in audience research and placed the active and self-determined audience at its core, media effects were attributed to causes originating from the communicator (cf. Schenk, 2007). The starting point of the approach is the media recipient with their individual needs, who uses media and content actively and voluntarily to satisfy these needs (cf. Katz et al., 1973). Personal values, interests, and social roles influence media usage, and the recipient intentionally decides for or against communication channels (cf. Rubin, 2000; Ruggiero, 2000). For the U&G approach, the keyword therefore is: Audience selects (cf. Katz et al., 1973). According to the Uses & Gratifications approach, the development from a thought to an active action looks as follows:

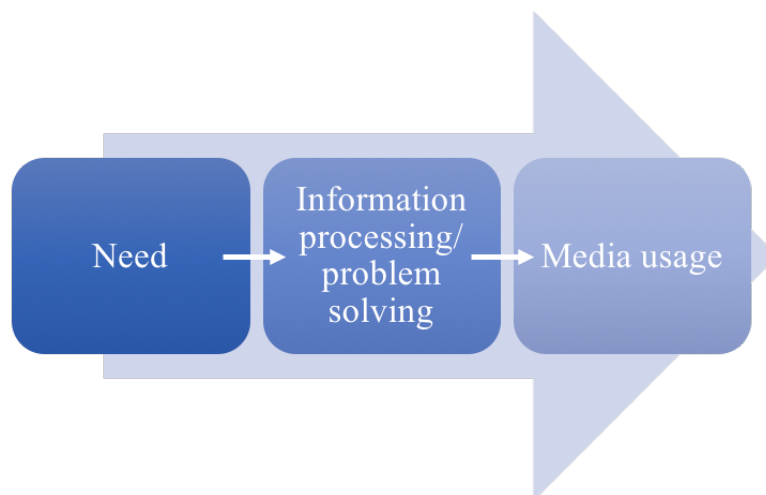


Figure 9 Basic Concept U&G Approach after Schweiger (2007:62)

Mass media satisfy a variety of needs arising from social roles and psychological factors (cf. Katz, Gurevitch & Haas, 1973). To explain individual motives in media consumption, four groups of needs are presented: cognitive needs, affective needs, social/integrative needs, and identity needs (see Table

<sup>11</sup> The Uses-and-Gratifications model is abbreviated as U&G approach in the following parts of this paper.

2; Pai & Arnott, 2013; Schweiger, 2007). *Cognitive needs* describe the search for information and knowledge, serving for orientation and environmental observation (cf. Katz et al., 1973). For example, someone who turns on the television with the aim of informing themselves or learning something new is satisfying their cognitive needs (cf. Nabi et al., 2006). Indeed, information search in the online ecosystem can be classified as a cognitive function; accordingly, "information search" on social media can also be categorized as a cognitive need (cf. Browne et al., 2007).

Personal emotions drive *affective needs*, which include distraction, relaxation, recuperation, suppression, combating boredom, seeking emotional arousal, as well as enhancing aesthetic, pleasant, and emotional experiences (cf. Katz, Gurevitch & Haas, 1973). Indeed, those who use media to pass time, escape from reality, or be stimulated by content also satisfy affective needs (cf. Deleuze et al., 2019). Katz, Gurevitch und Haas (1973) attribute affective needs to a visit to the cinema: here, motives such as relaxation, entertainment, and emotional experiences come together, providing satisfaction for affective needs.

Social media serves the satisfaction of social interaction needs and networking with other users while also enabling participation in everyday discussions (cf. Coyle & Vaughn, 2008; Hampton et al., 2017; Reinecke et al., 2014). These *social needs* also serve for subsequent communication and social integration. Media provide topics for discussion in non-virtual settings and can motivate the formation of social groups and participation in common activities (cf. Schweiger, 2007; Snethen & Zook, 2016). The fulfillment of social needs is also influenced by the presence of individuals and characters in the mass media, as the establishment of intimate relationships between the audience and media figures satisfies the desire for social contact vicariously (cf. Dai & Walther, 2018; Giles, 2002). This concept is called parasocial interaction and describes a media involvement in which media users see (virtual) media personalities as friends, seek advice from them, and imagine themselves to be part of their social world (cf. Rubin et al., 1985). Parasocial interaction can be observed especially on video-based networks like YouTube, where the everydayness and approachability of media personalities create the illusion of a mutual relationship among recipients (cf. Albiez, 2020). Accordingly, parasocial interaction is also relevant on a social network like TikTok, where creators present themselves as particularly approachable and accessible (cf. Akhtar & Islam, 2023; Flecha-Ortiz et al., 2023).

The *identity need* explains why people also turn to media representations of unpleasant behaviors such as war videos: it serves to reinforce personal values, search for role models, and supports the process of self-discovery (cf. Schweiger, 2007). This category of needs not only plays a role in information search from the perspective of media consumers but also empowers users to create a digital identity, develop it as they please, and edit an image of how they want to be perceived by clicking on "Create Profile" on a social media platform like TikTok (cf. Greenhow & Robelia, 2009;

Thomas et al., 2017). Before the online era, needs could be more clearly assigned to different media. For example, television, with its diverse character, tended to satisfy affective needs, whereas newspapers, with their informational and news-oriented nature, primarily targeted cognitive needs (cf. Katz et al., 1973). With the introduction of interactive (online) media, users were given the opportunity to input their own personal content into the electronic system and interact with other users (cf. Schenk, 2007). Thus, online media, in addition to serving the need for information and education, also fulfill socialization and entertainment functions (cf. Korhan & Ersoy, 2016). Recipients have access to a continuously expanding array of media content through online offerings, from which they can select according to their needs, regardless of time and location (cf. Trültzsch-Wijnen, 2020). The interplay between needs, availability, and offerings makes it impossible to predict an individual's actual media usage or to isolate usage motives. For example, it would be erroneous to conclude that a TikTok user exclusively utilizes the app for affective needs satisfaction simply because they have formed parasocial relationships with some creators (cf. *ibid.*; Schweiger, 2019). Nevertheless, the following attempts to delve more specifically into the uses and gratifications of TikTok usage, as those motives also influence the consumption of political TikTok videos.

### *3.2 Uses and Gratifications on TikTok*

#### *Affective Needs*

Social media platforms like TikTok enable passive content consumption, where users have limited opportunities to make their own choices and instead merely consume and be entertained by content (cf. Khan, 2017). According to a study by Bucknell Bossen & Kottasz (2020:18), TikTok users were surveyed about their motivations for using the platform, revealing that “the gratification of affect/entertainment was the primary motivation.” Upon closer examination of the passive TikTok usage motive "entertainment", it becomes evident that escapism also serves as a significant motive within the affective category of needs (cf. Omar & Dequan 2020; Scherr & Wang, 2021). Escapism cannot be exclusively attributed to TikTok; other social media platforms like Instagram (cf. Kırçaburun & Griffiths, 2019), YouTube (cf. Buf & Ștefăniță, 2020) or the streaming platform Twitch (cf. Chen & Chang, 2019) are also used to escape reality in a virtual manner. On the Chinese TikTok counterpart Douyin, entertainment is also the most common motivation for use (cf. Yang & Ha, 2021).

To contextualize the relevance of affective needs in TikTok usage, a study by Al-Menayes (2015) can be referenced: their survey found a correlation between the time a user spends on social media and their satisfaction with the platform. The longer they spend on the platform, the more entertained they feel. Thus, one could assume a connection between the affective motivation of "entertainment" and the regular usage duration of users. Because of the personalized ForYou page, Users

no longer need to actively search for suitable content; it is directly fed into their feed, and the more time they spend on the app, the more the content is constantly tailored to their entertainment needs.

### *Cognitive Needs*

In Chapter 2.2.2., it was already demonstrated how TikTok has established itself as a source of information: TikTok has become the third most frequently used source of information on global events among 12 to 19-year-olds (cf. Feierabend et al., 2023; Feierabend et al., 2022). Cognitive needs on TikTok, however, cannot be exclusively narrowed down to seeking information about current events: TikTok is also used for acquiring healthcare knowledge (cf. Song et al., 2021), information for purchase decisions (cf. Wang & Oh, 2023) or for staying up to date with celebrity news and trend development (cf. Bucknell Bossen & Kottasz, 2020). Studies by Yang & Ha (2021), Omar & Dequan (2020) and Scherr & Wang (2021) indicate that information seeking and information sharing play a relatively subordinate role compared to entertainment motivation. TikTok, as a video-sharing platform, inherently possesses an entertainment character due to its visual component, whereas platforms like X, as a text-based microblogging platform, are more associated with informative gratifications (cf. Quan-Haase et al., 2015).

### *Social Needs*

TikTok is not designed as a traditional social networking platform for interpersonal communication. However, the app provides the infrastructure for users to send messages to each other, share videos with other users, and follow other accounts (cf. Anderson, 2020; Shutsko, 2020). The mutual sharing of videos is even believed to have a positive impact on existing relationships between users (cf. Vaterlaus & Winter, 2021). Relationships can also form between previously unknown individuals through the app. On TikTok, community-building can be observed, stemming from shared participation in a trend, which fosters its own dynamics (cf. Bonifazi et al., 2022).

As it is known on platforms like Instagram, where relationships are formed, for example, through participation in influencer events (cf. Miguel et al., 2022), similar dynamics are observed on TikTok. Offline communities are formed, such as the event series "Hot Girl Walk" in Berlin, which originated from a TikTok trend. Here, young TikTok users gather for joint activities, fostering connections beyond the digital realm (cf. Mittmann, 2023). Bucknell Bossen & Kottasz (2020) support the idea that TikTok serves as a platform for social networking as well and they further add, "that preadolescents (..) were also seeking out new friends and networks on TikTok in the same way that adolescents were." Nevertheless, social needs, like cognitive needs, do not seem to surpass the entertainment function of TikTok: the majority of users are passive content consumers who follow influencers and



content creators, building parasocial relationships with them, but do not prioritize interaction with others during app usage (cf. Yang & Ha, 2021).

### *Identity Needs*

Young people can become content creators on TikTok, portraying their daily lives and themselves as they wish or drawing inspiration from other creators (cf. Mahmudah et al., 2023). In spite of that, usage motives such as identity formation, fame desire, or social recognition play a significantly larger role for users who actively produce content rather than passively consuming it (cf. Bucknell Bossen & Kottasz, 2020). Nevertheless, the influence of TikTok on identity formation should not be underestimated: users can also engage in exchanges with others through the comment section under videos, providing and receiving feedback, which also contributes to the process of identity formation (cf. Montag et al., 2021). Since the app has such a wide range of uses and provides a platform for various perspectives, users come into contact with influences via TikTok that may be closed off to them in everyday life. For example, there is a queer community on TikTok that raises awareness for queer topics, thus bringing people with different sexualities into contact with those who may not have been socialized with sexual diversity before (cf. Duguay, 2023). In conclusion, it can be summarized that all categories of needs identified in the U&G approach after Katz et al. (1973) are found on TikTok. Nevertheless, due to the structure and functionality of the app with its ForYou Page, motives such as entertainment and escapism seem to prevail, making TikTok a platform with very prominent affective needs (cf. Omar & Dequan, 2020; Scherr & Wang, 2021; Yang & Ha, 2021).

### *3.3 The Role of Information Intermediaries in Shaping Political Opinion*

The profound influence of information intermediaries<sup>12</sup> on opinion formation and their resulting impact on the democratic process is widely debated today (cf. Oertel et al., 2022). In the 2023 Media Weight Study<sup>13</sup> conducted by the Medienanstalten, 62.6 percent of surveyed Germans aged 14 to 29 stated that the internet held the highest potential for shaping their opinions (cf. GIM, 2023). A data collection by Bitkom e.V (2023) further elaborates on this finding, indicating that 43 percent of Germans aged 16 to 29 perceive an influence of social networks on their political opinions. This chapter aims not only to examine the perspective of influential media but also to shed light on the user along with their individual dynamics in the opinion formation process, particularly in the context of the U&G approach (cf. Gerard & Orive, 1987).

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<sup>12</sup> The term information intermediaries covers various mediating services that potentially influence individual and public communication in the online space and act as gatekeepers to provide information for recipients. (cf. Schulz & Dankert, 2017)

<sup>13</sup> ger. Mediengewichtsstudie

From the perspective of media users, various components influence their opinion formation. Thus, in this process, individual approaches such as general information-seeking behavior, for instance, the utilization of heterogeneous or rather homogeneous sources (cf. Wunderlich, 2023), thematic prior knowledge (cf. Leonhard et al., 2019) as well as personal motivation to engage with the subject (cf. Stark et al., 2020) all play a significant role. At the same time, individual socialization, along with the user's perceived need for orientation (cf. Matthes, 2005) and the felt obligation to stay up-to-date with the news (cf. Berg, 2022; Palmer & Toff, 2020) can also influence the opinion formation process. Furthermore, opinion formation is influenced by whether there is already awareness of the topic in the media and how relevant this awareness is perceived by the user (cf. Huck, 2009; Wu et al., 2020). The latter two influences already indicate that information intermediaries strongly influence whether and to what extent topics are received, processed, and become part of users' personal opinions. Stark et al. (2018) illustrate the potential effects in the opinion formation process as a causal chain, where users follow a fact-finding process based on the topics proposed by the media, leading to the formation of individual opinions.

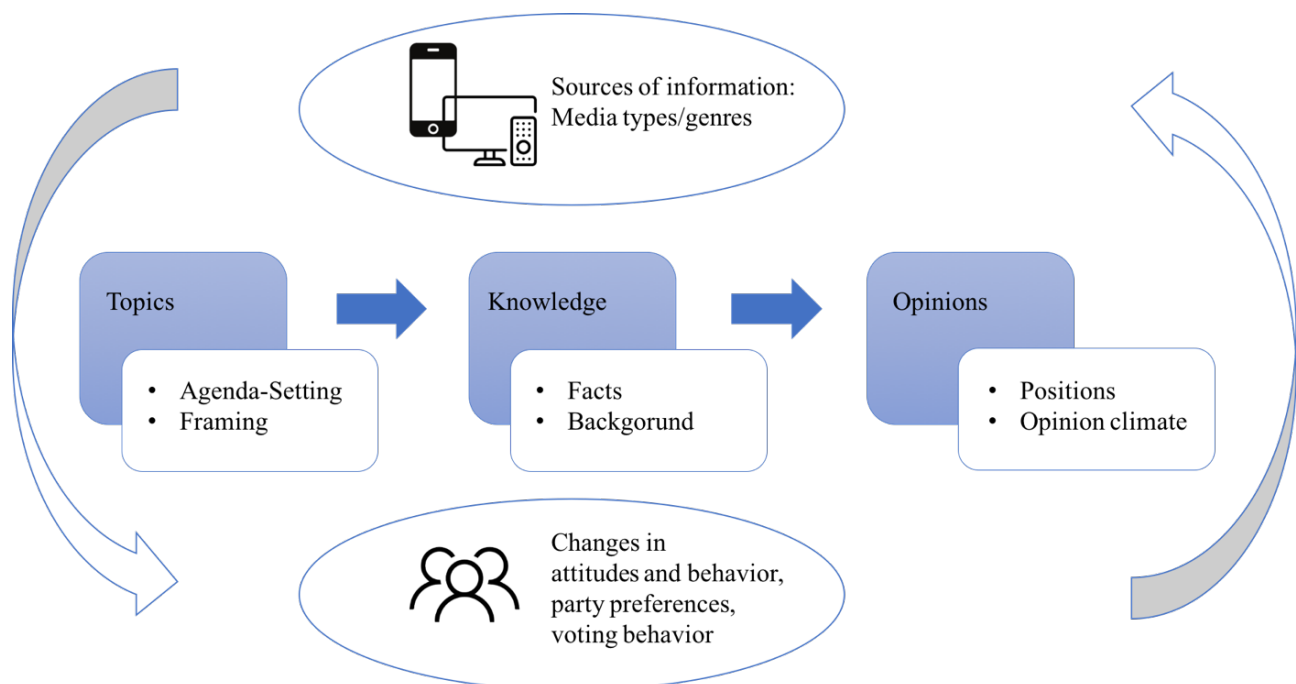


Figure 10 Impact Potential in the Opinion-forming Process after Stark et. al. (2018: 111)

Following the framework proposed by Stark et al. (2018), the specific influence of the media occurs already in the first step of the process, during topic selection. This significance of topic provision can also be extended to social media platforms such as TikTok and the associated influencing factors on (political) opinion formation, which is why the media phenomena of agenda-setting and framing will be further elaborated upon below (cf. Feezell, 2017; Hemphill et al., 2013).



### 3.3.1 Agenda-Setting

While mass media cannot explicitly control what people think, they do influence what people think about (cf. Coleman et al., 2008). At the core of the agenda-setting approach lies the influence of mass media on the public, determining “which issues – and which organizations – will be put on the public agenda for discussion.” (McCombs, 1977: 89) Specifically, this means that on the media agenda, certain topics are addressed, and through frequent publication frequency, presentation, and placement, the media determines what people think about on the public agenda, thus influencing the perceived relevance of topics by the audience in the long term (cf. Bentivegna & Artieri, 2020; McCombs & Valenzuela, 2020). McCombs (1977) demonstrates the media's influence on the public agenda using a curve. According to this, there is a minimum level of media exposure, or on social media, virality, required for a topic to gain prominence on the public agenda. Moreover, the more intensive the coverage continues, the greater the thematic significance becomes for media consumers (cf. Eichhorn, 1996; Hunt & Gruszczynski, 2021).

Langer & Gruber (2021) cite the media coverage and the associated thematic awareness in the British Windrush scandal as an example of the agenda-setting effect. In 2012, migration rules for the United Kingdom were tightened, leading to individuals living in the UK from former British colonies being considered and treated as illegal immigrants (cf. Cummings, 2020; Slaven, 2022). Despite the immense consequences for British citizens, the Windrush scandal reached the public agenda and political debate only in 2017, after the issue was picked up by major publications such as *The Guardian* and thus became part of the media agenda (cf. Langer & Gruber, 2021). This scandal also highlights that the media agenda also influences the political agenda. Political actors view media attention to topics as an indicator of currently relevant issues on the public agenda, accordingly anticipate the media's impact on the public, and adjust political discourses and strategies accordingly (cf. Walgrave & Van Aelst, 2006).

Of course, the media agenda cannot be generalized as the primary source for political debates; however, the “political agenda-setting” role of the media exerts significant influence on politics (cf. Aelst & Walgrave, 2011). A continuation and, so to say, the extreme of agenda setting is described by Haarkoetter (2022) as agenda cutting, where topics are intentionally neglected and therefore do not make their way onto the public agenda. For instance, the lack of COVID-19 media coverage by the Japanese public broadcaster NHK in the lead-up to the 2020 Olympic Games could be described as agenda cutting (cf. Buchmeier, 2022).

### 3.3.2 Framing

A frame can be seen as a mental structure that organizes, categorizes, and ultimately enables the formation of opinions based on a variety of pieces of information (cf. Chong & Druckman, 2007; Minsky, 1988). However, this frame can also be constructed externally, for example, by communication sources such as news organizations, public debates, or political agendas (cf. Nelson et al., 1997). Specifically, Entman (1993: 52) describes the process of framing as

*“ to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described.”*

Thus, frames can be considered helpful guides that provide the public with orientation and helpful guidance (cf. Fitzgerald, 2009; You & Ju, 2019). On the one hand, framing is a tool that makes complex issues accessible in a way that enables public political participation (cf. Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007). On the other hand, it can be argued that while frames set by communicators may be neutral, they can also be set in a positive or negative light, thus having the potential to influence the public's thinking and understanding of political, economic, or social issues (cf. de Vreese et al., 2011). Regardless of the persuasive power of frames, framing serves as a kind of link between agenda setting and the concrete, substantive effect on the audience (cf. Reese et al., 2001). An example of media framing in politics is the coverage of mass media regarding the Russian war against Ukraine. While linguistic frames such as the use of terms like "invasion" or "aggression" depict Russia as the aggressor in the war, frames like "Denazification of Ukraine" or "Defense of Donbass People" attempt to justify the war and portray it in a positive light (cf. Chernov, 2023; Wilson et al., 2023).

### 3.3.3 Long-term Effects of Media Influence

The framework regarding the potential effects on the opinion process by Stark et al. (see Chapter 3.3) provides a valuable categorization of how information intermediaries influence opinion formation. Regarding media phenomena, both framing and agenda setting are addressed. Hasebrink further delineates the impact of information intermediaries on the audience and identifies six types of effects.

Type of Effect	Short-term effects	Long-term effects
<b>Knowledge transfer</b>	Factual knowledge about specific current events	Background knowledge of the political system and the emergence of long-term political problems
<b>Agenda Setting</b>	Perceptions of the relevance of specific political issues	Perception of the relevance of general topics

<b>Framing</b>	Consideration of certain aspects of current political issues, specific perspectives on the subject matter	Overarching perspectives on political topics
<b>Communicating the climate of opinion</b>	Perceptions of the distribution of opinion in relation to specific issues	Perception of typical (popular) attitudes towards political topics
<b>Persuasion</b>	Changing attitudes at the level of specific issues or individual politicians	Long-term political attitudes and party preferences, attitude to politics in general
<b>Stimulus</b>	Intentions to act and actual voting behavior or participation in specific situations	General participation behavior

Table 3 Overview of Types of Media Influence after Hasebrink (2016), translated into English by the author

Particularly noteworthy is the distinction between short-term and long-term effects. Short-term effects in media coverage pertain to current political controversies and are influenced by individual reports, whereas long-term effects arise from recurring patterns over an extended period, not necessarily tied to specific issues (cf. Hasebrink, 2016). These long-term effects of media influence can be demonstrated through the example of the Windrush scandal, as discussed in section 3.3.1. While occasional coverage from 2012 to 2017 hardly elicited reactions from the public, the influence of the scandal on the British public became apparent after prolonged discussion in the mass media from 2017 onwards. As a response to the media echo, in June 2020, 130,000 people signed a petition calling for expedited compensation payments to survivors and for accountability for what had transpired (cf. Gentleman, 2020). Furthermore, a shift in public satisfaction with government performance can be observed. A survey conducted by the Ipsos Institute in 2018 indicates that dissatisfaction among British citizens with the government's immigration policy increased as a result of the scandal, with a majority of the public (63 percent) expressing shame over how Britain treated the Windrush Generation (cf. Gottfried, 2018).

Awareness of the formation of long-term effects of media influence is particularly relevant concerning political content on social media. The overview by Hasebrink et al. (2016), along with reference to media influence on the population in the Windrush scandal, demonstrates that once a journalist covers a topic that currently has high and widely discussed media relevance, the contribution automatically becomes part of the public opinion formation process. In such a situation, there could be a conflict between journalistic neutrality and the platform logic of channels like TikTok. Public service media or other media outlets with a commitment to neutrality must, on one hand, adhere to the dynamics of infotainment and catchy expressions on social media, but on the other hand, they must not knowingly influence public opinion through sensationalism.

### 3.4 Social Media as a Tool for Shaping Political Opinion

On platforms like TikTok or Instagram, diverse perspectives intersect, blend, and mutually influence one another, thereby making social media an active force in shaping or directing public opinion (cf. Ausat, 2023). In Chapter 3.3, it was already elucidated how media coverage, through phenomena such as agenda setting or framing, can have long-term effects on the public. Viewing political opinion formation from a social media perspective reveals different and novel mechanisms enabled by the platform's unique logic and communication style. The influence of social media differs from traditional media such as TV or newspapers right from the outset of media consumption. In classical news communication, people often feel like outsiders, barely involved in the events and failing to recognize the relevance of the news to their own lives (cf. Coleman et al., 2012). To effectively engage young people, news must be communicated in a more captivating, relatable, and immersive storytelling manner (cf. Dennis & Sampaio-Dias, 2021; Nee & Santana, 2021). This need for orientation leads, as found by a study from Marchi (2012), to the extent that young individuals prefer subjective, opinionated reporting over objective communication. This trend results in traditional news channels such as television, radio, or newspapers no longer meeting these expectations for political communication, causing young people to source their information from social media (cf. Boczkowski et al., 2018; Marchi, 2012; Schwaiger et al., 2022).

When examining the influence of social media on political opinion formation, an analogy can be drawn to the perceived "classic" influence on purchasing decisions via social media. In both cases, the sender positions themselves as problem solvers, aiming to persuade the recipient through their message to make a certain decision, whether it's related to political matters or purchasing choices (cf. Hanisch, 2023). Through social media marketing, companies can build a community (cf. Habibi et al., 2014), interact promptly with questions or suggestions from followers (cf. Dash et al., 2021), demonstrate approachability and likeability (cf. Le-Hoang & Thi Huong Ly, 2020), and target their content as advertising to the preferred audience (cf. Mayrhofer et al., 2020). This can ideally lead to the creation of a positive brand image, ultimately influencing the purchasing decisions of the target audience (cf. Sambol, 2020). Platforms like TikTok, with their very personal channel tone and entertainment character, are particularly suitable for creating a positive brand image (cf. Shafa & Hidayat, 2022). According to Lees-Marshment (2001: 692), these characteristics of brand communication also apply to the dissemination of political content:

*“Political parties, interest groups and local councils are amongst those entities that increasingly conduct market intelligence to identify citizen concerns, change their behavior to meet those demands and communicate their “product offering” more effectively.”*

According to Lees-Marshment's logic, communicators can influence the public in their political opinion formation just as brands can move their target audience to make purchasing decisions. In this regard, political actors such as parties or individual politicians can advertise to reach a particularly large audience (cf. Geise, 2023). On platforms owned by the Meta corporation, political advertising is subject to disclosure requirements (Meta, 2024b), whereas according to TikTok's guidelines, both paid political ads and political advertising on TikTok are actually prohibited (cf. TikTok, 2024). A study conducted by the Stiftung Neue Verantwortung, however, has found that nearly all German political parties circumvent this ban, particularly members of the AfD (cf. Semenova & Hohlfeld, 2023). The following figure from a study by the Stiftung Neue Verantwortung shows the number of accounts that ran political advertising on TikTok despite the ban between October 1, 2022, and August 31, 2023.

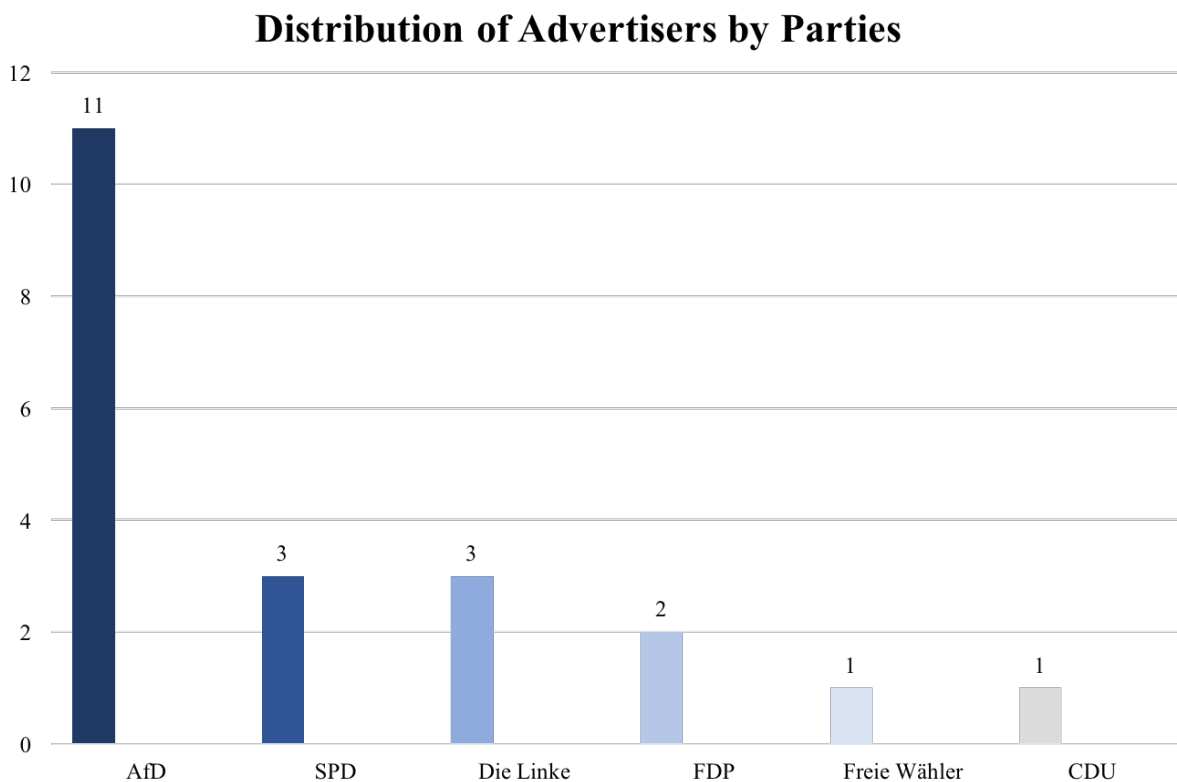


Figure 11 Number of Advertisers in Combination to the Party Distribution after Semenova & Hohlfeld (2023)

A glance at the expenditures of parties in online election campaigns illustrates the dimension of political advertising on social media. For example, in the German federal election of 2021, the party “Die Grünen” allocated around 1.6 million euros out of a campaign budget of 3.9 million euros for advertisements on Google, YouTube, Facebook, and Instagram (cf. Der Spiegel, 2021).

A highly effective method for placing communication tools such as ads on social media even more precisely is the so-called microtargeting (cf. Barbu, 2014). Using this strategy, promising voter groups are identified through modern technologies and data-driven analyses to then deliver highly

targeted advertisements to them on social media platforms (cf. Kruschinski & Haller, 2020). This leads to a phenomenon known as "personalization of election campaigns" (Kusche, 2020: 108; translated by the author), as advertisements using microtargeting are tailored to individual preferences, presenting topics of individual relevance to each person in their preferred format and language, thus meeting their needs accordingly (cf. Borgesius et al., 2018).

Microtargeting or political advertising in general, doesn't always have to be communicated through a channel controlled by political officials or parties. It can also occur through seemingly neutral channels that, however, advocate for a certain opinion (cf. Kusche, 2020). Just as with purchasing decisions, in the political context, more influence can be exerted on opinions when the recipient is a popular internet personality rather than a political party (cf. Hanisch, 2023; Riedl et al., 2021). That's partly because shared messages from influential figures are perceived as more genuine and trustworthy than news directly from media organizations (cf. Turcotte et al., 2015). The power of opinion leaders is significantly amplified through the possibilities on social media. While the influence of opinion leaders in traditional media was limited to their direct discussion networks, influencers on social media have the opportunity to reach a much larger audience across a variety of platforms (cf. Weeks et al., 2017). Examples of the influence of opinion leaders in political debates can be found in the communication strategy surrounding the American presidential elections. For instance, in 2015, the American singer Katy Perry positioned herself on social media in support of presidential candidate Hillary Clinton. A post endorsing Clinton prior to the election received over 560,600 likes on Instagram (cf. Perry, 2015). Similarly impactful was a YouTube video by actor Dwayne Johnson, in which he pledged his support for presidential candidate Joe Biden on his account with over 6.3 million followers in 2020 (cf. Johnson, 2020).

These posts could then be shared by the followers of the celebrities, reaching even more people. For this reason, opinion leaders with political messages in the social media realm wield significant influence (cf. Bause, 2021). In addition to promoting democratic statements like in the case of Katy Perry and Dwayne Johnson, both influential social media opinion leaders as well as politicians and parties can also spread disinformation and unverified facts (cf. Igwebuike & Chimuanya, 2021). Political advertising on social media is currently scarcely regulated in Germany and the EU, and so far, it is subject to hardly effective disclosure requirements (cf. Geise, 2023). A new EU regulatory framework aims to change this: in the future, political advertising on social media will only be allowed to be financed by companies or individuals established in the EU, posts must disclose their funding sources, and an accessible database will list the sponsors and financing of online ads (cf. Born, 2023). Nevertheless, the new law will only come into effect after the 2024 European Parliament elections, which means that until that time, there will continue to be a risk to the transparency of political campaigning on social media (cf. Schulten, 2023).

### 3.5 Risks of Political Opinion Forming on Social Media

Even before the advent of social media platforms like TikTok or Instagram, phenomena such as agenda setting or framing were discussed through newspapers, TV, or radio (cf. Iyengar & Simon, 1993). While the constant availability of news and discussion spaces on social media contributes to a more intense, direct exchange of communication, it also poses significant risk factors that were not present during the times when print and TV were the main sources of information (cf. Russmann, 2015). In the January 2024 Global Risk Report by the World Economic Forum (2024), disinformation and misinformation were designated as the greatest future risks for the next two years. While Chapter 2.2.3 focuses on the controversies surrounding TikTok, this chapter aims to specifically connect the risk factors of political opinion formation with activity on social media platforms. The risks can be summarized into four overarching categories: simplification and polarization, filter bubbles and echo chambers, fake news and lack of fact-checking, and content moderation.

**Simplification and Polarization:** In times marked by crises and conflicts, staying up-to-date with new developments can pose a challenge for news consumers. The sheer volume of information can lead to a news avoidance attitude, where individuals avoid engaging with news altogether (cf. Ohme et al., 2023). Especially on social media platforms, the flood of news is so pronounced that young people, in particular, indicate feeling overwhelmed (cf. Kramp & Weichert, 2022; Lee et al., 2023). As a consequence, communicators resort to reducing complexity and personalizing news (cf. Farkas & Bene, 2021; Winter, 2023). On one hand, this is to avoid straining the audience's dwindling attention span and to prevent information overload (cf. Dai & Wang, 2023). On the other hand, it's to keep up with the fast-paced and dynamic platform logic of networks like TikTok (cf. Hahn et al., 2022). Consequently, informational videos on TikTok are characterized by a fleeting politainment style (cf. Cervi et al., 2023) and TikTok videos, in general, tend to skim the surface of a topic to provide a brief overview rather than delivering comprehensive coverage (cf. Dwinanda et al., 2022). News videos are therefore predisposed to offering simple solutions, which opens the door to polarizing statements (cf. Cervi et al., 2021). Referring to polarization through personalized and simplified explanations, Franke and Hajok (2023; translated by the author) draw a connection to the exposure of young people to right-wing ideologies and conclude:

*“Low-threshold and oriented towards everyday life, the right-wing extremist scene offers young people seemingly simple answers to complex questions on social media, which gains particular attractiveness in times of orientation search.”*



Since the reduction of complexity in political content via social media can be seen as a contemporary tool in a fast-paced political landscape, it's difficult to compare the depth of information in social media videos with that of a longer TV segment providing background information.

**Filter bubbles and echo chambers:** While the selection of media content used to be curated by journalistic outlets in the past, today algorithm-based recommendation systems select suggestions tailored to individual preferences (cf. Negreira-Rey et al., 2022). In Chapter 2.2.3, algorithms and filter bubbles were already explained as controversial features of TikTok; regarding political opinion formation, these effects can lead to a thematically one-dimensional consumption. Filter bubbles occur when users on platforms are mainly confronted with content and opinions that align with their existing views (cf. Chitra & Musco, 2020). This leads to a limited thematic perspective, as divergent viewpoints are filtered out, and users are shielded from unpleasant information (cf. Min & Wohn, 2020). Echo chambers amplify these effects by isolating users into groups with similar opinions, political orientations, or beliefs, and tend to reinforce existing convictions through repeated interactions with like-minded individuals or sources, without critical reflection (cf. Cinelli et al., 2021).

The U.S. Presidential Election of 2016 provides an example of this effect, where supporters of Donald Trump on Twitter interacted with different content, engaged in different discussions, and consulted different sources compared to supporters of Hillary Clinton (cf. Guo et al., 2018). On algorithm-based platforms like TikTok, filter bubbles and echo chambers do not necessarily result from pre-existing beliefs that seek confirmation: if a user consumes videos out of curiosity or due to provocative statements, the algorithm will suggest similar content in the future (cf. Oertel et al., 2022). Therefore, filter bubbles and echo chambers are risky for political opinion formation because individuals in such environments tend to develop a distorted perception of reality and public opinion climate (cf. Schweiger et al., 2019). When people are only confronted with confirming opinions, there is a risk that they will lose contact with different perspectives, impairing their ability to engage in reasoned discussion and compromise, and fueling division within society (cf. Chan et al., 2023; Schubert, 2023). This creates a dangerous dynamic in which misinformation and one-sided propaganda can more easily take hold (cf. Heyen & Manzel, 2023). Especially young users, who may not yet have been adequately trained in media literacy, are at risk of being unable to form a balanced information basis due to algorithmically induced filter bubbles and echo chambers (cf. von Lautz et al., 2023).

**Fake News und Lack of Fact-Checking:** Current developments and studies indicate that misinformation and disinformation will not only persist as ongoing risks in the coming years (cf. World Economic Forum, 2024), but are already flooding social media platforms today. An analysis by

NewsGuard found that in 2022, nearly 20 percent of the search result videos presented on TikTok for prominent news topics contained misinformation, based on a sample of search queries (cf. Brewster et al., 2022). Misinformation includes fake news related to wartime events, as explained in Chapter 2.2.3 through examples such as deepfake videos in the Russian invasion of Ukraine (cf. Broinowski, 2023). TikTok itself announced on October 9, 2023, its collaboration with the journalism school Reporterfabrik, an educational project of the Correctiv research center, to combat misinformation about the war and launch a media literacy campaign (cf. TikTok, 2023a). However, TikTok was warned by the European Commission on October 12, just three days after the campaign launch, due to circulating misinformation about the Hamas attack on Israel, and was asked to take action against the spread of fake news within 24 hours (cf. Breton, 2023).

As a concrete example of the lack of fact-checking on TikTok, the account of the magazine Junge Freiheit (@jungefreiheit) can be mentioned, which in visual presentation and professionalism hardly differs from other news accounts at first glance. For instance, in a video from December 29, 2023, a moderator of the channel states, "Berlin alone spends 2.7 million euros on refugees every day" (Junge Freiheit, 2023; translated by the author), referring to an unverified statement from the online magazine, which the Senate is said to have made in response to a request from an AfD delegate (cf. JF Online, 2023). Especially for young TikTok users who are not familiar with the magazine's affiliation with right-wing extremist political currents (cf. Pappert et al., 2021) low-threshold populism and misinformation are often not identified as such (cf. Materna et al., 2021; Vodafone Stiftung, 2020). In Germany, in the context of the 2023 JIM study, 58 percent of 12- to 19-year-olds reported having encountered misinformation, and in the month prior to the survey, approximately two out of five participants were also confronted with extreme political views, conspiracy theories, or hate messages (cf. Feierabend et al., 2023). An investigative report by the Correctiv research center suggests that misinformation on social media will be strategically used in the coming years to influence political opinion formation. Therefore, right-wing populist political actors intend to "establish an agency for right-wing influencers (...) through which young people will be exposed to content on platforms such as TikTok or YouTube that is intended to be perceived as normal political theses" (Bensmann et al., 2024, translated by the author).

**Content Moderation:** Although moderation features on social media platforms, such as blocking accounts, restricting comment functions, or removing videos due to community guidelines, aim to combat hate speech or misinformation, they also pose risks to the diversity of political opinions and democratic discourse (cf. Binns et al., 2017). Opposing opinions can be suppressed by deleting controversial comments or blocking individuals with different political views (cf. Goyanes et al., 2021). For users, the removal of posts due to violations of platform guidelines often appears opaque: in a

study by Jhaver et al. (2019) on removed posts on the social network forum Reddit, over a third of participants stated that they did not understand why the post was removed from the platform. Content moderation on social media can therefore be perceived as a form of censorship, where the platform “quite literally removes the content of their speech, and in the case of an account suspension prevents their access to a channel for future expression.” (Myers West, 2018: 2374) On TikTok as well, word filters are employed, as revealed by an investigation conducted by NDR, WDR, and tagesschau. In 2022, at least 20 words were set via automated filters on TikTok, whereby comments containing any of the words such as "LGBTQ," "Sex," or "Cannabis" were not displayed (cf. Eckert et al., 2022). Steen et al. (2023) further elaborate on these findings, adding that randomness, lack of contextual understanding, and bias against marginalized communities continue to be issues in content moderation on TikTok. Avoiding verbal and content-related missteps is also relevant from an algorithmic perspective, as perceived violations of community guidelines on social media can have long-term consequences for content creators. For instance, the so-called "shadow banning" may occur, where a user is not immediately banned after a violation but is instead covertly downgraded in the platform's recommendation system (cf. Leerssen, 2023). Indeed, the knowledge of content moderation on social media could potentially be exploited to selectively block opposing viewpoints. For example, if accounts with right-wing ideologies report democratic accounts, this could negatively impact their reach following the principle of shadow banning (cf. Cotter, 2023).

## 4 Research Interest

This chapter provides an overview of the current state of research and highlights the significance of the topic, thereby concretizing the research gap and presenting the research question.

### 4.1 *Relevance and Problem Definition*

The field of journalism and the dissemination of political content are currently undergoing a transformative process. The declining attention span of media consumers has led to a situation where, in information transmission, emotions, storytelling, and audience engagement can sometimes be even more significant success factors than the actual content itself (cf. Denisova, 2023; Lorenz-Spreen et al., 2019; Marchi, 2012). The concept of the social media platform TikTok addresses these changed needs in media consumption. In 2023, the short video platform, with its algorithm-based "ForYou" page, had the longest average session duration among all social networks in Germany (cf. DataReportal, 2023). Despite TikTok's primary focus on affective needs such as entertainment or escapism (cf. Bucknell Bossen & Kottasz, 2020; Scherr & Wang, 2021), the platform nowadays plays a significant role in knowledge transfer and shaping political opinions (cf. Ausat, 2023). Among adolescents aged 12 to 19 in 2023 and 2022, TikTok ranked third as the most commonly used source to stay informed about current world events (cf. Feierabend et al., 2023; Feierabend et al., 2022). This dynamic becomes concerning when considering the controversies and risks surrounding the TikTok platform. There is hardly any other social media platform where disinformation, which the Global Risk Report 2024 has named the biggest future risk of the next two years, spreads as quickly as on TikTok (cf. Global Witness, 2022; Southwick et al., 2021).

Additionally, the platform is experiencing a growing infiltration of right-wing populist statements in videos, which are particularly difficult for young users to identify as such (cf. Franke & Hajok, 2023; Materna et al., 2021; Vodafone Stiftung, 2020). The AfD is the most successful political party on TikTok in Germany as of February 2024 (cf. Mack, 2024). The state chairman of the AfD in Saxony-Anhalt, Ulrich Siegmund, who according to Correctiv research was also part of a secretive meeting to discuss far-right migration plans, is the politician with the largest reach on TikTok in Germany (cf. Amadeu Antonio Stiftung, 2024). Democratic parties and organizations could counteract the growing spread of right-wing ideologies on TikTok through their own platform activities. However, as of 2023, they have shown little presence on TikTok, thus failing to reach a young audience primarily active on the platform (cf. Hollender, 2023). Given the upcoming state and European elections in 2024, where even teenagers can participate, and the increasing use of TikTok among them for knowledge consumption, researching political content on TikTok is currently of particular

importance. To effectively counter disinformation and right-wing propaganda with fact-based content, it is necessary to define specific success factors of TikTok videos with political content.

#### *4.2 State of Research and Research Question*

The current status of research on political communication in short video format is highlighted by the designation of TikTok as an "under-researched but increasingly significant platform for political expression" (Literat & Kligler-Vilenchik, 2023: 2). As is customary in the scholarly exploration of relatively young platforms, some studies conducted after TikTok's rise in popularity have focused on users' motivations for usage (cf. Omar & Dequan, 2020), highlighted differences in usage compared to other platforms (cf. Granow & Scolari, 2022) or applied the Uses & Gratifications approach to TikTok (cf. Bucknell Bossen & Kottasz, 2020). The relevance of TikTok as an educational tool during the COVID-19 lockdown paved the way for educational policy investigations of TikTok content. For instance, a study by Literat (2021) examines how young people shared their experiences with virtual education on TikTok. While Akbari et al. (2022) investigate the effects of TikTok on promoting higher education within the framework of educational TikTok research, Fiallos Ordoñez et al. (2021), explore which educational policy topics are particularly successful on TikTok, and Jacobs et al. (2022) delve into the effects of TikTok usage on learning performance.

In the literature, research has also been conducted on political content on TikTok, particularly regarding account analyses and user interaction with political topics. Studies aim to explore the activity of political parties (cf. Cervi & Mari-n-Lladó, 2021), news providers, and media outlets (cf. Klug, 2020; Klug & Autenrieth, 2023; Titze, 2023), or individual political actors (cf. Cervi et al., 2023) on TikTok. Regarding user interaction with political topics, Serrano et al. (2020) have already explored how users discuss political issues with each other using communication tools on TikTok, and Ackermann & Dewitz (2020) have observed the creative output of the hashtag #ww3. While these studies provide a basis for the research focus of this work, it is noteworthy that the content-related success factors of political videos have remained largely unexplored.

While Li et al. (2021) do examine success factors of TikTok videos based on video attributes such as conveyed emotions and tone, it is noteworthy that they focus on videos containing COVID-19 information rather than political content. A similar situation is evident in the research conducted by Ling et al., (2021), Guinaudeau et al., (2022) and Heyder & Hillebrandt (2023), who also examine success factors of TikTok videos but without focusing on the political context. Of particular relevance to this study is a research conducted by Umansky & Pipal (2024), which examines the tone used by US governors and members of Congress in their TikTok videos. However, this study concept also highlights the challenge faced by researching political content on TikTok: either the communication

of the senders is examined or the reaction of users to their content. So far, social media research has failed to establish a connection between user expectations of political content in video format and the specific representation of these contents. How users want to see political videos on TikTok, both in terms of content and design, has remained unexplored. Additionally, many studies focus on measuring the success of a video in key performance indicators such as likes or video reach. In the context of political content on TikTok, where short thought-provoking messages are more common rather than comprehensive education due to the platform's logic, a subsequent follow-up action such as actively googling the information addressed in the video, visiting the corresponding website or subsequent searches on other social media channels becomes more important. In light of the existing research gaps and the significance of TikTok as a political medium for young people, the following research guiding question will be explored:

**How must political content in short-videos be communicated on the social media platform TikTok in order to achieve a thematic follow-up action among 13- to 25- year-old users in Germany?**

This study aims to gain insights from a scientific perspective into the success factors of political videos among the young generation. Furthermore, this guiding research question can also lead to specific practical implications that political parties, journalistic media, or individual creators can actively implement in their videos.

The age range in the guiding research question was chosen because TikTok is officially accessible only to teenagers aged 13 and above (cf. TikTok, 2021). Furthermore, the results of the JIM studies from 2022 and 2023, which surveyed adolescents aged 12 to 19, have shown that a significant amount of young people's lives takes place on TikTok (cf. Feierabend et. al., 2022; 2023). Therefore, it is essential to include this age group in this research. In the Vodafone Jugendstudie (2022), participants aged 14 to 24 were surveyed, and the ZDF/ARD Online Study has also found that TikTok is a significant social media platform for users up to 29 years old (cf. Granow & Scolari, 2022). To establish a suitable age range, this research ultimately set an age limit of 25 years. In this way, the research in this study represents both teenage students and slightly older individuals, still adequately capturing the Generation Z demographic.

## 5 Methodical Approach

This chapter encompasses both an explanation of the overall research design and a discussion of the two methods employed. Moreover, Chapter 5 illustrates the entire data collection process as well as an examination of the quality criteria of the applied research methods.

### 5.1 Research Design

In this study, a mixed-methods approach is employed to examine the success mechanisms behind short videos containing political content on the social media platform TikTok. Before a detailed examination of the thematic follow-up actions by users, as addressed in the research question, can be undertaken, it is necessary to conduct an investigation into the key elements that render political videos successful, thus ensuring their placement on users' "ForYou" pages. This involves combining quantitative and qualitative research methods, as “the strengths of both approaches are combined, leading, it can be assumed, to a better understanding of research problems than either approach alone.” (Creswell & Garrett, 2008: 322) Creswell & Clark (2007) categorize four variations for this research design: triangulation, embedded, explanatory, and exploratory. For this study, the explanatory design is suitable, as the purpose of this method typically involves explaining and interpreting quantitative results using qualitative research (cf. Creswell et al., 2003).

The explanatory design consists of two consecutive phases, where quantitative data is first collected and analyzed, followed by the collection and analysis of qualitative data (cf. Creswell & Clark, 2007). The weighting of qualitative and quantitative research can be determined based on the research interest (cf. Creswell et al., 2003). In this study, the focus is on the qualitative study, explaining and interpreting the quantitative data. The explanatory design is considered the “most straightforward” (Creswell et al., 2003: 178) among the different manifestations of mixed-methods research, according to Creswell et al. (2003), because the implementation is simplified due to data collection in separate phases. The suitability of this methodological approach for analyzing the success mechanisms of political videos on TikTok is evident from comparable research designs. For instance, Mao (2014) initially employed quantitative data collection in a study on high school students' attitudes and beliefs, which was then interpreted using open-ended questions and semi-structured interviews. Similarly Skelton et al. (2020) utilized the results of focus groups and individual interviews with social media users to develop a quantitative survey. The combination of qualitative interviews and quantitative analysis in the research design of Aloraini & Cardoso (2022) investigating the feelings of social media users regarding online language learning also suggests that mixed-method designs are well-suited for studying social media structures. As explained in 4.2, this study aims to



investigate both the communication style of political information senders on TikTok as well as the reaction of users to this content. The quantitative part of this study focuses on the success factors of the videos, while the qualitative part seeks to capture the opinions of TikTok users. Figure 14 illustrates the specific approach in the mixed-methods design of this study.

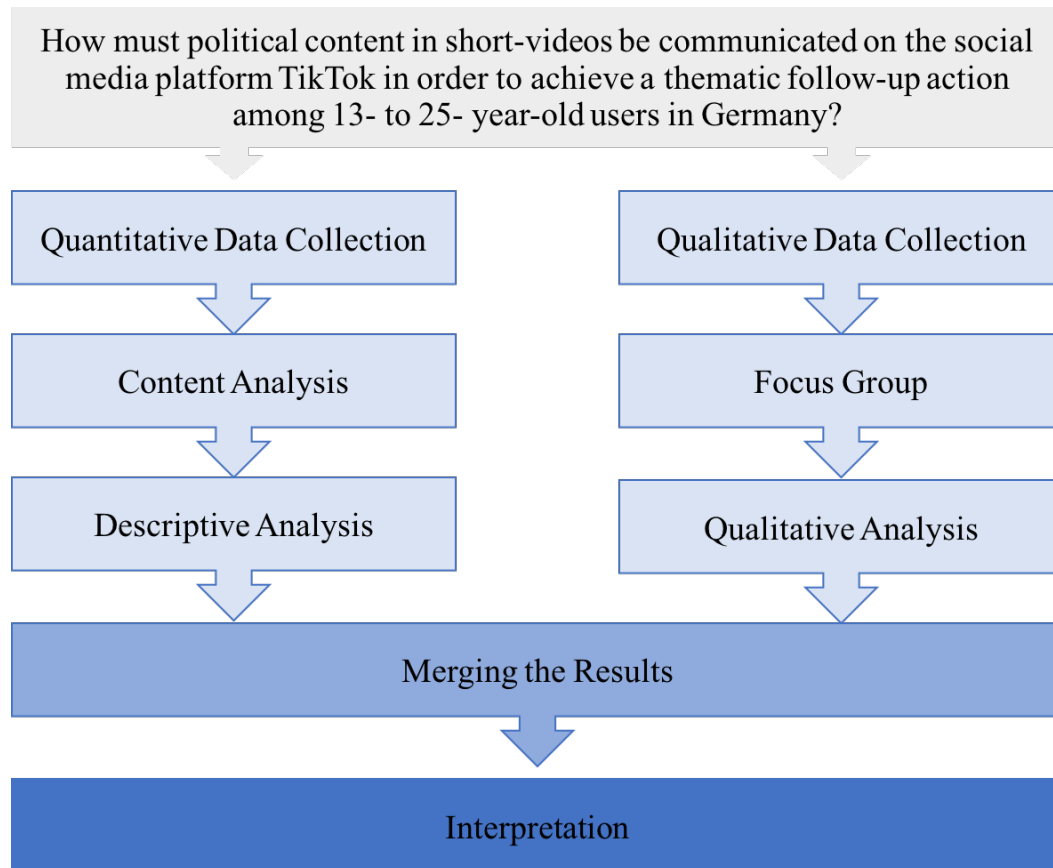


Figure 12 Research Design of this Study

In this study, the explanatory design of a mixed-methods approach was employed, whereby quantitative data was collected through content analysis, and qualitative data was gathered through a focus group. The combination of quantitative research and focus groups is particularly suitable when quantitative data require further explanation, and focus groups need to be structured in terms of content (cf. Morgan, 1998; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998). In what follows, both the quantitative as well as the qualitative research methodology is presented.

## 5.2 Content Analysis of Successful TikTok Videos with Political Topics

### 5.2.1 Content Analysis in Quantitative Research

Krippendorff (2004: 18) defines content analysis as “a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from texts (or other meaningful matter) to the contexts of their use.” Therefore, researchers conducting content analysis utilize communicative content from source materials and process it using analytical constructs or inference rules to draw conclusions about the research subject from the collected data (cf. White & Marsh, 2006). Originally, content analysis was primarily used to analyze texts. Today, the method is also applied to analyze various types of media such as film posters (cf. Aley & Hahn, 2020), job advertisements (cf. Rios et al., 2020) or TikTok videos (cf. Li et al., 2021). Thus, the source data for content analysis are always qualitative in nature, but the data analysis can be both qualitative and quantitative (cf. Wegener, 1994).

In quantitative content analysis, the main difference in comparison to the qualitative content analysis lies in its treatment of numbers. It is utilized to operationalize data, making variables or characteristics tangible and measurable (cf. Uhl, 2016). The aim of quantitative content analysis is thus to quantify data using valid measurement rules and to statistically analyze them through mathematical operations, in order to describe communication and make statements about relationships (cf. Mayring, 1988; Riffe et al., 2019). In quantitative content analysis, the approach involves classifying data using predefined categories derived from external sources, which are then applied to the data being analyzed on a quantitative level (cf. Morgan, 1998). This study aims to gain insights into the success factors of political videos on TikTok through quantitative analysis. Since success on TikTok is often measured by numerical metrics such as views or likes, and comprehensive data analysis is required to enable comparisons and generalize conclusions, quantitative content analysis is a suitable method for this research step.

### 5.2.2 Hypotheses

The success of a research design for quantitative content analysis lies in the theory-driven formulation of hypotheses, which in turn serve as the basis for constructing the category system (cf. Uhl, 2016). For formulating hypotheses, insights from the theoretical framework were considered and supported by previous research findings. Below are four hypotheses briefly presented and explained through their relationship to the literature.

Empirical studies have shown that the attention span of media consumers is constantly decreasing – the shorter and more entertaining the content, the better (cf. Lorenz-Spreen et al., 2019).

News outlets are thus faced with the challenge of not overwhelming viewers with political videos and, due to the fast-paced platform logic, offering simple solutions rather than extensive discussions (cf. Cervi et al., 2021; Hahn et al., 2022; Dai & Wang, 2023). A study by Guinaudeau et al. (2022) on the difference between political short videos on YouTube and TikTok has also found that 58 percent of the 1,998,642 analyzed TikTok videos are between 5 and 20 seconds long, with a success peak at the length of 15 seconds. These results suggest that the most successful political TikTok videos are also very short. This leads to the following hypothesis H1:

**H1: The majority of successful, political TikTok videos in Germany has a video length of less than one minute.**

The success of TikTok videos is also based on conveying authenticity and accessibility by the protagonists, often achieved by filming in a "backstage" situation in their personal environment (cf. Su et al., 2021). However, the JIM study in 2023 for the first time also surveyed sources of information about current events that do not exclusively occur in the online space. 54 percent of study participants aged 12 to 19 stated that after conversations with their family, they most frequently consume news on TV or radio (cf. Feierabend et. al., 2023). This suggests that traditional TV news remains the state-of-the-art in news communication for young people. In the JIM study 2022, adolescents also indicated that they trust the "Tagesschau" and the "Tagesthemen" the most (cf. Feierabend et. al., 2022). This insight relativizes the notion that news communication on TikTok must necessarily rely on pure entertainment in POV<sup>14</sup> format. These findings suggest that young TikTok users also orient themselves towards familiar, trustworthy formats with regard to the visual presentation of messages on TikTok. It can therefore be assumed that the host in the video should be shown in a more distanced perspective rather than in the typical social media POV format. Also, production of the video should take place in a professional rather than a very personal set-up, similar to TV productions. While attitudes towards the presentation look of news have apparently remained similar, the attention span of young news consumers has changed drastically. TikTok users are accustomed to a variety of video editing and effect options, quick cuts, stickers, or other creative add-ons from entertainment videos, which can further promote entertainment and brevity (cf. Weimann & Masri, 2020).

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<sup>14</sup> "Point of View", referring to a person filming themselves with a front camera perspective

The combination of the still-strong trust in traditional TV news and the popularity of effects and cuts to counteract the dwindling attention leads to hypothesis H2:

**H2: The combination of videos shot in full body perspective with a professional setup and text and editing effects occurs most frequently among successful, political TikTok videos in Germany.**

The success of individual creators on TikTok or other social media platforms largely relies on the audience's potential for identification with the influencers (cf. Lin et al., 2023; Shan et al., 2020). For news anchors, whose role can be compared to the moderators of news videos on TikTok, the likelihood of a parasocial relationship is higher when the audience can identify with the host (cf. Döring, 2013). To make a statement about the hosts of political short videos, the age and gender distribution on the app are relevant. According to the ZDF/ARD Online Study 2023, 72 percent of German TikTok users are between the ages of 14 and 29. Additionally, 20 percent more female viewers use TikTok compared to male viewers (cf. Granow & Scolari, 2022). Accordingly, it can be assumed that TikTok videos are more successful when a person is used as the host with whom the majority of the target audience can identify or at least shares similar characteristics. Hypothesis H3 is based on these thoughts:

**H3: The presence of female hosts aged 17 to 27 in political TikTok videos has a positive impact on the success of the video.**

To be able to discuss not only statements about objective video elements but also the video content, the tone of the videos will be examined in the content analysis. For this purpose, it is worth taking another look at the concept behind the phenomenon of clickbaiting as one of the most important mechanisms behind the virality of content (see Chapter 2.1.3).

Both in print and online journalism, striking headlines increase the likelihood of being noticed by readers (cf. Molina et al., 2021). On social media as well, the virality of messages increases with the use of negative and threatening statements (cf. Mousavi et al., 2022). And the sharing rate, which indicates how often a video has been shared by users and which also plays a role on TikTok, increases with the use of negative key emotions such as “Surprise, Joy, Sadness, Anger, Fear und Disgust.“ (Dobele et al., 2007: 300) Due to the fast-paced nature of the ForYou page and the endless content possibilities, users must be captivated within the first few seconds to prevent them from swiping to another video (cf. Marquardt et al., 2023). Negative news stories take on a different significance when presented in a serious and deterministic manner (cf. Naumer & Yurtoglu, 2020). It can be deduced

from this that successful TikTok videos use viral mechanisms such as clickbaiting and the expression of negative emotions in their hook<sup>15</sup>. Nevertheless, it can be assumed that accounts that actively focus on communicating political news in a journalistic manner are oriented towards the journalistic style of newsreaders, which is still appreciated by the younger generation (cf. Feierabend et. al., 2022). This consideration describes hypothesis H4:

**H4: The majority of successful, political TikTok videos in Germany with oral speech deliver the news with negative tonality and neutrally addressing the viewers.**

The following section will explain how these four hypotheses will be tested using a quantitative content analysis.

### **5.2.3 Implementation**

Through a quantitative examination of 100 TikTok videos containing political content, statements regarding the success factors of political short videos will be made. The videos will be examined for their format, production style, hosts, content, audience engagement, and length. These insights are crucial for preparing the focus group, where they will be qualitatively tested, and the categories of content analysis will also be used and adjusted for the coding of the focus group. For analysis, a sample of the 100 most successful videos from ten TikTok accounts of major media institutions and media companies will be created, spanning from September 1, 2023, to February 1, 2024. Success in the analysis will be equated with reach (views). All 100 videos will be treated equally in the following analysis and referred to as "successful videos." The analysis of videos from sources that adhere to journalistic principles stems from the demand for journalistic objectivity in the content. These principles do not need to be fulfilled by private accounts. Private creator accounts are particularly susceptible to lack objectivity in their reporting on political topics and are not subject to fact-checking mechanisms used by major news outlets, which are considered reliable. Furthermore, these accounts are often operated by multiple individuals, both male and female. If statements regarding the gender of the hosts are to be made as success factors, the inclusion of channels with exclusively male or female hosts could lead to biases. Selection of videos based on thematic hashtags is also not suitable for this work, as hashtags can thematically influence the tone of voice and not all channels use hashtags, limiting the sample set.

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<sup>15</sup> The term "hook" is used in the social media chargon as an appealing formulation at the beginning of a video that arouses the interest of viewers and motivates them not to switch to another video.

In summary, all channels and videos must meet the following conditions to be included in the sampling:

- The channel must belong to a public broadcasting institution, and/or adhere to objectivity, responsibility, and other journalistic principles, and/or receive government funding from the federal government.
- The channel, if working with hosts, must represent both female and male hosts.
- The channel must have at least 20,000 followers.
- The language of the video must be German.
- The video cannot contain any promotions (contests, advertising for services).
- The video must address a topic that can be broadly considered political and/or part of public news coverage. Videos with a purely entertainment focus without political relevance will not be included in the sample.
- The video must have been published between September 1, 2023, and February 1, 2024.

The channels that meet these requirements were selected randomly. The sample consists of videos from the following ten channels:

Channel Name	Publishing institution	Follower Count
@tagesschau	NRD/ARD-aktuell	1.4 Mio
@rtlaktuell	RTL interactive GmbH	106.600
@br24	Bayerischer Rundfunk	416.600
@zeit	ZEIT ONLINE	98.900
@faz	Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung	22.700
@un.logo	Zweites Deutsches Fernsehen (ZDF)	94.000
@what.politik	TINCON	23.000
@nicetoknow	Westdeutscher Rundfunk	411.700
@weltspiegel	DasErste.de	20.300

Table 4 Sample of TikTok Videos analyzed in the Quantitative Analysis

Based on comparable previous research conducted by Cervi & Marí-n-Lladó, (2021), Umansky & Pipal (2024), Zhu et al., (2019) and Li et al. (2021), a category scheme was developed using a deductive-inductive approach, as presented in section 5.2.4. Before coding all the videos according to the coding scheme, a pre-test was conducted with a sample of ten randomly selected videos. The deductive perspective of schema creation allowed testing on the sample to determine whether the existing categories were adequate or if additions or adjustments were necessary to ensure an appropriate representation of the videos.

After coding the initial ten videos, the schema was expanded to include the category "Video Theme" as it was found that the themes of the videos could vary significantly. Following the completion of coding for the pre-test, a seven-day period was maintained. This interval between the pre-test and final coding aimed to ensure the reliability of the category scheme by having only one person responsible for coding due to the nature of the work as a thesis.

### 5.2.4 Coding Schema

For the creation of the codebook, reference was made to category systems from comparable research designs of Cervi & Marí-n-Lladó, (2021), Umansky & Pipal (2024), Zhu et al., (2019) and Li et al. (2021). Categories that were essential for answering the hypotheses were added to the codebook and then tested on 10 percent of the material, as described. The final codebook, which also included a description of each category and an example of each sub-category (see Appendix A), ultimately consisted of seven dimensions. Under "Qualified Impact," the index observable via TikTok is summarized, including views, likes, comments, and shares of the video. Views are particularly relevant for evaluation as they represent the video's success. The "Format" refers to video elements such as effects, text, and music, which were divided into TikTok Sound and Original Sound. The "Production Style" dimension encompasses the form of video shoots, such as the host's perspective and the professionalism of the type of recording. With regard to the video hosts, the gender was recorded and the age of the hosts was attempted to be determined through an online search on the respective channel. In cases where no information on the age of the hosts was listed online, the age was estimated by the coder. The "Content" dimension includes the video's content elements, describing the video topic, presentation style, and tonality by the hosts. Finally, "Viewer Addressing" summarizes the type of audience language used, and the "Length" category is divided into videos under or over a duration of 30 seconds. In total, seven dimensions were established, covering a total of eight categories and 37 sub-categories. The final coding scheme is illustrated in Table 5.

Qualified Impact			
Number of Views	Number of Likes	Number of Comments	Number of Shares
Format			
Elements			
Video with Effects	Video with Text	Video with Text and Effects	Only Video
Sound			
TikTok Sound		Original Sound	
Production Style			
Video Shoot			
Close-up	Full-Body Shot	POV	No Set-up
Type of Recording			



Homemade		Professional			
Hosts					
Age					
17-27	27-35	35+	No Host		
Gender					
Female	Male			No Host	
Content					
Video Topic					
Daily News	Random Information	Historical Throwback	Explanation of Political Context		
Presentation Style					
Acting	Animated Infographic	Oral Speech	Pictorial Slideshow	TikTok Dance/Challenge	Documentary
Tonality					
Alarm/Concern/Negativity	Hope/Positivity	Humor	No Emotions		
Viewer Addressing					
Individual Addressing			Neutral Addressing		
Length					
≤30 Seconds			> 30 Seconds		

Table 5 Coding Framework for the Top 100 Most Successful TikTok Videos by 10 Big Political News Accounts

This coding scheme was transferred to an Excel sheet (see Digital Appendix F) for the coding process. This made it possible to binary code the characteristics of the various sub-categories during video consumption by marking the presence of a sub-category (presence=1; no presence=-) in the Excel sheet. The final code data could then be used for statistical data analyses in SPSS, in which mainly regressions with different variables, frequency evaluations and correlations were carried out.

### 5.2.5 Quality Criteria in Quantitative Research

The quality criteria of quantitative research – reliability, validity and objectivity – are used to assess the quality of diagnostic procedures (cf. Hartig et. al., 2012). These criteria were taken into account in the conception of the research design, in the coding process and in the evaluation, because “[a]ny content analysis should be validatable in principle.” (Krippendorff, 2004: 39) The reliability of this study is supported by the standardized codebook, which was strictly applied during the analysis of the videos. The codebook precisely defines sub-categories and provides examples, ensuring the reproducibility of the study. The reliability of the coding scheme as a measuring instrument was ensured through a pre-test using ten videos. Inter-coder reliability was also assessed through the pre-test, with a seven-day gap between the pre-test and final coding. The ten pre-test videos were subsequently re-coded, ensuring consistent results. As the ten videos processed in the pre-test were also coded in exactly the same way in the final process, the reliability of the coding scheme was confirmed. Despite the limitation of videos being coded by a single person, this method was unavoidable due to the nature

of the work as a thesis. The validity of the study is ensured by the use of comparable measurement instruments in the literature. Particularly in the research designs of Cervi & Marí-n-Lladó, (2021), Umansky & Pipal (2024), Zhu et al., (2019) and Li et al. (2021) comparable coding processes and especially coding schemes are used. It can therefore be assured that the quantitative analysis is a validly constructed measuring instrument. Objectivity is particularly ensured through the clear definition of categories in the codebook and example videos for each category. In case of coder uncertainty regarding assessed attributes such as tonality or video theme, reference can be made to the category definitions, which precisely explain each case. This transparency of the research design also enables the reproducibility of the research. The research findings will be published in Chapter 6.1, allowing for a direct comparison with the results of the focus group.

### *5.3 Focus Group Discussion of Successful TikTok Videos with Political Topics*

#### **5.3.1 Focus Groups in Qualitative Research**

The second part of the mixed-methods study in this work is of qualitative nature. Using a focus group, the quantitative results will be reviewed, new content perspectives opened, and follow-up reactions after consuming a political TikTok video will be included to answer the research question. To determine what type of content motivates young users to engage in follow-up actions such as googling the topic, a personal reflection on media usage and an individual evaluation of content must take place, which qualitative research enables (cf. Häder, 2019). The participatory research style is particularly suitable for this purpose, as it places participating individuals along with their perspectives, learning processes, and individual and collective predispositions at the center of the research (cf. von Unger, 2014). Participatory research methods include group interviews, group discussions, and focus groups (cf. Bär et al., 2020). While the group interview focuses on gathering individual opinions and the group discussion analyzes the dynamics in the social process, the focus group prioritizes the actual discussion topics rather than the social group constellation (cf. *ibid.*).

A focus group is a planned gathering of participants, with a specific group composition and size, aimed at a predetermined purpose (cf. Przyborski & Riegler, 2020). The goal is to ascertain the opinions and feelings of the participants through guided discussion, thereby generating transformative knowledge and new insights for a product or service (cf. Bär et al., 2020; Krueger & Casey, 2009). The focus groups are facilitated by a moderator who stimulates discussion through initial questions and maintains ongoing conversations (cf. Krueger et al., 2020). Focus groups are used, among other purposes, for product and program development, improving customer and employee satisfaction, generating ideas, and forming strategic corporate objectives (cf. Krueger & Casey, 2009). In

contrast to the structured interview, which also aims at self-reports and individual opinions of the interviewees as a qualitative data collection method, the focus group investigates collective contexts and is particularly valuable for practical fields of action (cf. Loosen, 2016; Przyborski & Riegler, 2020). The empirical research of this study is intended, among other things, to gain practical implications for communicating political content on TikTok. Therefore, the process of opinion formation and idea generation within a discussion-worthy topic is more important than simply querying different individual opinions. Hence, the focus group is preferred over the structured interview and group interview and is utilized as the data collection instrument. The social situation within the focus group could also be advantageous for the research findings, as the method, characterized by expression of opinions, feedback culture, and mutual exchange, resembles communication on TikTok (cf. Bär et al., 2020).

### **5.3.2 Implementation**

#### *Participants*

A focus group was conducted online via Zoom, involving two male and three female participants aged between 14 and 25 years. This age range was chosen because adolescents and young adults within this demographic are considered the primary target audience of TikTok, thus representing the youthful, social media-savvy generation (cf. Granow & Scolari, 2022). It was decided to have a heterogeneous group with regard to age and gender. This composition was suitable because while homogeneous groups may yield more detailed but less diverse results, heterogeneous groups provide varied material and lively discussions, which may have a negative effect on the depth of the conversation (cf. Zwick & Schröter, 2012). For this study, a heterogeneous group constellation is more suitable as it aligns better with the diverse and varied nature of the practical issue, and also because different usage patterns of social media due to age differences are expected to provide interesting discussion prompts. A prerequisite for participation in the focus group was the confirmation that participants are active TikTok users and their completion of a brief online survey prior to the focus group.

#### *Pre-Survey*

Prior to the focus group, participants were asked to complete a short, non-anonymous pre-survey online. The aim of this survey was to identify potential discussion topics before the meeting, thereby saving time during the session for more focused discussions and allowing for more targeted interpretation of the focus group results. The pre-survey included questions about participants' personal usage of short video platforms, their information-seeking behavior regarding current political events, and their knowledge of the newly formed political party, Bündnis Sahra Wagenknecht (BSW). The latter

question aimed to filter out participants who might not be suitable for one of the short tasks within the focus group. In the second part of the focus group, participants' further information-seeking behavior after consuming a video on a topic they were still insufficiently informed about was tested.

The Bündnis Sahra Wagenknecht (BSW) was selected as the subject for this, as the party is relevant for young people with regard to the European elections, but had not yet been positioned precisely enough in the media at the time of the focus group. Also, there were enough TikTok videos about the BSW with different design and content elements to allow them to be discussed in the focus group. Accordingly, participants with a good or very good understanding of Bündnis Sahra Wagenknecht were not admitted to the focus group. The following table<sup>16</sup> summarizes the results of the pre-survey, with detailed responses provided in Appendix B.

Age	Frequency of use	Purpose of consumption	Use of other short video services	Sources of information on current political events	Frequency of playing political videos	Knowledge of the Bündnis Sahra Wagenknecht
14	Several times a day	Consume videos passively	Instagram Reels	TV news; TikTok	Now and then	Bad
17	Daily - several times/week	Consume videos passively ( <i>Following influencers</i> )	Instagram Reels	Special news apps; Podcasts; TikTok; Instagram	Frequently	Rather bad
19	Daily - several times/week	Consume videos passively	YouTube Shorts	Search engines such as Google/Bing etc.; TikTok; YouTube; Instagram; Satire programs	Frequently	Bad
22	Several times a day	Consume videos passively; Produce, edit and share own videos; Collect information on current events; ( <i>for work, discovering new music</i> )	Instagram Reels	Special news apps; TikTok; Instagram	Frequently	Rather bad
25	Daily - several times/week	Consume videos passively, Collect information on current events	Instagram Reels	Online offers from TV and radio stations; Special news apps; Search engines such as Google/Bing etc.; Podcasts; Satire programs	Frequently	Undecided

Table 6 Result Overview of the Pre-Survey

<sup>16</sup> The survey options were provided to the participants in German and have been translated into English by the author for presentation in this work.

### *Guideline*

The questions posed by the moderator seem to arise spontaneously from the discussion in the focus group, but are the result of a question guide that has been prepared in advance (cf. Krueger & Casey, 2009). This guide is developed, tested, and adjusted to successfully lead and moderate the group (cf. Bär et al., 2020). With the help of the guide, group dynamics and participant activation can be influenced strategically; initially, participants are motivated to respond with more general answers through less specific questions, fostering a relaxed group atmosphere, so that towards the end of the discussion, more insightful information can be expected through the specification of questions (cf. Krueger & Casey, 2009). The guide for this work was developed based on the dimensions used in the quantitative analysis, which should be qualitatively tested within the focus group (see Appendix C). Additionally, the guide was expanded with questions about the participants' further information behavior after consuming a TikTok video. In addition to the classic debate, short videos from the quantitative analysis will be shown in the focus groups to illustrate the different characterizations of the dimensions, which can be discussed by the participants and thus promote the development of practical implications.

To positively influence both group dynamics and the depth of the discussion, the guide and moderation begin with a brief question round about the participants' current status regarding the consumption of political short videos on TikTok. This transitions into the content phase, where two political short videos with different characterizations for each dimension (Format, Production Style, Hosts, Content, Viewer Addressing, and Length) are shown, compared, and discussed. The focus group ends with the viewing of four different videos about the Bündnis Sahra Wagenknecht (BSW) and the subsequent discussion about the potential follow-up information behavior of the participants. To create as authentic a consumer experience as possible, all 16 videos were uploaded to a TikTok account and the channel link was shared with the participants so that they could view the videos on their private devices.

### *Data Analysis*

The focus groups were recorded with the participants' consent and transcribed afterward (see Appendix D). Transcription errors were manually corrected. Transcribing the recordings was necessary for the subsequent process, as relevant contributions could be summarized and categorized using MaxQDA in the qualitative analysis phase. This provided a clear basis for forming inductive subcategories.

### 5.3.3 Qualitative Content Analysis According to Kuckartz

The results of the focus group were analyzed using qualitative content analysis, which allows for drawing conclusions on specific aspects of communication and categorizing objects within a particular domain into different classes (cf. Mayring, 2015). Furthermore, the pre-planning of the focus groups suggested the use of a content analytic approach; similar to the guide, qualitative content analysis focuses on different categories of discussion topics and embodies analytical aspects (cf. Mayring & Brunner, 2009). The qualitative content analysis by Philipp Mayring focuses more on frequency analysis, whereas the content-structuring content analysis by Udo Kuckartz seemed more suitable in terms of the personally opinionated nature of the focus group (cf. Kuckartz, 2018). The category formation in Kuckartz's content-structuring content analysis follows an inductive-deductive schema (cf. *ibid.*). Thus, the knowledge interest defined in the guide can be combined with newly emerged thematic fields in discussions.

The evaluation of the focus groups followed the procedural schema of content-structuring content analysis according to Kuckartz

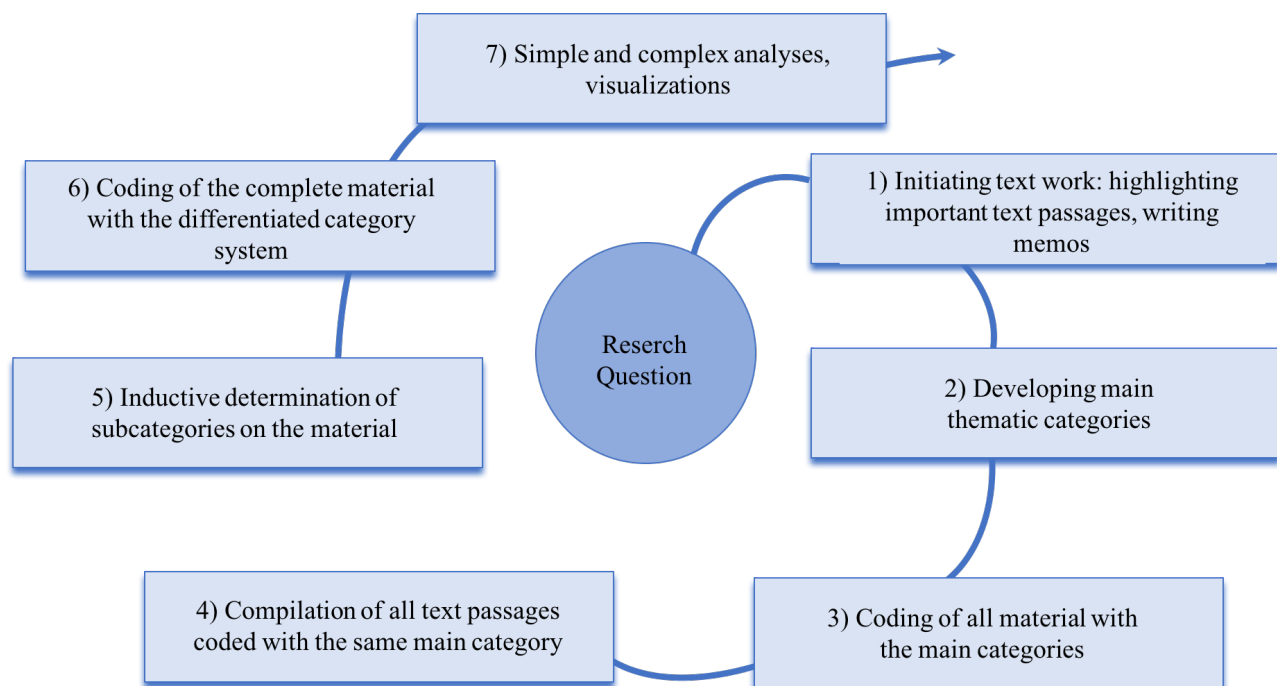


Figure 13 Flowchart of a Content-Structuring Content Analysis after Kuckartz (2018: 100)

Throughout the transcript, all steps of the content analysis were sequentially executed, with the second step (development of thematic main categories) undertaken deductively based on the dimensions

of the quantitative analysis. For instance, the category C3\_Hosts stemmed from the "Hosts" dimension in the coding schema of the quantitative analysis. Subsequently, the material was coded using this category C3\_Hosts. Compiling all statements within the main category enabled the derivation of new subcategories from the content, such as C3.1 Clothing or C3.2 Host Presence. Additionally, categories C7\_Information Behavior and C8\_Follow-up Information Triggers were added to the category system due to the inductive nature of the content-structuring schema. All deductive categories and inductively determined subcategories were then described in detail within a codebook (see Appendix E), including examples from the transcripts, delineating them from each other and also applied to the transcripts to code the entire material with the refined category system. During this process, text excerpts that could be attributed to, for instance, category C3\_Hosts were assigned to the developed subcategories. Consequently, at the conclusion of the coding process, one or more text excerpts were listed under each subcategory. The table below visually illustrates the categories along with their inductive subcategories.

Main Categories	Subcategories
C1_Format	
C2_Production Style	
C3_Hosts	C3.1_Clothing
	C3.2_Host Presence
	C3.3 Identification Potential
C4_Content	C4.1_Seriousness
	C4.2_Tonality
	C4.3_Sender
	C4.4_References
C5_Viewer Addressing	
C6_Length	
C7_Information Behavior	C7.1_Comment Section
	C7.2_Google-Search
	C7.3_Caption
	C7.4_Instagram
	C7.5_Senders Website
	C7.6_TikTok Search
	C7.7_Link in Bio
C8_Follow-up Information Triggers	C8.1_Personal Interest
	C8.2_Bits of Information
	C8.3_Senders Reliability

Table 7 Category System Including Inductively Formed Sub-Categories Used in Focus Group Analysis



### **5.3.4 Quality Criteria in Qualitative Research**

Mayring (2016) suggests six overarching quality criteria for qualitative research: procedural documentation, argumentative interpretation validation, rule-based procedure, proximity to the subject, communicative validation, and triangulation. The criteria of proximity to the subject and communicative validation are ensured through the participants and the moderation of the focus groups. In the focus groups, short videos on TikTok are the central shared interest of the participants, and the (virtual) relationship of the followers to the app thus establishes proximity to the research subject. The active discussion among participants allows the moderator to validate and secure the results and statements through targeted questioning in dialogue. Thus, the findings can be communicatively validated. A systematic and rule-based evaluation of the focus groups, based on the content-structuring content analysis, enables a rule-based procedure. Categories and subcategories are formed and differentiated step by step according to Kuckartz's (2018) schema, with full disclosure of all data collection instruments (see Appendices A, B, F). Therefore, the criterion of procedural documentation can be upheld. The documentation material also enables argumentative interpretation validation since analysis and interpretation are subsequently conducted solely based on quotes from the focus group transcripts. Lastly, because the results are discussed in relation to the current state of research, the criterion of triangulation is also met.

## 6 Research Results

This chapter serves to present the findings from the qualitative and quantitative analysis. Chapter 7 combines and compares the results of both methods.

### 6.1 Result Presentation Content Analysis

**Content Length:** To investigate the content scope of the 100 most successful TikTok videos from ten political channels, the length of the videos was analyzed. Of these videos, 84 percent (84/100) had a duration of over 30 seconds, while 16 percent (16/100) were 30 seconds or less. Considering these results, hypothesis H1 (*"The majority of successful, political TikTok videos in Germany has a video length of less than one minute"*) is thus rejected. The length of a video can also be related to the type of content being conveyed. For instance, videos that tap into TikTok trends like dance challenges, using special voiceover sounds or typically tend to be shorter in duration, whereas videos featuring oral presentations tend to be longer. For example, among the videos with a duration of 30 seconds or less, 75 percent (12/16) were classified as Documentary genre. In contrast, videos with a duration of over 30 seconds were categorized as Documentary genre in only 22 percent (19/84) of cases. For longer videos, the Oral Presentation content category predominates, being used in 60 percent (50/84) of cases.

**Content Production:** Under the umbrella term Content Production, video elements such as editing, sound effects, camera perspective, and the professionalism of the recording can be summarized. The fusion of the dimensions "Video Perspectives," "Video Elements," and "Type of Recording" aims to shed light on the success factors of video aesthetics. Within the dimension "Video Perspectives," sub-categories such as "Close-up," "Full Body Shot," "POV," and "No Set-up" were coded. For instance, the latter sub-category was employed in videos without hosts, such as in the case of animated infographics. "Video Elements" could be coded into sub-categories like "Only Text," "Only Effects," "Text and Effects," or "Only Video," while the "Type of Recording" was differentiated into "Professional" or "Homemade."

The following graphic summarizes the top five combinations of these three categories.

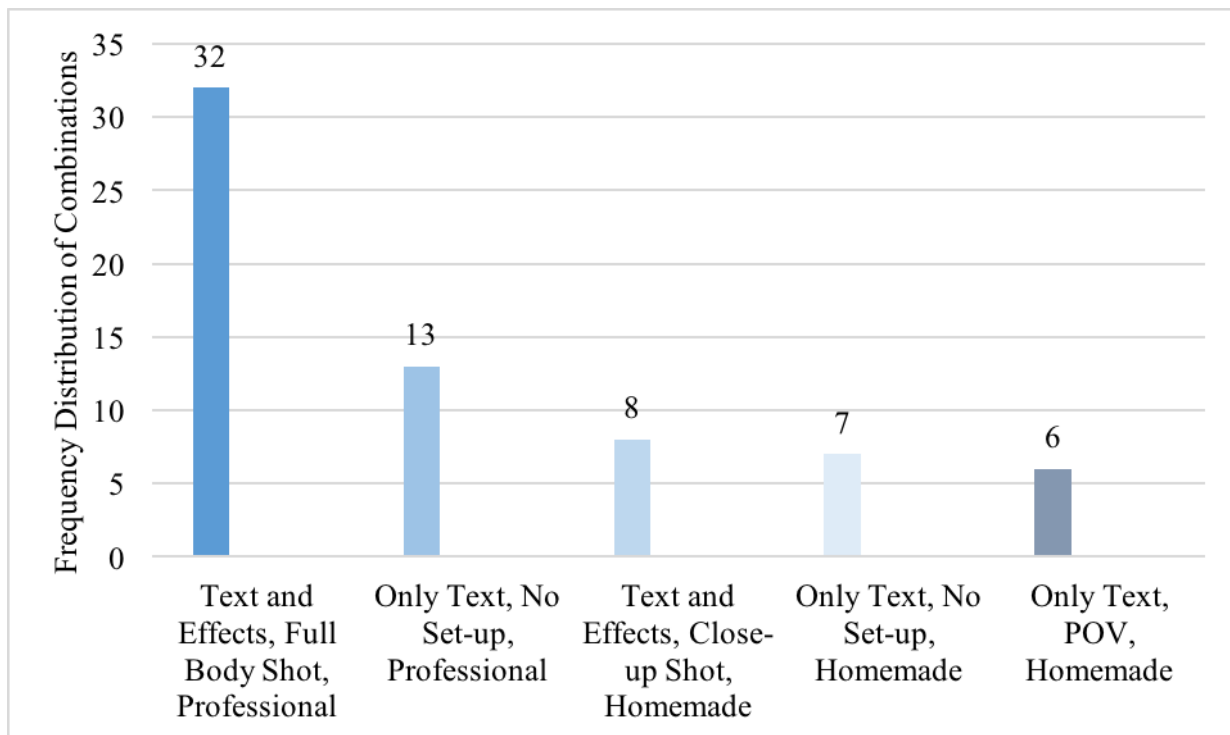


Figure 14 Frequency Distribution of Combinations Considering Format and Production Style

The use of video elements featuring text and effects, the recording perspective of full-body shots, and the professional type of recording were applied in 32 percent (32/100) of the videos. The next most common combination, which includes exclusively text elements, no set-up, and a professional type of recording, was used in 13 percent (13/100) of the videos. Based on these findings, hypothesis H2 (*"The combination of videos shot in full body perspective with a professional setup and text and editing effects occurs most frequently among successful, political TikTok videos in Germany"*) can be confirmed. The success of TikTok videos can be influenced by the use of a viral sound sticker that is currently trending and used by many creators. To examine the use of the audio, the category "Sound" was subdivided into "TikTok Sound" and "Original Sound". "TikTok Sound" was coded when a viral sound sticker was used in the video, while "Original Sound" was coded when the video did not use any additional sound. Only 10 percent (10/100) of the successful TikTok videos used TikTok Sound, while 90 percent (90/100) of the videos used the Original Sound. However, when comparing the view counts of videos with TikTok Sound and Original Sound, it is noticeable that videos with TikTok Sound were clicked on average 6 percent more frequently than videos with Original Sound.

**Content Transfer:** The term "Content Transfer" describes the way in which the content is conveyed in the video. This category includes the sub-categories "Host Gender", "Host Age", "Presentation

Style", "Tonality", and "Viewer Addressing". The content analysis should also provide insights into whether there is a relationship between the gender and age of the hosts and the success of the video. For this purpose, a linear regression was conducted. In the category "Host Gender", the sub-categories "Female", "Male", and "No Host" were coded, while "Host Age" was divided into "17-27", "27-35", "35+", and "No Host". Finally, the success of the video (Views) was chosen as the dependent variable, with the presence of a female host aged 17-27 (Female; 17-27) chosen as the independent variables. The following table shows the results of the regression analysis<sup>17</sup>.

Model Characteristics	Independent Variables	Regression Coefficient	Sig.
Dep. Variable=Views	27-35	-267010.971	0.083
R <sup>2</sup> =0.281; n=100	Female	-490722.010	0.002

Table 8 Linear Regression Model 1 - Results

The regression analysis shows that at the significance level  $\alpha=0.1$ , the presence of hosts aged 17-27 years is significant for video success; at the significance level  $\alpha=0.01$ , the presence of a female host is also significant for video success. Thus, a significant influence, as assumed in hypothesis H3, could be proven, but in the opposite direction as assumed. The hypothesis H3 (*"The presence of female hosts aged 17-27 years in political TikTok videos has a positive impact on the success of the video"*) must therefore be rejected. However, it's essential to mention the weaknesses of the regression analysis of this dataset. Firstly, the presence of a female host aged 17-27 years was binary coded (1=female host, 2=no female host; 1=host aged 17-27; 2=host not aged 17-27), while the views were coded as continuous data. Therefore, the binary coded data contain less information and may contribute less precisely to explaining the variability of the dependent variable. Secondly, after extracting the videos without a host, the dataset consisted of only 70 videos. For a regression analysis, the sample size was very small, resulting in a high standard error and limited inference capabilities. As the analysis proved that the presence of female hosts aged 17-27 had a negative influence on video success, a further regression was carried out with the independent variables "Male" and "27-35".

Model Characteristics	Independent Variables	Regression Coefficient	Sig.
Dep. Variable=Views	27-35	340976.149	0.019
R <sup>2</sup> =0.285; n=100	Male	318409.931	0.025

Table 9 Linear Regression Model 2 - Results

<sup>17</sup> The complete results and calculations of the data analysis with SPSS can be found in Digital Appendix G.

It can therefore be concluded that at the significance level  $\alpha=0.05$ , the presence of male hosts has a positive influence on the views of a video and at the same significance level, the age range of 27 to 35 has a positive influence on the views as well. To check whether videos with middle-aged male hosts are universally more successful, the dependent variable "Views" was exchanged with the variable "Shares" to find out whether the frequency of shares also correlates with the presence of middle-aged male hosts. However, with significance values of  $\alpha=0.189$  (independent variable: male) and  $\alpha=0.169$  (independent variable: 27-35), no correlation could be confirmed for the influence on shares.

On a network like TikTok characterized by concise statements and politainment, it is relevant to examine the tone and addressing style of the videos. The tone of the videos can be categorized into "Alarm/Concern/Negativity," "Hope/Positivity," "Humor," and "No Emotions," while addressing style can be categorized as "Individual Addressing" or "Neutral Addressing." The analysis aimed to determine the most common combination of these sub-categories in videos featuring hosts presenting their content in the form of "Oral Speech," similar to the presentation style of news anchors. Out of 100 videos, over half (52/100) utilized "Oral Speech" as the presentation style. The following presentation illustrates the most common combinations of tone and addressing style.

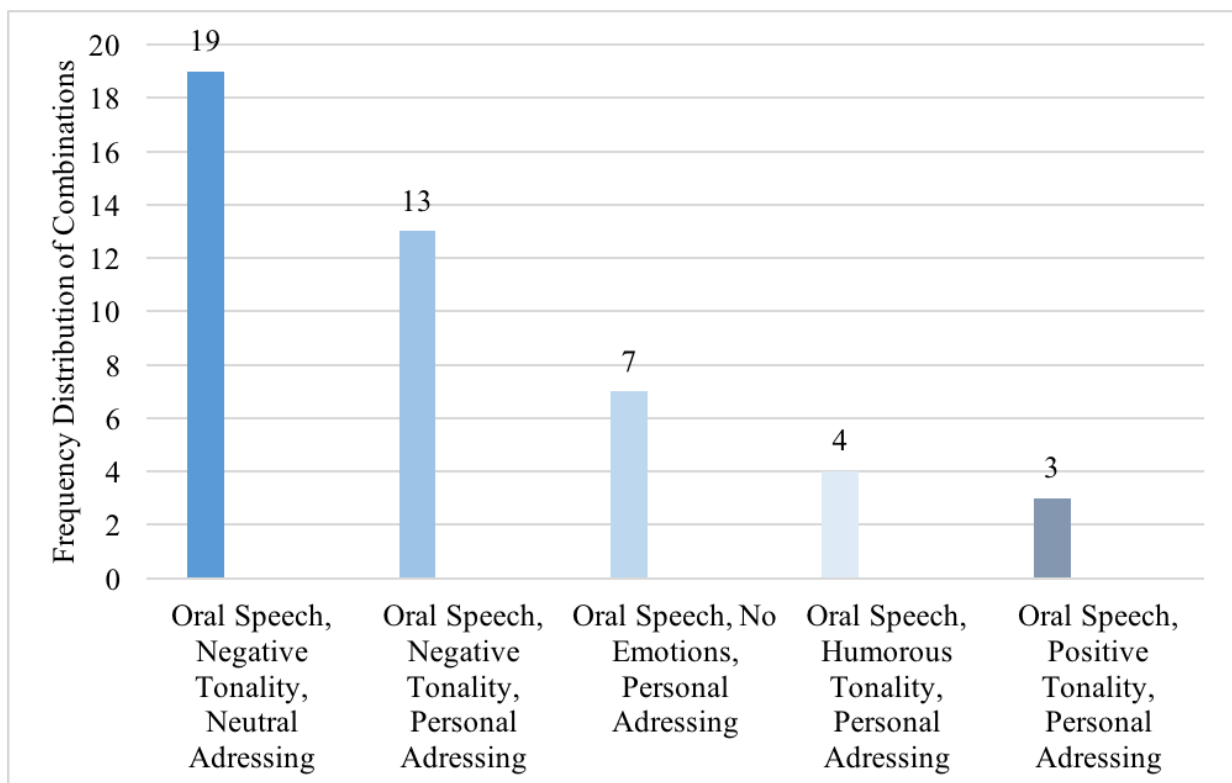


Figure 15 Frequency Distributions of Combinations Considering Tonality and Viewer Addressing

The analysis reveals that 37 percent (19/52) of videos featuring Oral Speech utilize a negative tone (hereafter referred to as this category) and do not address the users personally. Only 25 percent (13/52), on the other hand, combine a negative tone with personal addressing. Thus, hypothesis H4

("The majority of successful, political TikTok Videos in Germany with oral speech deliver the news with negative tonality and neutrally addressing the viewers") can be confirmed. The assumption that the majority of videos employ a negative tone is further supported by the research findings: Overall, 45 percent (45/100) of the videos utilize a tone characterized by "Alarm/Concern/Negativity," 27 percent (27/100) employ humor, 13 percent (13/100) use "Hope/Positivity," and 14 percent (14/100) exhibit no discernible emotions. Since the analysis of the combination frequencies has already confirmed that the negative tonality is frequently used in successful political videos on TikTok, its influence should also be tested for significance with a linear regression.

Model Characteristics	Independent Variables	Regression Coefficient	Sig.
Dep. Variable=Views R <sup>2</sup> =0.029; n=100	Negative Tonality	238499.305	0.049
Dep. Variable=Shares R <sup>2</sup> =0.079; n=100	Negative Tonality	2021.596	0.003
Dep. Variable=Shares R <sup>2</sup> =0.025; n=100	Humorous Tonality	-1428.965	.062

Table 10 Linear Regression Model 3 - Results

The regression analysis thus confirms that the use of a negative tonality at significance level  $\alpha=0.05$  has a significant influence on the positive performance of a political TikTok video. Finally, the negative tonality was to be tested in terms of its influence on the sharing behavior of users. The regression analysis showed that negative tonality is the only characteristic of the "tonality" dimension that has a significant positive influence (Sig.=0.003) on video shares. It can therefore be concluded that videos with negative tonality are shared significantly more often than videos with positive, humorous or neutral tonality. In addition, "humorous tonality" as an independent variable even has a negative influence ( $\beta= -1428.965$ ; Sig.=0.062) on the sharing behavior of users. The use of humorous tonality in a political TikTok video therefore has a significant negative effect on video shares.

Additionally, it is noteworthy that there is an unexpectedly neutral addressing style in the videos. In the sample, only 31 percent (31/100) directly address the viewers, while 69 percent (69/100) opt for a neutral addressing style. Regarding content topics, personal addressing is most frequently observed in videos featuring Daily News (12/31) and Random Information (13/31).

## 6.2 Result Presentation Focus Group

The presentation of the focus group results is based on the categories and sub-categories formed deductively and inductively in the qualitative content analysis. Therefore, the following section presents the results of the categories *Format*, *Production Style*, *Hosts*, *Content*, *Viewer Addressing*, *Length*, *Information Behavior*, and *Follow-up Information Triggers*.

### *Format*

Postproduction elements are perceived as indicators of quality by the participants. Participants consider videos with graphical embellishments of cuts, emojis, and effects as "better made"<sup>18</sup> (S5<sup>19</sup>: 00:17:48), noting that in videos with effects, "more effort had gone into it" (S5: 00:17:48). Regarding an informatively designed thumbnail image, one participant expressed: "it just grabs me from the moment I see from the outset what it's about on the title image" (S2: 00:21:34). In addition to visual effects, participants particularly emphasize the relevance of subtitles. When subtitles are included, participants find it "easier (..) to follow the video" (S2: 00:21:34), they aid in understanding what is being said (cf. S6: 00:22:34), and highlighting individual words, text passages, or bullet points is also positively received (cf. S3: 00:32:47; S5: 00:57:55). One participant prioritized the visual effect over the content regarding a video with subtitles, cuts, video effects, and embedded images, stating: "You stay more engaged, even though the topic didn't actually interest me" (S6: 00:22:34). However, participants stress the importance of ensuring that the effects and cuts serve to enhance the video content rather than being inserted randomly. One participant criticizes the intention behind a video filter and interprets the creator's idea as:

*"let's use some TikTok filters that young people use nowadays to reach them" (S2: 00:48:20).*

Another participant signals that many post-production effects can also overwhelm viewers, expressing that "sometimes there was just a bit too much going on in his video" (S5: 00:39:14).

### *Production Style*

The participants' reactions make it clear that the production style has a significant impact on the perception of the content as political news. One participant explains that a less professionally recorded

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<sup>18</sup> The focus group was held in German and translated into English for the presentation of the results of this study. The complete transcript can be found in Appendix D.

<sup>19</sup> To improve readability, the speakers are abbreviated as 'S' followed by their respective number.



video from a POV perspective is capable of disguising political content and thus maintains the viewers' attention.

*“in this algorithm, when you're scrolling through, you're more likely to come across this typical Tagesschau video where you might think, "Ugh, I don't want to hear the news right now, I'll just scroll on." But then a video pops up of a person filming themselves, in that atmosphere, and I would actually continue listening to that.” (S2:00:59:56)*

Another participant associates the portrayal in POV format with the communication style of influencers and perceives this production style as appropriate only in a context "where all your followers know you and trust you as a person." (S6: 00:30:45) The video would have a different effect if the viewer already knew the moderating person, "then it wouldn't need to be so professional." (S3: 00:32:06) Additionally, video perspective and professionalism have a significant impact on the perceived trust of the participants in the sender. Participants perceive videos in a close-up or full-body format as more trustworthy (cf. S5: 00:30:05; S3 00:32:47; S2: 00:26:21). The statement of a participant makes it clear that young TikTok users do not harbor aversion to traditional TV news; rather, such a presentation style can act as an indicator of the source's credibility: "But if someone wants to report to me about really political topics or any scientific topics, I'd rather (..) see it from a more serious perspective frontally, as you ultimately learned from news." (S2: 00:27:51)

### *Hosts*

The participants also consider the involvement of hosts in the video and their presence as indicators of a quality video. Particularly, the clothing style of the host, their presence in the video, and the potential for identification with the host were discussed by the participants.

### **Clothing**

The clothing style of the host was associated with the host's credibility in the focus group. Particularly, the youngest participant (15 years old) expressed negative opinions regarding the clothing of hosts and their associated perception. She drew a comparison between a professionally and frontally shot video and one shot in POV format: "I think the second lady seems much more serious. She also had a jacket on or something, I would much rather buy something from her than, I found the first one looked a bit scruffy somehow" (S4: 00:33:18). In a conversation about the potential for identification with a female host, the participant again expressed doubts about the appearance of the hosts, stating that she could not identify with the woman because she "was wearing a terrible skirt." (S4: 00:41:42)

### **Host Presence**

In the group, there was consensus regarding the belief that the video content should not be overshadowed by the excessive presence of a host. Participants criticized overly present hosts for perceived "self-promotion" (S4: 01:01:38) and preferred it when the person "was integrated a bit more subtly" (S2: 00:38:09) and "a bit more in the background" (S6: 00:37:04). One participant again drew a comparison to a Tagesschau host and viewed it positively that a host was "more like a Tagesschau presenter, very, very monotonous and really presented the whole topic very objectively." (S2: 00:38:09)

### **Identification Potential**

Regarding the question of whether perceived identification with the hosting individuals motivated participants to positively evaluate the videos, the group was divided. One participant expressed that she perceives a video as particularly positive because she can identify with the woman in the video, even without being asked about her perceived connection to the host (cf. S2: 00:21:34). Another participant does not see identification potential as a reason for staying engaged with a video and explains: "I wouldn't identify with it anyway, whether it's Jens Riwa or the woman or the other guy, so for me it's more about the voice and the way of presenting." (S6: 00:43:20) Generally, it becomes apparent that the age of the host influences the identification potential and also the associated interest in the video. This even extends to the youngest participant herself describing a host coded as 17-27 years old in the quantitative analysis as "somehow too old and completely inappropriate" (S4: 00:41:42). The age of the host is also inferred to indicate familiarity with the TikTok app; one participant speculates that a host estimated to be 40 years old "might not even know exactly what that platform is" (S2: 00:41:02). A participant extrapolates from the identification potential to the subject matter of the video and would prefer a younger host for sports topics. However, "if it's about something where you might need a bit of experience, maybe like the stock market, I might prefer to listen to that from someone who I think is a bit older and maybe has a bit more experience" (S3: 00:43:46).

### *Content*

In the discussion about specific video content, the prevailing opinion is that content must be conveyed in a trustworthy manner, and sensational or humorous content in political videos is rejected by the group.

### **Seriousness**

The participants react very negatively to videos that convey content either with exaggerated humor or extreme dramatization. A video that reports on the accident of a young student with dramatic tone is particularly highlighted as being strongly rejected:

*“With the first one, what annoyed me most was that they were making a big deal out of a really tragic incident, and exaggerating it, which I find completely inappropriate for the situation.”*  
(S4:00:50:39)

Overall, it becomes evident that participants tend to express more negative sentiments towards videos when they perceive a lack of seriousness in content delivery (cf. S5: 00:47:23; S3: 00:51:11; S6: 00:54:14). One participant also feels that sensationalist content often lacks connection to fundamental issues and suggests to “ask yourself, do I really need to report on this specific case or about, say, the general problem, for example, PE class in the heat“ (S5: 00:52:15). Another participant, however, interjects during the debate, stating that if the video presents content in an engaging manner, she wouldn't "really care whether it's serious or fact-based or how the numbers are put together." (S2: 00:59:56) Furthermore, in the discussion about specific video content, it is reiterated that participants still view the Tagesschau as the epitome of news reporting and compare other content to its level of seriousness (cf. S6: 00:54:14; S2: 00:26:21; S2: 00:38:09; S5: 00:39:14).

### **Tonality**

In line with participants' desire for serious reporting, videos presented by hosts in a neutral manner are preferred (cf. S3: 00:50:18; S6: 00:49:10). It becomes evident that while participants understand why many contents are conveyed with clickbaiting tones, ultimately, the preference leans towards a neutral approach:

*“the attention span of people on TikTok is low, but better make short videos, tell it briefly and succinctly and professionally, and then you have a good video that people might also watch.”*  
(S2: 00:53:22)

The tone of the videos should not be influenced by the situation of the hosting person (cf. S6:00:57:16) and should be delivered with less of a tendency to "overdramatize" (S2: 00:53:22). Additionally, it is noticeable that contents coded with a humorous tone in the quantitative analysis are particularly rejected by younger participants (cf. S5: 00:47:23; S4: 00:50:39). A 19-year-old participant evaluates a video that presents a topic as a role-play and with supposedly youthful slang as follows: "And the second one was just not my sense of humor. But I think if you're 40 and up, then maybe it hits the mark more." (S3: 00:51:11) A 15-year-old participant finds the same video "just ridiculous" (S4: 00:50:39) and "would have immediately swiped away" (ibid.).

## Sender

Videos tend to be rated better by group participants when they are familiar with the content sender and perceive them as trustworthy.

Once again, a participant mentions the Tagesschau as a more reliable sender:

*“Because there was this small “Das Erste” logo in the corner and you could somehow see that the videos were from the Tagesschau. (.) and that already changed a lot for me, that I automatically perceived the videos as serious. (S5: 00:39:14)*

In addition to Tagesschau, the content network of ARD and ZDF is also mentioned as a trusted sender, with one participant explaining that they would always opt for a video from this sender because, "I can see right away that it's from Funk, and I like to choose Funk as a source of information" (S2: 01:21:23). Another participant, in a separate discussion, cites seeing the Funk logo as the main reason why she preferred a video, stating that she found the video better because of it (cf. S5: 01:23:02).

## References

A participant shares with the group that the inclusion of substantive source references in videos makes the content appear more trustworthy to her – regardless of the actual quality of the source (cf. S2: 01:22:14).

*“I don't actually look at the source in principle and don't even look closely at what's written in small print later. But that gives me the feeling of transparency, the feeling of okay, there really was someone there, an editor, a journalist, who dealt with the topic” (S2: 01:22:23)*

The participant evaluates source references as "seriously" (S2: 01:21:23), while another participant expresses the view that she does not pay attention to source references once she has assessed the sender of the video as trustworthy (cf. S5: 01:23:02).

## Viewer Addressing

The participants never discussed or mentioned personal or neutral language independently during the evaluation of a video. When the group was asked by the moderator about their opinion on a personally addressing host, a positive atmosphere prevailed. One participant highlights a specific inquiry by the host to the viewers and perceives this address as a situation "where you somehow feel connected." (S5: 00:59:20) Another participant gives the impression that a personal address by the host can lead to more tension and solidarity from the viewer: "As a student myself, I find the topic interesting, and when she's about to open that letter, I also want to know in the end whether it's enough for her or not." (S2: 00:59:56) Additionally, it is noticeable that participants tend to evaluate and reject videos

that heavily rely on personal addressing and personal stories of the hosting person as rather unprofessional (cf. S4: 00:33:18). One participant expresses that a video with personal addressing would remind her of "a voice message from a friend." (S5:00:28:23)

### *Length*

The length of the videos largely reaches consensus within the group: a video lasting 1 minute and 21 seconds is considered "way too long" by the participants (S4: 01:06:37). Knowing the length of this video, they would simply scroll away as a matter of principle, regardless of the topic presented there (cf. S2: 01:07:17). They feel that TikTok "might be the wrong platform for presenting such long videos." (S3: 01:06:54) One participant recognizes for herself that her "attention span isn't really that high anymore" (S5: 01:07:56) and finds the detailed presentation of numbers in a video overwhelming and difficult to remember (cf. *ibid.*). When comparing a 24-second video on police training with a 1-minute and 21-second video on the Middle East conflict, only the oldest participant (25 years old) finds the length of the video appropriate.

*"I think I would have found it a bit confusing if it had been a super short video about the Middle East conflict, where they interrupted the information super quickly. I might not find that so appropriate."* (S6: 01:08:52)

### *Information Behaviour*

In a discussion about seeking further information after consuming a political TikTok video, it becomes clear: participants engage in more time-consuming research and switching from the app to Google primarily for topics that they find very intriguing. They prefer well-structured follow-up information on TikTok itself. The statement of one participant can be seen as representative of the group's attitude towards information seeking. She tries to make the search "as easy as possible (..) and to have the shortest, shortest information paths" (S2: 01:12:53).

### **Comment Section**

Among two participants, the comment section under political TikToks is a regularly used source for follow-up information. One reason for turning to the comment section is mentioned as the factual verification of the video content:

*"But if I read through the comments, and if then a large part of the comments already say that it's nonsense, then I would doubt it and maybe really leave the app and google it again."* (S5: 01:11:48)

This participant also uses the comment section to compare their own opinions and feelings about the topic with those of other app users (cf. S5: 01:27:23). Another participant also states that the comment

section serves as the first step in their follow-up information search (cf. S2: 01:12:26). Both participants, however, view further education through the comment section critically and would take additional measures for information gathering (cf. S2: 01:12:26) and they "wouldn't sign off on that 100% that it was smart." (S5: 01:11:48) Another participant categorically rejects reading comments on political posts because "90% of them are just pure garbage." (S3: 01:29:35) Additionally, accounts that actively manage their community within the comment section and address fake news are positively highlighted (cf. S2: 01:27:47).

### **Google Search**

All participants mention Google as a method used to generate follow-up information. However, among the participants, Google search is considered more as a "last resort" when other methods have not yielded results. After reading the comments, one participant would "maybe really leave the app and google it again." (S5:01:11:48). Also, it is also evident among the participants that the switch from TikTok to Google is only made when the video content has sparked significant interest. One participant would conduct a Google search if several thematically similar videos "confirm the same thing" (S2: 01:12:26) or if a forwarded TikTok video was perceived as thematically interesting (cf. S3: 01:13:48). If participants are uncertain about the truth of the video, a Google search would be less likely:

*"I think I would definitely switch to Google to look something up, but I think in the first step, I would trust the source on TikTok. I think if I had doubts, I would stamp it as untrue anyway."*  
(S6: 01:13:03)

### **Caption**

The video description (caption) is also used by participants to further educate themselves and verify information after watching the video (cf. S4: 01:11:04; S3: 01:28:42). One participant wishes for a caption where "a few bullet points of information are listed directly" (S4: 01:28:42). Another participant prefers a caption with a reference to the link in the profile bio when searching for further information, where additional information could be found (cf. S2: 01:27:47).

### **Social Media**

Additional information is also sought by participants on social media platforms such as TikTok itself and Instagram. One participant indicates that for the search for follow-up information, they initially do not leave the TikTok app, instead, they first read comments under the corresponding video, after which the participant "then goes into the search on TikTok and enters the topic again in TikTok and watches comparable videos and checks if there are several videos that confirm the same thing." (S2:

01:12:26) Another participant makes it clear that TikTok performs the worst in terms of information intensity among all the social media platforms she uses, as during the follow-up information process, she would then "check on Instagram or something, if there's something more detailed about it" (S4: 01:11:04).

### **Senders Website**

Only one participant mentions considering the website of the content creator when searching for information. This step is demonstrated by the participant in relation to a source she categorized beforehand as reliable and trustworthy, the Tagesschau. In such situations, the participant first pays attention to the source of the video and concludes that if the video, for example, comes from the Tagesschau, "then you can just go to their website." (S4: 01:11:04)

### **Link in Bio**

The link in the bio containing additional information related to the video content is a widely discussed follow-up method within the group. One participant suggests that additional information in the account's bio would be helpful, but active mention of its availability in the video is necessary, and the various links in the bio should be "super structured and easily visible at a glance, so that you can click on it directly." (S6: 01:26:06) However, he adds that searching for information in the bio link or entering a question into Google doesn't make a big difference for him time-wise (cf. S6: 01:26:06). Another participant emphasizes the importance of a well-structured bio with regular updates, finding it "incredibly uncomfortable when you watch an older video and then the latest article is linked there and you can't find it directly" (S4: 01:28:42). TikTok videos that mention a link in the bio with additional information within the caption are also highlighted positively (cf. S2: 01:27:47).

### *C8\_Follow-up Information Triggers*

The participants expressed their potential follow-up behavior regarding specific videos and emphasized that a possible continuation of information-seeking action is related to their personal connection to the topic, the information conveyed in the video, and the sender themselves.

### **Personal Interest**

The group emphasizes that if there is no personal interest in the video's topic, no follow-up information-seeking behavior is initiated. Further research is only pursued if the participants already know whether the subject matter "interests [me] thematically at all." (S5: 01:24:09) One participant, however, explains that this personal interest doesn't necessarily have to be very strong or related to an interest already followed by the participant:



*"The basic interest must be aroused and the subtopic that really interests me must be clear."*  
(S6: 01:26:06)

### **Bits of Information**

After being presented with four videos on a topic, each featuring different tones, production styles, and hosts, the participants emphasized that the content of the video and the information conveyed within it strongly influence their motivation for follow-up. Small information triggers spark interest among the participants when a host starts "hinting at a few facts, which makes you want to know more" (S4: 01:20:17). Participants don't want to "start from scratch" (S5: 01:24:02) when conducting follow-up research. Information in the video must be visually appealing so that participants are able to remember the video content and seek further information afterwards (cf. S2: 01:21:23; S4: 01:20:17).

### **Senders Reliability**

In the discussion about videos that encourage follow-up information, it becomes evident that participants prefer to further educate themselves on content communicated by sources they personally deem trustworthy (cf. S6: 01:13:03). The oldest participant (25 years old) criticizes a video in which information about the new party Bündnis Sahra Wagenknecht is shared with viewers by the party leader herself:

*"When she has this share of speaking time, she can present her position as she wants anyway. That's why I don't think it's so good for her to comprehensively inform about her party or to motivate me to later go to Google or something."* (S6: 01:24:29)

A younger participant (19 years old), on the other hand, would be inclined to use exactly this video for further research because in this video, "you really have the primary source there, or whatever you call it, getting information firsthand. Because I mean, the others can say whatever they want." (S3: 01:21:00) Another participant also considers familiarity with the source when deciding on a follow-up reaction and would only further educate herself on one of the videos shown if she knows the sender and likes to use them as an information source (cf. S2: 01:21:23).

## 7 Discussion

The results presented in Chapter 6 are now contextualized within a scientific framework, differences and similarities between the quantitative and qualitative analyses are discussed, implications for journalistic practice are addressed, and finally, limitations of the study are outlined.

### *Reference to Literature*

Political journalism in Germany stands at a crossroads: trust in journalism among the population is diminishing (cf. Edelman, 2023), disinformation has been identified as the greatest challenge in the coming years (cf. World Economic Forum, 2024), and the trend in news consumption among young people is shifting towards opinion formation via social media platforms such as TikTok (cf. Feierabend et al., 2023). Entertainment instead of education, a climate of disinformation, and uninformed and easily manipulated youth, where a window into their minds can be filled with random content daily. Without delving deeply into political education on TikTok and with reference to statements such as those made by Erik Ahrens at the beginning of this work, knowledge transfer on TikTok could be characterized in such a way. This study aims to not portray young users with this stereotyping when examining the success factors of political TikTok videos, but rather to actively incorporate their opinions and ideas through a focus group. From the findings, it can be inferred that young people expect politically informative content on TikTok to be tailored to their demographics and to have entertainment value, but they also want to be taken seriously and not be underestimated.

The evolution of political reporting from print to online and from online to social media has become state-of-the-art in journalism. Publications and media houses must keep pace with this development or risk losing the young audience. The results of the pre-survey conducted in this study reflect the trend outlined in the JIM Study (2023) and the study by Vodafone Stiftung (2022): for young people, social media has become one of the most important sources of information on global political events. Moreover, the uses and gratifications reported by the participants in the focus group align with the research findings of Bucknell Bossen & Kottasz (2020): for the participants in the research group, affective gratification through passive consumption of videos predominates on TikTok as well (cf. Appendix B; Table 6).

However, when shifting the focus away from video consumption to the analysis of specific video elements, divergences between the results available in the literature and the findings of this study become apparent. For example, this study reveals differences between the results of the qualitative and quantitative analyses regarding video length compared to findings from the literature. Research by Guinaudeau et al. (2022) found that over half of political TikTok videos are, on average, 15 seconds long. Therefore, hypothesis H1 of the quantitative analysis assumed that a video length

of under 30 seconds could also be a success factor. Ultimately, 84 percent of the examined TikTok videos exceeded the length of 30 seconds. With the help of the focus group results, this discrepancy can be interpreted: although group trends suggested a preference for shorter videos, it was also evident that a lack of substantive information could have a negative impact on potential follow-up information action. Based on the participant statements, political short videos must a) provide sufficient information to b) pique the personal interest of viewers and c) provide viewers with bullet points that can serve as an incentive for further information-seeking behavior. It is therefore questionable whether participants in 15-second videos, as defined by Guinaudeau et al. (2022), could generate sufficient information as a basis for subsequent information-seeking. Although focus group participants confirm that their attention span, as previously noted by Lorenz-Spreen et al. (2019) has decreased, the need for "information bits" and the greater success of longer videos in the quantitative content analysis suggest that young TikTok users also expect substantive information in political content.

In terms of the production style of political TikTok videos, differences between the findings of the present literature and the results of this study are also evident. While the literature indicates a significant decline in the consumption of linear TV news among young people (cf. vom Orde & Durner, 2024) and that young individuals primarily obtain their information about world events from social media (cf. Feierabend et al., 2023), productions such as the Tagesschau still appear to serve as a benchmark for quality journalism that is seen as credible and trustworthy. While the literature suggests that success on TikTok primarily hinges on videos in line with the "Bedroom Culture" concept (cf. Kennedy, 2020) characterized by minimal production effort and high authenticity from the hosts (cf. Lin et al., 2023), along with numerous triggering statements (cf. Denisova, 2023), the results of both the quantitative analysis and the focus group yield surprising findings. Professionally produced videos in a set-up are preferred over lower-quality "Homemade" videos. Videos shot in a self-filmed POV format perform less favorably compared to videos featuring hosts depicted frontally from the waist up. The quantitative content analysis even demonstrated a significant positive influence of professionalism in production on video success. This insight is crucial for this discussion and can be illustrated by a quote from the focus group:

*"But if someone wants to report to me about really political topics or any scientific topics, I'd rather (...) see it from a more serious perspective frontally, as you ultimately learned from news." (S2: 00:27:51)*

While young app users expect political news on TikTok to adapt to the platform's characteristics through editing, effects, and subtitles, they still associate the communication of political news with a certain level of seriousness and a perceived trust relationship with the source – similar to what they have learned from publications such as Tagesschau at a young age. The quantitative analysis in this

study also reveals that the most successful videos include text and effects but are professionally shot in a full-body format. However, news on TikTok, like print or online publications (cf. Zayani, 2021), must adhere to prevailing attention mechanisms. The popularity of clickbaiting tonality in news communication (cf. Pengnate, 2019), the principle of the Curiosity Zone (cf. Aart et al., 2008) and the increased use of negative key emotions that prompt people to share news (cf. Dobeles et al., 2007) suggest that political news on TikTok cannot escape these triggers either. The content analysis in this study supports this consideration: the most successful videos with oral speech employ a negative tone, which may include sensationalist and fear-motivating statements by the hosts or speakers. The quantitative analysis was able to determine that, as already assumed in the literature by Dobeles et al. (2007) with emotions such as sadness, anger, fear, and disgust in relation to sharing behavior, negative tonality in political TikTok videos has a significantly positive effect on video performance and the sharing amount.

However, the focus group underscores that overly active clickbaiting does not necessarily guarantee the success of a video: when video content was particularly sensationalized, participants doubted the seriousness and accuracy of the video and its source. Moreover, the discussion regarding the hosts' addressing of the audience seems to epitomize the conflict between TikTok's platform logic and the desire for serious reporting. While TikTok is highlighted in other research as a network with high creator-viewer identification potential (cf. Lin et al., 2023; Shan et al., 2020) and influences on the need for identity formation (cf. Bucknell Bossen & Kottasz, 2020), this research shows that a personal approach in political TikTok videos can also have negative consequences. In the quantitative content analysis, videos without personal addressing performed better, and in the focus group, a too-personal relationship between hosts and viewers was also criticized. Group participants made it clear that videos featuring hosts who act very familiarly could only work if the participants already knew the hosts and their style beforehand. Otherwise, there would be a fear of being confronted with misinformation from an untrustworthy source.

### *Interpretation of the Research Findings*

The JIM Study 2022 found that the younger generation of 12 to 19-year-olds still have a high level of trust in the Tagesschau – 65 percent of respondents rated Tagesschau and Tagesthemmen as credible news offerings (cf. Feierabend et al., 2022). In contrast, only 17 percent of participants trust the reporting of the Bild-Zeitung. It can therefore be concluded that many young people have grown up and been socialized with regular consumption of news programs such as the Tagesschau, perceiving moderators against a neutral background with a serious demeanor and their professional language as quality indicators for political reporting. In the case of the Bild-Zeitung, which is associated with

clickbaiting headlines, young people appear to be more critical of the factual accuracy. This observation has a significant impact on the interpretation of the research findings of this study: for all participants in the focus group, the quality, seriousness, and tone of political TikTok videos play a crucial role. Moreover, the quantitative content analysis has revealed that professionalism in production and post-production, as well as the presentation of news in the form of "Oral Speech" by a moderating person, are among the success factors. Thus, the "traditional" form of political reporting continues to prove its worth, albeit with videos now being consumed on social media platforms like TikTok instead of on television screens.

At this point, it is also possible to explain the rejection of hypothesis H3 in more detail with the help of the focus group. Based on the literature and the platform logic of TikTok, it was assumed that young people also want to have political news explained to them by young people their own age. From hosts with whom there is potential for identification. In fact, the quantitative analysis showed that the presence of female hosts aged 17-27 has a negative impact on video performance. However, the presence of male hosts aged 27-35 has a positive effect on the views of the political video. This tendency can be explained by statements from the focus group. Participants expect hosts to be serious and prefer to be informed by slightly older hosts, especially when it comes to complex topics (cf. S3: 00:43:46). For example, identification potential may be a success factor for entertainment-based videos or when following lifestyle influencers; in the case of short political videos, the person presenting the video should also radiate seriousness in their age and appear comparable to presenters on TV. However, this realization does not mean that a cut-down version of the televised *Tagesthemen* would automatically be successful. Videos still need to adapt to the platform logic, experiment with effects and sounds, work with video hosts who can trigger identification with the audience, and stand out with captivating delivery. However, this delivery should not exceed a certain threshold, as videos with overly dramatized tone and clickbait statements may be perceived as untrustworthy and misinformative by viewers.

Regarding the captivating tone of political TikTok videos, based on the findings of this study, certain observations can also be made. While the quantitative analysis indicates that 37 percent of the successful political TikTok videos with Oral Speech indeed employ a "negative" tone and that the negative tonality has a significant positive impact on both the views and the shares, these videos are also critically examined by the focus group. It can be assumed that young TikTok users still feel ridiculed by older authority figures for their activity on the platform, as TikTok has often been characterized in public discourse as a "silly dance-video fad" (Harwell, 2022). Moreover, the trend of TikTok becoming a source for information on global political events is portrayed as a threat by the public: young people are now said to have to "learn critical thinking" (Kolleck, 2023: translated by

the author) due to fake news on TikTok, and young users may often not immediately grasp the sometimes extreme character of the videos (Neumeier et al., 2024). While these are indeed serious challenges, the public discussion surrounding misinformation on TikTok could also lead young people to feel as though their ability to engage in critical thinking is being questioned.

The statements made in the focus group regarding the significant importance of seriousness and the favorable performance of news-like videos in the quantitative analysis support the notion that young people do not want to feel underestimated or trivialized in political communication. It is also notable in the focus group highly playful content, ostensibly targeting a young audience, is particularly negatively perceived. For instance, the youngest participant (14 years old) describes such a video as “just ridiculous“ (S4: 00:50:39), while another participant criticizes that a video gives her the feeling “that there were some older editors behind them, thinking about how to reach the young audience.“ (S2: 00:48:20) This finding from the focus group goes hand in hand with the insight from the quantitative analysis that a humorous tonality has a significantly negative impact on video shares. These statements underscore the importance of communicating political content authentically on TikTok, without giving viewers the impression that the content is primarily designed to go viral due to the inclusion of numerous TikTok-specific elements.

This authenticity is also crucial regarding a potential follow-up action. Participants in the focus group rarely conduct further research on information that comes from a seemingly unreliable source. Generally, the act of leaving the platform and conducting research outside the app does not seem to be a common practice among participants. The focus group reinforces the assumption: TikTok videos must be able to stand on their own and convey all the content within the limited seconds. Account owners should not assume that the community is willing to leave the app to further educate themselves independently. As one participant in the focus group emphasized, political videos are mixed into users' ForYou pages, sometimes they are motivated to engage with the content, and at other times, there is no interest (cf. S6: 00:54:14). Therefore, videos must get straight to the point and integrate all information within the limited time. For information beyond the video content, the video caption or the comment section is available, which is also frequented by participants in the focus group for follow-up actions. Thus, the focus group discussion revealed that there is indeed potential for substantive follow-up actions by TikTok users. However, it is an even more important finding that TikTok users expect such high-quality videos from trustworthy sources that there is no need for follow-up information. Regarding video content and follow-up actions, the results of the quantitative analysis and the focus group provide a solid foundation for learnings that could be implemented in practice.

### *Practical Implications*

For the conception of political TikTok videos, several success factors were examined through the quantitative content analysis and the focus group. According to the research findings of this study, a successful political TikTok video includes

- Text und Effects
- Original Sound
- Full-Body Shot Perspective of the Hosts
- Professional Recording
- Hosts aged from 27 to 35
- Male Hosts
- Daily News as Video Topic
- Oral Speech as Presentation Style
- Rather Negative Tonality
- Video Length longer than 30 Seconds

This study suggests that building a TikTok channel with political content requires a significant amount of production effort and conceptual work. Furthermore, an analysis of the target audience should be conducted, and the selection of hosts should be made accordingly. Both analyses in this study indicate that while the videos create an approachable atmosphere, they should still convey seriousness through the use of a professional setup and the incorporation of text and effects in post-production. Overall, this study highlights that with political TikTok videos, despite the entertainment-based platform logic, one should not take the easy route, but rather ensure that the videos are also compelling in terms of content.

Some of the accounts examined in the content analysis have adopted different communication styles. For instance, the account @weltpiegel operates without hosts and only uses compilations of stock videos, @what.politik opts for a very personal setup and personal addressing by young hosts, and @un.logo delivers news packaged in funny TikTok filters. Despite employing different communication styles, these accounts have achieved success, as evidenced by their high view counts categorized as successful videos in this study. They serve as evidence that these research findings may not apply to every account, and that alternative communication styles may also have their place on TikTok. While the factors listed above seem to contribute to the success of a video, other tones, production styles, or perspectives can still resonate with the target audience and establish themselves. Statements from the focus group such as "That would help a lot if I knew the person herself, then it wouldn't need to be so professional" (S3: 00:32:06) demonstrate, that with a long-term communication format of an account, the target audience tends to become accustomed to the style of these videos and ultimately expects it. Thus, alternative forms of political news on TikTok can establish them-



selves. Moreover, the focus group discussion on potential follow-up actions enables, based on participant statements, an exemplary process of follow-up actions after consuming a political TikTok video to be illustrated.

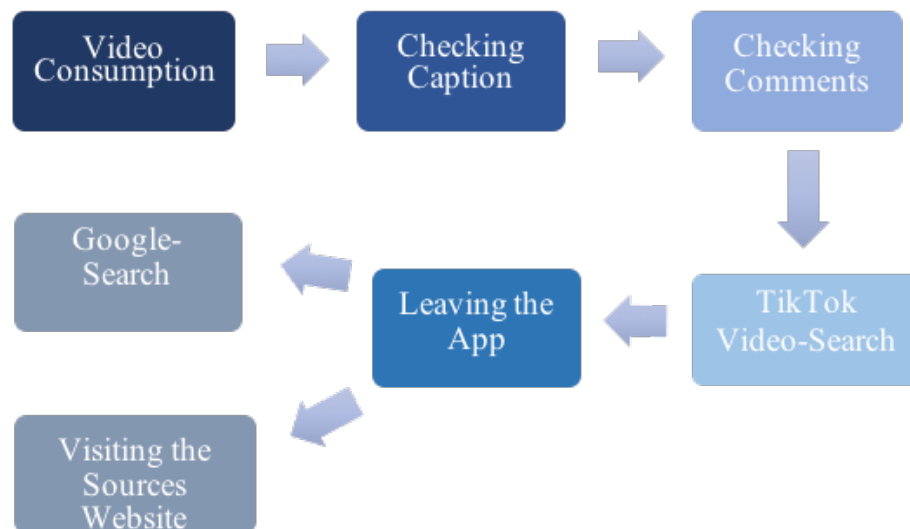


Figure 16 Illustrated Process of a Follow-up Action After the Consumption of a Political TikTok Video

Within the group, it became evident that leaving the app is more considered as a "last resort" than a necessary measure. For operators of political TikTok accounts, this trend implies that subsequent information should ideally already be provided in the caption or comments. Well-structured bullet points could effectively present follow-up information in the caption. Additionally, the caption could refer to a link in the bio, which provides further articles or thematically relevant links (also well-structured).

### Limitations

The truthfulness of TikTok videos is often difficult to assess, as fake news is frequently disguised as particularly convincing facts (cf. Franke & Hajok, 2023; Materna et al., 2021). To mitigate this risk, a sample of channels was selected for the quantitative content analysis, consisting of channels belonging to a public broadcasting corporation, and/or adhering to principles of objectivity, responsibility, and other journalistic fundamentals, and/or receiving government funding from the federal government. This measure ensured that only videos not relying on populist, misleading statements were examined. However, this restriction resulted in the exclusion of previously mentioned successful channels such as @nini\_erklaert\_politik or @johannaruediger from the sample. Additionally, the sample also imposed a thematic limitation: the nature of most channels as news channels of public broadcasting suggests that most videos would fall into the category of "Daily News." Consequently,

while the video topic was included in the analysis, it was only discussed peripherally as a success factor.

A limitation of this study concerns the coding process itself. Despite ensuring inter-coder reliability through the coding test based on ten videos and a seven-day gap between the test and final coding, the involvement of a second person who also codes could have been advantageous in assessing video attributes. Particularly, the assessment of the age of the moderator was sometimes based on the coder's personal impression, where an additional opinion would have been useful. The sample size of both the focus group and the quantitative content analysis presents another limitation. While statements on success factors could be made with the sample of 100 successful videos in the content analysis and regression analysis was feasible with this sample size, the statements would have been more meaningful with a larger sample, such as 1,500 videos as in the TikTok research by Ackermann & Dewitz (2020). Additionally, although important insights were gained from the focus group, and the results of the content analysis could be contextualized, it is important to emphasize that the opinions of only five young people are not representative of the entire TikTok community. Furthermore, the method of the focus group itself may also impact the research results. While participants demanded creativity and assertiveness in evaluating TikTok videos, within the group, the seriousness was implicitly established as a quality indicator after repeated discussions. This led to the quality of the videos being exclusively judged based on their credibility in many cases. Although this is an important finding of this study, the discussion about the seriousness of the videos resulted in other success factors not being adequately debated. In individual interviews, the moderator could have specifically addressed these other factors. However, due to group dynamics and the emphasis on the assessment of seriousness, this was not possible in some parts of the focus group.

A challenge faced by both individual interviews and focus groups is the non-verifiability of participants' statements. Especially in discussions about social media habits, participants may not want to stand out negatively by, for example, stating that they prefer videos with low informational content and more entertainment value. Therefore, it is possible that focus group participants may have adjusted their opinions to align with the statements of other participants in order to appear in a positive light.

## 8 Conclusion and Outlook

Compelling and sensational or neutral and serious? Productions like in a TV studio or authentic videos in the living room? Googling for newly acquired information or searching for insights in the comments section? TikTok's ForYou page, with its "unpredictable flow and potential eventfulness" (Lupinacci, 2021: 2), offers space for various styles of political information dissemination. While the stereotypical TikTok user on the app seeks affective gratification to satisfy their craving for entertainment or escapism, TikTok has nevertheless undergone a transformation from a young dance app to a serious channel for political education. This development was instrumental in driving the research interest of this study. Young people acquire their knowledge of world events through TikTok, but in doing so, they are also confronted with large amounts of misinformation, posing a challenge for account operators to build trust with the younger generation. A trust relationship that may go beyond simply consuming TikToks, which often contain only short information snippets with an entertainment focus rather than in-depth reporting, and motivates them to take informative follow-up actions. Since social media research has thus far neglected to focus on the TikTok user along with their content and stylistic expectations regarding political content in video form, this study aimed to establish a particular relationship between the user and the success factors of short videos. In order to find out how political TikTok videos can be successful and encourage further information behavior, the research question "How must political content in short-videos be communicated on the social media platform TikTok in order to achieve a thematic follow-up action among 13- to 25- year-old users in Germany?" was formulated.

Through a quantitative content analysis of the 100 most successful TikTok videos from ten accounts with a political orientation, success factors influencing the performance of a TikTok video positively were examined. In a focus group, these success factors were discussed and critically evaluated by young TikTok users. Furthermore, an additional investigation of follow-up actions after consuming a video within the focus group was conducted, with participants sharing their personal experiences with further research after watching videos. This study thus complements the existing research by providing a detailed insight into the informal and stylistic character of political communication in the 9:16 format. While other research approaches also address success factors of TikTok videos (cf. Guinaudeau et al., 2022; Heyder & Hillebrandt, 2023), these publications focus on already viral videos and do not address the actual trigger for the success of a video: the users themselves. By employing a mixed methods approach that combines qualitative and quantitative research, this study examined successful videos through content analysis and also considered the opinions of the app users. This not only facilitated the acquisition of scientific knowledge but also enabled the derivation of essential learnings for journalistic practice and social media editing. Thus, this study is able to

make statements about the expectations of TikTok users, the success factors, and potential motivators for informative follow-up actions.

When TikTok users consciously choose to consume a political video, they expect more than just quality and informative content; they also seek a degree of entertainment and the assurance that their role as a discerning audience member with critical thinking skills is acknowledged. To motivate TikTok users aged 13 to 25 to take follow-up actions such as conducting research in the comments, reading the video caption, or searching on Google, the first step is for users to perceive the video as credible and trustworthy. This can be achieved through factors such as professional production and post-production, a captivating yet not excessively dramatized tone from the video hosts, and memorable and substantively informative fact communication. In the second step, the account must make additional content information as accessible as possible, for example, by presenting further facts in the video caption, the comment section, or a well-structured and regularly updated link in the bio.

While this study has already identified some implications for motivating TikTok users to engage in follow-up actions after consuming a political short video, this field offers great potential for further research. The participants of the focus group struggled to articulate their preferences regarding how information should be presented to encourage follow-up actions by the account owners. Therefore, it would be interesting to track the journey from information intake to completed follow-up information and test different stimuli in this process. For instance, an experiment could be conducted to specify user follow-up actions in response to further information needs. TikTok users with varying ages, educational backgrounds, and levels of social media affinity could be shown videos related to a common theme (e.g., the European elections) as per the research design of this study. Subsequently, experimental testing could determine which type of video prompts which follow-up reaction and how the entire process could be optimized most effectively. Another research perspective that is very obvious in the context of TikTok and political opinion formation is an investigation into the success factors of right-wing extremist short videos on TikTok. During the development of this study, there were many incidents in this regard: the European Commission initiated proceedings against TikTok for a possible violation of the Digital Services Act<sup>20</sup> (cf. Europäische Kommission, 2024) and the reach of the TikTok account of right-wing populist AfD politician Maximilian Krah was restricted by TikTok (cf. Klein, 2024). At the same time, the popularity of the hashtag #reclaimtiktok continues to rise, under which users seek to democratize political discourse in Germany (cf. *ibid.*). These developments show that right-wing extremism and populism pose a significant challenge on TikTok,

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<sup>20</sup> “ In particular, it deals with the **protection of minors, transparency in advertising, data access for researchers and risk management in relation to addictive design and harmful content.**” (European Commission, 2024; emphasis in the original, translated by the author)

which must be addressed with effective countermeasures. Although the participants of the focus group reacted more negatively to dramatizing and polarizing videos, it cannot be denied that this type of content is particularly instrumentalized by the right-wing scene on TikTok (cf. Franke & Hajok, 2023). Therefore, it would be interesting to take a closer look at this content and answer the following questions: Who are the main consumers of these videos? How are the hooks constructed? What are the differences in tone in populist videos? Which sources do these videos use, and where does the communication of fake news take place? A content analysis with a large sample of successful videos featuring right-wing populist statements would be suitable for such research.

Finally, a third perspective can be highlighted, which also must not be neglected by social media research in the near future. While this study has deliberately focused on TikTok, political information communication in the 9:16 format also takes place on Instagram. For young people, Instagram is also an important channel for information on current events, as both the JIM study (2023) and the results of the focus group emphasize. On February 9, 2024, Meta released the following statement:

*“If you decide to follow accounts that post political content, we don’t want to get between you and their posts, but we also don’t want to proactively recommend political content from accounts you don’t follow. So we’re extending our existing approach to how we treat political content – we won’t proactively recommend content about politics on recommendation surfaces across Instagram and Threads.”*

Accordingly, political posts on Instagram are now heavily restricted, with users no longer being shown videos unless they follow the corresponding account. Research must therefore address the question of what influence this significant restriction now has on political communication on social media and the political opinion formation of the younger generation. This development could, for example, signify a shift in political information communication in video format from Instagram to platforms like TikTok or YouTube Shorts, which should be thoroughly investigated. Additionally, research should also examine the effect of this content ban on young people in their information seeking and political opinion formation. Particularly during the "super election year" of 2024, encompassing significant events such as the US elections, the European elections, and various regional elections, it becomes crucial for social media research to enable journalism, political spheres, and all voters themselves to understand the profound impact of social networks on the formation of political opinions.

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## Appendix A: Code Book Quantitative Content Analysis

Dimension\_1 *Qualified Impact of Successful TikTok Videos with Political Topics*

Category	Description of Category	Use of Category	Application Examples	Differentiation from other Categories
<b>Number of Likes</b>	Total Number of Likes by February 01 2024	The number of likes the video has achieved by February 1, 2024 is entered here.		
<b>Number of Comments</b>	Total Number of Comments by February 01 2024	The number of comments the video has received by February 1, 2024 is entered here.		
<b>Number of Saves</b>	Total Number of Saves by February 01 2024	The number of users who have memorized the video by February 1, 2024 is entered here.		
<b>Number of Shares</b>	Total Number of Shares by February 01 2024	The number of times the video has been shared up to February 1, 2024 is entered here.		



## Dimension\_2 Elements of Successful TikTok Videos with Political Topics

Category	Description of Category	Use of Category	Application Examples	Differentiation from other Categories
<b>Video with Effects</b>	Editing effects such as transitions, zooms or similar elements without text/subtitles	The category will be used, if the video contains post-production editing effects such as transitions, zooms or similar elements, but no text elements to support what is being said	<a href="https://www.tiktok.com/@heidireich-innek/video/7043142326306213125?is_from_webapp=1&amp;sender_device=pc&amp;web_id=7285336237388023329">https://www.tiktok.com/@heidireich-innek/video/7043142326306213125?is_from_webapp=1&amp;sender_device=pc&amp;web_id=7285336237388023329</a>	
<b>Video with Text</b>	Text and/or subtitles, no effects	The category will be used, if the video contains written text and/or subtitles that support what is being said, but no effects	<a href="https://www.tiktok.com/@educusu/video/7329944221039775009?is_from_webapp=1&amp;sender_device=pc&amp;web_id=7285336237388023329">https://www.tiktok.com/@educusu/video/7329944221039775009?is_from_webapp=1&amp;sender_device=pc&amp;web_id=7285336237388023329</a>	
<b>Video with Text and Effects</b>	Editing effects as well as written text	The category will be used, if the video contains both editing effects such as transitions, zooms or similar elements, written text and/or subtitles	<a href="https://www.tiktok.com/@chrismueller/video/7326963263554473248?is_from_webapp=1&amp;sender_device=pc&amp;web_id=7285336237388023329">https://www.tiktok.com/@chrismueller/video/7326963263554473248?is_from_webapp=1&amp;sender_device=pc&amp;web_id=7285336237388023329</a>	

			<a href="https://www.tiktok.com/@felixschulz/video/7139596403357011206?is_from_webapp=1&amp;sender_device=pc&amp;web_id=7285336237388023329">336237388023329</a>	
<b>Only Video</b>	A video that contains neither editing effects nor written text	The category will be used, if the video doesn't contain any editing effects and no written text as well	<a href="https://www.tiktok.com/@felixschulz/video/7139596403357011206?is_from_webapp=1&amp;sender_device=pc&amp;web_id=7285336237388023329">https://www.tiktok.com/@felixschulz/video/7139596403357011206?is_from_webapp=1&amp;sender_device=pc&amp;web_id=7285336237388023329</a>	

Dimension\_3 *Sound used in Successful TikTok Videos with Political Topics*

Category	Description of Category	Use of Category	Application Examples	Differentiation from other Categories
<b>TikTok Sound</b>	Sound sticker from the TikTok music library	The category will be used, if the video uses a sound from the TikTok library as a sound sticker	<a href="https://vm.tiktok.com/ZGehbCF95/">https://vm.tiktok.com/ZGehbCF95/</a>	
<b>Original Sound</b>	Only the original video sound	The category will be used, if the video does not use a sound sticker from the TikTok library	<a href="https://www.tiktok.com/@zdfinfo/video/7324601610812788001?is_from_webapp=1&amp;sender_device=pc&amp;web_id=7285">https://www.tiktok.com/@zdfinfo/video/7324601610812788001?is_from_webapp=1&amp;sender_device=pc&amp;web_id=7285</a>	

			<u>336237388023329</u>	
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Dimension\_4 *Video Shoot Perspectives of Successful TikTok Videos with Political Topics*

Category	Description of Category	Use of Category	Application Examples	Differentiation from other Categories
<b>Close-up</b>	Showing the host head-on from the waist up	The category is used when the host is shown in the video exclusively from the upper body upwards and in closer perspectives	<a href="https://www.tiktok.com/@sallylisa-starken/video/7265040929692650784?is_from_webapp=1&amp;sender_device=pc&amp;web_id=7285336237388023329">https://www.tiktok.com/@sallylisa-starken/video/7265040929692650784?is_from_webapp=1&amp;sender_device=pc&amp;web_id=7285336237388023329</a>	The close-up shows the host from the upper body upwards, while the full body shot shows the host from the knees upwards. If the host's body is obscured in the corresponding perspective (e.g. by a desk or table), the category is coded as the host can be seen without being obscured
<b>Full-Body Shot</b>	Showing the host head-on in a full-body shot	The category is used when the host is shown in the video from the knees upwards and in closer perspectives	<a href="https://www.tiktok.com/@thomas_sattlberger/video/7325512026988514593?is_from_webapp=1&amp;sender_device=pc&amp;web_id=728533">https://www.tiktok.com/@thomas_sattlberger/video/7325512026988514593?is_from_webapp=1&amp;sender_device=pc&amp;web_id=728533</a>	The full-body shot shows the host from the knees upwards, while the close-up only shows the host from the upper body upwards. If the host's body is obscured in the corresponding perspective (e.g. by a desk or

			<a href="https://www.tiktok.com/@what.politik/video/7291336103452282144?is_from_webapp=1&amp;sender_device=pc&amp;web_id=7285336237388023329">6237388023329</a>	table), the category is coded as the host is seen without being obscured
<b>POV</b>	Showing the host from his own point of view (selfie view)	The category will be used if the host films themselves from their own perspective, or if the video at least gives this impression	<a href="https://www.tiktok.com/@what.politik/video/7291336103452282144?is_from_webapp=1&amp;sender_device=pc&amp;web_id=7285336237388023329">https://www.tiktok.com/@what.politik/video/7291336103452282144?is_from_webapp=1&amp;sender_device=pc&amp;web_id=7285336237388023329</a>	The POV category is also encoded if the host is only filming in POV format at the beginning or end of the video and has the recording device in front of them in other scenes, for example
<b>No Set-up</b>	No set-up	The category will be used if the video does not use a set-up, for example because it does not contain a host	<a href="https://www.tiktok.com/@sprechenderfisch/video/7301409569203408160?is_from_webapp=1&amp;sender_device=pc&amp;web_id=7285336237388023329">https://www.tiktok.com/@sprechenderfisch/video/7301409569203408160?is_from_webapp=1&amp;sender_device=pc&amp;web_id=7285336237388023329</a>	

Dimension\_5 *Type of Recording of Successful TikTok Videos with Political Topics*

Category	Description of Category	Use of Category	Application Examples	Differentiation from other Categories
<b>Professional</b>	Video with high quality standards and high-quality set-up	The category will be used, if the coders classify the video as professional due to its high quality standards and high-quality set-up	<a href="https://www.tiktok.com/@zeit/video/7304304585596816672?is_from_webapp=1&amp;sender_device=pc&amp;web_id=7285336237388023329">https://www.tiktok.com/@zeit/video/7304304585596816672?is_from_webapp=1&amp;sender_device=pc&amp;web_id=7285336237388023329</a>	
<b>Homemade</b>	Video with low quality standards and amateurish set-up	The category will be used, if the coders classify the video classify as homemade due to low quality standards and amateurish set-up	<a href="https://www.tiktok.com/@ahmad.neu/video/7324042488652631329?is_from_webapp=1&amp;sender_device=pc&amp;web_id=7285336237388023329">https://www.tiktok.com/@ahmad.neu/video/7324042488652631329?is_from_webapp=1&amp;sender_device=pc&amp;web_id=7285336237388023329</a>	
<b>No Set-up</b>	No set-up	The category will be used, if the video does not include a set-up, for example because it does not include a host	<a href="https://www.tiktok.com/@sprechenderfisch/video/7301409569203408160?is_from_webapp=1&amp;sender_device=pc&amp;web_id=728533">https://www.tiktok.com/@sprechenderfisch/video/7301409569203408160?is_from_webapp=1&amp;sender_device=pc&amp;web_id=728533</a>	

			<u>6237388023329</u>	
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Dimension\_6 *Host Age of Successful TikTok Videos with Political Topics*

Category	Description of Category	Use of Category	Application Examples	Differentiation from other Categories
<b>17-27</b>	Host aged from 17 to 27	The category will be used, if the coders estimate the age of the host from 17 to 27	<a href="https://www.tiktok.com/@what.politik/video/7329867114334915873?is_from_webapp=1&amp;sender_device=pc&amp;web_id=7285336237388023329">https://www.tiktok.com/@what.politik/video/7329867114334915873?is_from_webapp=1&amp;sender_device=pc&amp;web_id=7285336237388023329</a>	
<b>27-35</b>	Host aged from 27 to 35	The category will be used, if the coders estimate the age of the host from 27 to 35	<a href="https://www.tiktok.com/@tagesschau/video/7329573519308672288?is_from_webapp=1&amp;sender_device=pc&amp;web_id=7285336237388023329">https://www.tiktok.com/@tagesschau/video/7329573519308672288?is_from_webapp=1&amp;sender_device=pc&amp;web_id=7285336237388023329</a>	
<b>35+</b>	Host is older than 35	The category will be used, if the coders estimate the age of the host	<a href="https://www.tiktok.com/@re-schkefernsehen/video/733">https://www.tiktok.com/@re-schkefernsehen/video/733</a>	

		to be older than 35	<a href="https://www.tiktok.com/@20minuten/video/7330606214226677025">0571330779188512?is_from_webapp=1&amp;sender_device=pc&amp;web_id=7285336237388023329</a>	
<b>No Host</b>	A video that does not contain a host	The category will be used, if the video does not contain a host	<a href="https://www.tiktok.com/@20minuten/video/7330606214226677025">https://www.tiktok.com/@20minuten/video/7330606214226677025</a>	

## Dimension\_7 Host Gender of Successful TikTok Videos with Political Topics

<b>Category</b>	<b>Description of Category</b>	<b>Use of Category</b>	<b>Application Examples</b>	<b>Differentiation from other Categories</b>
<b>Female</b>	Female Host	The category will be used, if the coders estimate the gender of the host as female	<a href="https://www.tiktok.com/@franziska.brantner/video/7318841909227556129?is_from_webapp=1&amp;sender_device=pc&amp;web_id=7285336237388023329">https://www.tiktok.com/@franziska.brantner/video/7318841909227556129?is_from_webapp=1&amp;sender_device=pc&amp;web_id=7285336237388023329</a>	
<b>Male</b>	Male Host	The category will be used, if the coders estimate the gender of the	<a href="https://www.tiktok.com/@zdfinfo/video/7328414654269607201?is">https://www.tiktok.com/@zdfinfo/video/7328414654269607201?is</a>	



		host as male	<a href="https://www.tiktok.com/@ya-hoonews/video/7330383718533680426">from_webapp=1&amp;sender_de-vice=pc&amp;web_id=7285336237388023329</a>	
<b>No Host</b>	No Host featured in video	The category will be used, if the video does not contain a host	<a href="https://www.tiktok.com/@ya-hoonews/video/7330383718533680426">https://www.tiktok.com/@ya-hoonews/video/7330383718533680426</a>	

Dimension\_8 *Video Topic of Successful TikTok Videos with Political Topics*

<b>Category</b>	<b>Description of Category</b>	<b>Use of Category</b>	<b>Application Examples</b>	<b>Differentiation from other Categories</b>
<b>Daily News</b>	The video discusses topics on the current public agenda	The category is used if the video reports on current political events.	<a href="https://www.tiktok.com/@franziska.brantner/video/7318841909227556129?is_from_webapp=1&amp;sender_de-vice=pc&amp;web_id=7285336237388023329">https://www.tiktok.com/@franziska.brantner/video/7318841909227556129?is_from_webapp=1&amp;sender_de-vice=pc&amp;web_id=7285336237388023329</a>	To fall into the "Daily News" category, the video must be related to current events at the time of publication. For example, formats such as a weekly review or simple news updates are categorized as daily news.
<b>Random Information</b>	The video discusses political information unrelated	This category is used if the video reports on random information with	<a href="https://www.tiktok.com/@zdfinfo/video/7328414654269607201?is">https://www.tiktok.com/@zdfinfo/video/7328414654269607201?is</a>	The "Random Information" category differs from Daily News in its lack of reference to

	to the current public agenda	a political reference that is not currently on the public agenda	<a href="#"><u>from_webapp=1&amp;sender_device=pc&amp;web_id=7285336237388023329</u></a>	current events. It also differs from "Explanation of Political Context" in its depth of information and selection of topics. Random Information refers to information that does not analyze in-depth political issues, but merely provides a rough overview of a supposedly arbitrary topic
<b>Historical Throwback</b>	The video explains political issues from a historical perspective	The category is used if the video reports on a historical event or looks at topics from a historical perspective	<a href="#"><u>https://www.tiktok.com/@ya-hoonews/video/7330383718533680426</u></a>	The category differs from the category "Explanation of Political Context" in its thematic starting form: in the Historical Throwback, a topic is rolled up historically and past events are retold, whereas in the Explanation of Political Context, the background to a currently relevant topic is explained
<b>Explanation of Political Context</b>	The video discusses the background information of a political topic	The category is used if the video provides comprehensive background information on a political topic	<a href="#"><u>https://www.tiktok.com/@zeit/video/7307615182077938976?is_from_webapp=1&amp;sender_device=pc&amp;web_id=7285336237388023329</u></a>	The category "Explanation of Political Context" differs from the category "Daily News" in its function as a transport of comprehensive background information, while "Daily News" only presents the news itself without placing the news in a bigger picture

## Dimension\_9 Presentation Style of Successful TikTok Videos with Political Topics

Category	Description of Category	Use of Category	Application Examples	Differentiation from other Categories
<b>Acting</b>	Information transfer via acting and role plays	The category will be used, if the information is presented via a individual or group acting, and role plays	<a href="https://www.tiktok.com/@matthiasrenger/video/7328044085527285025?is_from_webapp=1&amp;sender_device=pc&amp;web_id=7285336237388023329">https://www.tiktok.com/@matthiasrenger/video/7328044085527285025?is_from_webapp=1&amp;sender_device=pc&amp;web_id=7285336237388023329</a>	
<b>Animated Infographic</b>	Information transfer via graphic visualization elements	The category will be used, if the video uses a combination of images, illustrations, charts, graphs, text, cartoon and other elements that are animated to visualize information	<a href="https://www.tiktok.com/@chrismuellerrr/video/7311013861748968737?is_from_webapp=1&amp;sender_device=pc&amp;web_id=7285336237388023329">https://www.tiktok.com/@chrismuellerrr/video/7311013861748968737?is_from_webapp=1&amp;sender_device=pc&amp;web_id=7285336237388023329</a>	
<b>Oral Speech</b>	Information transfer via oral presentation	The category will be used, if the video uses a host who talks orally, and often formally, to audience	<a href="https://www.tiktok.com/@tagesschau/video/7330560597177732384?is_from_webapp=1&amp;sender_device=pc&amp;web_id=7285336237388023329">https://www.tiktok.com/@tagesschau/video/7330560597177732384?is_from_webapp=1&amp;sender_device=pc&amp;web_id=7285336237388023329</a>	The "Oral Speech" category differs from the "Acting" category in its style: although the hosts can also speak frontally into the camera in the "Acting" category, "Oral Speech" is

			<u><a href="#">6237388023329</a></u>	used if no Acting, Role Play or TikTok Trend is used
<b>Pictorial Slideshow</b>	Still images to swipe through	The category will be used, if the video presents a series of still images in a prearranged sequence	<u><a href="https://www.tiktok.com/@nini_erklart_politik/photo/7326863100693581088?is_from_webapp=1&amp;sender_device=pc&amp;web_id=7285336237388023329">https://www.tiktok.com/@nini_erklart_politik/photo/7326863100693581088?is_from_webapp=1&amp;sender_device=pc&amp;web_id=7285336237388023329</a></u>	
<b>TikTok Dance/Challenge</b>	Viral dance, Trend or a viral challenge	The category will be used, if the video features a viral dance, viral trend or a viral challenge that circulates on TikTok	<u><a href="https://www.tiktok.com/@heidireich-innek/video/7289091536694906145?is_from_webapp=1&amp;sender_device=pc&amp;web_id=7285336237388023329">https://www.tiktok.com/@heidireich-innek/video/7289091536694906145?is_from_webapp=1&amp;sender_device=pc&amp;web_id=7285336237388023329</a></u>	

<b>Documentary</b>	Report in a documentary style	The category will be used, if the video provides a factual record or television-like report of events or interviews with people	<a href="https://www.tiktok.com/@manu_talk/video/7220013491585879302">https://www.tiktok.com/@manu_talk/video/7220013491585879302</a>	The category differs from "Oral Speech" in its setting: in "Documentary", for example, the host is directly at the scene of the event and explains the surroundings, or the video takes place without a host and a voiceover explains what is to be seen, as in a TV reportage
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Dimension\_10 *Tonality conveyed in Successful TikTok Videos with Political Topics*

<b>Category</b>	<b>Description of Category</b>	<b>Use of Category</b>	<b>Application Examples</b>	<b>Differentiation from other Categories</b>
<b>Alarm/Concern/Negativity</b>	Tonality of fear, anxiety, worry or sadness for self or others	The category will be used, if the video expresses news with the tonality of fear, anxiety, worry or sadness for self or others	<a href="https://www.tiktok.com/@what.politik/video/7327280303901363488?is_from_webapp=1&amp;sender_device=pc&amp;web_id=7285336237388023329">https://www.tiktok.com/@what.politik/video/7327280303901363488?is_from_webapp=1&amp;sender_device=pc&amp;web_id=7285336237388023329</a>	

<b>Hope/Positivity</b>	Tonality of hope and positivity for self or others	The category will be used, if the video expresses news with the tonality of hope and positivity for self or others	<a href="https://www.tiktok.com/@2050magazin/video/7151433991671909637?is_from_webapp=1&amp;sender_device=pc&amp;web_id=7285336237388023329">https://www.tiktok.com/@2050magazin/video/7151433991671909637?is_from_webapp=1&amp;sender_device=pc&amp;web_id=7285336237388023329</a>	
<b>Humor</b>	Funny or playful tonality	The category will be used, if the video presents an unexpected, funny or playful situation about the news that intended to make people laugh	<a href="https://www.tiktok.com/@matthiasrenger/video/7304691109026925857?is_from_webapp=1&amp;sender_device=pc&amp;web_id=7285336237388023329">https://www.tiktok.com/@matthiasrenger/video/7304691109026925857?is_from_webapp=1&amp;sender_device=pc&amp;web_id=7285336237388023329</a>	
<b>No Emotions</b>	No recognizable emotions	The category will be used, if the coder cannot examine any emotions in the way of transferring information, like when video conveys news in a neutral way without recognizable emotions	<a href="https://www.tiktok.com/@tagesschau/video/7323257645891128609?is_from_webapp=1&amp;sender_device=pc&amp;web_id=7285336237388023329">https://www.tiktok.com/@tagesschau/video/7323257645891128609?is_from_webapp=1&amp;sender_device=pc&amp;web_id=7285336237388023329</a>	

Dimension\_11 *Viewer Addressing in Successful TikTok Videos with Political Topics*

Category	Description of Category	Use of Category	Application Examples	Differentiation from other Categories
<b>Individual Addressing</b>	Personal addressing the viewers	The category will be used, if the video addresses the viewers personally by for example using the pronomial form of address	<a href="https://www.tiktok.com/@nicenow/video/7309473523402050849?is_from_webapp=1&amp;sender_device=pc&amp;web_id=7285336227288022220">https://www.tiktok.com/@nicenow/video/7309473523402050849?is_from_webapp=1&amp;sender_device=pc&amp;web_id=7285336227288022220</a>	
<b>Neutral Addressing</b>	Neutrally addressing the viewers	The category will be used, if the video does not address the viewer personally, but provides information in a neutral way	<a href="https://www.tiktok.com/@rtlaktuell/video/7329917720944774432?is_from_webapp=1&amp;sender_device=pc&amp;web_id=7285336237388023329">https://www.tiktok.com/@rtlaktuell/video/7329917720944774432?is_from_webapp=1&amp;sender_device=pc&amp;web_id=7285336237388023329</a>	



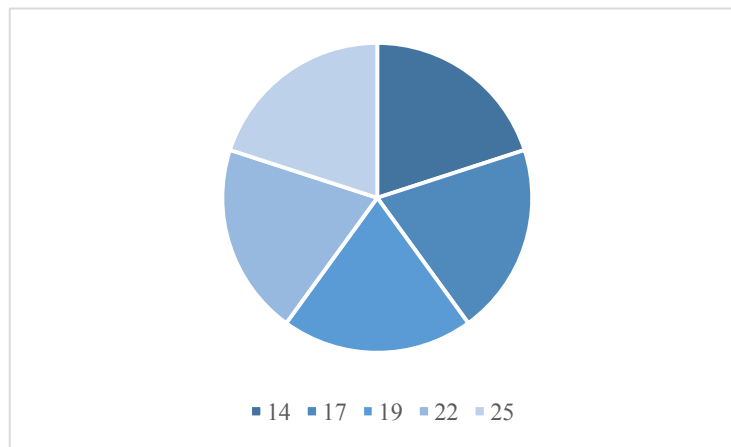
Dimension\_12 *Length of Successful TikTok Videos with Political Topics*

Category	Description of Category	Use of Category	Application Examples	Differentiation from other Categories
<b>≤30 Seconds</b>	Length less than or equal to 30 seconds	The category will be used, if the video length is less than or equal to 30 seconds	<a href="https://vm.tiktok.com/ZGehg1nVw/">https://vm.tiktok.com/ZGehg1nVw/</a>	
<b>&gt;30 Seconds</b>	Length longer than 30 seconds	The category will be used, if the video length is longer than 30 seconds	<a href="https://vm.tiktok.com/ZGehgSxm7/">https://vm.tiktok.com/ZGehgSxm7/</a>	

## Appendix B: Pre-Survey Focus Group

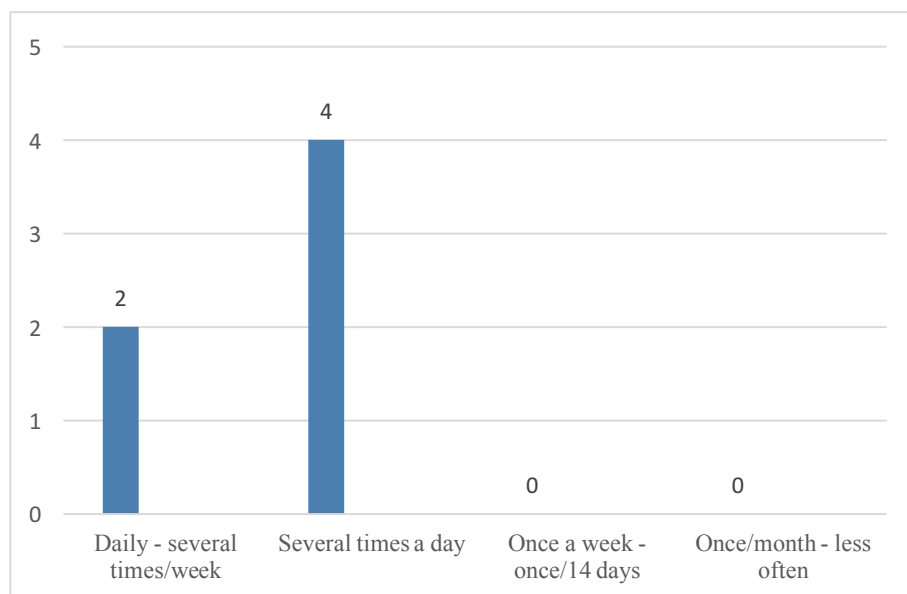
### 1. How old are you?

1 (20.0%): 14  
 1(20.0%): 17  
 1(20.0%): 19  
 1(20.0%): 22  
 5(20.0%): 25



### 2. How often do you use TikTok?

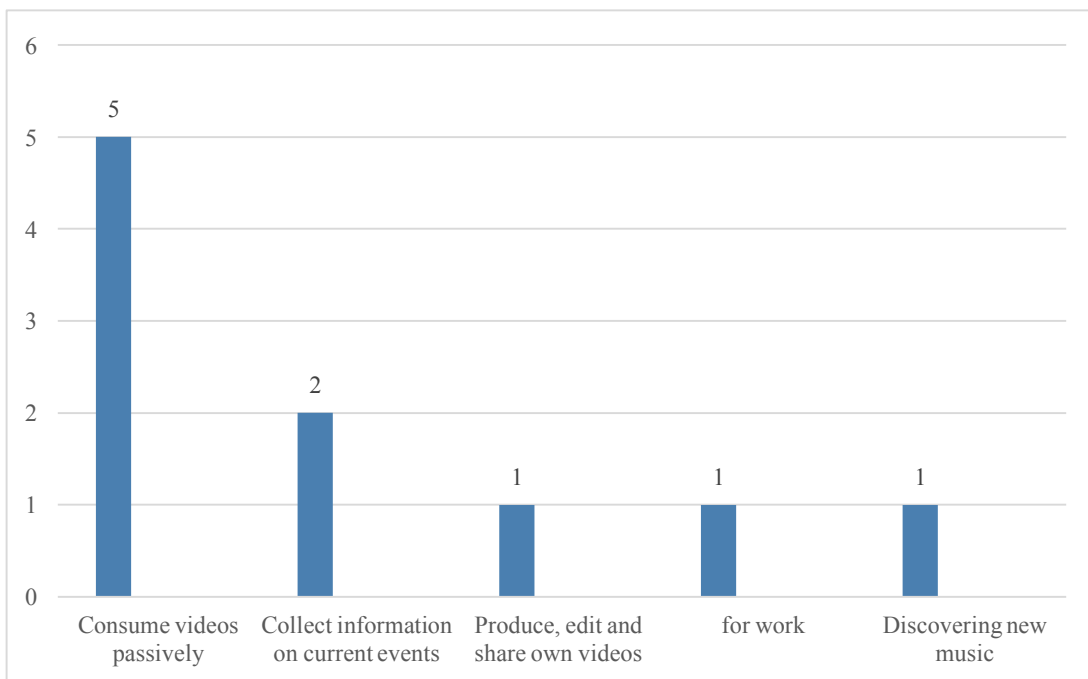
3 (60%): Daily - several times/week  
 2 (40%): Several times a day  
 0 (0.0%): Once a week - once/14 days  
 0 (0.0%): Once/month - less often



### 3. For what purpose do you use TikTok most often? (multiple answers possible)

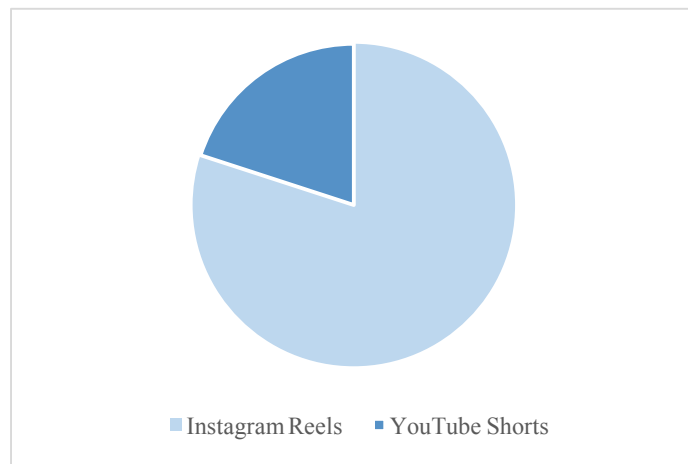
5 (100%): Consume videos passively  
 2 (40%): Collect information on current events  
 1 (20%): Produce, edit and share own videos  
 1 (20%): for work\*<sup>21</sup>  
 1 (20%): Discovering new music\*  
 0 (0.0%): Send messages / chat

<sup>21</sup> The answers marked with \* were inserted in the free text field



**4. Do you also use other short video services? If yes, which ones? (multiple answers possible)**

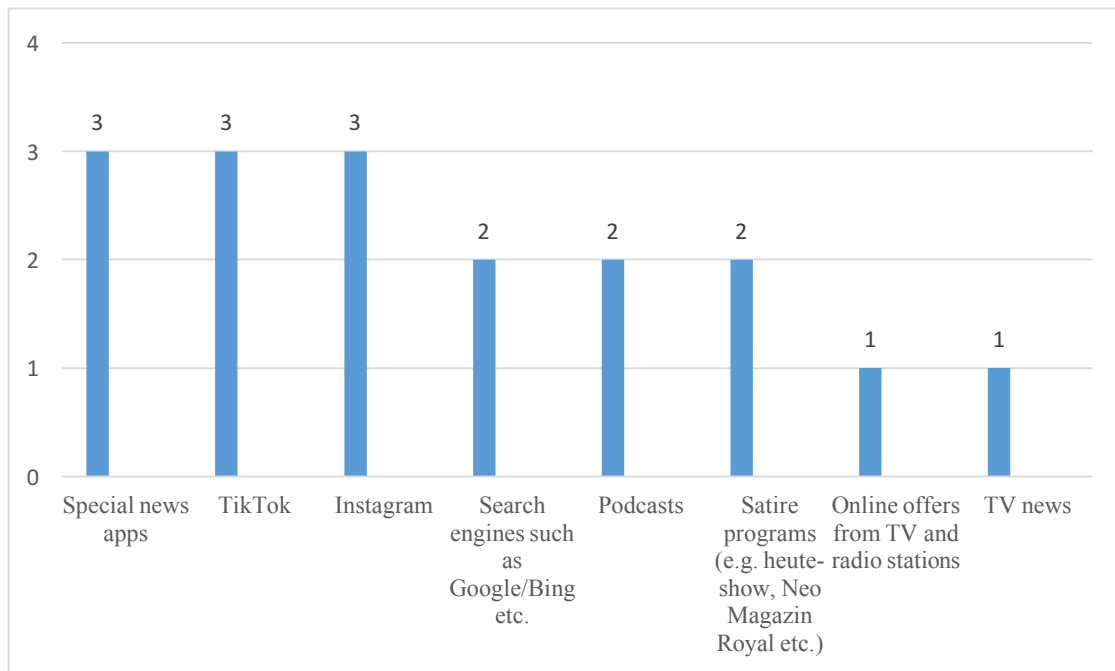
4 (80%): Instagram Reels  
 1 (20%): YouTube Shorts  
 0 (0.0%): Snapchat Spotlight  
 0 (0.0%): Apart from TikTok I don't use any other short video services



**5. How do you keep yourself informed about current political events? (multiple answers possible)**

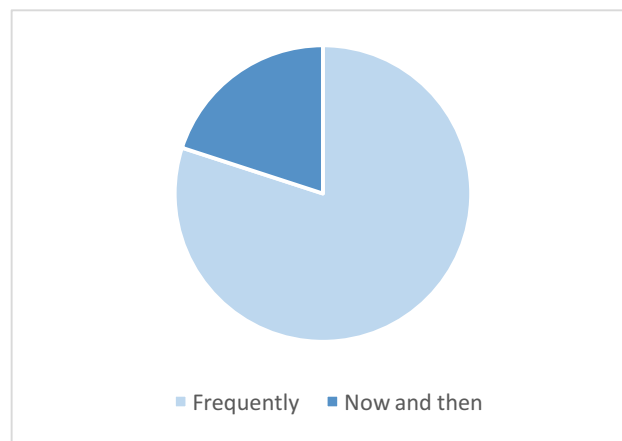
3 (60%): Special news apps  
 3 (60%): TikTok  
 3 (60%): Instagram  
 2 (40%): Search engines such as Google/Bing etc.  
 2 (40%): Podcasts  
 2 (40%): Satire programs (e.g. heute-show, Neo Magazin Royal etc.)  
 1 (20%): Online offers from TV and radio stations  
 1 (20%): TV news

0 (0.0%): Radio  
0 (0.0%): Snapchat  
0 (0.0%): Provider like gmx.de, web.de, t-online  
0 (0.0%): Print newspaper



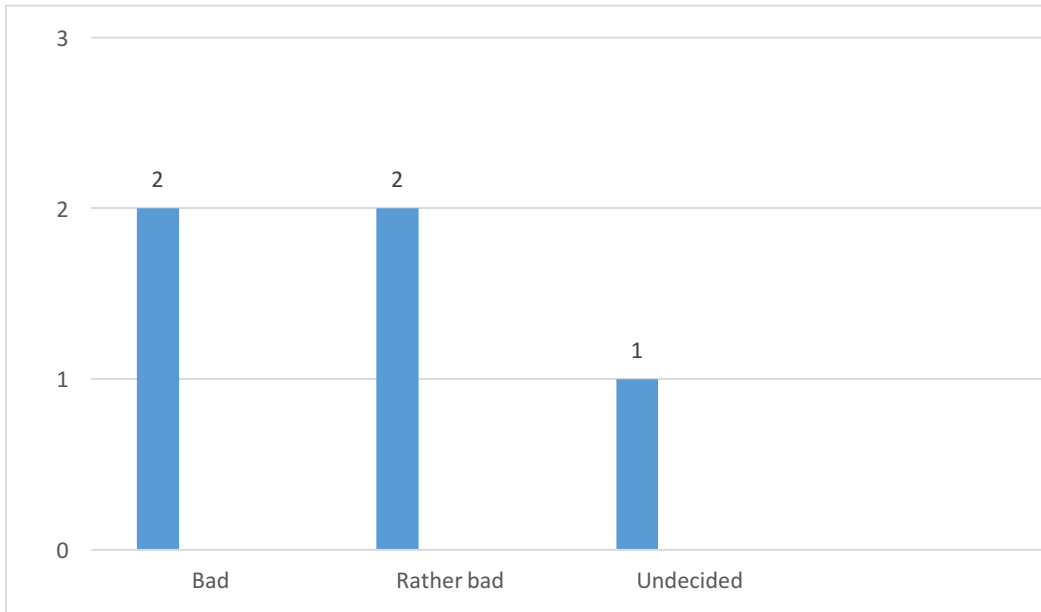
### 6. How often do you see political videos on your ForYou page?

4 (80%): Frequently  
1 (20%): Now and then  
0 (0.0%): Very frequent  
0 (0.0%): Rarely  
0 (0.0%): Never



**7. How is your knowledge on the newly founded party "Bündnis Sahra Wagenknecht (BSW)"?**

2 (40%): Bad  
2 (40%): Rather bad  
1 (20%): Undecided  
0 (0.0%): Good  
0 (0.0%): Very good



## Appendix C: Focus Group Guide "Political Videos on TikTok"

	Objective/category	Targeted questions	Implementation	Material	Time in min	Research interest
1	<b>Introduction</b>				<b>5</b>	
		Short flash: name, favorite Social media App	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Moderator introduces herself, research question is explained, further procedure explained</li> <li>- Explain that everything will be treated confidentially</li> <li>- Thank the participants in advance</li> </ul>			
<b>PART A</b>						
2	<b>Status quo on the consumption of political content on TikTok</b>				<b>8</b>	
		<p>a) In what form is political content played out to the respondents?</p> <p>b) How must the political content be structured so that</p>	<p>a) You are all on TikTok and have therefore already come into contact with political videos. (Refer to the answers to the pre-survey) Which of these videos do you remember?</p>	No material, as an unfiltered/not influenced by video samples opinion can still be requested here.		Uses-and-gratifications approach

		the respondents actively consume it?	b) You have probably also noticed that political content on TikTok is structured differently. Sometimes there is a moderator, sometimes it is just a recording of a documentary etc. What kind of political content have you gotten stuck on in the past and not scrolled straight through?			
3	<b>Testing the quantitative results/discussion of the video elements</b>				<b>35</b>	
In each category, two videos are compared and viewed by the participants. The videos are then discussed.						
3.1	Format					
		a) Which video format do you prefer?	a) Watch the videos and pay attention to the cuts and subtitles, not the content. Which one do you think is better?	Two videos are shown that differ greatly in the "Elements" and subtitles.  Video 1: <a href="https://vm.tiktok.com/ZGeP6BCWF/">https://vm.tiktok.com/ZGeP6BCWF/</a>  Video 2: <a href="https://www.tiktok.co">https://www.tiktok.co</a>	6	Testing the dimension: Format



				m/@faz/vi- deo/728602857351573 0209?is_from_webapp =1&web_id=73333167 43747929602		
3.2	Production Style					
		a) For which video do you prefer the production style?	a) Watch the videos and pay attention to the production style, i.e. the perspective of the host and the professionalism of the recording. Which one do you think is better?	Two videos are shown, which differ greatly in the sub-categories "Video Shoot" and "Type of Recording".  <b>Video 1:</b> <a href="https://www.tiktok.com/@what.politik/video/7291336103452282144?is_from_webapp=1&amp;web_id=7285336237388023329">https://www.tiktok.com/@what.politik/video/7291336103452282144?is_from_webapp=1&amp;web_id=7285336237388023329</a>  <b>Video 2:</b> <a href="https://www.tiktok.com/@rtlaktuell/video/7297246627633450272">https://www.tiktok.com/@rtlaktuell/video/7297246627633450272</a>	6	Testing the dimension: Production Style

3.3	Hosts					
		a) For which video do they prefer the host?	a) Watch the videos and now pay attention to Host. Which one do you like better now?	Two videos are shown that differ greatly in the sub-categories "Age" and "Gender".  <b>Video 1:</b> <a href="https://www.tiktok.com/@tagesschau/video/7330315160667557152?is_from_webapp=1&amp;web_id=7285336237388023329">https://www.tiktok.com/@tagesschau/video/7330315160667557152?is_from_webapp=1&amp;web_id=7285336237388023329</a>  <b>Video 2:</b> <a href="https://www.tiktok.com/@tagesschau/video/7275374382988479777?is_from_webapp=1&amp;web_id=7285336237388023329">https://www.tiktok.com/@tagesschau/video/7275374382988479777?is_from_webapp=1&amp;web_id=7285336237388023329</a>	6	Testing the dimension: Hosts
3.4	Content					
		a) Which video do they prefer to use to display of the content?	a) Watch the videos and pay attention to the presentation style (acting, oral speech) and the tonality of the hosts	Two videos are shown that differ greatly in the sub-categories "Tonal-	6	Testing the dimension: Content

			(i.e. do they present the content in a funny or serious way, etc.).	ity" and "Presentation Style".		
				<p><b>Video 1:</b>  <a href="https://www.tiktok.com/@nicetoknow/video/7275702087449611553?is_from_webapp=1&amp;web_id=7285336237388023329">https://www.tiktok.com/@nicetoknow/video/7275702087449611553?is_from_webapp=1&amp;web_id=7285336237388023329</a></p> <p><b>Video 2:</b>  <a href="https://www.tiktok.com/@un.logo/video/7307660521975581985?is_from_webapp=1&amp;web_id=7333316743747929602">https://www.tiktok.com/@un.logo/video/7307660521975581985?is_from_webapp=1&amp;web_id=7333316743747929602</a></p>		
3.5	Viewer Addressing					
		a) For which video do you prefer viewer addressing?	a) Watch the videos and pay attention on how the hosts talk to you – maybe in personal, or in a rather neutral way? Which one is better?	Two videos are shown, which differ in the sub-category "Viewer Addressing".	6	Testing the dimension: Viewer Addressing
				<p><b>Video 1:</b>  <a href="https://www.tiktok.com/@what.politik/video/7298360671878614305?is_from_webapp">https://www.tiktok.com/@what.politik/video/7298360671878614305?is_from_webapp</a></p>		

				<p>=1&amp;web_id=7285336237388023329</p> <p><b>Video 2:</b>  <a href="https://www.tiktok.com/@rtlaktuell/video/7288718288991915297?is_from_webapp=1&amp;web_id=7285336237388023329">https://www.tiktok.com/@rtlaktuell/video/7288718288991915297?is_from_webapp=1&amp;web_id=7285336237388023329</a></p>		
3.6	Length					
		a) For which video do you prefer the length?	a) Watch the videos and pay attention to the video length. Which video do you think is better?	<p>Two videos are shown, which differ in the sub-category "Length".</p> <p><b>Video 1:</b>  <a href="https://www.tiktok.com/@zeit/video/7288379703247850784?is_from_webapp=1&amp;web_id=7333316743747929602">https://www.tiktok.com/@zeit/video/7288379703247850784?is_from_webapp=1&amp;web_id=7333316743747929602</a></p> <p><b>Video 2:</b>  <a href="https://www.tiktok.com/@br24/video/7286862431089872161?is_from_webapp=1&amp;web_id=73333185">https://www.tiktok.com/@br24/video/7286862431089872161?is_from_webapp=1&amp;web_id=73333185</a></p>	6	Testing the dimension: Length

				07277649440		
<b>TEIL B</b>						
<b>4</b>	<b>Follow-up Information behavior</b>				<b>33</b>	
<b>4.1</b>	<b>General follow-up behavior of the participants</b>					
		a) Which type of follow-up information behavior is most common among the test participants?	a) I'm sure you've already had a situation on TikTok where you've found out about a piece of news that you weren't sure about beforehand/wanted to check/find out more about. How do you proceed in such a situation? If you haven't had a situation like		8	Classify follow-up actions of the participants

			<p>this before, take one of the videos you've already watched as an example and imagine you'd like to find out more about it.</p>			
4.2	<b>Subject-specific follow-up behavior of the participants</b>					
		<p>The test subjects watch four videos on a political issue, which differ in design, tonality, length, etc.</p>			15	<p>Classifying the participants' follow-up actions for a specific topic</p>
		<p>a) Which of these videos motivates you the most to seek information on this political issue afterwards?</p>	<p>a) You have already heard something about the founding of the Bündnis Sahra Wagenknecht on the Tagesschau, but you don't yet understand exactly what this new party is all about. (Referring to the pre-survey results) One day you are scrolling on TikTok and see one of these videos. Which video motivates you the most to get more information about</p>	<p>Four videos are shown, which differ greatly in various sub-categories:</p> <p><b>Video 1:</b>  <a href="https://vm.tiktok.com/ZGeP6f3wU/">https://vm.tiktok.com/ZGeP6f3wU/</a></p> <p><b>Video 2:</b>  <a href="https://vm.tiktok.com/ZGeP6V8B8/">https://vm.tiktok.com/ZGeP6V8B8/</a></p> <p><b>Video 3:</b>  <a href="https://vm.tiktok.com/ZGeP6UHRt/">https://vm.tiktok.com/ZGeP6UHRt/</a></p>		

			the Bündnis Sahra Wagenknecht after watching it?	<b>Video 4:</b> <a href="https://vm.tiktok.com/ZGeP6C1Ap/">https://vm.tiktok.com/ZGeP6C1Ap/</a>		
4.3	<b>Own ideas to motivate the follow-up behavior</b>					
		The participants discuss the question of how videos on TikTok should be designed so that they can gather further information on the topic as a follow-up?			10	<b>Classify further factors for follow-up behavior</b>



		a) How should TikTok videos be designed so that respondents continue to engage with this political topic afterwards?	a) You have now seen four videos for comparison, all of which deal with a political topic. How should a TikTok video be designed so that you take one of the follow-up actions you mentioned earlier after watching it? (Follow up if necessary: Should the videos address you personally? Should they actively refer to a source of information?)	Group discussion		
<b>5</b>	<b>Conclusion</b>				<b>3</b>	
Thanks to all participants. Offer to send the MA by e-mail as soon as completed.						

## Appendix D: Focus Group Transcript

Speaker 1 [00:00:05] Hi, everyone.<sup>22</sup> Um. Nice to have you all here today to participate in my focus group on the topic of political videos on TikTok. And once again, a brief introduction from me and the topic. I'm Katja. I'm currently studying at Neu Ulm University, and I'm currently writing my master's thesis, which includes this focus group today. For you, here's how today will go. We will discuss and debate personal political short videos together, and I'll show you a few inspirations that you can then evaluate. It's important that each of your opinions counts and is important to me. That means, as soon as you have a thought, feel free to express it and should express it. Because that's exactly how the conversations that our focus group thrives on today are created. Don't worry, you don't have to be an entertainer or anything like that here because I'll be leading the focus group and asking you impulse questions that we'll address together. Exactly. And then we can get started. Does anyone have any questions from your side?

Speaker 3 [00:01:10] No, there aren't.

Speaker 1 [00:01:13] Very nice. Then here's the information again. I will be recording our conversation today, and your names will be treated as anonymous and confidential in the transcript, of course. Is that okay with all participants?

Speaker 4 [00:01:26] Yes, of course.

Speaker 1 [00:01:28] Before we start the discussion, I would appreciate it if everyone would briefly introduce themselves with their name and favorite social media app. And I'll start again. Hi, I'm Katja, and my favorite social media app is Instagram.

Speaker 3 [00:01:45] Hello, I'm Simon, and my favorite app is also Instagram.

Speaker 4 [00:01:50] Hello, I'm Maja, and my favorite app is also Instagram.

Speaker 6 [00:01:59] I'm Paul, and my favorite app is also Instagram.

Speaker 2 [00:02:04] I'm Lina, and my favorite app is TikTok.

Speaker 5 [00:02:09] I'm Helen, and my favorite app is Pinterest.

Speaker 6 [00:02:14] But that's not a social media app, right?

Speaker 1 [00:02:18] Well, it still counts, I would say...

Speaker 5 [00:02:19] But I also love TikTok very much.

Speaker 1 [00:02:22] Okay, great. Thank you for your brief introduction round. Um, as we've just heard, you're all active on Instagram and TikTok and sometimes on other platforms as well. And you've therefore already come into contact with political videos. That's why I'd like to start with a quick brainstorming session. Specifically, I'd like to ask you, which or which of these videos do you remember? And it doesn't matter whether the video really appeared on your For You Page while scrolling, was sent to you, and whether you found it really exciting or whether you found it strange

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<sup>22</sup> The focus group was held in German and translated into English for this paper.

or uninteresting. Therefore, in general, can you remember one or more political TikTok videos that you have seen before?

Speaker 6 [00:03:07] Actually, I was just shown a video of Markus Söder half an hour ago, and he was talking about which movies he likes to go to. And it was really boring.

Speaker 5 [00:03:19] Lately, I've been shown videos by DariaDaria and also by Luisa Dellert, who complained about how the Instagram algorithm has changed. I'm not sure if this applies to TikTok as well, but for example, DariaDaria is now showing herself more and more in underwear or bikinis because the Instagram algorithm still shows her political opinion videos to people.

Speaker 1 [00:03:49] Yes, I've seen that too. Also, with another one, with this "Nini erklärt Politik" (...)

Speaker 2 [00:03:52] Yes, exactly, that's right, she does it too. What I've often seen lately are the videos of the demonstration against the AfD, which have been appearing very often on the For You Page recently.

Speaker 1 [00:04:07] So, even more than just in individual (..)

Speaker 2 [00:04:10] From different accounts of people reporting on it, but also just those giving an overview of where all the demos were and roughly how many people were there.

Speaker 1 [00:04:19] Interesting (..)

Speaker 3 [00:04:20] Personally, I often get videos of Christian Lindner, but not from his accounts, more like compilations of Bundestag speeches or what he does in a day, I think I saw yesterday.

Speaker 1 [00:04:36] Are they often in a horizontal format, and was it just adapted for TikTok or Instagram because it was probably in some documentary or in some other video?

Speaker 3 [00:04:46] Exactly that. Exactly that.

Speaker 1 [00:04:47] Interesting.

Speaker 4 [00:04:49] Uh, I've also seen a lot of videos with AfD posters where the AfD is crossed out. So, I remember that, those are the demos against the right, which have been appearing very often on my For You Page.

Speaker 1 [00:05:06] So, a bit like Lina said and probably more towards the demo.

Speaker 4 [00:05:07] Exactly.

Speaker 1 [00:05:09] Yes, interesting, because what you've all said now were really different things you've mentioned. One was from the politician himself, the other was probably from a larger, depending on the organization or even from individual influencers. Then you must have also noticed that political content on TikTok or on Instagram is completely different in structure, right? This means that sometimes there is a moderator, as Paul mentioned, Markus Söder somehow spoke to him. Sometimes it's a recording from a documentary, as Simon just said. Or sometimes a moderator, like at the Tagesschau, speaks directly into the camera, as Helen mentioned, which might have been the case with DariaDaria. And sometimes such videos are simply structured like sketches. And now, if you think about what we've all said and the different content and different presentation formats there are, I would be interested in which type of political content you have really stuck with in the past and not

just scrolled past immediately? So really, have you actively said, okay, this is a person speaking somehow to me, I'll watch this now, or just like Simon said, this is a longer documentary that somehow ended up on TikTok. I'll watch that.

Speaker 6 [00:06:36] Depending on the topic. For example, I've also seen a lot of things from the heute-show, and I also found the one about the railway interesting, which of course personally affects me, or even sometimes the AfD.

Speaker 1 [00:06:51] What was the contribution about?

Speaker 6 [00:06:53] What?

Speaker 1 [00:06:54] What was the contribution about the railway?

Speaker 6 [00:06:56] Oh yeah, a typical heute-show segment where they kinda took apart the railway, what doesn't work there, etc., and also the political implications behind it, why nothing works.

Speaker 1 [00:07:07] But then really also prepared for TikTok or Instagram or, as Simon said, as it probably also happened in the heute-show. Then like a YouTube compilation.

Speaker 6 [00:07:16] Probably prepared for TV and then only posted on TikTok. Exactly. So for me, it probably depends on the topic and not on the person or channel.

Speaker 2 [00:07:32] What I don't really like to watch are the videos that are really prepared for TikTok, which are really in the 19 to 16 format. Especially from Tagesschau. There's often a blonde person. I don't know her name. A woman who briefly and concisely illuminates topics that you might normally see in longer contributions in Tagesschau. But she explains it and breaks it down to 30 seconds. And I quite like to watch it because you quickly get a lot of information packaged.

Speaker 1 [00:08:05] Basically short snippets, where you can then say afterwards, that interested me, I might even further inform myself about it, and just like Simon said, to get a short overview.

Speaker 6 [00:08:15] Exactly.

Speaker 5 [00:08:16] For me, what I can remember is, on the one hand, this video from DariaDaria and also, you mentioned her too, I believe "Nini erklärt", she also comes from Stuttgart or at least lives in Stuttgart. Not sure exactly. But in any case, I find she always makes quite interesting short videos and what was also recently, was International Women's Day. There was quite a lot about it, and I always found it exciting. When it was really these TikTok videos that just broke down why it's important to continue fighting for women's rights and why it's still important to advocate for it. Fridays for Future also did a lot, which I always thought was pretty cool.

Speaker 1 [00:08:55] So it's a topic that personally interests you?

Speaker 5 [00:08:59] Yes, definitely. But, uh, I also thought that, for example, this year or maybe even last year, there would just be more prominent topics. And also with everything going on, the Ukraine crisis, the situation in the Gaza Strip and generally with Israel, I just thought maybe this year wouldn't get so much attention, but it did anyway, and I just found it nice and exciting that it was highlighted again why it's still important to stand up for women's rights. Also in Germany, where you might think everything is fine.

Speaker 1 [00:09:37] Yes (...)

Speaker 4 [00:09:39] Uh, for me, so I think I mainly stick to videos where if I know a person, so just now from the circle of friends or from the circle of relatives, someone tells something political. I just watch it because I want to see the person, how they talk there. Otherwise, those are heute-show contributions, no, not heute-show but from Tagesschau, which are specially prepared.

Speaker 1 [00:10:12] So also like Lina said, so that you get an insight into a topic, which might be a bit shorter and more concise than if you were to watch a 30-minute Tagesschau.

Speaker 4 [00:10:21] Exactly.

Speaker 3 [00:10:22] Yeah, I would agree with Paul. Especially contributions from the heute-show, when the videos on YouTube, when they're cut together like best-ofs and then posted vertically on TikTok again. I often get caught up in those.

Speaker 1 [00:10:41] Would you, because now there are such things on Instagram or TikTok, say, okay, I'd rather watch something short, compiled, and not watch the whole heute-show now. The question also goes to Paul then.

Speaker 3 [00:10:55] Yeah, definitely. If it's a specific topic that interests me more than the whole show. And then I'd rather watch the YouTube post or a TikTok post, depending on, instead of watching the whole show.

Speaker 6: [00:11:10] Believe me, it wouldn't matter. If I saw it on YouTube, I'd watch it just the same. Also in a longer version if the topic interests me, as well as on TikTok. But on Instagram or TikTok, it's just there. You don't have to actively decide to click on it.

Speaker 1 [00:11:25] And you wouldn't say that, or you, Simon and Paul right now, when you see, you get a video played on Instagram, which is not in this typical 9 to 16 format, but the other way around. And you see it and you see, okay, that's a longer video, maybe even six or seven minutes. Then you wouldn't say okay, I'll switch channels and go to YouTube and search for the topic there and watch it there, you would stick to the respective channel where it was played for you or not?

Speaker 6 [00:11:52] Yes, definitely. I wouldn't switch the app just to watch it. Unless if it's very short on TikTok and I want to see the whole post.

Speaker 1 [00:11:59] Okay.

Speaker 3 [00:12:00] Yeah, I would say the same. But I don't think the videos from the heute-show are really five, six minutes long, but they're actually quite short, at most maybe, as far as I know, at most 45, 50 seconds or so and just, as I said, only the best of the best cut together.

Speaker 1 [00:12:21] Okay. Very interesting. Well, thank you for sharing the information with me at this point. That was already very helpful for me. Now we're also getting to the practical part of our focus group today. And you will watch a total of twelve videos today, so short videos, which we will each compare one-on-one and where I will then ask you afterwards, after you have watched it, why you found one video better and for which you would decide. Exactly. And for that, you can now just go to this profile that I sent to the group. That's a profile I created specifically, and there are the videos that we will be working on today. Did everyone find it? Perfect. Exactly. And today we're basically working our way from bottom to top. And I would ask you to now take a look at videos one and two. So each one is also always indicated in the caption which videos it is. So we're starting from the very bottom, and please watch each video only once. We always have different steps, there are six categories in category one, and I would like you to, when you watch these videos now, pay attention to the

cuts and the integrated texts in the video. So basically, whether subtitles are used, whether effects are used, funny emojis fly in from all sides and so on. And then afterwards, as I said, I will ask you which video you found better and why. Exactly. And to watch the videos, you can also mute yourselves, and once you're done watching the videos, so basically now first watch these two videos, then the next two, etc. Then feel free to look back into the camera again, and then we can already start talking about it. And then I see, so to speak, how everything is already finished.

Speaker 6 [00:14:15] What are the first two now? So, at the very bottom, and then left or right?

Speaker 1 [00:14:19] It's actually indicated in the caption which are the first ones. So, you have to scroll all the way down, and there you'll see the video with the guy in front of the blue background first, that's essentially video one, and (...).

Speaker 6 [00:14:30] Ah, I see (...).

Speaker 1 [00:14:30] It says there, essentially, video one, video two. You can also scroll through it like a feed.

Speaker 6 [00:14:35] Okay, got it (...).

Speaker 5 [00:14:36] Okay, and now we're watching video one, and (...).

Speaker 1 [00:14:40] You're watching video one and video two, and then we'll meet back here to discuss.

Speaker 5 [00:14:48] Okay, great.

Speaker 1 [00:14:48] Perfect. Anyone else have questions, or are we good? Great. See you in a bit.

### **(Video 1 and Video 2 are watched by the group)**

Speaker 1 [00:17:28] Okay. You're all looking at me, so you're done. Great. Now I'm just curious, off the top of your head, which video did you prefer?

Speaker 6 [00:17:44] Definitely the second one (...).

Speaker 5 [00:17:48] I think it's somewhat difficult to compare and say which I liked better. Well, I felt like with the second one, more effort had gone into it. Especially with the different emojis and the popping up of the messages. But they were different styles somehow. Um, although the first one, I perceived it as ironic, I hope it was ironic. Um, because it was just a compilation. But personally, well, it was a compilation of different segments from an interview with Robert Habeck, I would say. Um, and the guy somehow tried to come up with funny answers. That's how I interpreted it. Hm, but personally, the second one appealed to me more, and I also thought it was better made.

Speaker 1 [00:18:36] Would you then (...)

Speaker 2 [00:18:36] I (...)

Speaker 1 [00:18:38] Sorry, go ahead.

Speaker 2 [00:18:40] You can ask them something.

Speaker 1 [00:18:42] Because both of you just said that the first one didn't catch your attention. Would you have continued swiping?

Speaker 6 [00:18:51] Yeah, I think I felt the urge to swipe further. But I wasn't allowed to, even though I generally find Robert Habeck very interesting and what he talks about. And I also find ironic videos and sarcastic things quite interesting, so I think I would have swiped further.

Speaker 1 [00:19:09] Because that was actually something, a bit of a today-show style, as Simon and you mentioned earlier. Would it have been different if maybe, if it had been a bit more visually interesting? Because there was actually nothing in it. There were no great cuts, no effects, etc.

Speaker 6 [00:19:29] I think it would definitely have been better if it had been edited with more effort. A bit in the style of the second video. Um, yeah. Can't say now whether I wouldn't have swiped further, but I think it would have definitely made it more appealing.

Speaker 3 [00:19:34] I would agree with that, but I also think it could have been a bit shorter because at some point the attention span starts to wane. So that was a bit difficult, but I liked the style of the second video better. But I was actually more interested in the content of the first video.

Speaker 4 [00:20:08] Well, I found, oh, did you want to ask another question?

Speaker 1 [00:20:10] Feel free to share your opinion.

Speaker 4 [00:20:12] Well, I actually found the first video better. I found the first video too long, but I found it much more interesting content-wise than the second one. With the second one, I would have swiped away immediately. I think with the first one, I would have liked to swipe away at some point in the middle, because we know the joke by now, but I found it more pleasant to watch.

Speaker 1 [00:20:37] Was it just too much for you with the second one, or what was it about the second one?

Speaker 4 [00:20:42] The content didn't interest me at all. Then I found these visual elements, they're nice, but they kept repeating them all the time. So I didn't think it was well done.

Speaker 5 [00:20:49] I think it's also a bit difficult because I think thematically I also wouldn't have swiped away from Robert, so wouldn't have swiped away from Robert Habeck until I maybe noticed that he was making fun of Robert Habeck. Then I might have been a bit annoyed. But um, I don't know if I would have watched it out of personal interest, whether you can study Taylor Swift or not. But that might also depend on whether you have a personal preference for Taylor Swift or not.

Speaker 2 [00:21:34] So what I simply find in the second video, it just grabs me from the moment I see from the outset what it's about on the title image. I see, her name is Aylin, I can somewhat identify with her, but in general, I feel like a person is speaking to me. I know who she is, I think she's a journalist or whoever. And just the fact that there's always text in the video, it's just easier for me in the end to follow the video, and I also enjoy watching it longer, unlike the video of Robert Habeck, where after the second switch, I realize, okay, this is all meant sarcastically. Yes, it's funny to hear, but nothing new happens anymore. And the fact that in the second video, you have these icons, text support, and a person who really speaks animatedly with you, I find that much more appealing.

Speaker 1 [00:22:21] Paul, how was it for you? You've only said so far that the first video was too visually lacking. How was it with the second one? Did you feel visually engaged there too? Or was it too much? Was it too little? What was your assessment?



Speaker 6 [00:22:34] It was definitely better. Especially, the subtitles help a lot, I think, with understanding for the viewers. The icons, well, they're nice, but I don't really care about them. But sometimes there were also pictures interspersed, and at the end, half of the screen was used for other content. And that was definitely made more interesting. You stay more engaged, even though the topic didn't actually interest me.

Speaker 1 [00:23:03] Would it have been appropriate, then, as a general question, to have subtitles in the first video, so that it could be followed a bit better?

Speaker 6 [00:23:11] I think so. But it was naturally very text-heavy, I'm not sure if that would have been annoying.

Speaker 5 [00:23:17] I think, I can imagine that you could highlight different words and maybe even add a sound effect to them. Just to make it a bit more playful and to make viewers more engaged, so that it's not just a ping-pong of words but something new happens.

Speaker 1 [00:23:39] Also, visually, it's not as dry.

Speaker 5 [00:23:41] Yes, exactly.

Speaker 1 [00:23:44] Okay. Yes, fascinating. Thank you for your assessment of this first video. Then we can directly move on to the second one. Watch the next two videos. Now it's about video three and video four. Please pay more attention this time to the host's perspective, that is, to the professionalism of the videos. You can kind of compare it, would this be a video that you could have recorded yourself with your phone camera? Or is there really a studio behind it and was it actually produced in that way? And afterwards, I will ask you again which one you preferred. Exactly. And now it's about video three and four on our account, and you can now go directly into them.

### **(Video 3 and Video 4 are watched by the group)**

Speaker 1 [00:26:09] Okay. Then it also looks like everyone is finished. Then at this point also the question to you all. Which video did you find better?

Speaker 2 [00:26:21] Well, I have to say, in this context of getting information, I found the second video better. I understand the reasoning of the first person, why she holds it like that in her face and films from this perspective, simply also to maybe appear more approachable, to appear more authentic, and so on. You know that a lot from influencers, how they tell a story in the story, that they were just in a store and did something. So for me, initially, it was more like okay, I think she's going into the store and telling what happened to her, but not this topic that she wants to draw attention to later. And that also gives me this vibe, that I don't feel like it's a trustworthy source, because she's just some person like you and me, who's telling me something right now. And the other video doesn't even necessarily have to be backed up with scientific sources. But the fact that she stands in front of me frontally, like a news anchor, and explains the topic with the driver's license and so on very professionally and seriously, just gives me a slightly more trustworthy vibe for this video.

Speaker 1 [00:27:29] But that's very interesting what you're saying about this trustworthy vibe. Because on TikTok, we're often used to everything being filmed a bit more spontaneously and from a situation. I mean, the girl just went into the store, saw oat milk, made a video about it, so to speak. Don't you find that a bit more authentic? After all, you have the Tagesschau on at around 8:15 on the first channel.

Speaker 2 [00:27:51] That's what I mean. So I definitely find it authentic because you know it from this influencer context. But if someone wants to report to me about really political topics or any scientific topics, I'd rather, well, it appeals to me more because I really see it from a more serious perspective frontally, as you ultimately learned from news. But of course, in itself, I identify more with a person who goes into the store than with the person who is somehow standing there and reporting.

Speaker 5 [00:28:23] I find it a bit difficult with the video, or with the two videos, because on the one hand, the first video just gave me more the impression, which has already been mentioned, that it's simply more authentic and that it's more like something I would also listen to in a voice message from a friend who then tells me, oh my God, did you know how much tax is actually on an oat drink? And I think she still backed it up with facts, so I wouldn't even think that I would lack trust or that I would lack trust in her. I found it more with the other video, which bothered me a bit. I actually thought it was pretty cool with these text boxes that always reiterated the points, but I have to say, you can also lose a lot of seriousness from my perspective in the moment when it's then formulated a bit sloppily, because for example, once, I think it said something like "Politics should regulate", and then the last question was also a bit weird and then I think to myself, in that moment, you, well for me, lose a lot of trust within a second or so, well, I don't know if it's clear, but I just find that in the moment, when it's somehow not nicely formulated, it's much more noticeable for me, than if there are no text boxes.

Speaker 1 [00:29:46] But you would, as I understand it, you would still identify the second video a bit as more serious, also as Lina already mentioned, as serious because it really is a person who also maybe stands frontally and not just quasi in selfie POV mode in front of you and reports to you.

Speaker 5 [00:30:05] I find it a bit difficult because in terms of seriousness, I'm not sure if I would say that. I think you could tell where more time was invested, and I want to say, the second video was clearly better. But because the girl in the first video, or young woman in the first video, also worked with facts and figures, she didn't lose credibility for me, but rather, um, through a rather, "sloppy" is the wrong word, but through a somewhat casual formulation in the second video, that was more of a negative for me.

Speaker 1 [00:30:43] How about the others?

Speaker 6 [00:30:45] I definitely liked the second one better than the first. I think, while it's authentic, how it was done in the first video, but I think it can work, as Lina said, in an influencer context where all your followers know you and trust you as a person. Because the video is a bit more focused on her as a person, how she speaks and walks through the supermarket and talks clearly about the topic. But I think the person is still a bit too much in the foreground, whom I don't know. Although the facts were well researched, and in the second video, it's more about the video as a consumable, what I see, and not so much about the person who moderates or presents it. And I also found the bullet points quite nicely done. And as Helen just mentioned, with a formulation, I don't think I would be immediately put off. I just find the effort and the overall product better there.

Speaker 1 [00:31:45] But would it be different for you if, because you also mentioned, you know the person who presents herself a bit like an influencer, you don't know her. If it were an account you had been following for a while, for example, and a person who always shares news in this way, would you then not be so put off by the less great professionalism?

Speaker 3 [00:32:06] Yes, definitely, I think. That would help a lot if I knew the person herself, then it wouldn't need to be so professional.

Speaker 1 [00:32:15] Okay. Simon and Maja, do you also have any opinion on this? Or do you agree with the others?

Speaker 5 [00:32:24] I think they're lagging.

Speaker 1 [00:32:33] I think they're really lagging.

Speaker 6 [00:32:36] What?

Speaker 1 [00:32:37] Ah, you're back.

Speaker 3 [00:32:38] Can you hear us?

Speaker 1 [00:32:39] Yes.

Speaker 3 [00:32:39] Did you ask something or should we just share our opinion?

Speaker 1 [00:32:42] Yes. I asked if you would agree with the others?

Speaker 3 [00:32:47] Yes, personally, I would definitely agree with Paul. I found the second video visually better. I prefer to stick with it, because with the first one, yeah, it was nice, as Lina said, a bit leaning towards influencers. That's all well and good, but I found the second one a bit more trustworthy. And then with a few bullet points, I can remember it quite well, so I would definitely watch the second one more and it also stays more in my mind than the first one.

Speaker 4 [00:33:18] I would definitely also agree with that, which is another aspect why I believe the second one is more serious, is also the appearance of the person herself. So I think the second lady seems much more serious. She also had a jacket on or something, I would much rather buy something from her than, I found the first one looked a bit scruffy somehow, she had apparently just gone to the supermarket in the morning and then talked about milk. I just didn't find that appealing, where I think, I'm happy to listen to you now, but you're just telling me something, I rather had that feeling.

Speaker 1 [00:34:05] Okay. Then those were some interesting perspectives that have emerged here. Then we can directly move on to the next videos, then we've already reached the halfway point, and now you're going to watch video five and six on our channel, please. And this time really pay attention, as you already did, especially with the first one, to the people. Look actively at who that is, who's hosting the video. Who's talking to you? How do they behave? Do you find that cool? Do you not find it so cool? So please watch video five and six now.

**(Video 5 and Video 6 are watched by the group)**

Speaker 1 [00:36:32] So. Here it was essentially about music ban versus vape ban. Which video did you like better? What would you say?

Speaker 4 [00:36:39] I found the first video, the one about the music ban, significantly better. I think, especially in terms of the person. She was dressed more professionally again, and she just told the story much more vividly. I found that much more pleasant, and thematically, it simply interested me much more.

Speaker 3 [00:37:02] I would say that (...)

Speaker 6 [00:37:03] I actually found the second one more interesting. Sorry Simon, did you want to say something first?

Speaker 3 [00:37:03] No, all good, go ahead.

Speaker 6 [00:37:04] I actually found the second one more interesting, and also from the point of view that the person wasn't as prominent as in the first one. In the first one, the person was very large in the video. And you could also see the ring light in her eyes. That somehow irritated me, and in the second one, the person was a bit more in the background. Just presented the topic more subtly. That's why I liked the second one better.

Speaker 3 [00:37:34] Personally, I would say, I found them relatively similar, comparable. I mean, I also think the first person presented a bit, a bit better, but for me, it didn't differ so much that I would prefer one over the other.

Speaker 1 [00:37:53] Okay, so it's sort of like, in one video, the person was a bit too present, in the other, the person was a bit more in the background. Uh, Helen, Lina, how was it for you?

Speaker 2 [00:38:09] The only thing that bothered me a bit, well, I also found the second video better in that respect, that the person was integrated a bit more subtly, rather than completely facing forward. But what bothered me a bit about the woman was the way she spoke, this e-cigarettes should be banned. A bit biased too, as if you feel she has her own opinion on it and how should I say, yeah, presenting it with her own opinion, I mean, while the other one really, more like a news anchor, very, very monotonous and really presented the whole topic very objectively.

Speaker 1 [00:38:55] Okay. So basically, if you were to generalize, would you prefer it if the person simply reads their content in a serious manner and the person is less in focus than the actual content?

Speaker 2 [00:39:11] Exactly.

Speaker 5 [00:39:14] Yes, yes, I can actually agree with Lina and Paul. That I also found the second video a bit better, but I also found it fundamentally interesting that from my perspective, it made a difference compared to the previous videos. Because, firstly, there was this small logo in the corner and you could somehow see that the videos were from the Tagesschau. Uh, and I found that, I think, already changed a lot for me, that I automatically perceived the videos as serious. And, uh, I found that sometimes there was just a bit too much going on in his video, even though it was opened up right away, so to speak. Then I immediately see in the background somehow, these, uh, celebrities and then he's there in the foreground. So there's just a lot going on, I find, in this video. And I think it's good with her, that there's just a small flag and a small country. And you also immediately see in the text what it's actually about. So, uh, yeah, that would be my assessment.

Speaker 1 [00:40:20] But also a question that just occurred to me. Maybe just one more question for Maja, Lina, and Helen. The woman is not exactly the same age as all of you, but maybe a bit comparable to you. Isn't it something special when you see such a video compared to the guy, because you think hey, that could almost be me, and maybe I wouldn't necessarily see something like that on the Tagesschau at 8:15, but on this account. Does it make a difference for you when you see okay, I can maybe identify with her in some way?

Speaker 5 [00:40:53] I think it would be a bit different if the other video wasn't a dark-skinned man. I think if the man were just a white cis man, I would probably feel much more connected to the woman and think hey, cool, it's not always the typical man, but I mean, you can't necessarily compare them, I think.

Speaker 2 [00:41:02] Well, I think it's also better for me to be addressed by someone who's roughly the same age, where I feel like they also somehow know or are also in the target group they theoretically want to address and not this okay, I don't know how old he is, but a 40-year-old, who's told, hey, please make a video for TikTok and he might not even know exactly what that platform is. So I think you can identify more with the woman in that regard.

Speaker 4 [00:41:42] Well, I can't honestly identify with the woman at all. I thought she was wearing a terrible skirt. Um, I thought she, I don't know, I find her somehow too old and completely inappropriate. So I could even identify more with the uh, gentleman in the serious T-shirt, who speaks enthusiastically. So I think, sorry if I say it like this, but she was somehow completely inappropriately dressed and that's why I couldn't identify with her at all.

Speaker 1 [00:42:20] But what I also found quite interesting, because you mentioned she might have been a bit too old. Could you imagine that someone who is much younger could also make such a video? And the content, because you also said it's important to you that it comes across as somewhat serious, that even younger people can convey it more seriously?

Speaker 4 [00:42:40] Yes, if, yes if the person can express themselves and they appear serious. Yes. That's definitely possible. I'm pretty sure.

Speaker 1 [00:42:52] Okay, interesting. Now maybe a question to Simon and Paul again. Do you think it makes a difference for you when you swipe and you see hey, this is someone my age? I don't know. Could now be my buddy from the gym, who is presenting this. Do you prefer to listen to that rather than if it's someone who is classically presenting everything like Jens Riva from the Tagesschau?

Speaker 6 [00:43:20] I think, for me, it doesn't matter that much. But maybe also because it was never a desire for me to do something like that. So I wouldn't identify with it anyway, whether it's Jens Riwa or the woman or the other guy, so for me it's more about the voice and the way of presenting.

Speaker 3 [00:43:46] I would say, for me, it depends on the topic area being presented. Meaning, if it's about something where you might need a bit of experience, maybe like the stock market, I might prefer to listen to that from someone who I think is a bit older and maybe has a bit more experience. But if it's about something where maybe a younger person is needed, maybe especially about sports or something like that, then I would rather listen to it from younger people.

Speaker 1 [00:44:13] Then thank you for your insights. Let's move on directly to the next pair. In the next pair, the videos are side by side, and they differ very much in their content. I have to say that in advance. That means, please take a look at these videos and pay close attention to the presentation style. That means, do they just read the text? Is it like a sketch? Is the content funny, neutral, biased? Exactly. Just take a look at that, and now you can take a look at Video 7 and Video 8.

**(Video 7 and Video 8 are being watched by the group)**

Speaker 1 [00:46:34] Okay, is everyone done? Perfect. Um, yeah. Maybe interesting for you to know. These were actually both videos from public broadcasting. So, they're actually both very reputable sources.

Speaker 5 [00:46:49] Oh God, I was just wondering where you dug up that second video from.

Speaker 1 [00:46:54] That it was actually financed by your broadcasting fee, uh-huh. It's really difficult to compare the videos because they address very different topics as well. One was about a tragic accident, the other was about a climate conference being discussed. But can you still try to assess which presentation style resonated with you more, if anything resonated with you at all?

Speaker 5 [00:47:23] Well, honestly, both seemed incredibly unprofessional to me. So, even the first video, I don't understand why the title "Nice to Know" was used for a story about a classmate who died during PE class, like how does that relate? I would have expected something more like, "Nice to Know" how, I don't know, Paulaner Spezi is made, you know, with what ingredients. So, I have to say, I struggled with both videos, but I probably would have been more drawn to the first video because it had a somewhat more dramatic effect or simply a more dramatic story. And I definitely would have stayed longer with this "Nice to Know" than with those weird angels. Um, yeah, that's my assessment.

Speaker 2 [00:48:20] Somehow, both videos give you the feeling that there were some older editors behind them, thinking about how to reach the young audience. With the first video, it's like, let's make extreme cuts, extremely different zoom transitions, I don't know, so that people stay engaged and speak extremely excitedly so that people think it's a super, super relevant topic. Which it might be. With the second video, it's more like, let's use some TikTok filters that young people use nowadays to reach them. So, it's just nothing where I would say, hey, you've caught my attention in any way.

Speaker 6 [00:49:10] Yeah, so I didn't think either were great, but the first one actually annoyed me more because it was a relatively serious topic or important, being portrayed in a way that was unnecessarily dramatic, like the title says "Student Dies" without any subtlety, I don't think that's necessary. And the person also had a very strong opinion about it. It was zero percent neutral. I would have immediately switched it off. I found it extremely irritating. The second one, I just didn't like.

Speaker 1 [00:49:48] So, would you basically say, as I understood it just now, that if you start watching a video and you notice it's very strongly tendentious, meaning, there's a very strong opinion represented from the outset, it's presented very tragically, like, "Oh my God, did you know," in that style, would you rather swipe away or would you maybe also say, oh, okay, this is catching my attention?

Speaker 3 [00:50:18] Uh, generally, probably swipe away. Unless the topic interests me so much that I don't do that. But then I would still prefer if it were presented neutrally. So, I would still prefer if it were more neutral. Otherwise, I would probably swipe away.

Speaker 1 [00:50:36] Simon and Maja. How did you feel about the two videos?

Speaker 4 [00:50:39] Well, I found both incredibly unprofessional. With the first one, what annoyed me most was that they were making a big deal out of a really tragic incident, and exaggerating it, which I find completely inappropriate for the situation. And the second one, I just found ridiculous. I would have immediately swiped away because I just found it uncomfortable to watch. Yeah.

Speaker 3 [00:51:11] For me, it was the same. I found the first one very unprofessional because it was like, I think it was said in the vein of, some students reported that he wanted water or something like that. I thought okay, that doesn't necessarily have to be. And the second one was just not my sense of humor. But I think if you're 40 and up, then maybe it hits the mark more.

Speaker 1 [00:51:35] What I find quite interesting, what resonates with all of you a bit, is this, that you all found it too unprofessional. Both videos. Do you think or believe that content, on TikTok for example, which is sometimes very opinion-based, as I said, also this very strongly exaggerated, using



a lot of superlatives. Can such videos be professional at all? So, is TikTok a platform where you would see professionalism at all?

Speaker 5 [00:52:15] Honestly, I think it is possible to create professionalism. I mean, I think especially with the first video, it could have easily been made more professional by not referring to the opinions of the other students or the reports from the students, but maybe, uh, to media that reported on it, which are perhaps also quality media? So, I think you could have easily created more professionalism that way, or just ask yourself, do I really need to report on this specific case or about, say, the general problem, for example, PE class in the heat. So, something like that. Regarding the second medium, I have to say, I still find professionalism in an angel costume, how do you want to achieve that, that's still questionable, but maybe there is. So, that may not have been the intention at all. It was maybe supposed to be a bit more of a joke.

Speaker 2 [00:53:22] I also think that as a platform that publishes such videos, you have to ask yourself whether it's always necessary to overdramatize, whether that's the way to reach the young audience. I mean, sure, the attention span of people on TikTok is low, but better make short videos, tell it briefly and succinctly and professionally, and then you have a good video that people might also watch.

Speaker 1 [00:53:55] Yeah (..)

Speaker 4 [00:53:56] I could also, sorry (..)

Speaker 1 [00:53:58] Go ahead.

Speaker 4 [00:54:00] So, I could also imagine on TikTok and such, professional videos by the Tagesschau, for example. But it has to have a different framework and be presented differently.

Speaker 1 [00:54:12] Yeah, definitely.

Speaker 6 [00:54:14] The problem with a platform like TikTok is that it's so mixed in that you first get a post from the Tagesschau, which is serious. But the next ten videos are again different things, which are not necessarily serious. You don't always have that, they don't always fit into the attention span of the day, where you want to read news or watch something funny, and on TikTok, you can't decide what you want to consume, unlike when I open the Tagesschau app. I think that's maybe a fundamental problem.

Speaker 1 [00:56:59] So, here we have another case, as we did earlier, regarding the style of the videos and their professionalism. But, which video did you feel more engaged with? Just in general.

Speaker 6 [00:57:16] Well, I believe, for me, it was the second video for similar reasons as with the other videos, that the other person reported on the incident in a fairly neutral and factual manner. And in the first video, it was more like a personal opinion about the topic. And, well, there were facts presented as well, but often very opinionated based on her situation. And since I don't know her personally, I'm not sure if I would necessarily trust her opinion. Even though she tried to present the facts.

Speaker 5 [00:57:55] Honestly, in the first video, there were no facts at all because, for example, the maximum Bafög rate, you can research that in a second, but she didn't do that and just mentioned some number, also saying, "I believe," so that wasn't a reliable source either. But despite that, I felt more drawn to her video. Simply because of the nice background music and the fact that the numbers were highlighted in color. I just felt that the design appealed to me more. And I have to say, well, the



other one was again so dramatized, and you couldn't see any faces clearly. But how am I supposed to know if it was a teacher or three students? So, in both cases, I didn't feel the truthfulness was very high.

Speaker 1 [00:58:59] But because you just mentioned that you were generally more drawn to the first one. Could it also be, or a general question to all of you, that because she asked at the end, "How about you? Do you receive Bafög too? What's it like?" that maybe you feel a connection because you might know the situation, and you might even comment underneath saying, "Hey, I'm in the same boat." Does that have an influence?

Speaker 5 [00:59:20] Yes, I can definitely imagine that plays a part. I remember Bafög was a big topic for me too. And I also appreciated how she brought in the opinions of other people at the end, even though it wasn't a fact. But again, for example, what she mentioned about whether the parents really want to support you. That's also something I think many students can relate to. The situation where you somehow feel connected.

Speaker 2 [00:59:54] I have to say (...)

Speaker 1 [00:59:55] Yes, please (...)

Speaker 2 [00:59:56] I have to say, I would definitely have stuck more with the first video. Simply because it starts with a little cliffhanger, like, "Will this be enough for me to live on? Let's find out," which means, in essence, I find it intriguing. As a student myself, I find the topic interesting, and when she's about to open that letter, I also want to know in the end whether it's enough for her or not. And at the moment, I don't really care whether it's serious or fact-based or how the numbers are put together. In essence, I just find it fascinating. And that's actually, as Paul mentioned earlier, in this algorithm, when you're scrolling through, you're more likely to come across this typical Tagesschau video where you might think, "Ugh, I don't want to hear the news right now, I'll just scroll on." But then a video pops up of a person filming themselves, in that atmosphere, and I would actually continue listening to that.

Speaker 1 [01:00:53] So, would you say you would make concessions in the desire for seriousness? If you say, hey, this is someone I can identify with so much, or especially with the topic, that I don't care if they're standing in front of a green screen or not.

Speaker 2 [01:01:09] Yeah, I think it really depends on the person. I mean, it's like if I have my two or three favorite influencers who can tell me anything, and I ultimately believe them, as opposed to if it's just someone I find cool, who I might have seen a few times on the For You page, then that's also a reason for me to stick around and keep watching, rather than if it's just some random presenter or journalist.

Speaker 1 [01:01:33] Simon and Maja, did the first one also appeal to you more, for the reasons mentioned earlier?

Speaker 4 [01:01:38] Well, the second video appealed to me much more because I felt that the facts were more prominent. It's not nice what happened there. But with those video recordings, which weren't good, but it kind of emphasized that more. She kept herself in the background. In the first video, it felt more like self-promotion, and I couldn't really relate to that.

Speaker 3 [01:02:11] Well, to be honest, I would have skipped both videos. Simply because, for me, the first video was, yeah, somehow all that talking to the camera about oneself, that doesn't really appeal to me, and the second video, well, the content, it's not something new, that there are people

fighting at Berlin schools, and whether it's a teacher or an external person, that's secondary. So, I probably wouldn't have watched both videos until the end.

Speaker 1 [01:02:41] But what about you? When you said okay, the first topic just didn't grip you. If it had been a gripping topic that personally interested you more, if it had been someone who said, "Hey, tell me your opinion about this," as you mentioned earlier about the stock market or something similar, tell me your opinion or your stance. Would that then appeal to you more if someone interacted with you like that?

Speaker 3 [01:03:02] Yeah, I think here again, it depends on the timing, similar to before. If I'm at the office at noon and don't have much time to scroll through, then I would probably just keep scrolling. But if you have time and you're already on your phone, I would watch it longer if it's a topic that interests me more.

Speaker 4 [01:03:19] Okay.

Speaker 6 [01:03:20] Then the problem I had with the video was also that at the moment when she said whether it's enough or not, you already know that it's not enough. And I already know what her opinion is. And I know exactly what the video is supposed to tell me. Already in the first second. And I find that a bit too biased. It's just her situation in that moment.

Speaker 1 [01:03:43] It was too predictable for you what was going to happen?

Speaker 3 [01:03:47] Exactly, I already knew that either Munich or Berlin would come into play, that the rents there are so expensive. Yeah. I just didn't like it.

Speaker 1 [01:03:56] Okay. Then we've already arrived at our last pair of videos. And now it's about a very simple criterion, namely the length. And so, you can go ahead and watch Video eleven and Video twelve. With Video eleven, if you want, since we don't have much time left, if you watch it in fast-forward or something, that's also no problem.

**(Video 11 and Video 12 are watched by the group)**

Speaker 1 [01:06:17] So, one video delivered the news very briefly and succinctly, and the other one was really detailed and packed with a lot of background information. Which one, I mean, it's difficult to say, but which one would have kept you more engaged with a topic like in the first video?

Speaker 4 [01:06:37] Well, I would definitely have stuck with the shorter one about the police, or at least given it equal attention. I felt like there was a clear storyline, and it just went straight to the point. You get the relevant information and then we're done. The other one dragged on, and it was just way too long for me.

Speaker 3 [01:06:54] I'd agree with that. I mean, the second video, you could really consume it quickly. But the first video, I think Instagram or especially TikTok might not be the right platform for presenting such long videos because a platform like YouTube, where people actively click on it and want to watch it, is probably the better option.

Speaker 2 [01:07:17] I have to say, when I'm on TikTok and I see at the bottom how long the video is going to be, in the end, how long the whole thing will drag on, I just scroll away on principle because it's not the way I want to consume information on that platform. And the first video just gave me the vibe as if it were just a documentary that was cut down to five minutes, let's say. So, I would definitely stick with the second video.

Speaker 5 [01:07:56] Yeah, I think I can honestly agree with you. I mean, in terms of the topic, I definitely found the first video more interesting, and I also find it a sad development that I notice in myself. But my attention span isn't really that high anymore. And I also notice, for example, sure, if it's just simpler numbers that I can remember, like you can go to the police at 16 years old, instead of how many victims there have been so far. But still, that somehow sticks with me more. And I also have to say that I found it again that they highlighted these things, that really made a big difference. Or different text passages.

Speaker 1 [01:08:35] Simply highlighting information one after the other in quick succession. The video was under 30 seconds. The second one, that you guys watched. Ideally then, so to speak (...)

Speaker 4 [01:08:44] Yeah.

Speaker 1 [01:08:46] As short as possible. Would you also agree with that, Paul?

Speaker 6 [01:08:52] Um, I'm still considering. I think the length of the videos suited the topic. I think I would have found it a bit confusing if it had been a super short video about the Middle East conflict, where they interrupted the information super quickly. I might not find that so appropriate. And for me personally, it wasn't too long. But it did feel more like a news article. But personally, I didn't find it so bad. It was just a bit shorter, more concise, uh, the second one, with the police. But in terms of length, I found both okay. Mainly because of the topic in the first video.

Speaker 1 [01:09:34] But from what I gathered, TikTok isn't necessarily the channel for you all for a lot of background and information, but rather for short insights into topics. But not necessarily to be fully informed about the topic, right?

Speaker 3 [01:09:48] Yeah.

Speaker 4 [01:09:48] Definitely.

Speaker 1 [01:09:52] Okay, I see collective nodding. Um, then thank you for scrolling through that for so long and for the many insights. And especially regarding the last point we just looked at together, the length of the video, TikToks are structured totally differently. So, if you try to condense a video about the Middle East conflict, like the one you just watched, into 25 seconds, then it's difficult to get comprehensive information. So, I'm really interested in wrapping up our discussion with a little question. That means, have you ever had the situation on TikTok where you learned about news, about some news that you weren't clear about, that you wanted to fact-check, where you wanted to gather a bit more information? And how do you approach such a situation step by step? If you can't think of a specific example right away where that happened, where you saw something and thought, okay, I have to google that. Does that really check out? Just take one of the videos we've just seen as an example. And imagine you'd like to learn a bit more about such a topic. How do you proceed then? So, the video has just ended, and then what do you do if you want more info?

Speaker 4 [01:11:04] So, that has definitely happened to me, especially on TikTok. When there were very, very short videos with only the most superficial facts. Um, and what I always did was I first checked the source, so if you saw it, for example, from the Tagesschau, then you can just go to their website, or alternatively, you can check on Instagram or something, if there's something more detailed about it. Or, what you can often do is look in the caption, there's sometimes more detailed information, and otherwise through simple Google searches.

Speaker 1 [01:11:41] Okay, so would you also say, you exit the app and just type it into Google and see?

Speaker 5 [01:11:48] Well, what I definitely have done more often, which I wouldn't automatically anticipate as confirmation or confirmed knowledge. But if I read through the comments, and if then a large part of the comments already say that it's nonsense, then I would doubt it and maybe really leave the app and google it again. But otherwise, I also tried to educate myself sometimes through the comments. Which I wouldn't say, well, I wouldn't sign off on that 100% that it was useful.

Speaker 2 [01:12:26] I actually have to confess as a person who, as Helen mentioned, first looks at the comments and then goes into the search on TikTok and enters the topic again in TikTok and watches comparable videos and checks if there are several videos that confirm the same thing. If that wasn't the case afterwards, then I would actually also research the whole topic again on Google.

Speaker 1 [01:12:51] But that's basically as a last resort. As long as you (...)

Speaker 2 [01:12:53] Yeah, just to make it as easy as possible for me and to have the shortest, shortest information paths to me.

Speaker 6 [01:13:03] So, I think I would definitely switch to Google to look something up, but I think in the first step, I would trust the source on TikTok. I think if I had doubts, I would stamp it as untrue anyway. And then I wouldn't bother to check it myself because I think in the first step, within my attention span, I would probably tell myself it's most likely bullshit. Then I wouldn't go to Google now. But because I'm so interested in the topic and I trust the source, then I might also educate myself further on Google.

Speaker 1 [01:13:40] Simon, what about you? Would you even forward a video if you find it interesting, if you want to know more about it, would you forward it and ask someone about it?

Speaker 3 [01:13:48] No. I wouldn't do that because, I don't know. It really has to be a real bombshell for me to forward it to someone. But I think I would actually do it like Paul. So probably go to Google and then, and then there already on the news and educate myself further there.

Speaker 1 [01:14:16] Okay, then now to wrap up our group, you may all, for the last time, I promise, briefly give your input. And let's face this scenario again, this discussed scenario of watching a video and then informing yourself afterward. Namely, imagine the following scenario. You've already heard something about the "Bündnis Sahra Wagenknecht" on the Tagesschau, but you're still not quite sure what this new party is all about. That's the case for many people, it's the case for me personally as well, so it's not far-fetched. One day, you're scrolling through TikTok and you see one of these videos. One of the videos that I'm about to show you. And then I'd like to know which of these videos motivates you the most to learn more about the topic? And now you get to watch the very last videos that you haven't seen yet on the channel. Namely, videos 13 to 16. This time not just two.

**(Video 13 to Video 16 are watched by the group)**

Speaker 1 [01:19:54] Is everyone finished? Perfect. Then you're done with watching videos for today. You've held out, very nice. Um, now that you've watched these last videos again. They all deal with the same topic, essentially. And which of these videos would now motivate you the most to further engage with this topic afterward?

Speaker 4 [01:20:17] For me, it's definitely the second video, because it already started hinting at a few facts, which makes you want to know more. In the other videos, it was the first one, which I just

found silly, I just wanted to switch off. With the last one, there wasn't really the right context, about this new party and everything. I missed the context there. And in the one from Funk, that was the third video, you only saw her talking. And it wasn't visually compelling and underscored enough for me.

Speaker 3 [01:21:00] So personally, I would say the last one, the one where she speaks herself, because you really have the primary source there, or whatever you call it, getting information firsthand. Because I mean, the others can say whatever they want. Whether that's true, whether she said it exactly like that, you don't know. So, I would choose the last one.

Speaker 2 [01:21:23] So, I think I would choose the video of the woman, the third video. Simply because I can see right away that it's from Funk, and I like to choose Funk as a source of information. Then she starts directly into the video with this how much percent? 27% for Wagenknecht question mark. Where you first ask yourself, how, so you don't really understand exactly what it's about, and then she clarifies very directly afterward. I find she presents it very seriously but also appealingly, and you always have the source overlay left to what she verbally says. In the other video from the man who speaks similarly to her, I also find the whole thing very appealingly designed, but I don't find any sources for what he says afterward verbally, only source, video, source, image. That's why I would choose the third one and then do further research.

Speaker 1 [01:22:14] That's a topic we haven't had yet. You also mentioned that you find these source references quite good. Why?

Speaker 2 [01:22:23] I don't actually look at the source in principle and don't even look closely at what's written in small print later. But that gives me the feeling of transparency, the feeling of okay, there really was someone there, an editor, a journalist, who dealt with the topic and not this, I may have read article XY for the other article and now I'm collecting information from there somehow.

Speaker 1 [01:22:50] Is it different for others? So far, nobody has chosen video one. Helen, what about you? Do you feel similarly, that you would also look at sources and therefore find video three the best?

Speaker 5 [01:23:02] No, personally, I have to say that I definitely liked video three because I also noticed that it was from Funk. I have to say, I didn't pay attention to the sources, which also surprised me when Lina mentioned that there were sources at all. I actually think that video number two appealed to me the most or motivated me the most to do further research. Or would have motivated me to do further research because elements were already included and shown, what one can actually imagine under the party. And I found that personally interesting.

Speaker 1 [01:23:56] So, you would prefer to continue researching if there are already building blocks contained in this video (..)

Speaker 5 [01:24:02] Yes, so that I don't have to start from scratch.

Speaker 1 [01:24:04] and then solidify the opinion, or to form an opinion, then quasi still (..)

Speaker 5 [01:24:09] I think for me it's just important that I don't start from scratch, but somehow already have a little idea of where it's going and, um, therefore somehow know whether it interests me thematically at all. Sounds harsh, but yeah.

Speaker 1 [01:24:27] Paul, how was it for you?



Speaker 6 [01:24:29] I generally found the second and third ones the most appealing, not at all the first one, and actually, I initially found the last one quite good, but then she talked way too much and could only say what she wanted. And I didn't really find that relevant. When she has this share of speaking time, she can present her position as she wants anyway. That's why I don't think it's so good for her to comprehensively inform about her party or to motivate me to later go to Google or something. So, more the second and third where things were really prepared for me that I can then follow up on if I'm interested.

Speaker 1 [01:25:15] Because you just mentioned that it would motivate you more to go to Google afterwards, for example. How would you like that to be in your dream vision of your social media world, so to speak, where you've just seen this video that you found quite good, found interesting, you'd like to learn more about it. How could this process be simplified? Helen and Lina already mentioned that they sometimes look at the comments. How would it be possible to get information more quickly? So, could it somehow be pointed out that in the bio on TikTok or on Instagram there is still a link to a relevant article, for example? Would something like that help you? Or do you have another idea?

Speaker 6 [01:26:06] I believe that first of all, the information needs to be presented in a super structured way, as Helen also mentioned, so that I can maybe directly enter a subtopic that particularly interests me somewhere, or, but what you just suggested about additional info in the bio would probably also help. However, it would need to be pointed out if someone is unlikely to check for something like that. And it would also need to be super structured and easily visible at a glance, so that you can click on it directly. Personally, I don't find it so important because the effort, that one-tenth of a second to switch apps and go to Google, if something interests me, I'll do it anyway. And whether I click on the bio or on a link, or swipe up twice and enter something on Google, it doesn't make such a big difference to me time-wise. The basic interest must be aroused and the subtopic that really interests me must be clear.

Speaker 1 [01:27:03] Would that maybe be a bit different for Lina or for Helen, where, for example, you might have said that you like to look at the comments, and if maybe three bullet points about it are written in the comments by the account itself. So that you can look at it again and maybe also where it says, Hey, get updated here XYZ again on the topic.

Speaker 5 [01:27:23] Um. Well, I think that would definitely be a sign that the source would be presented as credible for me. But I have to say, I sometimes just like to read the comments because then I see again how other viewers feel about it and what it triggers for them and what their opinion is.

Speaker 2 [01:27:47] What I find cool on TikTok or on Instagram Reels is when they write at the end that there are more infos in the caption, or within the caption there is a reference, as you said, to the bio where a link is integrated. Where you can then look at the entire article. And what I also really like is when the account itself responds to comments because there are always some people who then pick something out and spread fake news within the comments, where you see, a comment afterwards has 20,000 likes, where obviously only nonsense was written, and where this comment is then refuted within the account.

Speaker 1 [01:28:30] Maja, Simon, how about you? Would you also look at the comments again and read through any bullet points there? Or is there another way you would prefer to inform yourself after watching such a video?

Speaker 4 [01:28:42] So I would find it best if there are further information in the caption. What I don't find so pleasant is when they say that you have to first go to the video description, wait no, or

to the account and then the newest video is linked or the appropriate article is linked there. I always find it incredibly uncomfortable when you watch an older video and then the latest article is linked there and you can't find it directly. Then I quickly lose motivation to continue informing myself there. That's why I always find it easiest if it's simply linked directly in the caption or if a few bullet points of information are listed directly in the caption. And then a further link at the bottom in the caption.

Speaker 3 [01:29:35] Exactly. Exactly. Yes, but I wouldn't necessarily look at comments under political posts because 90% of them are just pure garbage. So, I would either google or go to the caption, yes.

Speaker 1 [01:29:59] Alright, then those were some very interesting insights that you've just added about how you might want to further inform yourselves after watching such videos. Then we're already at this point, at the end of our group today. Thank you very, very much for participating. I hope you still had a bit of fun scrolling through all these videos. If you're interested in what came out of it, of course, this focus group that I conducted with you is not the only part of my master's thesis, but I have also done other analyses on such topics, so let me know if you'd like to be updated on the results. And then I thank you very, very much for being here today. And I wish you a very pleasant evening.

## Appendix E: Code Book Qualitative Content Analysis

### C1\_Format

Code	Name	Description of Content	Use of Category	Application Examples	Differentiation from other Categories
C1	Format	The format includes the use of texts, effects and sounds in a TikTok video.	The category is used when participants talk about creative elements of the videos that were added in editing and post-production.	“Especially, the subtitles help a lot, I think, with understanding for the viewers. The icons, well, they're nice, but I don't really care about them.” (S6: 00:22:34)	

### C2\_Production Style

Code	Name	Description of Content	Use of Category	Application Examples	Differentiation from other Categories
C2	Production Style	The production style includes the perspective and placement of the host in the video,	The category is used when the participants talk about the placement of the host in the video, the shooting perspective and the	„But the fact that she stands in front of me frontally, like a news anchor, and explains the topic with the driver's license and so	



		the recording angle and the professionalism of the recording.	professionalism of the video specifically related to the camera shot.	on very professionally and seriously, just gives me a slightly more trustworthy vibe for this video.” (S2: 00:26:21)	
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## C3\_Hosts

Code	Name	Description of Content	Use of Category	Application Examples	Differentiation from other Categories
C3	Hosts	The presence of a moderator within a TikTok video	The category is used when the participants talk about the moderator in the video	„I believe the second one is more serious” (S4: 00:33:18)	

## C3.1\_Clothing

Code	Name	Description of Content	Use of Category	Application Examples	Differentiation from other Categories
C3.1	Clothing	Clothing of the moderating person	The category is used when the participants	„I thought she was wearing a terrible skirt.” (S4: 00:41:42)	

			talk about the moderator's clothes.		
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## C3.2\_Host Presence

Code	Name	Description of Content	Use of Category	Application Examples	Differentiation from other Categories
C3.2	Host Presence	The presence of the moderator in the foreground or background of the video	The category is used when participants talk about the presence of the moderator and the focus of the video on the moderator.	„I also found the second video better in that aspect, that the person was integrated a bit more subtly, rather than completely facing forward“ (S2: 00:38:09)	While the category C2_Production Style is applied to the static placement of the moderator, C3.2 is coded as soon as the presence or restraint of the moderator as perceived by the participants is brought up.

## C3.3\_Identification Potential

Code	Name	Description of Content	Use of Category	Application Examples	Differentiation from other Categories
C3.2	Identification Potential	Identification potential of the participants with the moderator	This category is used when participants express their personal identification with the moderator.	“So I wouldn't identify with it anyway, whether it's Jens Riwa or the woman or the other guy“ (S6: 00:43:20)	

## C4\_Content

Code	Name	Description of Content	Use of Category	Application Examples	Differentiation from other Categories
C4	Content	Thematischer Inhalt eines TikTok Videos	The category is used when the participants make statements about the video content or its transportation by the moderator.	„the other one was again so dramatized, and you couldn't see any faces clearly“ (S5: 00:57:55)	

## C4.1\_Seriousness

Code	Name	Description of Content	Use of Category	Application Examples	Differentiation from other Categories
C4.1	Seriousness	Seriousness of the content of a TikTok video	The category is used when the participants specifically comment on the seriousness of the content	„I think you could have easily created more professionalism that way, or just ask yourself, do I really need to report on this specific case“ (S5: 00:52:15)	

## C4.2\_Tonality

Code	Name	Description of Content	Use of Category	Application Examples	Differentiation from other Categories
C4.2	Tonality	Tonality of the content conveyed by a TikTok video	The category is used when the participants comment specifically on the tonality conveyed by the videos	„It was zero percent neutral. I would have immediately switched it off.“ (S6: 00:49:10)	Category C4.1 is aimed at the perceived seriousness of the content conveyed, while category C4.2 includes the way in which the moderator

					addresses the audience (dramatic address, neutral address, positive address).
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## C4.3\_Sender

Code	Name	Description of Content	Use of Category	Application Examples	Differentiation from other Categories
C4.2	Sender	The sender (account) on which the TikTok video was published	The category is used when the participants formulate a connection from the sender of the video to the content delivery	„Simply because I can see right away that it's from Funk, and I like to choose Funk as a source of information.” (S2: 01:21:23)	

## C4.3\_References

Code	Name	Description of Content	Use of Category	Application Examples	Differentiation from other Categories
C4.3	References	Reference information, which should	The category is used when the participants	„I don't actually look	

		prove the information within a TikTok video and are included in the video	formulate a connection between the reference information within a video and the content conveyed.	at the source in principle and don't even look closely at what's written in small print later" (S2: 01:22:23)	
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## C5\_Viewer Addressing

Code	Name	Description of Content	Use of Category	Application Examples	Differentiation from other Categories
C5	Viewer Addressing	The moderator's personal or impersonal approach to the audience	The category is used when the participants comment on the moderator's address and formulate whether and how they feel addressed	„And I also appreciated how she brought in the opinions of other people at the end, even though it wasn't a fact. But again, for example, what she mentioned about whether the parents really want to support you. That's also something I think many students can relate to. The situation	

				where you somehow feel connected.” (S5: 00:59:20)	
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## C6\_Length

Code	Name	Description of Content	Use of Category	Application Examples	Differentiation from other Categories
C6	Length	The video length of the TikTok video	The category is used when participants comment on the length of the videos	„I would definitely have stuck with the shorter one about the police, or at least given it equal attention” (S4: 01:06:37)	

## C7\_Information Behaviour

Code	Name	Description of Content	Use of Category	Application Examples	Differentiation from other Categories
C7	Information Behaviour	Information behavior on the part of the participants for further	The category is used when participants express a specific method of obtaining further information	„Or, what you can often do is look in the caption, there's sometimes more detailed	

		information search after consuming a TikTok video	after watching a TikTok video	information, and otherwise through simple Google searches.“ (S4: 01:11:04)	
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C7.1\_ Comment Section

Code	Name	Description of Content	Use of Category	Application Examples	Differentiation from other Categories
C7.1	Comment Section	Obtaining information after watching a TikTok video by searching for information in the comment section of the video	The category is used when participants comment on further information searches in the comment section of the video	„I actually have to confess as a person who, as Helen mentioned, first looks at the comments and then goes into the search on TikTok and enters the topic again in TikTok (..) (S2: 01:12:26)	



## C7.2\_Google-Search

Code	Name	Description of Content	Use of Category	Application Examples	Differentiation from other Categories
C7.2	Google-Search	Obtaining information after watching a TikTok video by searching for information on Google	The category is used when participants comment on further information searches on Google	„So probably go to Google and then, and then there already on the news and educate myself further there.” (S3: 01:13:48)	

## C7.3\_Caption

Code	Name	Description of Content	Use of Category	Application Examples	Differentiation from other Categories
C7.3	Caption	Obtaining information after watching a TikTok video by searching for information in the caption (video description)	The category is used when participants comment on further information search in video caption	„Or, what you can often do is look in the caption, there's sometimes more detailed information, and otherwise through simple Google searches.“ (S4: 01:11:04)	

## C7.4\_Instagram

Code	Name	Description of Content	Use of Category	Application Examples	Differentiation from other Categories
C7.4	Instagram	Obtaining information after consuming a TikTok video by searching for information on Instagram	The category is used when participants comment on further information searches on Instagram	„or alternatively, you can check on Instagram or something.“ (S4: 01:11:04)	

## C7.5\_Sender's Website

Code	Name	Description of Content	Use of Category	Application Examples	Differentiation from other Categories
C7.5	Sender's Website	Obtaining information after consuming a TikTok video by searching for information on the sender's website	The category is used when participants comment on further information searches on the sender's website	„for example, from the Tagesschau, then you can just go to their website“ (S4: 01:11:04)	

## C7.6\_TikTok Search

Code	Name	Description of Content	Use of Category	Application Examples	Differentiation from other Categories
C7.6	TikTok Search	Obtaining information after watching a TikTok video by searching for information using the TikTok search function	The category is used when participants comment on further information searches using the search function on TikTok	„and then goes into the search on TikTok and enters the topic again in TikTok and watches comparable videos and checks if there are several videos that confirm the same thing.“ (S2: 01:12:26)	

## C7.7\_Link in Bio

Code	Name	Description of Content	Use of Category	Application Examples	Differentiation from other Categories
C7.7	Link in Bio	Obtaining information after consuming a TikTok video by searching for information in the link in the channel's bio	The category is used when participants comment on further information searches via the link in the channel bio	„What I find cool on TikTok or on Instagram Reels is when they write at the end	

		(channel description; LinkTree)		that there are more infos in the caption, or within the caption there is a reference, as you said, to the bio where a link is integrated.” (S2: 01:27:47)	
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C8\_Follow-up Information Triggers

<b>Code</b>	<b>Name</b>	<b>Description of Content</b>	<b>Use of Category</b>	<b>Application Examples</b>	<b>Differentiation from other Categories</b>
C8	Follow-up Information Triggers	Motivators for further information intake after consuming a TikTok video	This category is used when participants comment on video elements that motivate them to seek further information on the topic after watching the video	„where things were really prepared for me that I can then follow up on if I'm interested.” (S6: 01:24:29)	

## C8.1\_Personal Interest

Code	Name	Description of Content	Use of Category	Application Examples	Differentiation from other Categories
C8.1	Personal Interest	Personal interest in the video topic as a trigger for further information intake after consuming a TikTok video	This category is used when participants cite personal interest in the video topic as a trigger for further information intake	„but somehow already have a little idea of where it's going and, um, therefore somehow know whether it interests me thematically at all.“ (S5: 01:24:09)	

## C8.2\_Bits of Information

Code	Name	Description of Content	Use of Category	Application Examples	Differentiation from other Categories
C8.2	Bits of Information	Bits of information within the video as a trigger for further information intake after consuming a TikTok video	The category is used when participants name the bits of information conveyed within the video as a trigger for further information intake	„because it already started hinting at a few facts, which makes you want to know more.“ (S4: 01:20:17)	

## C8.3\_Sender's Reliability

Code	Name	Description of Content	Use of Category	Application Examples	Differentiation from other Categories
C8.2	Sender's Reliability	The seriousness of the sender as a trigger for further information intake after consuming a TikTok video	The category is used when participants mention the sender's reliability as a trigger for further information intake	„I would say the last one, the one where she speaks herself, because you really have the primary source there, or whatever you call it, getting information firsthand.” (S3: 01:21:00)	C8.2 is coded if the participants relate the sender's reliability specifically to their further information intake. C4.2 is coded if the participants make a general statement about the sender of the video (without specific reference to the further information intake)