

“Oh yeah, I read something about that on Instagram the other day”

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**Researching the cultural difference between students in the Netherland and Germany in
the use of social media as a source of information on socio-political issues**

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Abstract

In this thesis, the role of the social media platforms Instagram and Twitter as sources of information on socio-political issues was examined. The aim was to discover behaviours and attitudes of 18 to 29-year-old students in the Netherlands and Germany towards social media. Furthermore, it should be determined whether the platforms influenced the politicisation of the students, how much the students trusted social media and how they dealt with misinformation. A contrastive approach to intercultural communication, and a mixed-method approach were chosen. First, a qualitative part was carried out, including semi-structured interviews with 3 Dutch and 3 German participants, which served as a basis for developing the quantitative part. In the quantitative part, a questionnaire was distributed that received 37 answers for the Netherlands and 64 answers for Germany. The results demonstrated that Instagram is an important information platform for students in both countries. Students from Germany used Instagram more as a source for neutral information, while students from the Netherlands followed more political aligned accounts. Furthermore, Instagram influenced the politicisation of the examined students, even though they did not trust the platform. Concludingly, the research showed that students in the Netherlands and Germany used social media similarly. Only differences in the choice of platforms and the following behaviour could be found.

Keywords: Intercultural Communication, Social Media, Instagram, Twitter, Politicisation, Netherlands, Germany, Culture, Students

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1. Introduction

Social media has changed societies worldwide so much that it “has already become such an integral part of everyday life that it makes no sense to see it as separate” (Miller et al., 2020 p.7). The platforms are used daily for various purposes, whether self-expression, networking and communicating across long distances, or informing about the latest news. Previous research has shown that the use of print media as a news source declined by 20% among Dutch people in the last six years and by half among Germans in the last eight years (Newman et al., 2020). In contrast, the use of social media as a news source was higher, at almost 40% in both countries in 2020, with an upward trend, which demonstrates the relevance of studying the impact of social media on society.

In 2021, the impact of social media on political opinion-making and the elections in the Netherlands was an influential topic (Vermaen et al., 2021). Furthermore, the global corona pandemic forced everyone to stay at home, which increased the use of social media, including a boom in online news provision (Beisch & Schäfer, 2020). The news consumed covered a wide range of topics, e.g., the Corona pandemic, the elections in the Netherlands and Germany in 2021, and news on socio-political issues.

Socio-political issues are combinations of problems, phenomena, and political events that unlike political issues, which are usually discussed and decided solely at a governmental level, are also societally relevant and highly discussed since they commonly impact the lives of citizens. Socio-political issues are deep-rooted in inequalities in societies based on race, gender, sexuality, religion, and wealth distribution. Bourdieu (as cited in Miller et al., 2016) outlined three different types of inequality that are dynamically interrelated and arise from dissimilar distributions of capital and the use of power-holding elite groups to reproduce existing privileges: economic capital (access to monetary resources); social capital (social relationships and institutionalised networks in which individuals are integrated); and cultural

capital (knowledge or skills acquired through education, cultural goods, and skills). Social Media gives suppressed minorities a voice to speak out on those issues (Miller et al., 2016).

Regarding the Dutch and the German elections in 2021, many people were concerned about young people's political interest and attitude (Hänel, 2019; Zinner, 2019). However, as a study showed, young people in Germany are by no means disaffected by politics. On the contrary: 66 per cent of the students surveyed said they were interested in politics (Shell, 2019). The study also indicated that they aspire to shape the future of society and are already calling for the necessary course to be set today (Shell, 2019). Hasebrink et al. (2021) found that more than two-thirds of Germans between 18 and 24 are journalistically or comprehensively information-oriented, which positively influenced news interest and use. An influential aspect was the educational level of the participants, as people with a higher level of education were also more interested and informed about political news. In addition, the political opinion-forming of the journalistically or comprehensively information-oriented young people, in contrast to their peers, was not exclusively influenced by their personal environment but also by media, journalists, politicians, and political parties. According to Hasebrink et al. (2021), social media was the primary source of information for the respondents.

The Netherlands and Germany are cultural and geographical close to each other with important bilateral relations in politics, the economy, and education (Pekelder, 2013). However, there are differences, which are scientifically interesting to investigate, such as the openness and the opportunities for smaller parties in the Dutch political system, or the progress made in the transport and energy turnaround in the Netherlands, which is often seen as a possible example for Germany (Kirchner, 2017). Overall, Pekelder (2013) described the German point of view on the Netherlands as the *experimental laboratory of Europe* (p.78). On the other hand, Germany is one of the driving forces of the EU and is viewed very positively by most countries; for example, in 2017, 93% of the Dutch were in favour of Germany (Stokes

et al., 2017). Moreover, Germany is often perceived in the Netherlands as a protective partner with many commonalities, especially concerning the newer Eastern European member states of the EU (Pekelder, 2013).

This paper aims to examine the cross-cultural phenomenon of social media use as a source of information on socio-political issues in the Netherlands and Germany. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to indicate how students aged 18 to 29 used social media, their political interest, how they engaged with socio-political issues on social media, and their influence on their private lives. Based on the interviews, a questionnaire was developed to test the trends shown in the interviews in a larger population.

The structure of the paper is as follows: First, the background and problems of social media and the connection to politics and policy issues are presented. Thereby the main- and the sub-research questions are introduced. Afterwards, an overview of the method consisting of semi-interviews, a questionnaire and a combination strategy is given. This is followed by a presentation of the results of the study. The results are subsequently discussed in the context of the research questions and the theoretical background. In the end, the most important results are reiterated, and the limitations of the research and recommendations for further research are given.

2. Conceptual and theoretical framework

In this chapter the necessary academical insights and theories for the research on social media as a source of information on socio-political issues among university students in the Netherlands and Germany aged 18-29 are introduced. Firstly, social media in general and the two relevant platforms will be brought up. Following, theories and research on the connection between social media, politics, and political participation among young people will be presented. Finally, the problem of misinformation on social media is discussed. The research questions are introduced corresponding to the topics, and the relevance for the two chosen countries is highlighted.

2.1. Social media development

First, the term *social media* should be examined more precisely. Burgess et al. (2017) defined social media technologies as “digital platforms, services and apps built around the convergence of content sharing, public communication and interpersonal connection” (p.1). In the Mid-2000, *Web 2.0* was used to describe the rising social technologies on the internet. As Web 2.0 considered platforms such as *Instagram* or *Twitter* too detached from social life and mobility (Burgess et al., 2017; Miller et al., 2016) the term has evolved to social media. The continuous development of the networks shows that today they are more than just parts of the internet (Miller et al., 2016). Brügger (2017) described three waves that are flexible and overlapping developments towards today’s social media. Platforms such as *Facebook* or *MySpace* were first used via desktop pc and an internet browser; in the second wave, however, the platforms were supplemented by applications on mobile devices. Since the third wave, most platforms are mainly used with applications on mobile devices.

2.2. Social media platforms

Researching all available social media platforms would be too much. In the following part, the two platforms relevant for this research, *Instagram*, and *Twitter*, are going to be introduced:

Instagram (abbreviated IG) is a social media networking service designed for sharing photos and videos. It is mainly used in the mobile phone app. It was released in 2010 and is owned by *Facebook* since 2012. Users that must be older than 13 years can upload single photos or videos. There is also the option to include multiple images or videos in a single post (slides), edit them with filters or even create them in the app itself. With hashtags and geographic tagging, posts can be found publicly unless the users set their profile to private. The main page of each user is called feed and consists of the pictures and videos of the followed profiles. The complex algorithm they are organised by does not need to be described in detail for this thesis. Users can interact with content differently by liking, sharing in private messages with other users or user groups (the messaging function), saving in the private collection, or sharing in their story. The story feature allows users to post photos and videos in a sequential feed, with the posts accessible to others for 24 hours at a time. This story feed of followed accounts is displayed in a separate bar at the top of the standard feed. The social network reported more than one billion monthly active users worldwide in June 2018 and 500 million daily active users (Tankovska, 2021). In 2020 *Instagram* was used by 32% of the Dutch people and by 9% as a source for news, while 25% of the German people used it and 6% as a source for news (Newman et al., 2020).

Twitter (abbreviated TW) is a microblogging and social media networking service founded in 2006. Users can post and interact with short messages and images or videos of no more than 280 characters. The limit is often bypassed through so-called threads that are series of connected posts (tweets) from one account, whereby the following tweet always starts as the

first comment of the last tweet. Users can like and retweet posts (share on their profile). *Twitter* is used via desktop or mobile app. Since 2020, there has been a fleet function that is similar to the *Instagram* story function but is designed for tweets and not only for pictures. In 2019, *Twitter* had more than 330 million monthly active users (Molina, 2017), it is used by many politicians and official media sites, among others, for live reporting or fast publication of news. The platform is also described as a some-to-many microblogging service, as most tweets are written by a small minority of users, in contrast to *Instagram*. In 2020 *Twitter* was used by 14% of the Dutch people and by 7% as a source for news, while 13% of the German people used it at all and 6% as a source for news (Newman et al., 2020).

2.3. Social media logics

The fundamental dynamics between social media platforms, users, and social institutions, can be described independently of cultures, communities, and identities with the *social media logic* (van Dijk & Poell, 2013) which identifies four basic principles:

1. *Programmability*: Refers to the interaction between the platform and the users. The platform steers the users' contributions, and the users influence the flow of communication and information on the platform.
2. *Popularity*: The mechanisms of the platforms to make channels, pages etc., popular through algorithmic and socio-economic components.
3. *Connectivity*: The socio-technical network behind the platform that connects user activities and advertisers. The system defines and shapes the online environment, while users mutually shape the platform through their content.
4. *Datafication*: The ability of the platform to translate all user information, relationships, and connections into data. The other three principles mentioned above are only made possible by the condition of datafication.

Although these logics, platforms, communication technologies, and algorithms are essential for understanding social media, this research on social media must be much more focused on sociality, people, and relationships. Social media, in general, must be understood as a (digital) place where many people spend part of their lives (Burgess et al., 2017; Jacobs & Spierings, 2016, Miller et al., 2016; van Dijk & Poell, 2013). It is impossible to understand a platform in isolation. The complex relations between the different platforms need to be considered with a theory of polymedia, as people today use the full range of available possibilities to use specific platforms or media for certain types of interaction or consumption (Miller et al., 2016). Miller et al. stated that “It is the content rather than the platform that is most significant when it comes to why social media matters” (2016, p.1), and that becomes apparent when trying to categorise the different platforms according to their modes of use because they differ from culture to culture (Miller et al., 2016). In other words, how and why people chose which platforms to communicate with each other on what topics to form social relations moves far over the simple transmission of messages. Before social media, communication technologies were used in two ways: one-on-one communication via telephone (*private dyadic*) or communication via public broadcasting (Miller et al., 2016). The new opportunities of social media have created a polarisation described by Miller et al. (2016) as *scalable sociality*. It refers to the different purposes and types of use and combination of social media measured on two scales. For once, from the most private (e.g., private messages) to the most public (e.g., a public appeal). The other scale refers to the people involved and measures from the smallest group (two people) to the largest group (e.g., all people on the platform).

2.4. Identity, and communities of practice

Bucholtz & Hall (2005) introduced 15 important linguistic anthropology terms that summarise social identities linked to language. *Identity, performance, and community of*

practice are important while investigating how social media is used as a communicative tool in different cultures. Thus, *identity* is “an outcome of cultural semiotics that is accomplished through the production of contextually relevant socio-political relations of similarity and difference, authenticity and inauthenticity, and legitimacy and illegitimacy” (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005, p.382). In other words, dynamic production of similarity and difference in the immediate context and group dynamics. *Practice* characterises habitual and unconscious social activities or routines in an individual’s everyday life. The *communities of practice* are thus socialisations that are significant for the acquisition of both communicative and other cultural competencies (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005). The processes do not stop throughout life, and everyone may have several of these *identities* and be part of several *communities of practice*, as Bauman (1977) described:

Whereas practice is habitual and oftentimes less than fully intentional, performance is highly deliberate and self-aware social display. In everyday speech, as in much linguistic anthropology, the type of display that performance refers to involves an aesthetic component that is available for evaluation by an audience. (as cited in Bucholtz & Hall, 2005, p.380)

In connection to social media, the main research question of this thesis arises:

Is there a cultural difference in the use of the social media platforms Instagram and Twitter as sources of information on socio-political topics between university students in the Netherlands and Germany within the age of 18-29, and does this use affect their political ideas in the daily life?

2.5. Social media, politics, and political participation of the youth

There are many unique ways to use social media, and different factors play a role in that, such as geographical location, gender identity, age, the culture in which one was socialised, wealth, media affinity, and, of course, political attitudes. Regarding socio-political

issues, it is widespread that people follow accounts on social media that are in line with their political attitudes, what can create a *filter bubble*, “where citizens are primarily exposed to like-minded political views” (Barberá, 2015, p.5). According to Barberá (2015), however, most users use social media so frequently as a part of their lives that they do not only have online relationships with people they follow because of similar (political) interests but they also have important online relationships with family, friends, and acquaintances that are much more politically diverse. Miller et al. (2017) even describe social media as a conservative place for “reflecting prevailing values and social norms that rule relationships between people at the local level” (p.147). After all, social media is not always anonymous and mostly used for self-expression. To not lose reputation or become isolated, most people do not want to be seen as politically active (Storsul, 2014), and therefore do not often use social media to express their political ideas. The phenomenon is described as the *spiral of silence* (Miller et al., 2016). However, Miller et al. (2016) described many common ways of dealing with socio-political issues, such as stimulating discussions that do not need to be very serious and well-founded. Additionally, humour is often used as a form of political criticism. Finally, there is also simply passive participation, in which social media is entertainingly used by “ordinary people to ‘watch’ politics, even as spectators watch a football match, rather than to ‘do’ politics” (Miller et al., 2016, pp. 152-153).

It became apparent that social media platforms became not only a part of consumers life but also an essential part of campaigns and the appearance of politicians. Jacobs & Spierings (2016) examined the possibilities of social media for political parties and politicians the role of social media in the Netherlands and described four different opportunities:

1. *Advertisement opportunity* (directly sending out messages with the potential of reaching a broad audience)

2. *Human-contact opportunity* (creating a feeling of social presence by interacting with followers)
3. *Target-group opportunity* (reaching out to geographically dispersed groups)
4. *Salon-debate opportunity* (contacting and debating directly with journalists)

Furthermore, Jacobs & Spierings (2016) described the Netherlands as “well ahead of other European democracies” (p.72) regarding politics on social media and justified that by the opportunities of social media and the possibilities of the Dutch political system for smaller parties, as the Netherlands have lower electoral thresholds (Kiesraad, 2021), while e.g., in Germany there is a 5% electoral threshold. Nevertheless, the insights are also interesting for other countries such as Germany, as the Netherlands are often seen as *Europe’s experimental laboratory for socio-political or economic innovations* (Pekelder, 2013) and social media is not used purposefully by established German politicians (Deutschlandfunk, 2019). If anything, it is the youth departments of the parties and special media-credible politicians who use these platforms effectively (Hamberger, 2019). Apart from political parties, social media can also serve as a tool for marginalised groups to publicly raise their voice and speak out on inequalities and socio-political issues (Miller et al., 2016; Jacobs & Spierings, 2016). That is why social media is also used a lot by political activists, and political movements or organisations. Besides, also independent news sites are active on social media. In Germany, these are, for example, the accounts of the public broadcast media, such as *Tageschau* or *ZDF Heute*. In the Netherlands, news sites such as *NOS* and *RTL Nieuws* fulfil this role (Newman et al., 2020). It is certainly worthwhile examining whom people follow, whether they compile a diverse range of information for themselves or whether they tend to follow more politically homogeneous accounts. For these reasons, the first sub-question was formulated:

Which social media platforms do the participants use, and which pages for information on socio-political issues do they follow there?

Furthermore, this thesis will explore whether social media or the channels and accounts followed influence the politicisation of young people. Pfaff (2009) noted that youth subcultures can form instances of socialisation in relation to young people's political attitudes and civic competences. As social media is not seen as a remote sphere of the internet (Miller et al., 2016) but as a part of social life, it becomes apparent that subcultures can also be found online. The subculture this thesis focuses on are university students. Ahmad et al. (2019) found that online media significantly impacts political efficacy and informedness among Pakistani university students: Respondents to the study indicated that they discuss and share socio-political issues online and actively participate in various real-life political activities such as demonstrations.

Regarding demonstrations, and political protest, Jost et al. (2018) attributed social media with three different characteristics: Firstly, the effective communication and coordination of local protests via social media (e.g., information about police presence, violence, medical care, or legal support); secondly, social media's capacity as a tool for expressing approval or disapproval of protest actions by bystanders or people from geographically distant areas; thirdly, the structure of online social networks, which may vary depending on contextual factors, significantly impacts the success or failure of protest movements. The use of traditional news services seems to promote a form of political participation in existing political systems, while the use of online media is more functional for political participation characterised by voluntarism and loose networks, such as participation in demonstrations (ARD Forschungsservice, 2018). The motivation for people wanting to join demonstrations are described by van Zomeren et al. (2012) as follows:

Although the relative importance and causal order of the factors is disputed, collective action is more likely when people have shared interests, feel relatively deprived, are angry, believe they can make a difference, and strongly identify with relevant social groups. (as cited in Jost et al., 2018, p.94)

On this basis, Jost et al. (2018) described *moral outrage* (anger or indignation at perceived injustice), *social identification* (feeling of belonging to the group or share interests with them) and the *beliefs about group efficacy and empowerment* (confidence of succeeding with the group) as the social-psychological factors that can be influenced through social media and the displayed information on inequalities.

Loader et al. (2014) created the character term *the networked young citizen* to describe young adults that mainly use social media to inform themselves on socio-political issues, participate in non-hierarchical social movements, rallies etc., rather than in political parties and turn away from traditional political values. Whereas it must be stressed that the character is just a loose guideline and people that fall under the construct of *networked young citizens* still want to participate in the regular society (Loader et al., 2014). Additionally, the use of social media and the political ideas young people have, are important for “changes in social norms and behavior at the societal level in domains such as civic and political engagement, privacy and public safety” (Bolton et al., 2013, p.255). The theoretical background presented thus provides a basis for the sub-question:

Do Instagram and Twitter influence the politicisation and the daily life of the participants?

2.6. Misinformation on social media

So far, the mostly positive aspects of social media, such as communicating with different people or social media as a tool for acquiring information on current events and issues, were discussed. However, there are also many problems regarding social media, and the relevant problem for this thesis is the spread of misinformation on social media. Karlova & Fisher (2013) explained that “misinformation refers to claims that – unlike information – are not supported by the majority of societally accepted evidence adjudicators, and reflects content that may be inaccurate, uncertain, vague, or ambiguous” (as cited in Valenzuela et al., 2019,

& Niederer (2020a) indicated that the Dutch *Twitter*-sphere did not have a significant disinformation problem. Regarding the government elections in the Netherlands and Germany in 2021, one major topic was the Corona crisis and how to deal with it. Therefore, the issue of misinformation on social networks was also relevant. For example, the Dutch news website *NOS* reported that in a study regarding misinformation on Corona, the data journalism platform *Pointer* found at least more than 500 accounts that were suspected of being fake news accounts (NOS, 2020). In Germany, the public broadcaster ARD even set up a fact-checking website that provides information on the validity of widely spread corona myths (ARD, 2021).

Regarding the spread of misinformation, trust, and the decline in trust in media must be examined (The Media Insight Project, 2017). In 2020 about 60% of the Dutch people trusted the news media they consumed, but only 20% trusted news on social media (Newman et al., 2020). In Germany, also about 60% trusted the news sources they use, but here only 14% trusted social media regarding news (Newman et al., 2020). The levels of trust and the definitions differ from scholar to scholar, but as Sterrett et al. (2019) state, trust in social media is linked to media credibility and encompassed a variety of different "factors such as accuracy, completeness, fairness, bias, and trustworthiness" (p.785). Furthermore, trustworthiness due to reputation and the impression of a digital source on persuasion and information evaluation is underlined. The impact of cues such as sharer and source can vary depending on people's interest or involvement in the topic and general familiarity or experience in social media (Sterrett et al., 2019). For example, older people who did not grow up with social media tend to have less experience and are more sceptical about the role of technology in society (Blank, 2011) and therefore often do not consider social media trustworthy (Knowles & Hanson, 2018). However, people look for information they trust and with whom they share similar beliefs (Huckfeldt et al., 1995, as cited in Sterrett et al., 2019). Velasquez (2012, as cited in Sterrett et al., 2019) described a *two-stage flow model* in which public figures (e.g., politicians), who are

referred to as opinion leaders, share information created by mass media with their followers on social media and people are more likely to trust information if they trust the public figure who shared the information. However, this can also lead to problems: If people are very convinced of an opinion leader, they are more likely to believe and share misinformation (Sterrett et al., 2019). Valenzuela et al. (2019) also connected that to political participation:

Although being politically engaged does not make users more or less likely to be misinformed, participatory users seem more likely to share inaccurate claims regarding governmental affairs, science, and natural disasters than those who are less politically engaged. To the degree that informational uses of social media promotes political participation, this increased participation can lead to the spread of misinformation.
(p.814)

This finally results in the last sub-question for this paper:

Do the participants trust the social media platforms and pages they follow, and how do they convince themselves of the correctness of the information on socio-political issues presented?

3. Method and corpus

In this paper, intercultural communication is examined by the contrastive approach (ten Thije, 2016) through the comparison of the Dutch and the German culture, made possible by a mixed-method approach. The mixed-method approach is deliberately chosen and consists of qualitative and quantitative research, both of which aim to investigate the attitudes, preferences, and behaviours around social media platforms as sources of information on socio-political issues among students in the Netherlands and Germany aged 18-29. The qualitative research will be implemented through six semi-structured interviews, and the quantitative part will be conducted in the form of an online questionnaire.

3.1. Combination strategy

The strategy behind this mixed-method research was “to achieve an elaborate and comprehensive understanding of a complex matter, looking at it from different angles” (Dörnyei, 2007, p.164). The two methods were sequentially used to complement each other and develop a proper mixed-method strategy (Greene, Caracelli & Graham, 1989, as cited in Dörnyei, 2007). The chosen approach was a questionnaire survey facilitated by preceding semi-structured interviews; the typological organisation was *qual* → *QUAN* (Dörnyei, 2007). The first step, conducting and transcribing six semi-structured one-to-one interviews, served as a small-scale exploratory qualitative study to collect background information on the use of social media as a source of information on socio-political issues and the effect of the acquired information on the daily life of the small sample of three Dutch and the three German university students ages 18-29. The goal of the mixed-methods approach was characterised above all by using the strengths and minimising the weaknesses of both in individual research and “is effective in improving the content representation of the questionnaire and thus the internal validity of the study” (Dörnyei, 2007, p.171). Therefore, the ethnographic insights on the interviewees’ thoughts and behaviours cannot and were not intended to represent the whole

group under study, but the answers or in-depth knowledge were used to construct an effective questionnaire with relevant questions. Furthermore, the questionnaire aimed to clarify whether the other targeted students shared the consumption of social media and behaviour patterns in real life regarding politicisation from social media described by the interview participants.

3.2. Semi-structured interviews

3.2.1. Participants

The participants of this study have been recruited through the personal and university environment of the researcher and selected through purposive sampling (Dörnyei, 2007). As the researcher did not know how the participants use social media and which platforms they use, but he knew that they use social media, they were typical sampled (Dörnyei, 2007). So, people that do not use social media were omitted as they would not provide any information that is relevant for further research. A maximum variation sampling in age, nationality, gender identity and field of study was chosen (Dörnyei, 2007) to ensure a vast spectrum of different subgroups in the interviews. The sample size was six people, and saturation (Dörnyei, 2007) was reached after 3 Dutch and 3 German participants because the sampling of age, gender identity and nationality created a solid basis, and the researcher felt empirically confident. The participants and their personal details are displayed in Table 1 beneath.

Table 1

Participants in the semi-structured interviews

| Participant | Age | Nationality | Gender Identity | City of study | Field of study |
|-------------|-----|-------------|-----------------|---------------|---|
| P1 | 27 | German | Male | [PRIVATE] | M.Ed. Political Science |
| P2 | 23 | German | Female | [PRIVATE] | M.A. Educational Sciences |
| P3 | 20 | German | Female | [PRIVATE] | B.A. Pedagogics: Development and Inclusion |
| P4 | 26 | Dutch | Male | [PRIVATE] | M.A. Intercultural Communication |
| P5 | 21 | Dutch | Female | [PRIVATE] | B.A./B.Sc. Liberal Arts and Sciences |
| P6 | 19 | Dutch | Female | [PRIVATE] | LL.B. Law |

3.2.2. Materials

The semi-structured interviews were held and recorded via the communication platform Microsoft Teams and transcribed in Microsoft Word. The questions that were asked in the semi-structured interviews concerned the following topics:

- Usage of social media
- Filter bubbles and political orientation of feed
- Validity of information and trust in social media
- Politicisation

The interview guide (Dörnyei, 2007) can be found in Appendix A. The coding was done with the help of the software *Quirkos*.

3.2.3. Procedure

The semi-structured interviews were transcribed following the transcription conventions that can be found in Appendix B. The transcribed semi-structured interviews were coded afterwards with the help of *Quirkos*, which gives the possibility to mark text passages and assign them to several categories so that a uniform, but straightforward compilation can be compiled by the programme. The coding conventions can be found in Appendix C. Two rounds of coding were carried out. The first time in a broader way for parts that have to do with social media usage, filter bubbles, the validity of information and trust in social media, and the politicisation. To create a questionnaire, the second time, the already once coded parts were coded again to go more into detail about facts, behaviours, and attitudes (Dörnyei, 2007). It was an iterative process (Dörnyei, 2007) in which the coded passages and the respondents' statements were repeatedly compared with the possible statements for the questionnaire.

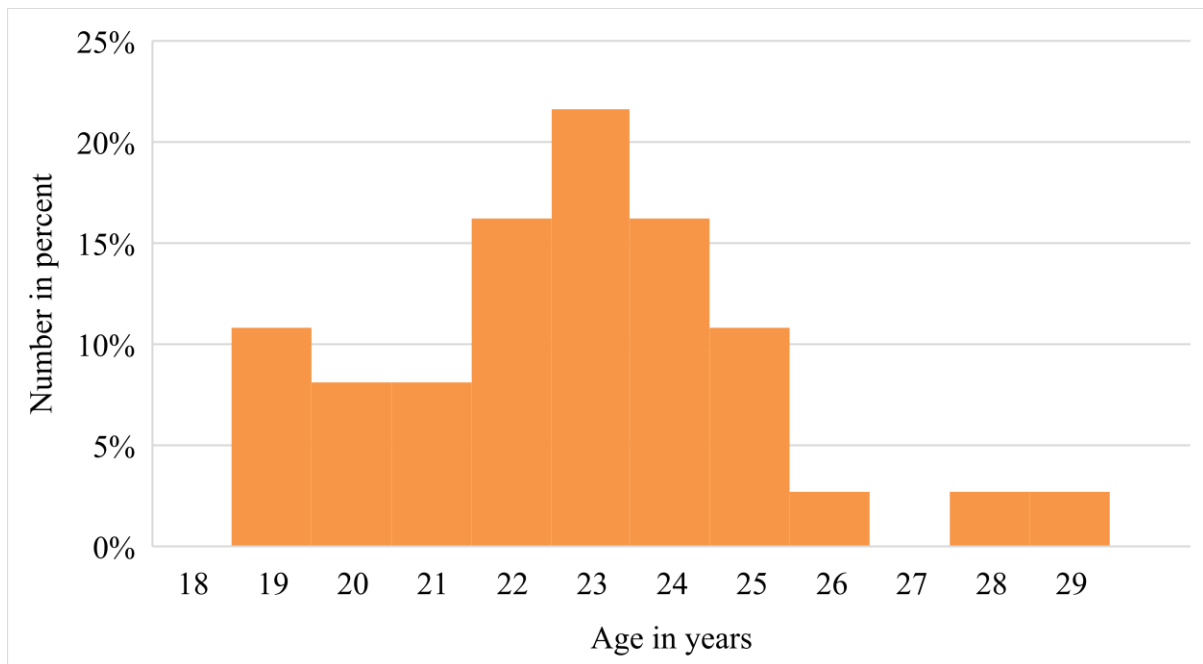
3.3. Questionnaire

3.3.1. Participants

The questionnaire was distributed to different student groups to get the most mixed sample possible regarding gender identity and age. The sampling strategy was a mix of two non-probability sampling types, namely snowball sampling and convenience or opportunity sampling (Dörnyei, 2007), to achieve representativeness of the countries while ensuring that the heterogeneity of different students was captured. Even if the potential participant did not have Dutch or German citizenship, they could participate if they felt sufficiently informed or even involved in socio-political discourses and the use of social media in one of the countries, e.g., because they lived in the Netherlands or Germany for a longer period. Overall, 37 people participated for the Netherlands and 64 for Germany. Each of the nationalities American, Austrian, Finnish, Hungarian, Italian, and Malaysian responded for the Netherlands. For Germany, it was one person each, for of the nationalities Belarusian and German & American. Regarding age, the mean (M) was 22,97 and the standard deviation (SD) was 2,31 (NL: M=22,76 SD=2,35; GER: M=23,09 SD=2,30). The distribution of age by country is shown in Figures 2 and 3.

Figure 2

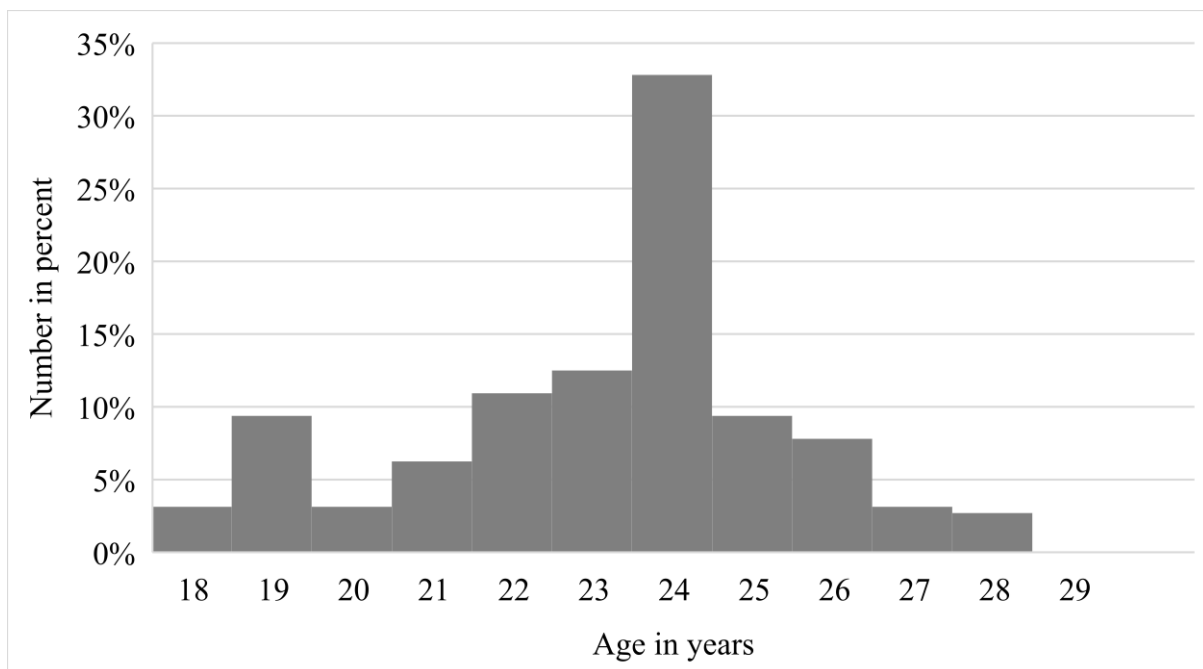
Number of participants for the Netherlands in the questionnaire



Note. The number of participants for the Netherlands in percent depending on age in years.

Figure 3

Number of participants for Germany in the questionnaire



Note. The number of participants for Germany in percent depending on age in years.

The general distribution of gender identity was 57 female (f) and 44 male (m) respondents (NL: 22f 15m; GER: 35f 29m), while none of the participants identified as non-binary or did not want to declare their gender identity.

3.3.2. Materials

The questionnaire was created and conducted with the online software *Qualtrics*. The link was shared through messages in student groups on messenger apps such as WhatsApp and Signal. Additionally, the researcher posted the link to the questionnaire on his profile on *Instagram* and *LinkedIn* and in different university student groups on *Facebook*. The statistics software *SPSS* was used to analyse the result and run relevant tests.

3.3.3. Procedure

The questionnaire aimed to describe the characteristics of student populations between 18 and 29 years of age in the Netherlands and Germany by examining samples of these groups. The design of the 10- to 20-minute-long questionnaire was developed through a two-step coding analysis of the semi-structured interviews. The results helped create 94 factual, behavioural, and attitudinal questions and statements towards social media as a source of information and social media's effects on politicisation in daily life that the participants should elaborate on. The collection time was one week. At the beginning of the questionnaire, an introduction with information on background and purpose of the study, participation, anonymity, and data management were given. The participants were asked to answer the simple questions on their personal choices and did not need to prepare prior. Besides, the contacts for complaints and further information of the researcher and the university's privacy officer were provided. Consent to the information mentioned on the page (see Appendix E) was requested to participate.

The first part of the questionnaire dealt with six multiple-choice and open factual questions on the respondent's details (Q1-6). Thereafter, the interest and preferred media for

information on socio-political issues and the political opinion were examined with two multiple-choice questions and seven statements that should be rated on a 5-point Likert scale with the extremes 1= “Strongly disagree” and 5= “Strongly agree” (Q7-Q9). Thereupon two multiple-choice questions on the general use of social media were posed (Q10;11). Next came two parts on the social media platforms Instagram and Twitter that were designed the same. First, it was validated if the participant uses the platform (IG: Q12; TW: Q19). If they answered with “Yes”, behavioural questions regarding the general use of the platforms were formulated (“Use IG”; “Use TW”).

If the participants responded to the multiple-choice questions prior, stating that they use the platform in general and as a source of information on socio-political issues, they reached the main block for the platforms (“Use IG SP”; “Use TW SP”). In terms of content, these blocks were divided according to the following topics with related questions and statements: Filter bubbles and follow behaviour (19 statements on a 5-point Likert scale; 1 multiple choice question); Trust and misinformation on the platform (nine statements on a 5-point Likert scale); Politicisation through the platform (five statements on a 5-point Likert scale). Finally, two optional additional short-answer questions could be answered for other types of misinformation detection and general feedback. Accordingly, some parts had a higher number of participants than others Table 2 below shows the number of participants for the different parts.

Table 2

Number of participants in the different questionnaire sections divided by chosen country

| Country of study | Use IG (Q13;14) | Use IG SP (Q15-18) | Use TW (Q20;21) | Use TW SP (Q22-25) | General (Q1-12;19;26;27) |
|------------------|-----------------|--------------------|-----------------|--------------------|--------------------------|
| Netherland | 29 | 14 | 8 | 4 | 37 |
| Germany | 56 | 35 | 13 | 9 | 64 |

The software *IBM SPSS Statistics* was used to analyse and manage the obtained data from the questionnaire. The first phase included cleaning and structuring the data. Responses from the test phase and incomplete answers were eliminated, and the variables were coherently

arranged, named, and classified. Subsequently, different variable combinations were checked for internal consistency reliability using the reliability tests for Cronbach's Alpha in *SPSS* and merged homogeneously to form a new variable as they measured the same target area (Dörnyei, 2007). Table 3 below shows the reliability values calculated for combinations depending on the examined countries. Regarding statements over filter bubbles and diversity in Q15 and Q22, it was planned to compute four further variable combinations, but these did not achieve values above $\alpha=.7$. Therefore, the variables were only considered individually. Furthermore, the variables for effect on the politicisation of the social media platform could only be created for Instagram, as the internal consistency could not be guaranteed for Twitter due to the small number of respondents.

Table 3

Reliability tests on the computed variables

| Measuring... | Questions or statements | Cronbach's alpha (α) | | Number of items |
|---|-------------------------|-------------------------------|---------|-----------------|
| | | Netherlands | Germany | |
| ...participant's interest and informedness on socio-political issues. | Q8.1-8.7 | .859 | .824 | 7 |
| ...participant's trust in the social media platform Instagram. | Q17.1;17.2 | .706 | .860 | 2 |
| ...effects of Instagram on participant's politicisation. | Q18.1-18.5 | .843 | .774 | 5 |
| ...effects of Instagram on participant's political interest. | Q18.1-18.3 | .775 | .768 | 3 |
| ...effects of Instagram on participant's political activism. | Q18.4;18.5 | .768 | .869 | 2 |

4. Results

In the following chapter, the questionnaire results are presented with in-depth additions from the six semi-structured interview participants (named P1-6) according to the three topics of the sub-questions. As for certain parts of the questionnaire, the number of responses was insufficient (<30) for either one or both populations (students between 18 and 29 that feel informed on socio-political issues and the political situation and involved in the general use of social media in the Netherlands or in Germany), the most results concerning the use of Instagram and Twitter as sources of information on socio-political issues cannot be generalised and are only valid for the sample. Data from parts of the questionnaire that all participants responded to were used for inferential statistical tests, and the findings are generalisable.

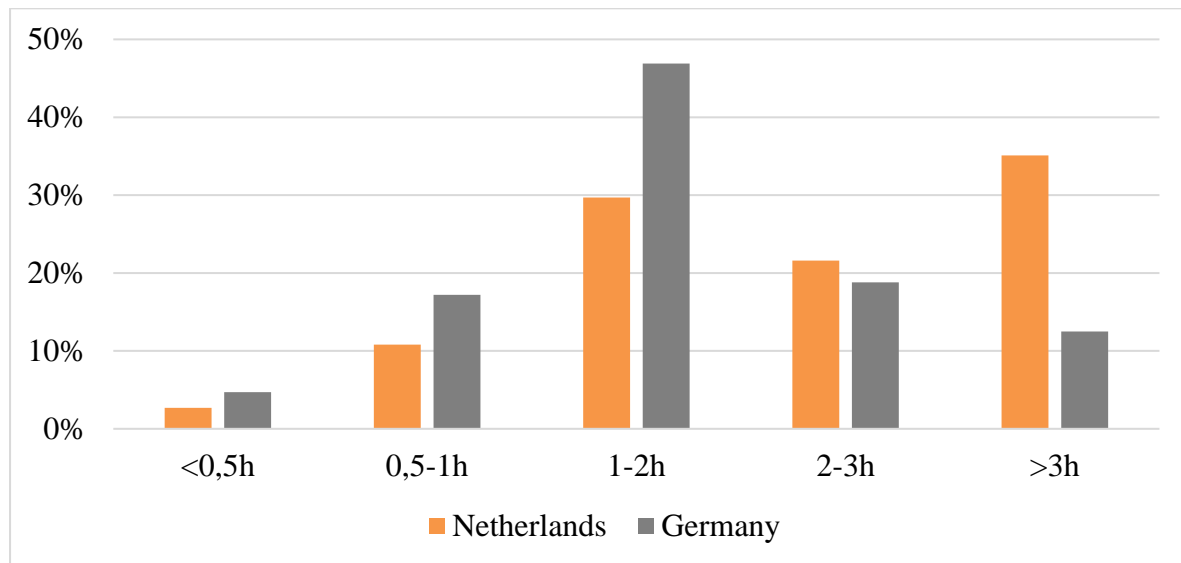
When reporting on statements, the agreement is measured on a 5-point Likert scale from 0 (“Strongly disagree”) to 5 (“Strongly agree”). For important findings, interval data for the Netherlands or Germany are given with the mean (M) and the standard deviation (SD) and nominal data is given in percentage or total frequencies. When reporting on the Dutch group, or the German group, participants, respondents, or students surveyed, this always refers to the sample; when reporting on students in the Netherlands or Germany, generalised statements about the populations mentioned above are made.

4.1. Social media platforms and follow behaviour

Investigating the non-specific daily use of social media, a Mann-Whitney U test (nonparametric alternative to a t-test) indicated that the time students spend on social media daily was greater for students in the Netherlands (Median=4) than for students in Germany (Median=3), $U=833,5$ $p=.01$. As shown in Figure 4 below, over a third of the Dutch group (35,14%) stated that they spend more than 3 hours per day on social media, while only 12,5% of the German group answered that.

Figure 4

Time students spend on social media every day in the Netherlands and Germany



Note. The time students between 18 and 29 spend on social media every day in percent depending on the countries Netherland and Germany.

As Table 4 below shows, most students in the Netherlands and Germany use YouTube (NL: 86,49%; GER: 90,63%) and the least used social media platform is LinkedIn (NL: 2,7%; GER: 1,6%).

Table 4

Use of social media platforms of students in the Netherland and Germany

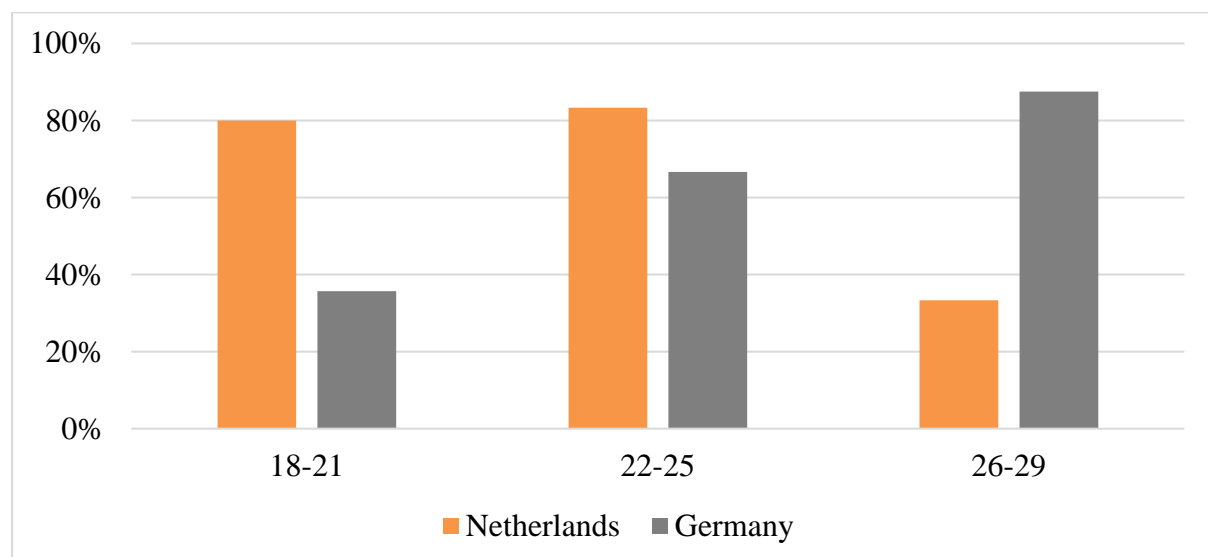
| Social media platform | Netherlands | | Germany | |
|-----------------------|-------------|--------|---------|--------|
| | F | F in % | F | F in % |
| Facebook | 29 | 78,4 | 40 | 62,5 |
| Instagram | 29 | 78,4 | 56 | 87,5 |
| LinkedIn | 1 | 2,7 | 1 | 1,6 |
| Reddit | 4 | 10,8 | 0 | 0 |
| Snapchat | 22 | 59,5 | 36 | 56,3 |
| TikTok | 10 | 27 | 15 | 23,4 |
| Twitter | 8 | 21,6 | 13 | 20,3 |
| YouTube | 32 | 86,5 | 58 | 90,6 |

Particularly noticeable is the use of Reddit from 10,81% of the students in the Netherlands, while none of the students in Germany use it. A chi square test showed a significant association between the country and the use of Reddit ($X^2(1,101)=7,204$, $p=.007$). Reddit, like LinkedIn, was not an option in the questionnaire but was manually indicated by respondents. Since these

platforms were not a fixed component, it may well be that participants forgot to indicate them, which can lead to differences. Instagram is the second most used platform in both countries. Although 9.12% fewer students in the Netherlands use it than in Germany, a chi square test indicated no significant association between the country and the use of Instagram ($X^2(1,101)=1.463$, $p=.226$). Regarding Facebook it is the other way around, whilst 78,38% of the students in the Netherlands use it, the number of students in Germany is 15.88% lower. However, a chi square test showed no significant association between the country and the use of Facebook ($X^2(1,101)=2,731$, $p=.098$). Nevertheless, the interview with P2 led to the finding that a difference in the use could be caused by age: “I’m still using Facebook. I know this isn’t social media that is so up to date anymore” (Interview Participant 2 (P2), Appendix D). The comparison of age groups in the sample (displayed in Figure 5 below), indicates that Facebook was least used by the youngest participants in Germany, while in the Netherlands, the oldest age group used it the least.

Figure 5

Use of Facebook form students dependent on age in the Netherlands and Germany



Note. The use of Facebook of students between 18 and 29 in three age groups in percent depending on the countries Netherland and Germany.

Most students in the Netherlands (91,9%) and Germany (90,63%) use digital media to inform themselves on socio-political issues. However, there were differences in the use of print (NL: 35.14%; GER: 25%) and social media (NL: 64.86%; GER: 78.13%). Chi square tests indicated that there was no significant association between the countries and using print media ($\chi^2(1,101)=1,177, p=.278$), and there was also no significant association between the countries and using social media ($\chi^2(1,101)=2,105, p=.147$). Additionally, the individual questionnaire participants from both groups stated they use radio emissions, podcasts, friends, and school to inform themselves. Only one participant from the Netherlands (2,7%) said he does not inform himself on socio-political topics.

When it comes to behaviour and use of Twitter, the sample size did not allow many generalisations, only that with a usage of around 20%, Twitter is among students in the Netherlands and Germany, one of the least used social media platforms, and additionally only 10,81% of students in the Netherlands and 14,06% in Germany use it to inform themselves on socio-political issues. In the sample, most participants of both countries used Twitter less than half an hour per day (NL: 87,5%; GER: 61,5%). If participants used it, it was used as an entertaining platform and a source of information. Due to the lack of respondents, the questionnaire section dealing with the use of Twitter for informing on socio-political topics will be omitted.

Instagram is used three and a half times more than Twitter by students in the Netherlands and even four and a half times more in Germany. The primary purposes in the sample were in both countries to be entertained and to keep up with friends and family (see Table F11 in Appendix F). For information on socio-political issues, 37.8% of the students in the Netherlands and 54.7% in Germany use Instagram. While the respondents for the Netherlands tend to regard the information as entertainment ($M=3.86$ $SD=1.027$), the respondents for Germany did not show a distinct attitude ($M=3.06$ $SD=.938$). Nevertheless, the

Dutch group agreed more ($M=4.64$ $SD=.842$), 78.57% even agreed strongly, with using Instagram to educate themselves on socio-political issues than the German group ($M=4.29$ $SD=.572$), where only 34.29% agreed strongly. Dutch P5 elaborated on this phenomenon:

So I like to inform myself of-of things that are a bit more independent. So, for example, Zeikschrift, [...] she's like this really smart woman and she just does research and she's also very, very well-informed on gender identity. [...]. So she kind of points that's kind of stuff out to people. And I think that's really cool because she just kind of helps me stay on top of all of that information because I am not really informed about it. (Interview Participant 5 (P5), Appendix D)

In terms of usage behaviour, the two groups showed no strong tendencies, but they were more likely to supplementary search for specific information on socio-political issues (NL: $M=3,36$ $SD=1,336$; DE: $M=3,29$ $SD=.957$) than to only scroll through their Instagram feed (NL: $M=2,5$ $SD=1,345$; DE: $M=2,86$ $SD=.912$). German P2 described it as follows:

Um, it's not the fact about informing myself in the first place. You know, when I when I want to know stuff, I know where I can get it, but it's not like, oh, I'm on this app again, so I look what happened. It's more like, let's see what-what is there and to upload stuff. (Interview Participant 2 (P2), Appendix D)

Regarding following Dutch or German accounts for information on socio-political issues, the students in the sample did not differ. However, the Dutch group agreed more strongly with following international accounts ($M=4.43$ $SD=1.089$) than the German group ($M=3.69$ $SD=1.183$). German P1 also stated: "I would say only international expertise, which helps me understand more about the local level and [...] operational situation." (Interview Participant 1 (P1), Appendix D). As shown below in Table 5, the Dutch group followed more politically aligned accounts such as parties, politicians, organisations, and political meme

accounts, which usually also have a political orientation. Both groups equally followed political activists more than political influencers.

Table 5

Pages that the participants of the questionnaire follow regarding socio-political issues dependent on the Netherlands and Germany

| Accounts | Netherlands | | Germany | |
|------------------------|-------------|---------------|----------|---------------|
| | <i>F</i> | <i>F in %</i> | <i>F</i> | <i>F in %</i> |
| Pol. parties | 7 | 50 | 11 | 31,4 |
| Politicians | 10 | 71,4 | 14 | 40 |
| Pol. influencers | 5 | 35,7 | 13 | 37,1 |
| Pol. activists | 9 | 64,3 | 22 | 62,9 |
| Socio-pol. movements | 13 | 92,9 | 26 | 74,3 |
| Independent news sites | 8 | 57,1 | 27 | 77,1 |
| Pol. meme accounts | 11 | 78,6 | 15 | 42,9 |
| Other | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |

It became apparent that participants for Germany were more likely to follow independent news sites, and that neutral information on Instagram were also more important to them ($M=4.14$ $SD=.912$) than to the participants for the Netherlands in the sample ($M=3.5$ $SD=1.160$). Neither the surveyed students in the Netherlands ($M=2.86$ $SD=1.167$) nor in Germany ($M=3.4$ $SD=.946$) tended to take a clear position towards (political) diversity in their feed and additionally the student groups in the sample both agreed that they tend not to follow politically different minded accounts (NL: $M=2$ $SD=.961$; GER: $M=2.23$ $SD=1.060$). Moreover, they agreed on unfollowing accounts when the content starts to change in a different political direction (NL: $M=3,57$ $SD=.852$; GER: $M=3,74$ $SD=.817$). In contrast, both groups in the sample agreed to follow socio-politically informative accounts if this would enable them to reach an ethically beneficial wider audience (NL: $M=3,93$ $SD=.997$; GER: $M=3,86$ $SD=.974$) and identified themselves with the accounts they follow (NL: $M=4,64$ $SD=.842$; GER: $M=4,46$ $SD=.701$). Lastly, respondents for the Netherlands agreed somewhat more with being in a filter bubble on Instagram ($M=4,36$ $SD=1,082$) than the respondents for Germany ($M=3,69$ $SD=1,051$). Dutch P6 explained it in the interview:

Well, I like that. I only see [...] things that I'm interested in, but it's also it can become quite dangerous if you don't see any other point of views. So it for me, I think it's comfortable because I'm not confronted with things I don't agree with at all, because it's nice when you scroll and you see stuff and, oh I agree. Oh that's nice. But I think it's it can be. Well you can become a bit uninformed on certain topics. (Interview Participant 6 (P6), Appendix D)

German P2 stated that she was okay with it because she knew she was in a filter bubble and knew where to find neutral information outside of Instagram, and in the questionnaire, a participant also declared that “[a] filter bubble [...] also displays [a] wide amount of contradicting opinions but on a highly specified level” (Interview Participant 2 (P2), Appendix D).

4.2. Effects on the politicisation of the daily life

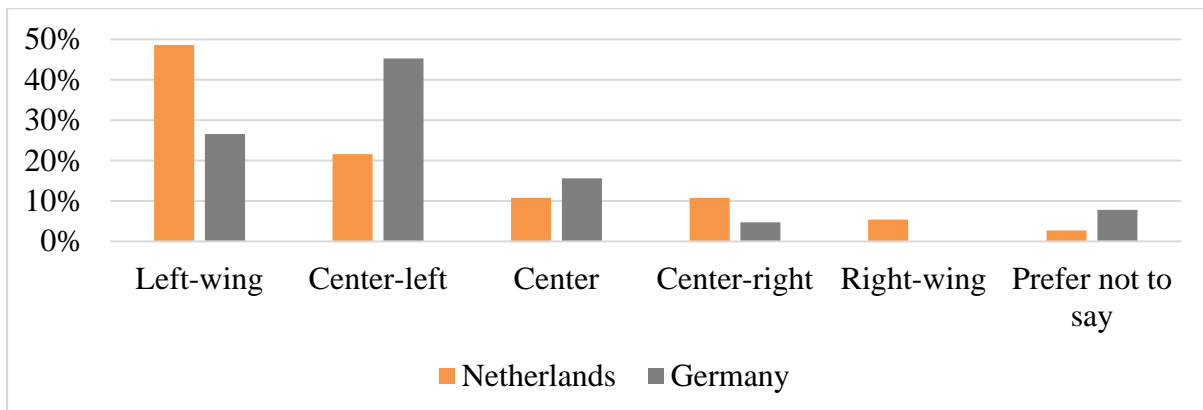
The findings regarding the political opinion of the participants and their interest in socio-political issues can be generalised. Due to the lack of respondents, the effects of Instagram on politicisation for the Netherlands are only valid for the sample, while the effects for Germany are generalisable. The results concerning Twitter, for reasons already mentioned, were not included.

The interest and informedness in socio-political issues were measured in a combination of variables, and to find out whether the interest and informedness in socio-political issues differed between students in the Netherlands and Germany, an independent samples t-test was conducted, that revealed that no significant difference was found ($t(99)=1,252$, $p=.214$) between the Netherlands ($M=4,2317$ $SD=.73798$) and Germany ($M=4,0580$ $SD=.63057$).

The political orientation of students in the Netherlands and Germany is predominantly oriented towards the left. Furthermore, as shown in Figure 6, students in the Netherlands more often describe themselves as extreme in their political views than students in Germany.

Figure 6

Political Opinion among students 18-29 in the Netherlands and Germany



Note. The political opinion of students between 18 and 29 in percent depending on the countries Netherlands and Germany.

The effect of Instagram on politicisation was measured in the effects on the political interest and the political activism. In the sample, the students in both countries agreed on the effect of Instagram on their political interest (NL: $M=3,7143$ $SD=.815$; GER: $M=3,6667$ $SD=.85559$). However, the participants were ambiguous on the effect of Instagram on their political activism for both countries (NL: $M=3$ $SD=1,31559$; GER: $M=2,8571$ $SD=1,10860$). The effect of Instagram on politicisation showed a difference in age for the sample: the older the respondents were, the less they agreed with the effect as shown in Table 6 below.

Table 6

The effect of Instagram on the politicisation depending on age and the country for the sample

| Age | Netherlands | | Germany | |
|-------|-------------|-----------|----------|-----------|
| | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> |
| 18-21 | 3,7 | 1,84 | 3,65 | .59 |
| 22-25 | 3,47 | .83 | 3,28 | .86 |
| 26-29 | 2,4 | 0 | 2,9 | .14 |
| total | 3,43 | .94 | 3,34 | .79 |

For students in Germany, there is a strong correlation between the interest and informedness on socio-political issues and the effects of Instagram on political activism ($r=-.587$, $p=.000208$) and a correlation between the interest and informedness on socio-political issues and the effect of Instagram on the politicisation ($r=.558$, $p=.006$).

Concerning the attitude towards discussing information from Instagram, the participants for the Netherlands and Germany disagreed with the mere consumption of information (NL: $M=2.00$ $SD=.961$; GER: $M=2.20$ $SD=1.183$) as well as with the consumption and public discussion on the platform (NL: $M=1.64$ $SD=.842$; GER: $M=2.20$ $SD=1.158$). Private discussion on the platform again was contradicted by the participants for the Netherlands ($M=2,21$ $SD=1,311$), while the participants for Germany did not have a distinct attitude ($M=2,83$ $SD=1,248$). It could have been caused by the statement's wording, as participants for the Netherlands ($M=4,36$ $SD=.633$) and Germany ($M=4$ $SD=1,029$) agreed to discuss information on socio-political issues they have required on Instagram in private with their friends or family. The results of all six interviews support that finding. Dutch P4 added that he and his friends discuss across platforms, e.g., discussing information from Twitter in WhatsApp groups.

In the qualitative part of the questionnaire, many participants shared statements on the perceived effect of social media on politicisation. Critical statements were also contributed, e.g., the following one by a German questionnaire participant:

I feel like many individuals often only shape their opinion on something based on a few posts they have read but then don't double check that information or try to stay objective, even though they might not be directly affected by an issue. In that way, so many topics are getting politicised, which in a sense is good because students and young people are getting involved with politics. But on the other hand, they will forget about it in a few weeks again anyway. I feel like that's how social media as a political platform works - topics are getting overly politicised in a very short amount of time, and then dropped again after a few days or weeks because something else has become more interesting [...]. (Q27, Appendix F)

4.3. Trust in social media and behaviour towards misinformation

The data regarding the participants' trust in Instagram and the followed accounts there cannot be generalised. Due to the lack of respondents, the data of Twitter will not be discussed.

The participants for both countries disagreed on trusting Instagram, its algorithms and flagging of misinformation (NL: $M=2,3571$ $SD=.88641$; GER: $M=2,1143$ $SD=1,02960$). From the interviews, it emerged that the commercial aims of the platforms could cause this. German P1 described it (regarding Twitter) as follows:

Um...I think in recent time, I'm trusting a little bit more because Twitter changed their policies, so they're kind of giving information and also blocking tweets that are like, obviously false. I mean, there was a lot of change with the tweets of Donald Trump and also some of the coronavirus tweets of people who don't believe in it, or also conspiracy theories are blocked. But I think they could do a better job. So I'm like not 100 percent trusting in them. And still, it's a private company and not like officially legitimated institution and it's not democratically controlled. So I guess my trust is limited. (Interview Participant 1 (P1), Appendix D)

The attitude towards influence on misinformation seemed to be shared by the participants for both countries, as the statement "I think because of freedom of expression, Instagram should not have any influence on posts" was rejected (NL: $M=2,21$ $SD=.802$; GER: $M=2,49$ $SD=1,067$). Simultaneously, respondents for Germany in the sample were more likely to agree ($M=3,57$ $SD=1,195$) that Instagram allows everyone to be heard, while respondents for the Netherlands were irresolute ($M=3,07$ $SD=1,439$).

In the sample, students in both countries trusted their own experience with social media regarding misinformation (NL: $M=3.71$ $SD=1.204$; GER: $M=3.57$ $SD=1.037$) and the accounts they follow (NL: $M=3.5$ $SD=1.225$; GER $M=3.54$ $SD=.980$). Participants in the interviews also considered the experience to be an essential difference to, e.g., their parents' generation. If it

seemed necessary to the questionnaire participants to research information, they agreed on doing that outside of Instagram (NL: $M=4,71$ $SD=.469$; GER: $M=4,46$ $SD=.919$), especially if they think the accounts are not trustworthy (NL: $M=4,21$ $SD=.975$; GER: $M=3,63$ $SD=1,060$). The qualitative parts of the research showed that the participants think it is helpful to look at the accounts in question and their political orientation. It would also be beneficial to include the comments under the posts, as this is typically where the followers gather, and their views can tell a lot about examined accounts. Besides, what both P2 and P5 supported was looking at whether the accounts had the expertise on specific issues: “black people talking about the experience of racism and what words not to use etc. instead of white people talking over them”. If there is uncertainty about the correctness of the information, the research is usually done by googling the issues, looking at several newspaper articles, fact-checking sites, and scientific information.

5. Discussion

In the following chapter, the sub-questions will be answered according to results from the semi-structured interviews and the questionnaire, discussed, and connected to the theoretical framework.

Firstly, to answer the main question, it is necessary to justify how cultural differences arrive in the first place and how they are caused. The Netherlands and Germany are close to each other, cultural as geographical. The nationality alone cannot be seen as the justification of the cultural differences; identities are much more flexible, complex, and strategic. Furthermore, the participants likely differ in some other identities (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005), all of which may also impact their social media consumption behaviour. However, essential for this thesis is that the participants differ in their identities as people socialised in the Netherlands or Germany. The concept of communities of practice by Bucholtz & Hall (2005) describes the differences between the two cultures or communities much better than only nationality. Both communities have their own rules in linguistic and social action (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005). Using social media is a practice and rooted in daily repetition that differs from community to community. In the process, it is decided, often subconsciously, which social media platform will be used for which actions to reach which people.

Which social media platforms do the participants use, and which pages for information on socio-political issues do they follow there?

The differences found in terms of preferences and general use of social media are crucial, as general use shows how important the platforms are and whether they are used as sources of information. More than two-thirds of students in the Netherlands and Germany use social media as a source of information on socio-political issues, while the students in the Netherlands spend significantly more time on social media. The platform usage rate of students in both countries is the same for Snapchat, TikTok, Twitter, and YouTube. In the sample,

Facebook seemed to be more popular among younger students for the Netherlands, where over three-quarters of students under 26 used it, while for Germany, only two-thirds of students between 22 and 25, and even only one-third of students under 22 used the platform.

Newman et al. (2020) studied the use of social media platforms as news sources and measured values in the general populations of the Netherlands and Germany that differed from this research: 9% of the Dutch population used Instagram, and 7% Twitter (Newman et al., 2020, p.76), while ca. 38% of the Dutch group in this study used Instagram, and ca. 11% used Twitter. In Germany, 6% of the general population used Instagram, and 6% used Twitter (Newman et al., 2020, p.71), while ca. 55% of the German group in the study used Instagram, and ca. 14% used Twitter. That implies that the participants have different rules and routines regarding social media than the general population in the countries. This could have been caused by the community of practice grounded on shared identities (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005): They are all young adults between 18 and 29 years old; socialised in a European country; and students. That could also explain the many similarities in their examined use of social media. In other words, all participants grew up with the internet and used social media in their daily lives, implying a media familiarity and credibility and living in a similar social environment.

Twitter, among students in the Netherlands and Germany, is one of the least used social media platforms in general and only about 10% of students in the Netherlands and 15% of the students in Germany use it to inform themselves on socio-political issues.

Instagram is the second most used social media platform behind YouTube by students in the Netherlands and Germany. In the sample, Instagram is used equally in both countries as entertainment and to stay in touch with their personal environment. Regarding scalable sociality (Miller et al., 2016), the people involved are a limited group (sender, family, and friends), and communication occurs more privately than publicly.

Instagram is used one and a half times more as a source of information on socio-political issues by students in Germany than by students in the Netherlands. Since the general interest in socio-political issues is about the same in both countries, this suggests that students in the sample in the Netherlands use other social media platforms or other media to get information, such as the NOS-app, which was mentioned several times in the semi-structured interviews.

Finally, both groups of students in the sample agreed that they do not subscribe to politically differently oriented sites and stated to be in a filter bubble on Instagram. It was acceptable to participants of the questionnaire and the interviews, as they were aware of this and knew where and how to find neutral information. Looking at the programmability, popularity, and connectivity of social media logic (van Dijk & Poell, 2013), it becomes apparent that not only students themselves but also Instagram as a platform is involved in forming these filter bubbles.

Do Instagram and Twitter influence the politicisation and the daily life of the participants?

The data from the students in the sample revealed that Instagram influenced the politicisation and political ideas in the daily lives of the participating students in both countries, and the participants of both groups were highly interested in socio-political issues.

The students in the Netherlands and Germany are predominantly politically oriented towards the left, and it was noticeable that the students in the Netherlands tend to give more extreme answers regarding their political orientation. An explanation could be the different political systems of the countries since the lower electoral threshold in the Netherlands gives more minor parties, which are often politically more aligned, the chance to become popular and to govern (Deutschlandfunk, 2018). Contrary, in Germany, it is almost exclusively the centre that governs, and the politically more aligned parties are not elected as much as in the Netherlands (Deutscher Bundestag, 2020). It also became evident that, in the sample, students

in the Netherlands followed politicians and political parties much more than students in Germany. These findings indicate that the assumption of the Netherlands as a European leader in politics on social media of Jacobs & Spierings (2016) is accurate and that the Netherlands may provide a better basis for the opportunities for political parties (Jacobs & Spierings, 2016). The German students in the sample did not seem to be politically uninterested or uninformed, so the cultural difference can probably be explained in that politicians in Germany are somewhat unfamiliar with social media (Deutschlandfunk, 2019), or that social media does not play as important a role in German politics as it does in the Netherlands. However, participants in both countries indicated that they felt an effect of Instagram on their political interest. For Germany, a significant correlation was even found between interest in socio-political topics and the influence of Instagram on politicisation.

In the sample, students' Instagram feeds tended to be politically left-wing. Although participants followed people from their private lives (Barberá, 2015), this did not appear to make their feed conservative (Miller et al., 2016), nor necessarily recognisably politically diverse (Barberá, 2015). Many of the students in the sample reported discussing information on socio-political issues they came across on Instagram privately with their friends or family in real life, on Instagram and across platforms. However, not publicly online, this could be explained by maintaining a higher social status through less public political expression on social media (Storsul, 2014) while also confirming the theory of the spiral of silence (Miller et al., 2016). However, a clear distinction must be made here between consumption and posting behaviour. Even if people do not post, they may have a politically oriented feed and be in a filter bubble that is not conservative. Then again, the feed can also be politically oriented, even though people follow people from their local environment who are politically differently oriented, if these people are in a spiral of silence because they do not want to attract attention in left-wing student circles with more conservative opinions, for example, because of their

social status. In the sample, there was a mix of the theories of Miller et al. (2016), Storsul (2014), and Barberá (2015).

The findings also indicate that the young people might politicise themselves among themselves in their subculture of students (Pfaff, 2009) predominantly to the political left. However, the students studied were aware of this and admitted that it could be problematic only to have a limited or one-sided perspective, and participants of the interviews self-reflectively stated that they knew where to look for neutral information if necessary. After all, the students saw more advantages in the filter bubbles, such as staying informed and discussing issues on a more specific level.

In the sample, students in the Netherlands agreed more strongly that they consume information on Instagram to educate themselves on socio-political issues than students in Germany. Another contrast is that the Dutch group tended to perceive the information on socio-political topics on Instagram as more entertaining and followed more political satire or meme accounts than the German group. In combination with the fact that they tended not to discuss things online and consumed more political satire, the behaviour of the Dutch group fits Miller et al.'s (2016) theory of "to 'watch' politics, even as spectators watch a football match, rather than to 'do' politics" (pp. 152-153).

Characteristics of the networked young citizen (Loader et al., 2014) can be observed in the students' questionnaire responses in both countries. Above all, the political interest was relatively high, and the influence of Instagram on it could be indicated for the sample. The responses showed that students for the Netherlands followed politicians more than the students for Germany in the sample. However, the following behaviour on Instagram cannot be used as evidence for the assumption that students are moving away from traditional parties (Loader et al., 2014). However, the proximity to socio-political movements and organisations on Instagram was evident in both countries in the sample.

In the sample, the effect of Instagram on political activity was slightly less than the effect on political interest. This is another reason why the concept of a subculture (Pfaff, 2009) of the networked young citizen (Loader et al., 2014) did not seem to fit all the questionnaire participants. Nevertheless, what emerged was that most of the participants in the sample were internationally oriented. The social-psychological factors described by Jost et al. (2018), which initially describe the motivation to participate in demonstrations, can also be indicated in the following of accounts on Instagram that inform on socio-political issues. The social identification with the followed accounts on Instagram was rated very high, while the beliefs about group efficacy and empowerment towards minorities that speak up on Instagram were rated more positively by the students in the sample in both countries.

Do the participants trust the social media platforms and pages they follow, and how do they convince themselves of the correctness of the information on socio-political issues presented?

In the sample, students in both countries were aware of misinformation on Instagram and trust towards Instagram did not appear to be highly developed. One possible explanation given in the interviews was that the lack of trust towards private tech companies with commercial interests limits trust towards the social media platforms owned by these companies.

Trust in the information provided by the followed accounts, in contrast, was relatively high in the sample, which is also in line with Newman et al. (2020), who stated that trust in one's own consumed information was higher than trust in media overall in the two countries. This finding can be linked to Miller et al., who stated, "It is the content rather than the platform that is most significant when it comes to why social media matters" (2016, p.1), and serves as evidence of an existing two-stage flow model according to Velasquez (2012, as cited in Sterrett et al., 2019). Furthermore, the participants indicated that they were more likely not to verify the information if they already trusted the account.

The assumption by Valenzuela et al. (2019) that political affiliation also promotes the sharing and believing of misinformation can neither be confirmed nor rejected.

In the sample, the Dutch and German group stated that Instagram should influence specific posts containing misinformation. Regarding misinformation or posts from doubtful accounts, respondents in both countries said they inspected untrustworthy accounts more closely and trusted in their experience with social media.

However, when uncertain about the information, both groups in the sample equally indicated that they would seek topics and information outside of social media, use fake-check sites, or seek advice from friends and family. Interestingly, the interview participants often mentioned that their parents' generation would be more inclined to believe and share misinformation, which respondents, like Sterrett et al. (2019), see as a cause of less developed media credibility.

6. Conclusion

This thesis aimed to investigate the following research question:

Is there a cultural difference in the use of the social media platforms Instagram and Twitter as sources of information on socio-political topics between university students in the Netherlands and Germany within the age of 18-29, and does this use affect their political ideas in the daily life?

Based on the qualitative results of six semi-structured interviews with Dutch and German students and the quantitative results of a questionnaire with 37 respondents for the Netherlands and 64 respondents for Germany, it can be concluded that there are many commonalities in the use of social media as a source of information on socio-political issues between university students aged 18-29 in the Netherlands and Germany, but there are also cultural differences. To be able to answer the main question more precisely, the various subject areas of the sub-questions must be summarised individually:

In the sample, the Dutch group spent more time daily on social media, while the German group used Instagram and Twitter more as a source of information regarding socio-political issues. However, Instagram is highly used for that reason in both countries. While the Dutch group followed more political aligned accounts, the German Group considered neutral information more important. Nevertheless, both groups stated to be in a filter bubble.

Although Instagram is used more politically in the Netherlands, the platform has impacted politicisation among students in both countries of the sample. Furthermore, both groups in the sample use the information they see on Instagram more to discuss their personal environment than publicly online.

Participants in both countries said they were aware of the misinformation on Instagram and tended not to trust the platform. However, they did trust the accounts they followed. If they wanted to convince themselves of the validity of the information shown, the participants from

both countries used online research tools such as fake-check sites, read (online) in trustworthy newspapers, or asked their personal environment for advice.

Concludingly, the research results show that there were cultural differences in the use of the social media platforms in general and in the use of Instagram as a source of information on socio-political topics between university students in the Netherlands and Germany within the age of 18-29 in the sample. There were no differences between the two countries in the sample regarding trust towards Instagram and misinformation. Furthermore, also an equivalent effect of Instagram on politicisation could be indicated for the students of both countries in the sample. Due to the lack of participants for Twitter, no conclusion could be drawn, except that the countries do not differ in usage rates and in both countries, scarcely any students use Twitter as a source of information on socio-political issues. The lack of differences can probably be explained by the fact that the participants share several identities, such as being a student, the generation (18-29 years old), being social media affine, and being socialised in a European country. Accordingly, there seem to be at least no other significant cultural differences: social media is used as a source of information in both countries; Instagram had a positive influence on the politicisation of the students in the sample; the students did not trust Instagram, but their followed accounts.

6.1. Limitations

The results of this research are limited in their validity by three aspects. The first important aspect is the generalisability: The results from the research mainly apply only to the people studied in the sample, although the questionnaire had 37 respondents for the Netherlands and 64 respondents for Germany and therefore could have been generalised. The problem was the structural design of the questionnaire that made it possible for participants to skip certain parts of the questionnaire when they did not apply to them, e.g., if the participant did not state that they used Twitter as an information source on socio-political issues, they did

not see the questionnaire part that examined this use. Since most of the participants did not use Twitter for this purpose, this part had to be excluded entirely, but also the part of the survey regarding Instagram as a source of information on socio-political topics was not answered frequently enough to generalise it for the Netherlands. As a result, no inferential statistics could calculate the significance of possible cultural differences. So, only descriptive statistics could be used. For this reason, the first part of the survey regarding political interest and general social media use was checked with inferential statistics to make some generalisations.

Another limitation is that it is arguable whether the students questioned can represent the entire student body, as the voluntary character of the questionnaire and the distribution via social media could have caused more students interested in socio-political issues and social media to participate.

Finally, the researcher's lack of extensive experience with surveys and their analysis in the IBS SPSS Statistics programme may also have influenced the results. In addition to the questionnaire structure, the wording of the statements, for example, which the participants had to rate on a 5-point Likert scale, can also influence the results. This means that, for example, the wording of a statement that sounds rather negative or is framed in such a way influences the participants who would tend to agree with the statement, rating it worse to look better.

6.2. Further research

The aspects mentioned in the limitations should be considered but not considered as invalidities of the research. The research has been carried out professionally and scientifically, and the results can be used as a basis and starting point for further in-depth research in the field. A collaboration with different universities could provide a broader audience. The universities could send the survey via a newsletter to all students or various random students of all disciplines to capture an even more diverse opinion and gather more respondents.

Another suggestion for further research would be to examine the correlation between political affiliation and social media as a source of information on socio-political issues. This could specialise in whether and how filter bubbles influence exposure to misinformation, perhaps even going as far as conspiracy theories. A possible question would be, “Which positions on the political spectrum are most exposed to misinformation on the social media platforms Instagram and Twitter, and does this have a reinforcing effect on the politicisation of students in the Netherlands and Germany?” If possible, the study should use ethnographic and behavioural research to determine the use of social media and not just what people say.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Interview Guide Semi-Structured Interviews

The interview questions will allow us to gather information on the following aspects of the use of social media as a source of information on socio-political topics:

- Usage of social media (especially Twitter and Instagram usage) (T1)
- Filter bubbles and political orientation of feed (T2)
- Validity of Information and trust in social media (T3)
- Politicisation (through social media) (T4)

The questions below are structured as follows:

- Main question/point
 - Probing questions

Opening the interview

- How are you?
- Thank you for taking part
- The master's program
- Introduction to the topic and the research of the thesis
- Informed consent
 - Questions about that?
- Interviews will be recorded
- Data deleted after 10 years
- Interviews will only be shared with supervisor
- Introduce yourself with your gender identity, age, university, studies, country of residence/nationality

Main questions

- Do you feel informed on socio-political issues and the political situation and involved in the general use of social media in the Netherlands/Germany? (T4)
- Are you politically interested? (T4)
 - How would you describe your political stance?
- Which media do you use to inform yourself on socio-political issues? (T1)
 - Do you use print news media to inform yourself on socio-political issues? (T1)
 - Which social media platforms do you use? (T1)
 - Do you discuss socio-political issues on social media? (T1)
- Do you use Twitter? (T1) (T2) (T3)
 - What for? (T1)
 - Whom do you follow there? (T2)
 - International or Netherland/Germany orientated? (T2)
 - Do you follow politically clearly aligned pages, more neutral sites or both? (T2)
 - Do you consume only informational content or also political satire/memes? (T1)
 - Do you trust Twitter as a platform? (T3)
 - How much time do you spend there for example in a day? (T1)
 - Do you scroll through your timeline/feed or do you specifically search for certain topics? (T1)
- Do you use Instagram? And if yes what for? (T1) (T2) (T3)
 - What for? (T1)
 - Whom do you follow there? (T2)
 - International or Netherland/Germany orientated? (T2)
 - Do you follow politically clearly aligned pages, more neutral sites or both? (T2)
 - Do you consume only informational content or also political satire/memes? (T1)

- Do you trust Instagram as a platform? (T3)
- How much time do you spend there for example in a day? (T1)
- Do you scroll through your timeline/feed or do you specifically search for certain topics? (T1)
- How do you inform yourself on the validity of the information from the internet? (T3)
 - Do you watch out for fake news and if so how? (T3)
 - Do you think the level of experience or the age matters regarding believing fake news? (T3)
- Do you think you are in a filter bubble? (T3)
 - Do you think that your feed is politically diverse? (T1) (T3)
- Do you use the information gained in your daily life? (T1) (T4)
 - Do you discuss topics that you saw on social media in discussions with your friends/family? (T4)
- Did social media contribute to your politicisation? (T1) (T4)
 - Did you even become politically active (by joining demonstrations etc.) because of social media? (T1) (T4)
- How important is social media in your country? (T1)
 - How important is it especially regarding socio-political topics/discussions? (T1) (T4)
- Which Opportunities, Advantages or even Disadvantages do you see in social media? (T1)
 - Especially regarding socio-political topics/discussions? (T1)

Closing questions

- Is there anything you would still like to add or mention?
- What should I have asked you that I didn't think to ask?

Appendix B: Transcription Conventions Semi-Structured Interviews

1. Ellipses to be used to represent extraordinary long pauses
2. Double slashes to be used to indicate overlapping speech
3. Dashes are used to connect words that are started, then broken off
4. Laughter to be transcribed as (Haha)
5. 'um's to be transcribed
6. [ANONYM] used to cover personal data
7. [inaudible] used to mark inaudible parts
8. Translation of Dutch or German words in box brackets

Appendix C: Coding Conventions Semi-Structured Interviews

The transcripts were coded twice:

- The first time in a broader way for parts that have to do with the usage of social media, filter bubbles, validity of information and trust in social media and the politicisation.
- To create a questionnaire, the second time the already once coded parts were coded again for to go more into detail about facts, behaviours, and attitudes.

First coding:

- Usage of Twitter (Political orientation of the feed, Informational or funny)
- Usage of Instagram
- Filter bubbles
- Validity of information
- Trust in social media
- Politicisation of the daily life of the participants

Second coding (only on the already marked parts):

- Facts
- Behaviours
- Attitude

Appendix D: Transcribed Semi-Structured Interviews

[NOT ACCESSIBLE FOR PRIVACY REASONS]

Appendix E: Questionnaire

Start of Page: Consent

Introduction

Thank you very much for participating in this anonymous questionnaire. It should take around 10-20 minutes to complete.

This questionnaire is part of a scientific study carried out by a student at the Utrecht University investigating cultural differences between Dutch and German students aged 18-29 regarding their use of social media.

Background and purpose of the study

This research study is conducted by one student as part of his master's thesis in his MA programme Intercultural Communication at the Utrecht University. This questionnaire is basically about the participants' consumption of social media. The questions are simple, rely on your personal experiences, attitudes, and behaviours and do not require any prior preparation.

Voluntary participation, anonymity, and data management

Your participation is entirely voluntary; therefore, no compensation is provided for your participation. Your responses in this survey will be completely anonymous and the researchers will ensure that the information provided cannot be traced back to you personally. You can withdraw your participation at any time, even during the questionnaire, by closing the tab or window. Then your answers will be deleted and will not be included in the study. However, once you have completed the survey, the research data can no longer be deleted, as it can then no longer be traced back to you.

Complaint's procedure

If you wish to submit a complaint about the procedure relating to this study, please contact Utrecht University's privacy officer, email: privacy@uu.nl

More information about this study

For more information about the study or questions prior or after the questionnaire you can contact the researcher below:

Eric Venohr – e.c.venohr@students.uu.nl

Consent

I confirm that I have read and understood the information above, and I give consent to the use of my answers for this study. [if “No is selected participant is redirected to the end]

- Yes
- No

End of Page: Consent

Start of Page: Factual questions participant

T1: Firstly, I would like to ask you to give me a few background information on you as a person.

Q1: How old are you? [specific open question regarding age number answer 18-29]

Q2: What is your gender identity? [multiple-choice single answer with open end clarification]

- Female
- Non-binary
- Male
- Prefer not to say
- Other _____

Q3: What is your nationality? [multiple-choice single answer with open end clarification]

- Dutch
- German
- Other _____

Q4: Are you studying at a university or university of applied sciences? [multiple-choice single answer]

- Yes
- No

Q5: Since this questionnaire will be about the cultural comparison between the Netherlands and Germany, in which of the two countries do you feel informed on socio-political issues and the political situation and involved in the general use of social media? (Even if you have a nationality other than Dutch or German, you can participate if you feel

sufficiently involved because you have lived in the Netherlands or Germany for a long time.)

[multiple-choice single answer]

- Netherlands
- Germany

Q6: In which city are you studying? (Indication is not mandatory) [specific open question]

End of Page: Factual questions participant

Start of Page: Socio-political Issues – Interest and Informedness

T2: This survey is concerned with socio-political issues. These are seen as a combination of issues, problems, phenomena, and events that are political but also important to the daily life of the society under study. More specifically, these socio-political issues are deeply rooted in inequalities and oppression in societies around the world, mostly based on race, gender, sexuality, religion, wealth distribution. Whereas purely political issues are mostly discussed at government and opposition level, where citizens have no direct influence on the discussion and decision-making around them.

The following questions are about your political interests and preferences and how informed you are about socio-politics in the Netherlands or Germany.

Q7: What do you use to inform yourself on socio-political issues? [multiple-choice multiple answer with open end clarification]

- Print media
- Digital media
- Social media
- Other _____

Q8: I feel... [5-point Likert scale; 1= “Strongly disagree”; 5= “Strongly agree”]

Q8.1: ...well informed about the political situation in my country.

Q8.2: ...well informed on socio-political issues in my country.

Q8.3: ...well informed on socio-political issues on an international level.

Q8.4: ...that socio-political issues are important and interesting.

Q8.5: ...that politics are important and interesting.

Q8.6: ...that social justice and equality is important.

Q8.7: ...environmental issues are important.

Q9: On the political spectrum I would describe myself as: [multiple-choice single answer]

- Left-wing
- Center-left
- Center
- Center-right
- Right-wing
- Prefer not to say

End of Page: Socio-political Issues – Interest and Informedness

Start of Page: Social Media in General

T3: The term Social Media describes various platforms with different characteristics. This questionnaire focusses on public platforms, such as Instagram and Twitter, and **not** on platforms that are mostly used for private messages, such as WhatsApp or Signal.

Q10: Which Social Media platforms do you use? [multiple-choice multiple answer with open end clarification]

- Facebook
- Instagram
- Snapchat
- TikTok
- Twitter
- YouTube
- Other _____

Q11: How much time in a day do you spent on Social Media? [multiple-choice single answer]

- <0,5h
- 0,5-1h
- 1-2h
- 2-3h
- >3h

End of Page: Social Media in General

Start of Page: Instagram

T4: The two platforms that my thesis focusses on are Instagram and Twitter. This is why we will now look at these two Social Media in more detail.

Q12: Do you use Instagram? [multiple-choice single answer; if “No” is selected, the participant is redirected to Q19]

- Yes
- No

Q13: How much time in a day do you spent on Instagram? [multiple-choice single answer]

- <0,5h
- 0,5-1h
- 1-2h
- 2-3h
- >3h

Q14: What do you use Instagram for? [multiple-choice multiple answer with open end clarification; if “To inform myself on socio-political topics.” is not selected, the participant is redirected to Q19]

- To keep in touch with my friends and family.
- To inform myself on socio-political topics.
- To be entertained (through e.g., memes).
- To express myself (through e.g., posts).
- Other _____

Q15: The following statements refer exclusively to socio-political topics on Instagram: [5-point Likert scale; 1= “Strongly disagree”; 5= “Strongly agree”]

Q15.1: I follow accounts with the same political agenda that I have.

Q15.2: I follow neutral/informational accounts.

Q15.3: I follow accounts when they are interesting even when I disagree with them politically.

Q15.4: I follow accounts when I can identify myself with them or their views.

Q15.5: I follow accounts that inform on socio-political issues when I think it is ethically beneficial because it gives them a wider audience.

Q15.6: I follow Dutch or German accounts when it comes to socio-political issues.

Q15.7: I follow international accounts when it comes to socio-political issues.

Q15.8: I stop following accounts when their content becomes uninteresting to me.

Q15.9: I stop following accounts when their content starts to differ from my political opinion.

Q15.10: The information on socio-political issues I see in my feed are divers/heterogeneous.

Q15.11: Neutral information on socio-political issues on Instagram are important to me.

Q15.12: I think on Instagram I am part of a filter bubble.

Q15.13: I only consume information on socio-political issues.

Q15.14: I consume information on socio-political issues and participate in private discussions on Instagram about them.

Q15.15: I consume information on socio-political issues and participate in public discussions on Instagram about them.

Q15.16: I inform myself on socio-political issues to educate myself.

Q15.17: I inform myself on socio-political issues to entertain myself.

Q15.18: I only scroll through my feed.

Q15.19: I scroll through my feed but also search for specific information on socio-political issues.

Q16: Whom do you follow on Instagram regarding socio-political issues? [multiple-choice multiple answer with open end clarification]

- Political parties
- Politicians
- Political influencers
- Political activists
- Socio-political movements and organisations
- Independent news sites
- Political meme accounts
- Other _____

Q17: There are a lot of problems with mis- and disinformation (explanation below) on Instagram.

Karlova and Fisher (2013) explain that "misinformation refers to claims that, unlike information, are not supported by the majority of socially accepted evidentiary judgements and reflect content that may be inaccurate, uncertain, vague or ambiguous". Misinformation in the context of social media is thus not only a problem, but rather a problematic phenomenon. The phenomenon can be seen on a scale from a mild form of misinformation on a parody level with no intention to cause harm, to a level of fabricated content designed to deceive and display false information. Colloquially, this is often called fake-news. [5-point Likert scale; 1= "Strongly disagree"; 5= "Strongly agree"]

Q17.1: I trust Instagram and its algorithms to only show valid information.

Q17.2: I trust Instagram and its algorithms to flag misinformation.

Q17.3: I think because of freedom of expression, Instagram should not have any influence on posts.

Q17.4: Instagram gives everyone the opportunity to express their opinion to a wide audience.

Q17.5: I always check the displayed information.

Q17.6: I check the displayed information if I do not know the account, or the account is not trustworthy.

Q17.7: I trust the accounts that I follow to only display valid information.

Q17.8: I trust my experience with Instagram to recognise misinformation.

Q17.9: When I want to get deeper into a topic, I saw on Instagram I research them outside of Instagram.

Q18: The following statements will be concerned with the effects of Instagram of your political ideas in the daily life:

For clarification: politically active can mean joining a youth department of a political party, but it can also mean participating in a demonstration that is raising awareness on a socio-political issue. [5-point Likert scale; 1= “Strongly disagree”; 5= “Strongly agree”]

Q18.1: Instagram contributed to my politicisation.

Q18.2: I use the information I see on Instagram in my daily life (e.g., in discussions with friends).

Q18.3: I became politically interested because of content on socio-political issues on Instagram.

Q18.4: I wanted to become politically active because of content on socio-political issues on Instagram.

Q18.5: I became politically active because of content on socio-political issues on Instagram.

End of Page: Instagram

Start of Page: Twitter

Q19: Do you use Twitter? [multiple-choice single answer; if “No” is selected, the participant is redirected to Q26]

- Yes
- No

Q20: How much time in a day do you spent on Twitter? [multiple-choice single answer]

- <0,5h
- 0,5-1h
- 1-2h
- 2-3h
- >3h

Q21: What do you use Twitter for? [multiple-choice multiple answer with open end clarification; if “To inform myself on socio-political topics.” is not selected, the participant is redirected to Q26]

- To keep in touch with my friends and family.
- To inform myself on socio-political topics.
- To be entertained (through e.g., memes).
- To express myself (through e.g., posts).
- Other _____

Q22: The following statements refer exclusively to socio-political topics on Twitter: [5-point Likert scale; 1= “Strongly disagree”; 5= “Strongly agree”]

Q22.1: I follow accounts with the same political agenda that I have.

Q22.2: I follow neutral/informational accounts.

Q22.3: I follow accounts when they are interesting even when I disagree with them politically.

Q22.4: I follow accounts when I can identify myself with them or their views.

Q22.5: I follow accounts that inform on socio-political issues when I think it is ethically beneficial because it gives them a wider audience.

Q22.6: I follow Dutch or German accounts when it comes to socio-political issues.

Q22.7: I follow international accounts when it comes to socio-political issues.

Q22.8: I stop following accounts when their content becomes uninteresting to me.

Q22.9: I stop following accounts when their content starts to differ from my political opinion.

Q22.10: The information on socio-political issues I see in my feed are divers/heterogeneous.

Q22.11: Neutral information on socio-political issues on Twitter are important to me.

Q22.12: I think on Twitter I am part of a filter bubble.

Q22.13: I only consume information on socio-political issues.

Q22.14: I consume information on socio-political issues and participate in private discussions on Twitter about them.

Q22.22: I consume information on socio-political issues and participate in public discussions on Twitter about them.

Q22.16: I inform myself on socio-political issues to educate myself.

Q22.17: I inform myself on socio-political issues to entertain myself.

Q22.18: I only scroll through my feed.

Q22.19: I scroll through my feed but also search for specific information on socio-political issues.

Q23: Whom do you follow on Twitter regarding socio-political issues? [multiple-choice multiple answer with open end clarification]

- Political parties
- Politicians
- Political influencers
- Political activists
- Socio-political movements and organisations
- Independent news sites
- Political meme accounts
- Other _____

Q24: There are a lot of problems with mis- and disinformation (explanation below) on Twitter. Karlova and Fisher (2013) explain that "misinformation refers to claims that, unlike information, are not supported by the majority of socially accepted evidentiary judgements and reflect content that may be inaccurate, uncertain, vague or ambiguous". Misinformation in the context of social media is thus not only a problem, but rather a problematic phenomenon. The phenomenon can be seen on a scale from a mild form of misinformation on a parody level with no intention to cause harm, to a level of fabricated content designed to deceive and display false information. Colloquially, this is often called fake-news. [5-point Likert scale; 1= "Strongly disagree"; 5= "Strongly agree"]

Q24.1: I trust Twitter and its algorithms to only show valid information.

Q24.2: I trust Twitter and its algorithms to flag misinformation.

Q24.3: I think because of freedom of expression, Twitter should not have any influence on posts.

Q24.4: Twitter gives everyone the opportunity to express their opinion to a wide audience.

Q24.5: I always check the displayed information.

Q24.6: I check the displayed information if I do not know the account, or the account is not trustworthy.

Q24.7: I trust the accounts that I follow to only display valid information.

Q24.8: I trust my experience with Twitter to recognise misinformation.

Q24.9: When I want to get deeper into a topic, I saw on Twitter I research them outside of Twitter.

Q25: The following statements will be concerned with the effects of Twitter of your political ideas in the daily life:

For clarification: politically active can mean joining a youth department of a political party, but it can also mean participating in a demonstration that is raising awareness on a socio-political issue. [5-point Likert scale; 1= “Strongly disagree”; 5= “Strongly agree”]

Q25.1: Twitter contributed to my politicisation.

Q25.2: I use the information I see on Twitter in my daily life (e.g., in discussions with friends).

Q25.3: I became politically interested because of content on socio-political issues on Twitter.

Q25.4: I wanted to become politically active because of content on socio-political issues on Twitter.

Q25.5: I became politically active because of content on socio-political issues on Twitter.

End of Page: Twitter

Start of Page: End - Feedback and Additional Questions

T5: Thank you very much for your participation and your effort!

Q26: Lastly, do you do something else to convince yourself of the validity of the information on social media? (optional) [open ended short-answer]

Q27: Or do you have any other notes or comments on the use of social media as a source of information on socio-political issues and the effects on the daily politicisation of students? (optional) [open ended short-answer]

End of Page: End - Feedback and Additional Questions

Appendix F: Results Questionnaire

Consent:

- “Yes”: NL: 37 (100%); GER: 64 (100%)

Q1: Age

Table F1

Answers to Q1 dependent on the Netherlands and Germany

| Age | Netherlands | | Germany | |
|-----|-------------|---------------------|----------|---------------------|
| | <i>F</i> | <i>F in % total</i> | <i>F</i> | <i>F in % total</i> |
| 18 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 3,1 |
| 19 | 4 | 10,8 | 6 | 9,4 |
| 20 | 3 | 8,1 | 2 | 3,1 |
| 21 | 3 | 8,1 | 4 | 6,3 |
| 22 | 6 | 16,2 | 7 | 10,9 |
| 23 | 8 | 21,6 | 8 | 12,5 |
| 24 | 6 | 16,2 | 21 | 32,8 |
| 25 | 4 | 10,8 | 6 | 9,4 |
| 26 | 1 | 2,7 | 5 | 7,8 |
| 27 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 3,1 |
| 28 | 1 | 2,7 | 1 | 1,6 |
| 29 | 1 | 2,7 | 0 | 0 |

Q2: Gender identity

Table F2

Answers to Q2 dependent on the Netherlands and Germany

| Gender Identity | Netherlands | | Germany | |
|-------------------|-------------|---------------------|----------|---------------------|
| | <i>F</i> | <i>F in % total</i> | <i>F</i> | <i>F in % total</i> |
| Female | 22 | 59,5 | 35 | 54,7 |
| Non-binary | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Male | 15 | 40,5 | 29 | 45,3 |
| Prefer not to say | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Other | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |

Q3: What is your nationality? [multiple-choice single answer with open end clarification]

Table F3

Answers to Q3 dependent on the Netherlands and Germany

| Nationality | Netherlands | | Germany | |
|-------------------|-------------|---------------------|----------|---------------------|
| | <i>F</i> | <i>F in % total</i> | <i>F</i> | <i>F in % total</i> |
| Dutch | 30 | 81,1 | 0 | 0 |
| German | 1 | 2,7 | 61 | 95,3 |
| American | 1 | 2,7 | 0 | 0 |
| Austrian | 1 | 2,7 | 0 | 0 |
| Belarus | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1,6 |
| Finnish | 1 | 2,7 | 0 | 0 |
| German & American | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1,6 |
| Hungarian | 1 | 2,7 | 0 | 0 |
| Italian | 1 | 2,7 | 0 | 0 |
| Malaysian | 1 | 2,7 | 0 | 0 |

Q4: Student?

- “Yes”: NL: 37 (100%); GER: 64 (100%)

Q5: In which of the two countries do you feel informed on socio-political issues and the political situation and involved in the general use of social media?

- Netherlands: 37
- Germany: 64

Q6: City?**Table F4***Answers to Q6 dependent on the Netherlands and Germany*

| City | Netherlands | | Germany | |
|-------------------|-------------|---------------------|----------|---------------------|
| | <i>F</i> | <i>F in % total</i> | <i>F</i> | <i>F in % total</i> |
| Amsterdam | 3 | 8,1 | 1 | 1,6 |
| Bayreuth | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1,6 |
| Berlin | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1,6 |
| Bochum | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1,6 |
| Bonn | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1,6 |
| Dortmund | 0 | 0 | 2 | 3,1 |
| Düsseldorf | 0 | 0 | 2 | 3,1 |
| Gießen | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1,6 |
| Göttingen | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1,6 |
| Groningen | 2 | 5,4 | 0 | 0 |
| Hamburg | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1,6 |
| Hannover | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1,6 |
| Jena | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1,6 |
| Kassel | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1,6 |
| Köln | 0 | 0 | 3 | 4,7 |
| Marburg | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1,6 |
| Münster | 0 | 0 | 10 | 15,6 |
| Paderborn | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1,6 |
| Siegen | 0 | 0 | 15 | 23,4 |
| Utrecht | 32 | 86,5 | 5 | 7,8 |
| York | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1,6 |
| No city specified | 0 | 0 | 13 | 20,3 |

Q7: What do you use to inform yourself on socio-political issues?**Table F5***Answers to Q7 dependent on the Netherlands and Germany*

| Media | Netherlands | | Germany | |
|---------------|-------------|---------------------|----------|---------------------|
| | <i>F</i> | <i>F in % total</i> | <i>F</i> | <i>F in % total</i> |
| Print media | 13 | 35,1 | 16 | 25 |
| Digital media | 34 | 91,9 | 58 | 90,6 |
| Social media | 24 | 64,9 | 50 | 78,1 |
| Other | 3 | 4,7 | 1 | 1,6 |

- Other:
 - NL

- “Friends mainly. Advertisements (social media/flyers) just sometimes.”
- “I don’t”
- “School”
- GER
 - “Radio emissions, podcasts”

Q8: I feel... [5-point Likert scale; 1= “Strongly disagree”; 5= “Strongly agree”]

Table F6

Answers to Q8.1-Q8.7 dependent on the Netherlands and Germany

| Number | Netherlands | | Germany | |
|--------|-------------|-----------|----------|-----------|
| | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> |
| Q8.1 | 4,05 | .911 | 3,95 | .785 |
| Q8.2 | 4,05 | 1,079 | 3,81 | .794 |
| Q8.3 | 3,59 | 1,166 | 3,28 | .845 |
| Q8.4 | 4,46 | .960 | 4,25 | .992 |
| Q8.5 | 4,3 | .909 | 3,97 | 1,069 |
| Q8.6 | 4,51 | 1,096 | 4,56 | .974 |
| Q8.7 | 4,65 | .857 | 4,58 | .832 |

Q9: On the political spectrum I would describe myself as:

Table F7

Answers to Q9 dependent on the Netherlands and Germany

| Political Opinion | Netherlands | | Germany | |
|-------------------|-------------|---------------------|----------|---------------------|
| | <i>F</i> | <i>F in % total</i> | <i>F</i> | <i>F in % total</i> |
| Left-wing | 18 | 48,6 | 17 | 26,6 |
| Center-left | 8 | 21,6 | 29 | 45,3 |
| Center | 4 | 10,8 | 10 | 15,6 |
| Center-right | 4 | 10,8 | 3 | 4,7 |
| Right-wing | 2 | 5,4 | 0 | 0 |
| Prefer not to say | 1 | 2,7 | 5 | 7,8 |

Q10: Which Social Media platforms do you use? [multiple-choice multiple answer with open end clarification]

Table F8

Answers to Q10 dependent on the Netherlands and Germany

| Social Media Platform | Netherlands | | Germany | |
|-----------------------|-------------|---------------------|----------|---------------------|
| | <i>F</i> | <i>F in % total</i> | <i>F</i> | <i>F in % total</i> |
| Facebook | 29 | 78,4 | 40 | 62,5 |
| Instagram | 29 | 78,4 | 56 | 87,5 |
| LinkedIn | 1 | 2,7 | 1 | 1,6 |
| Reddit | 4 | 10,8 | 0 | 0 |
| Snapchat | 22 | 59,5 | 36 | 56,3 |
| TikTok | 10 | 27 | 15 | 23,4 |
| Twitter | 8 | 21,6 | 13 | 20,3 |
| YouTube | 32 | 86,5 | 58 | 90,6 |

Q11: How much time in a day do you spent on Social Media? [multiple-choice single answer]

Table F9

Answers to Q11 dependent on the Netherlands and Germany

| Time per day | Netherlands | | Germany | |
|--------------|-------------|---------------------|----------|---------------------|
| | <i>F</i> | <i>F in % total</i> | <i>F</i> | <i>F in % total</i> |
| <0,5h | 1 | 2,7 | 3 | 4,7 |
| 0,5-1h | 4 | 10,8 | 11 | 17,2 |
| 1-2h | 11 | 29,7 | 30 | 46,9 |
| 2-3h | 8 | 21,6 | 12 | 18,8 |
| >3h | 13 | 35,1 | 8 | 12,5 |

Q12: Do you use Instagram?

- „Yes“
 - NL: 29 (78,4%)
 - DE: 56 (87,5%)
- „No“
 - NL: 8 (21,6%)
 - DE: 9 (12,5%)

Q13: How much time in a day do you spent on Instagram? [multiple-choice single answer]

Table F10

Answers to Q13 dependent on the Netherlands and Germany

| Time per day | Netherlands | | | Germany | | |
|--------------|-------------|----------------------|---------------------|----------|----------------------|---------------------|
| | <i>F</i> | <i>F in % use IG</i> | <i>F in % total</i> | <i>F</i> | <i>F in % use IG</i> | <i>F in % total</i> |
| <0,5h | 5 | 17,2 | 13,5 | 8 | 14,3 | 12,5 |
| 0,5-1h | 9 | 31 | 24,3 | 26 | 46,4 | 40,6 |
| 1-2h | 12 | 41,4 | 32,4 | 18 | 32,1 | 28,1 |
| 2-3h | 2 | 6,9 | 5,4 | 4 | 7,1 | 6,3 |
| >3h | 1 | 2,4 | 2,7 | 0 | 0 | 0 |

Q14: What do you use Instagram for? [multiple-choice multiple answer with open end clarification]

Table F11

Answers to Q14 dependent on the Netherlands and Germany

| Purpose | Netherlands | | | Germany | | |
|--|-------------|----------------------|---------------------|----------|----------------------|---------------------|
| | <i>F</i> | <i>F in % use IG</i> | <i>F in % total</i> | <i>F</i> | <i>F in % use IG</i> | <i>F in % total</i> |
| To keep in touch with my friends and family. | 22 | 75,9 | 59,5 | 43 | 76,8 | 67,2 |
| To inform myself on socio-political topics. | 14 | 48,4 | 37,8 | 35 | 62,5 | 54,7 |
| To be entertained. | 26 | 89,7 | 70,3 | 49 | 87,5 | 76,6 |
| To express myself. | 11 | 37,9 | 29,7 | 20 | 35,7 | 31,3 |
| Other | 2 | 6,9 | 5,4 | 5 | 8,9 | 7,8 |

- Other
 - NL
 - “Watch art”
 - “Work”
 - GER
 - “To be inspired (E.g. Cooking, veganisme poetry)”
 - “To be up to date in the biking & automotive industry”

- “To inform myself about sports exercises”
- “To inform myself on sports and music”
- “To kill time”

Q15: The following statements refer exclusively to socio-political topics on Instagram: [5-point Likert scale; 1= “Strongly disagree”; 5= “Strongly agree”]

Table F12

Answers to Q15.1-Q15.19 dependent on the Netherlands and Germany

| Number | Netherlands | | Germany | |
|--------|-------------|-----------|----------|-----------|
| | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> |
| Q15.1 | 4,21 | 1,051 | 4 | 1,213 |
| Q15.2 | 4,64 | .842 | 4,46 | .701 |
| Q15.3 | 4,14 | 1,406 | 4,23 | .953 |
| Q15.4 | 3,57 | .852 | 3,74 | .817 |
| Q15.5 | 4,36 | 1,082 | 3,69 | 1,051 |
| Q15.6 | 2,5 | 1,345 | 2,86 | .912 |
| Q15.7 | 3,5 | 1,160 | 4,23 | 1,165 |
| Q15.8 | 2 | .961 | 2,23 | 1,060 |
| Q15.9 | 2,86 | 1,167 | 3,4 | .946 |
| Q15.10 | 3,5 | 1,160 | 4,14 | .912 |
| Q15.11 | 3,36 | 1,336 | 3,29 | .957 |
| Q15.12 | 3,93 | .997 | 3,86 | .974 |
| Q15.13 | 3,93 | 1,141 | 3,97 | 1,200 |
| Q15.14 | 4,43 | 1,089 | 3,69 | 1,183 |
| Q15.15 | 2 | .961 | 2,20 | 1,183 |
| Q15.16 | 2,21 | 1,311 | 2,83 | 1,248 |
| Q15.17 | 1,64 | .842 | 2,20 | 1,158 |
| Q15.18 | 4,64 | .842 | 4,29 | .572 |
| Q15.19 | 3,86 | 1,027 | 3,06 | .938 |

Q16: Whom do you follow on Instagram regarding socio-political issues? [multiple-choice multiple answer with open end clarification]

Table F13

Answers to Q16 dependent on the Netherlands and Germany

| Accounts | Netherlands | | | | Germany | | | |
|------------------------|-------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|-------------------------|----------|--------------------------|--------------------------|-------------------------|
| | <i>F</i> | <i>F in % use IG</i> | <i>F in % use IG</i> | <i>F in % total</i> | <i>F</i> | <i>F in % use IG</i> | <i>F in % use IG</i> | <i>F in % total</i> |
| Pol. parties | 7 | 50 | 24,1 | 18,9 | 11 | 31,4 | 19,6 | 17,2 |
| Politicians | 10 | 71,4 | 34,5 | 27 | 14 | 40 | 25 | 21,9 |
| Pol. influencers | 5 | 35,7 | 17,2 | 13,5 | 13 | 37,1 | 23,2 | 20,3 |
| Pol. activists | 9 | 64,3 | 31 | 24,3 | 22 | 62,9 | 39,3 | 34,4 |
| Socio-pol. movements | 13 | 92,9 | 44,8 | 35,1 | 26 | 74,3 | 46,4 | 40,6 |
| Independent news sites | 8 | 57,1 | 27,6 | 21,6 | 27 | 77,1 | 48,2 | 42,2 |
| Pol. meme accounts | 11 | 78,6 | 37,9 | 29,7 | 15 | 42,9 | 26,8 | 23,4 |
| Other | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |

Q17: Misinformation and trust [5-point Likert scale; 1= “Strongly disagree”; 5= “Strongly agree”]

Table F14

Answers to Q17.1-Q17.7 dependent on the Netherlands and Germany

| Number | Netherlands | | Germany | |
|--------|-------------|-----------|----------|-----------|
| | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> |
| Q17.1 | 2,36 | .929 | 2 | 1,111 |
| Q17.2 | 2,36 | 1,082 | 2,23 | 1,087 |
| Q17.3 | 2,21 | .802 | 2,49 | 1,067 |
| Q17.4 | 3,07 | 1,439 | 3,57 | 1,195 |
| Q17.5 | 2,93 | 1,141 | 2,91 | 1,040 |
| Q17.6 | 4,21 | .975 | 3,63 | 1,060 |
| Q17.7 | 3,5 | 1,225 | 3,54 | .980 |
| Q17.8 | 3,71 | 1,204 | 3,57 | 1,037 |
| Q17.9 | 4,71 | .469 | 4,46 | .919 |

Q18: Effects of Instagram politicisation: [5-point Likert scale; 1= “Strongly disagree”; 5= “Strongly agree”]

Table F15

Answers to Q18.1-Q18.5 dependent on the Netherlands and Germany

| Number | Netherlands | | Germany | |
|--------|-------------|-----------|----------|-----------|
| | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> |
| Q18.1 | 3,79 | .893 | 3,46 | .852 |
| Q18.2 | 4,36 | .633 | 4 | 1,029 |
| Q18.3 | 3 | 1,301 | 3,54 | 1,187 |
| Q18.4 | 2,86 | 1,460 | 3,03 | 1,150 |
| Q18.5 | 3,14 | 1,460 | 2,69 | 1,207 |

Q19: Do you use Twitter?

- „Yes“
 - NL: 8 (21,6%)
 - DE: 13 (20,3%)
- „No“
 - NL: 29 (78,4%)
 - DE: 51 (79,7%)

Q20: How much time in a day do you spent on Twitter? [multiple-choice single answer]

Table F16

Answers to Q20 dependent on the Netherlands and Germany

| Time per day | Netherlands | | | Germany | | |
|--------------|-------------|----------------------|---------------------|----------|----------------------|---------------------|
| | <i>F</i> | <i>F in % use TW</i> | <i>F in % total</i> | <i>F</i> | <i>F in % use TW</i> | <i>F in % total</i> |
| <0,5h | 7 | 87,5 | 18,9 | 8 | 61,5 | 12,5 |
| 0,5-1h | 0 | 0 | 0 | 3 | 23,1 | 4,7 |
| 1-2h | 1 | 12,5 | 2,7 | 2 | 15,4 | 3,1 |
| 2-3h | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| >3h | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |

Q21: What do you use Twitter for? [multiple-choice multiple answer with open end clarification]

Table F17

Answers to Q21 dependent on the Netherlands and Germany

| Purpose | Netherlands | | | Germany | | |
|--|-------------|----------------------|---------------------|----------|----------------------|---------------------|
| | <i>F</i> | <i>F in % use TW</i> | <i>F in % total</i> | <i>F</i> | <i>F in % use TW</i> | <i>F in % total</i> |
| To keep in touch with my friends and family. | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 7,7 | 1,6 |
| To inform myself on socio-political topics. | 4 | 50 | 10,8 | 9 | 69,2 | 14,1 |
| To be entertained. | 6 | 75 | 16,2 | 8 | 61,5 | 12,5 |
| To express myself. | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 15,4 | 3,1 |
| Other | 1 | 1,3 | 2,7 | 1 | 7,7 | 1,6 |

- Other
 - NL
 - “To keep up with information in my work field.”
 - GER
 - “To be informed on specific science topics.”

Q22: The following statements refer exclusively to socio-political topics on Twitter: [5-point Likert scale; 1= “Strongly disagree”; 5= “Strongly agree”]

Table F18

Answers to Q22.1-Q22.19 dependent on the Netherlands and Germany

| Number | Netherlands | | Germany | |
|--------|-------------|-----------|----------|-----------|
| | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> |
| Q22.1 | 4,25 | .957 | 2,67 | 1,323 |
| Q22.2 | 4 | .816 | 3,33 | 1,414 |
| Q22.3 | 4,25 | .5 | 3,22 | 1,302 |
| Q22.4 | 4,5 | .577 | 3,56 | 1,014 |
| Q22.5 | 3,5 | 1,291 | 3,33 | 1,118 |
| Q22.6 | 4,25 | .5 | 3,33 | 1,414 |
| Q22.7 | 4,75 | .5 | 3,78 | 1,394 |
| Q22.8 | 2,75 | .957 | 4,22 | .667 |
| Q22.9 | 2,75 | .957 | 3,22 | 1,093 |
| Q22.10 | 4 | .0 | 3,22 | 1,302 |
| Q22.11 | 3,75 | 1,258 | 3,11 | 1,054 |
| Q22.12 | 3,75 | .957 | 3,67 | 1,225 |
| Q22.13 | 3 | 1,826 | 3,11 | 1,537 |
| Q22.14 | 2,75 | 1,5 | 2,44 | 1,590 |
| Q22.15 | 2 | 1,414 | 1,78 | 1,394 |
| Q22.16 | 4,75 | .5 | 4,33 | 1,323 |
| Q22.17 | 4 | .816 | 3,44 | 1,333 |
| Q22.18 | 3,5 | 1,0 | 2,89 | 1,364 |
| Q22.19 | 3,75 | 1,893 | 3,33 | 1,581 |

Q23: Whom do you follow on Twitter regarding socio-political issues? [multiple-choice multiple answer with open end clarification]

Table F19

Answers to Q23 dependent on the Netherlands and Germany

| Accounts | Netherlands | | | | Germany | | | |
|------------------------|-------------|-------------------------|----------------------|---------------------|----------|-------------------------|----------------------|---------------------|
| | <i>F</i> | <i>F in % use TW SP</i> | <i>F in % use TW</i> | <i>F in % total</i> | <i>F</i> | <i>F in % use TW SP</i> | <i>F in % use TW</i> | <i>F in % total</i> |
| Pol. parties | 2 | 50 | 25 | 5,4 | 4 | 44,4 | 30,8 | 6,3 |
| Politicians | 3 | 75 | 37,5 | 8,1 | 5 | 55,6 | 38,5 | 7,8 |
| Pol. influencers | 1 | 25 | 12,5 | 2,7 | 8 | 88,9 | 61,5 | 12,5 |
| Pol. activists | 3 | 75 | 37,5 | 8,1 | 8 | 88,9 | 61,5 | 12,5 |
| Socio-pol. movements | 2 | 50 | 25 | 5,4 | 7 | 77,8 | 53,9 | 10,9 |
| Independent news sites | 2 | 50 | 25 | 5,4 | 5 | 55,6 | 38,5 | 7,8 |
| Pol. meme accounts | 2 | 50 | 25 | 5,4 | 3 | 33,3 | 23,1 | 4,7 |
| Other | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |

Q24: Misinformation and trust [5-point Likert scale; 1= “Strongly disagree”; 5= “Strongly agree”]

Table F20

Answers to Q24.1-Q24.7 dependent on the Netherlands and Germany

| Number | Netherlands | | Germany | |
|--------|-------------|-----------|----------|-----------|
| | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> |
| Q24.1 | 3 | 1,155 | 1,89 | .928 |
| Q24.2 | 3,5 | 1,0 | 2,33 | 1,414 |
| Q24.3 | 2 | 1,414 | 3,11 | 1,167 |
| Q24.4 | 4 | .816 | 3,89 | .782 |
| Q24.5 | 3 | 1,414 | 3 | 1,225 |
| Q24.6 | 3 | 1,155 | 3 | 1,118 |
| Q24.7 | 3,75 | 1,893 | 4 | .707 |
| Q24.8 | 3,5 | 1,0 | 3,33 | 1,323 |
| Q24.9 | 4,25 | .957 | 4,22 | .972 |

Q25: Effects of Twitter politicisation: [5-point Likert scale; 1= “Strongly disagree”; 5= “Strongly agree”]

Table F21

Answers to Q25.1-Q25.5 dependent on the Netherlands and Germany

| Number | Netherlands | | Germany | |
|--------|-------------|-----------|----------|-----------|
| | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> |
| Q25.1 | 4 | .816 | 3,11 | 1,364 |
| Q25.2 | 4,25 | .5 | 4 | .5 |
| Q25.3 | 4 | .816 | 2,56 | 1,333 |
| Q25.4 | 3,5 | .577 | 2,22 | 1,202 |
| Q25.5 | 2,75 | .957 | 1,89 | 1,364 |

Q26: Lastly, do you do something else to convince yourself of the validity of the information on social media? (optional) [open ended short-answer]

- NL
 - “Check other news sites/outlets”
 - “Fact-checking personally as opposed to using fact-checking websites.”
 - “google”
 - “I always research what I see on Instagram because I don't trust all information provided there.”
 - “I check the same story with content creators on the other side of the political spectrum to see how they spin it.”
 - “I try to check what is claimed on social media(if the source is not given for the information) to check if there are any reputable articles on it somewhere”
 - “I try to take a step back from time to time to see whether the content I'm consuming is within a filter bubble”

- “If i see news on social media or in a news app which find odd. I google the main topic and read about it in three different newspapers to get a more nuanced view”
- “Look on the internet, news sites, ask people around about it”
- “not really. I base my vote on a party's point of view (left & green), the details are not really relevant for my vote.”
- “See what the source is and if t matches the topic (ex black people talking about the experience of racism and what words not to use etc instead of white people talking over them)”
- “Usually I google some stuff or the people mentioned in the posts”
- “Yes, fuck the fake news”
- GER
 - “Ask friends to talk about Information. Search Information at other sources.”
 - “Check the posting history, background, agenda and political stance of accounts”
 - “Check the references”
 - “Following verified accounts/ seeing information on more than one account or on other social media and when in doubt always double checking trough News papers or the sources that have been given in a post”
 - “Google, websites of independent news sites”
 - “I try to proof the Informations i got from social media with different online articels.”
 - “I usually double check with other sources, also from different countries, to see if the information provided/ shared is the same”

- “I'm a communal politician and so i talk to my colleagues and I'm informed about a lot of themes (even if I'm not interested in them ;D)”
- “Look who uploaded the Information (Tagesschau=reliable, BILD=Not reliable”
- “Mit anderen Menschen darüber sprechen und sich austauschen, Nachrichten schauen und vergleichen”
- “Yes”
- “yes, sometimes due to the ambiguity or disputes buried in the information, I will check the institution behind the information for example and what kind of power it maybe exert on the information”

Q27: Or do you have any other notes or comments on the use of social media as a source of information on socio-political issues and the effects on the daily politicisation of students?

(optional) [open ended short-answer]

- NL
 - “I don't really use social media for socio political issues. Sometimes there is a explanation video of NOS on YouTube. but mostly i just read the news in a news app.”
 - “I think it is a good way to reach a lot of people, especially the next generation.”
 - “The advertisements/suggested pages/posts depend highly depends on your social circle. This leads to polarisation apparently. GIYF”

- “The use short campaigning slogans and catchy claims only tell half if not less of the real story on most social media platforms the full story takes too much time and people don't seem to care much. Therefore I am a strong proponent of Youtube and similar platforms where yes you can post a short clip of you saying a slogan or something catchy but also take your time to explain the full story.”
- GER
 - “Die "Gegenstimmen" in Kommentaren unter für mich relevanten Posts bestärken mich in meiner (politischen) Meinung. Und lassen mich teilweise extrem an Solidarität und Menschlichkeit bestimmter (politisch-orientierter) Gruppen in unserer Gesellschaft zweifeln...”
 - “filter bubble is also displays wide amount of contradicting opinions but on a highly specified level”
 - “I feel like many individuals often only shape their opinion on something based on a few posts they have read but then don't double check that information or try to stay objective, even though they might not be directly affected by an issue. In that way, so many topics are getting politicised, which in a sense is good because students and young people are getting involved with politics. But on the other hand, they will forget about it in a few weeks again anyway. I feel like that's how social media as a political platform works - topics are getting overly politicised in a very short amount of time, and then dropped again after a few days or weeks because something else has become more interesting. - I am sorry for the long reply haha :D”
 - “I think it is a great way to spread information, I used Instagram a lot to find out where and when protests took place”

- “Social media displays things in an algorithm way, which I think will have a similar effect on people who see it. Therefore, I think it can not be the sole channel to know about the socio-political issues but a supplement. What behind needs to "nachfragen"”