

## **Question in Project:**

German Longitudinal Election Study (GLES) 2021 (English Version)

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## **Question Topic:**

Digitalization/ Use of digital systems

## **Construct:**

General use of social media (open vs. closed)

## **General Information:**

**\*Note: The item was tested in German. This is an English translation of the original German wording.**

## **Question Text:**

Which social media do you use occasionally or regularly?  
*[Welche sozialen Medien nutzen Sie gelegentlich oder regelmäßig?]*

## **Instruction:**

Version a. Please separate different social media with a comma! *[Bitte trennen Sie verschiedene soziale Medien durch ein Komma ab!]*

Version b. Multiple answers are possible. *[Mehrfachnennungen sind möglich.]*

## **Answer Categories:**

Version a. open question

## **Cognitive Techniques:**

Comprehension Probing, Specific Probing

## Findings for Question:

The questions 3a and 3b capture which social media the respondents use. As surveys are also conducted in CATI mode within the framework of the GLES, the pretest was intended to investigate whether an open-ended question (question 3a) differs from a closed question (question 3b), that is, whether, for example, certain social media are not considered in an open-ended question. For this purpose, respondents were first presented with the question in an open-ended response format and then in a closed format.

### 1. Which services are included under the category "social media" in the open-ended question? Are services such as WhatsApp and YouTube also included?

The spontaneously most frequently mentioned social media used by the test persons were Facebook ( $n = 7$ ), WhatsApp ( $n = 5$ ), Instagram ( $n = 4$ ), Twitter ( $n = 3$ ) and YouTube ( $n = 3$ ). Thus, at least some of the persons understood social media to include WhatsApp and YouTube. However, five test persons (TP 03, 04, 05, 06, 10) stated that they had spontaneously not considered at least one of the services, although they used it:

- *"Actually, I already use them, but I didn't think of them. I somehow didn't think of them at all, because [I directly think of something like Facebook and Instagram when I hear the term 'social media'. Now if it had said 'messenger services,' I would have said Telegram and WhatsApp. Then I definitely would have thought of that." (TP 04)*
- *"Ah, WhatsApp, is that a social medium? I'm quite a big fan of that. Yes, I have WhatsApp too, of course. YouTube I don't have in my head most of the time, but I also use it now and then." (TP 10)*

Subject 09 left question 3a unanswered, pointing out that the question had to be asked in a closed-response format because it was otherwise unanswerable for her (without considerable time investment):

*"Oh my goodness! Dear people, you don't do such a question with an open text field. Honestly, which mediocre person is now able to firstly name it, secondly write it correctly and thirdly list it completely? There must be a click-list of the 30 best-known social networks, but don't write it in. That's not going to work, I'd need half an hour. I'll put it this way, I use all of them. I recently discovered that I have accounts on 83 social networks, including StudiVZ and SchülerVZ. There's a 'We love Social Media'. I've actually registered everything there is. That's what I do for a living. I need to know how things work. [...] I wouldn't answer anything here because I don't feel like writing in." (TP 09)*

### 2. Is a social medium mentioned in question 3b that was not considered in question 3a?

The vast majority of test persons ( $n = 8$ ) mentioned at least one social medium in question 3b that had not been previously reported in question 3a. The media most frequently

not considered in the open-ended question 3a were WhatsApp ( $n = 4$ ), YouTube ( $n = 2$ ), and TikTok ( $n = 2$ ). Test person 09, who had not answered question 3a, stated in question 3b that he used all listed social media with the exception of Threema. When asked, all ten persons indicated that they preferred question version 3b because the given an-swer options would clarify what was meant by "social media":

- *"In any case, I can already say that I like the second one much, much better, because there are already a few examples. As you have now seen - [...] Instagram [...] I also use every day [...]. That's what I noticed right away, that I had forgotten that. So, the second one is definitely much better than the first question."* (TP 02)
- *"I find question 3b easier to answer, because there is a list and you have the possibility to name further things. It's always hard to decide for yourself what social media really is or what you yourself understand it to be if you don't have a list."* (TP 03)
- *"[Question 3b is easier] because it puts in front of you what platforms you count as social media."* (TP 05)

### **3. Is it clear what is meant by social media?**

The test persons had a very homogeneous understanding of the term and understood it to mean services that enable people to exchange information with other people via the Internet:

- *"When I thought of social media, the first thing I thought of was Facebook, where you can ex-change information with people and where you can also read up on things. I also thought di-rectly of Instagram, because you can also upload things there [...] and communicate with people. Those are social media for me."* (TP 01)
- *"Everything that [has to do] bidirectionally with some kind of communication that happens digitally. So, I'm not just consuming, but I can actively participate in some communication, and it's digital and in the frame with other people. It's a platform that allows that to happen."* (TP 05)
- *"Social media are such Internet platforms where you can sign up and where you can check different things. Like with YouTube, for example, if you want to know something, you type it in [...] and then you get an answer or a film or a video about it. On Facebook, you can sign up for certain groups or search for friends. That's what I understand by social media, where you can interact together."* (TP 08)

As already clarified above, some test persons did not count messenger services such as WhatsApp or video platforms such as YouTube as social media in the open-ended question:

- *"Originally, it was always clear to me that social media are things where you explicitly ex-change information with other people and post something yourself. I never really put YouTube under that, but ultimately there's the commenting function on YouTube and that's why it's nothing but a social media. It's ultimately a virtual space where people share via stream."* (TP 03)
- *"I actually understand it to mean directly the social networks like Instagram or Facebook, where I can link [and] exchange with other people. I briefly considered whether something like messaging services wouldn't also be part of that in a broad sense, but then came to the con-clusion that it wouldn't be."*(TP 04)

In addition, two respondents also mentioned services that do not belong to classic social media (TP 01: Netflix, TP 02: Spotify). The question whether another term, such as "social networks" would be preferred, was answered in the affirmative by three test persons (TP 01, 08, 10). These argued that the term would make it clearer that the services focus on networking and mutual exchange:

- *"So, by 'social media' I mean Facebook and Instagram. But something like Snapchat and WhatsApp are, for me, more like apps through which you can communicate with other people. [...] With a social network, you can also include WhatsApp and Snapchat, because 'network' sounds more like [an] exchange with other people."* (TP 01)
- *". . . " "I think social networks are better because you are really networked. You feel somehow con-nected there, you are registered there and you exchange information there. Social media' is more just this umbrella term that you always hear and under which you always store every-thing. People always assume that they are networked there."* (TP 08)

The remaining seven test persons, on the other hand, preferred the term "social media" or found both equally suitable:

- *"That would make no difference to me. I would have to think long and hard about whether there is a difference. By not mentioning both terms, I wouldn't think about whether there was a difference at all."* (TP 03)
- *"Media is actually more common."* (TP 06)

## **Recommendations:**

Question: No changes recommended.

Response format: We generally recommend using a closed response format as in question 3b, also in CATI mode. This makes it easier for respondents to answer the question and clarifies which services are to be included under "social media." In this way, underreporting of social media use can be prevented.