

Question in Project:

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

Question Topic:

Digitalization/ Use of digital systems

Construct:

Political subscriptions on social media

General Information:

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

Question Text:

Do you follow politicians or political parties on social media or have you subscribed to such channels? If yes, from which parties?

[Folgen Sie in sozialen Medien Politikerinnen und Politikern oder politischen Parteien oder haben Sie entsprechende Kanäle abonniert? Falls ja, von welchen Parteien?]

Instruction:

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

Answer Categories:

CDU/CSU

SPD

FDP

Bündnis 90/DIE GRÜNEN

DIE LINKE

AfD

Other *[Sonstige]*

I don't follow any politicians or parties. *[Ich folge keinen Politikerinnen und Politikern oder Parteien.]*

Don't know [weiß nicht]

Cognitive Techniques:

General Probing, Comprehension Probing

Findings for Question:

Question 7 asked the respondents whether they follow "politicians or political parties" on social media. The majority of respondents ($n = 6$) stated that they do not follow "politicians or political parties" on social media. Three persons answered question 7 in the affirmative and made use of the option of multiple answers. After some initial hesitation, respondent 04 opted for the answer category "Other" and added that she followed the party "DIE PARTEI".

1. How do respondents go about answering the question?

When asked how they went about answering the question and what social media they thought of during the process, most respondents ($n = 7$) indicated Facebook and Instagram. The platforms Twitter and YouTube were also mentioned, but only by three test persons. In most cases, persons first thought of their own social media use and considered whether they had political subscriptions there:

- *"[I actually] just thought about Facebook and Instagram [now]. Politicians and political parties are also represented there. But I don't follow anyone there."* (TP 01)
- *"I read through them from top to bottom and thought about who's in my Twitter feed, and then it was relatively easy."* (TP 09)

2. Is the term "follow" sufficiently familiar?

When asked what the persons understood by "follow," most responded with synonyms such as "subscribe," which is already included in the question text itself, or English terms such as "likes" or "followers."

- *"That I actively gave Likes or subscribed."* (TP 03)
- *"Whether I am a follower of any politician or politicians."* (TP 08)

Other persons explained their understanding of "follow" in the specific context of specific social media:

- *"On Facebook you can follow or subscribe to certain pages. On Instagram the same way."* (TP 01)
- *"That they show up in the timeline or Twitter feed and that I've shown them via a follow, a subscribe, or a like that I want information from them."* (TP 09)

Two persons also understood "following" to mean looking at and reading posts, without naming active following:

- *"That I read something about politicians on their channels." (TP 07)*
- *"Now I'm a bit irritated because I don't follow in that sense on Facebook, I'm not a follower on Instagram or anything like that. I don't. [...] I actually only follow [by] looking at Facebook, what they show there, what photos they bring or what actions they do." (TP 10)*

Since for the majority of the test persons the verb "follow" is associated with various social media, it can be assumed that the question is understood in the intended way. However, messenger services such as WhatsApp and Telegram were not mentioned by the test persons in connection with "follow". If such messenger services are also to be covered, the question should be rephrased accordingly.

Recommendations:

Question: If respondents should also cover messenger services in their answer, one possibility would be to adapt the question by naming exemplary social media of this kind. In order to avoid confusion with the term "follow", in the case of social media where this term is not usually used, we also recommend listing the examples in an explanation rather than in the question itself.

The question wording we recommend is therefore as follows:

"Do you follow politicians or political parties on social media or do you sub-scribe to corresponding channels? If yes, from which parties?"

This includes, for example, liking Facebook pages, following Twitter channels, but also subscribing to WhatsApp or Telegram groups."

Response format: No changes recommended.