MEDIÁLNÍ STUDIA
MEDIA STUDIES
JOURNAL FOR CRITICAL MEDIA INQUIRY

# Assessing Worthwhileness of Political Contributions on Social Media: A Study of Young Adults in Norway

Elizabeth Solverson

To cite this article:
Solverson, E. (2023). Assessing worthwhileness of political contributions on social media: A study of young adults in Norway. *Mediální studia*, 17(2), 184–208.

ISSN 2464-4846
Journal website: https://www.medialnistudia.fsv.cuni.cz/

2/2023

# ASSESSING WORTHWHILENESS OF POLITICAL CONTRIBUTIONS ON SOCIAL MEDIA: A STUDY OF YOUNG ADULTS IN NORWAY

**ELIZABETH SOLVERSON**
*Nord University*

## ABSTRACT

*Social media are important sources of political information for today's citizens. When browsing social media, users frequently make decisions about which posts are worthy of their finite time and attention. These choices shape their future information experiences and the broader political discourse. Yet, current understanding of how citizens assess political information within these complex social settings are limited. Through qualitative mini-focus groups conducted among young adults in Norway, this study investigates how users negotiate and assess political contributions on social media, drawing inspiration from the concept of perceived worthwhileness (Schrøder & Steeg Larsen, 2010; Schrøder, 2017). The findings reveal a multifactor worthwhileness equation, illuminating the intricate dynamics underlying political content assessment on social media. When evaluating content, participants weigh up diverse criteria, including personal goals, contextual fit, and perceived contributor intentions; always influenced by their personal circumstances and values.*

Keywords: social media ▪ young people ▪ Norway ▪ political communication ▪ worthwhileness ▪ non-news ▪ political information ▪ quality assessment

## 1. INTRODUCTION

In today's digital age, social media platforms have become integral aspects of citizens' information environments, especially for younger citizens (Newman, Fletcher, Eddy, Robertson, & Nielsen, 2023). Within social media newsfeeds, users may encounter a wide range of political messages produced and circulated by diverse sources within their online networks. Users are constantly tasked with deciding which among the multitude of available messages are worthy of their finite time and attention. Decisions users make regarding what content to consume, engage with, and endorse influence their own future content consumption which can, over time, influence their political identity (Slater, 2007). Users' engagement patterns also influence the

visibility of content for others within the networked ecosystem of social media, ultimately shaping the overall discourse.

Recent research indicates that young adults evaluate political information on social media on a case-to-case basis, drawing on flexible, "do-it-yourself" heuristics (Cotter & Thorson, 2022). Users approach social media with different values, interests, motivations, and intended gratifications (Whiting & Williams, 2013), which influence their decisions of what to watch, "like", or otherwise engage with. As information on social media travels via social networks, users' evaluation strategies are intertwined with social relationships (Cotter & Thorson, 2022), social norms (Gibbs, Meese, Arnold, Nansen, & Carter, 2015; Pangrazio, 2019), citizenship ideals (Gagrčin, Porten-Cheé, Leißner, Emmer, & Jørring, 2022), and personal identity (Slater, 2007).

Cotter and Thorson (2022, p. 642) contend that "existing theory is not yet well developed to account for content evaluations and effects resulting from the novel complexities of navigating [social media]"; they advocate "the need to pay attention to how young adults process non-news informational content in the complex contexts of social media platforms". This article contributes to addressing this gap.

Based on qualitative, mini-focus groups conducted among young adults in Norway, this study investigates the processes through which users negotiate and assess political contributions on social media, drawing inspiration from the concept of *perceived worthwhileness* (Schrøder & Steeg Larsen, 2010; Schrøder, 2017). Developed within the context of news-use studies, perceived worthwhileness connotes individuals' subjective assessment of whether a particular medium is worth the time and effort needed to process the information offered. When assessing worthwhileness, individuals undertake conscious and unconscious worthwhileness "calculations", shaped by considerations of diverse normative and practical factors, moderated by their unique lifeworld-derived priorities and inclinations (Schrøder, 2017, p. 104). Collectively, in what Schrøder (2017) labels *audience logics*, individuals' assessments of worthwhileness exert power over the media landscape as media producers cater to the preferences and reception patterns of audiences. This article highlights how users calculate the worthwhileness of diverse news and "non-news" political messages on social media, thereby advancing knowledge of audience logics in online contexts.

During the focus groups which inform this study, participants were encouraged to reflect on their perceptions of several pre-selected examples of user-generated or user-modified political content. The group setting and use of photo-elicitation-method (Leonard & McKnight, 2015) prompted participants to negotiate their shared, intersubjective, and diverging perspectives, providing insights into the underlying normative frameworks guiding their interpretations.

The findings highlight how users variably measure posts against multifaceted notions of worthwhileness, influenced by their own goals, subjectively perceived purposes of online political actions and discourse, the contextual fit of the contribution, and their interpretation of the contributing users' intention. Participants

weighed up these different concerns, utilizing information available within contributions to inform the specific frame they applied to the interaction. Based on these findings, I present a multifactor worthwhileness equation, outlining criteria users rely on when evaluating contributions. The primary contribution of this study is to illuminate the nuanced processes involved in assessing worthwhileness of political contributions on social media, thereby shedding light on the mechanisms underpinning audience logics on these platforms.

## 2. PERCEIVED WORTHWHILENESS

The concept of *perceived worthwhileness* (Schrøder & Steeg Larsen, 2010; Schrøder, 2017) offers a way of thinking about the process by which people evaluate whether a particular news medium is worth their while. Perceived worthwhileness incorporates insights from uses and gratifications studies, a theoretical perspective which focuses on the ways in which individuals actively choose media products to meet their needs and desires (Katz, Blumler, & Gurevitch, 1973). Perceived worthwhileness also moves beyond the rational focus of uses and gratifications perspective to consider the "socially produced, routinized meaning processes and discursive practices through which individuals makes sense of their everyday lives, as inscribed into larger social practices and structures, through interaction with others in the mediatized society" (Schrøder & Steeg Larsen, 2010, p. 528).

According to Schrøder and Steeg Larsen (2010, p. 527) an individual's assessment of worthwhileness "depends on a series of interrelated factors that enter into a personal 'calculation' or routine" in conscious and unconscious ways. The result of this calculation determines whether the individual will consume the medium, and how concerted their attention will be while doing so.

Schrøder (2017) proposes that worthwhileness consists of seven dimensions, which consumers subjectively construe and weigh up against one another. The dimensions Schrøder (2016) identifies for perceived worthwhileness of news media include public connection, time spent, situational fit, price, normative pressures, participatory potential, and technological appeal. *Public connection* (Couldry, Livingstone, & Markham, 2007), here, has to do with citizenship norm of staying oriented towards and updated about issues deemed to be of societal importance. According to Schrøder (2017), the degree to which a particular medium affords public connection plays a significant role in overall worthwhileness assessments. However, "if people cannot fit a medium into their time schedule, it has no chance of being consumed, no matter whether it potentially fulfils their need for public connection" (Schrøder & Steeg Larsen, 2010, p. 527). Thus, individuals may choose one medium over another based on the amount of time they perceive as necessary to take in the information, which is considered in relation to the shifting spatio-temporal contexts they find themselves in throughout their everyday routines. Individuals may also be influenced by peer normative pressures to do with which news media are perceived

as appropriate or inappropriate. Schrøder also highlights the importance of price and technological appeal, including the participatory potential, of news media, for users' worthwhileness assessments. The specific weighting individuals attribute to each factor depends on individuals' shifting personal priorities and inclinations, which, in turn, depend on context-specific circumstances.

The concept of perceived worthwhileness was developed in the context of "traditional" news-use, rather than social media. However, given that social media are increasingly important sources of political information, particularly for young adults, it is crucial to understand how political information is evaluated in these settings also. The notion of perceived worthwhileness provides a useful concept for advancing understanding of the situated calculations users engage in when encountering political information on social media; particularly since it draws attention to overlapping and often contradictory practical and normative factors which shape citizens' media consumption experiences. However, users' experiences with political information on social media differ from more traditional news use in important ways, which influences the factors users may consider when evaluating worthwhileness.

## 3. ASSESSING QUALITY ON SOCIAL MEDIA: IT'S COMPLICATED

In their US-based qualitative study, Cotter and Thorson (2022, p. 643) found that young adults "did not engage in content evaluation on social media through the conventions of institutionalized news consumption". Rather, they relied on their own "personal epistemologies" (Schwarzenegger, 2020), assessing the worth of political content on a constant-comparative case-by-case basis. These ad-hoc evaluations were intertwined with social relationships and personal identities. Users' drew on heuristic cues, for example the number of likes a post received, as indicators of quality (Borah & Xiao, 2018).

Social media are characterized by overlapping communication flows and purposes. The uses and gratifications perspective tells us that individuals use social media platforms for varied reasons including (but not limited to) social interaction, expression, entertainment, relaxation, and information seeking (Whiting & Williams, 2013). For many, political information forms a small part of the content in their personalized newsfeeds (Boczkowski, Mitchelstein, & Matassi, 2018). This content makes its way into users' feeds via diverse sources, including authoritative journalists and news producers but also friends, colleagues, politicians, influencers, organizations, activists, celebrities, and so on. It encompasses not only news, but various genre-blending non-news formats covering varied topics, tone, and styles. Rather than the one-way flow typical of traditional news media, social media provides opportunities for users to "join the conversation" via posts or comments. Consequently, political communication on social media unfolds within complex social contexts where facts, humour, opinion, entertainment, and sociality intertwine and overlap (Cotter & Thorson,

2022). Political content may be seen not only through a journalistic lens, but also through varied social frames of interpretation.

Like all social contexts, online spaces are characterized by social norms which guide users' behaviours and interpretations of others' actions (Pangrazio, 2019). Through socialization, social actors absorb certain unspoken rules about what to do and say in social situations (Goffman, 1959). Given the fact that "offline contexts permeate online activities" (Baym & boyd, 2012, p. 327), fundamental "rules" everyday social talk also shape online interactions. One widely accepted rule of talk is Grice's (1989, p. 26) *cooperative principle*, which presumes that communicative exchanges are, generally, "cooperative efforts; and each participant recognizes in them, to some extent, a common purpose or set of purposes, as at least a mutually accepted direction". The principle expects socialized individuals to "make conversational contributions such as is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which you are engaged" (1989, p. 26). In daily life, hearers judge appropriateness and value of conversational contributions based on whether the speaker appears to have satisfied the conditions of the cooperative principle, or, at least, to have intended to (Grice, 1969; Hansen & Terkourafi, 2023).

Relatedly, in everyday communication, people evaluate others according to how authentic, or true to themselves, they appear to act. According to Potter (2011, p. 4) the "demand for the honest, the natural, the real—that is, the authentic—has become one of the most powerful movements in contemporary life". Cultivating an authentic image has been identified as a key strategy for social media actors seeking visibility, including influencers (Bishop, 2023; Hearn, 2008) and politicians (Enli, 2015; Enli & Rosenberg, 2018).

Social media platforms are also characterized by *platform vernaculars* (Gibbs et al., 2015, p. 3), that is "shared (but not static) conventions and grammars of communication, which emerge from the ongoing interactions between platforms and users". Through habitual platform usage, users come to expect contributors to adhere to certain formats, tones, and topics, as deemed appropriate by the norms of the platform. Since users' newsfeeds are highly personalized around their own interests, connections, and usage patterns (Thorson & Wells, 2016), their expectations are likely shaped by similarly individualized expectations (Slater, 2007).

Scholars have also identified norms which specifically guide political talk on social media, influenced by notions of how "good citizens" ought to behave in different contexts (Mitchelstein, Boczkowski, & Giuliano, 2021). Gagrčin et al. (2022) argue that citizens value access social media provides to political information, including input from other citizens, but that many also experience information overload and fatigue. They highlight the emergence of *discursive citizenship norms* whereby citizens appreciate *considered contributions* which provide new information and perspectives but are critical of unhelpful *discourse pollution* such as misleading, repetitive, or insufficiently supported contributions. These norms highlight how, in the context of social media, worthwhileness may be construed not only in terms of the potential benefit

a particular media message may provide to the individual recipient, but also to the collective community.

To emphasize the socially situated nature of political information flows on social media, and following Gagrčin et al. (2022), throughout this article the term *political contribution* will be employed as a comprehensive descriptor, encompassing all content regarding politics or societal issues shared by users on social media platforms. The term "contribution" is preferred over more established terms like "content" or "post" as it draws attention to the actor (contributor) and act (of contributing) rather than focusing on the output in isolation.

The complex sociality which characterizes social media influences the way users interpret political information they encounter. Users may consider whether content delivers on diverse desired gratifications sought in a context, adheres to social norms derived from personal relationships and communicative contexts, and supports a healthy communal discourse. And all of these factors are affected by changing personal circumstances such as users' energy levels, physical context, and mood. These theoretical considerations will guide the exploration in the subsequent empirical findings section.

## 4. METHODOLOGY

This study is guided by the research question: how do users construct, negotiate, and assess worthwhileness of political contributions on social media? A qualitative mini-focus group (Krueger & Casey, 2014) design was chosen to serve this aim, since the group setting provided participants opportunity to negotiate, challenge, and refine one another's perspectives, promoting rich, intersubjective data (Fern, 2001). As a qualitative study, the purpose is to shed light on complex, situated processes, rather than generate statistically generalizable insights.

### 4.1. Participants

This study was conducted in Norway, a multiparty, liberal democracy with high levels of trust and widespread news readership (Newman et al., 2023; Skogerbø & Karlsen, 2021). Norway is characterized by widespread social media use, with over 97% of young adults regularly using one or more social media platform (SSB, 2020).The sample for this study consisted of 20 young adults, aged between 18 and 25. Members of this age range can be considered "social natives" (Newman et al., 2023) as they have grown up surrounded by the participatory web and experienced key socialization years traversing on- and offline contexts.

Recruitment methods included disseminating information via gatekeepers such as teachers and employers and displaying flyers within key establishments. The final sample included 11 women and 9 men, originating from varied regions of Norway, and representing a range of political interest levels, and ages (within the target

range). The sample shared some common sociodemographic traits; out of the 20 participants, 14 were currently in higher education, and only three had a minority ethnic background (see Appendix A for a demographic overview).

### 4.2. Data Generation

We conducted seven mini-focus groups (Krueger & Casey, 2014) between November 2021 and March 2022. Each focus group lasted between 100 and 130 minutes, including a ten-minute break. Each group consisted of 2-4 rather than the typical 6-8 participants to promote balanced participation and reduce difficulties associated with talking about politics in a public setting. To encourage participants to communicate in their typical mode of expression, the focus groups were held in Norwegian and moderated by a Norwegian research assistant who fell within the target population. I was also present, observing and asking clarifying questions.

During the focus groups, participants discussed their own experiences using social media, including and especially for politically relevant purposes (Discussion Guide included as Appendix B). Participants were advised to talk about any social media they used, but to specify which platform they were referring to in particular instances. Participants mentioned the following social media platforms, listed roughly in the order of their prevalence in discussions: Snapchat, Instagram, TikTok, Reddit, Facebook, YouTube, Discord, Messenger, Twitter, and WhatsApp. Because "the political" can mean different things to different people (Podschuweit & Jakobs, 2017), participants were prompted to discuss their own notions of the term and thereafter encouraged to keep a broad conceptualization in mind.

Each group was shown a selection of political contributions taken from various social media platforms (for an overview of examples, see Appendix C). These included various user-generated and user-moderated content including humorous memes, opinion expression, online activism, comment threads, and news stories accompanied by user commentary. The examples came from different types of users including politicians, influencers, and other celebrities, as well as anonymized private users. The examples were selected in collaboration with a young adult "advisory group" (Leonard & McKnight, 2015) to maximize relevance for the participants. The participants were encouraged to think about and reflect on their perceptions of the posts and how they might react if they encountered them online. Using the same examples across groups allowed for direct comparison, providing meaningful insights into the shared and individualized aspects of interpretive strategies.

### 4.3. Analysis Procedure

The conversations were recorded, fully transcribed in Norwegian, anonymized, and thereafter translated into English and repeatedly checked for accuracy. This involved repeated close-reading of the entire dataset, accompanied by extensive

memo-writing. This was followed by structural coding (Saldaña, 2021), where large passages of transcripts and research memos were collated to create smaller datasets for separate analyses. Next, these reduced datasets were subjected to more detailed, line-by-line, inductive coding guided by research questions.

The nested coding approach (Saldaña, 2021, pp. 121-124) was used to simultaneously characterize individual interactive instances ("child-codes") and tentatively group these into broader categories ("parent-codes"). Child-codes were primarily in the form of in-vivo codes, but also included process- and versus codes, while parent-codes were more conceptual and descriptive. Each child code was also labelled with the group number, participant number(s), and when applicable, political contribution example number. This resulted in 362 child codes and 98 parent codes. An example of a child-code and parent-code include: "G5, P12, EX10: putting a flag on your profile picture doesn't help'" under "perceived impact". During the coding process, perceived worthwhileness served as a sensitizing concept, giving direction to the analysis without steering the coding process into predefined categories (Berthelsen & Hameleers, 2021).

The next stage of analysis involved further synthesizing of code groups and categories, which led to the constructs of worthwhileness expectations outlined in the following sections of this article (see Appendix D for in-vivo quotes supporting these categories). Once the assessment criteria had been developed, I returned to the interview dataset, assessing the appropriateness of the proposed criteria, and making necessary adjustments.

## 5. CONSTRUCTING WORTHWHILENESS: WHAT SHOULD POLITICAL CONTRIBUTIONS LOOK LIKE?

Before exploring the situated processes of assessing worthwhileness, this section will outline the expectations study participants intimated regarding what constitutes ideal, "worthwhile" political contributions.

### 5.1. Individual Goals: Public Connection and Entertainment

Subjective conceptions of worthwhileness depend largely on the desired gratifications individuals anticipate from their social media experiences. Participants exhibited diverse yet overlapping motivations for using social media platforms. Most saw social media primarily as sources for entertainment and tools for social interaction. But they also used the platforms variably to coordinate their daily lives, explore their interests, and foster public connection.

Participants emphasized that accessing political information on social media provided means for discerning important issues and staying informed about current events. A few participants described social media as their main source of news.

Markus[1], for example, admitted, "I don't care so much about small political cases, so I don't read news, if something big happens it will come up on social media!". For most participants, social media supplemented their regular news habit. They expressed appreciation for the access social media provided to local and international news, but also non-news political content, such as other citizens' opinion expression, discussions, and viral political memes[2]. Participants also highlighted how viewing diverse political content was useful for developing and clarifying their political opinions. Notably, comment threads were identified as particularly useful sources for grounding and shaping their opinions.

These goals, which participants held to greater and lesser extents, fed into their ideas of worthwhileness. Participants considered the entertainment value of contributions, as well as how well they enhanced their sense of being informed and facilitated opinion development. But, importantly, participants' differential values, interests, and news habits shaped their impressions of what was relevant and informative *enough* to be useful, without interfering with their often more salient goals of enjoying themselves.

### 5.2. Democratic Ideals: Discursive Value and Impact

Participants conveyed normative notions about the ideal democratic purpose of social media, which influenced their understandings of worthwhileness. Participants seemed to value inclusive debate, they valued access social media provided to diverse opinions and frequently cited freedom of expression as an important right. There was consensus that it is primarily up to audience members to critically assess the veracity and value of others' contributions. As Anette put it "I think, in principle, it's perfectly fine to post what you think. But that the rest of us then who see it ought to take a separate initiative to find out about it for ourselves, like not just take whatever someone posts as true or the whole story".

While participants thought all citizens ought to be *allowed* to contribute, they did not see all contributions as equal. Participants appreciated *considered contributions* (Gagrčin et al., 2022), with "serious arguments backed up with facts" (Tobias, 19), but were critical of those that "did not contribute anything at all to the discourse" (Espen, 18). When describing her experiences reading through comment threads on political posts, Amalie mentioned, "you also learn the form of how people write in such a way that you sort of weed out what is unreasonable…and can know whether to believe what you see or not". Participants, to varying degrees, also viewed social media as a space where citizens could actively influence political processes. They frequently questioned the extent to which posts "did something" for society or for the

1 This and all other participant names are pseudonyms.

2 A meme here refers to a piece of content, such as an image, video, phrase, that spreads rapidly and widely across the internet.

discourse, particularly for activism-style posts that ostensibly aimed to do so. Participants also reacted negatively to political contributions which employed divisive or hateful language or tone. Several, for example, indicated that they did not appreciate seeing "bad words" or "personal attacks" online, in part because these were seen to preclude any meaningful exchange of information or viewpoints.

### 5.3. Contextual Fit

Participants' motivations and expectations varied across social media platforms, as each platform had its own set of norms, expectations, and motivations that shaped their evaluations of political contributions (Gibbs et al., 2015; Pangrazio, 2019). Several participants said they would immediately "scroll past" posts which did not fit with their expectations and goals for using specific platforms. These norms also influenced their more concerted worthwhileness assessments. Participants generally appreciated amusing content, including political "infotainment", regardless of the platform. However, more serious or cognitively demanding political content was considered more suited to certain platforms than others. TikTok and Snapchat, for example, were frequently deemed unsuitable for political topics. Several participants said they would immediately 'skip over' political posts on these platforms. While Reddit was frequently described as highly suited for political themes, among those who habitually used the platform, due in part to the platform affordances which allowed for lengthy discussions on specialized political issues. Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook were also seen as relatively appropriate platforms for political expression and discussion. Even on these platforms, participants expressed criticism of political posts, especially those from 'ordinary' users in their networks—friends, family members, or acquaintances—whom they did not consider to possess high levels of political interest or authority. Several also indicated preference for political discussions to be limited to closed group settings.

Assessments were also influenced by fluctuating circumstances including users' shifting moods, energy levels, as well as the different physical contexts from which they accessed social media, which influenced their willingness and ability to process political information. Even highly politically interested participants admitted to not always feeling motivated to engage with complex political information.

### 5.4. Contributor Intention

Participants also took into consideration the perceived intention of the contributing user, whether they appeared to be motivated by cooperative aims (Grice, 1989; Hansen & Terkourafi, 2023). Genuine attempts to inform or inspire others were valued over those that appeared primarily motivated by self-interest. For instance, Anders explained, "for me, it matters a little if I know the person or not, if I have

a relationship with them it makes it easier for me to understand if it's just to get likes or if you actually mean it".

Participants drew upon various aspects when speculating about users' intention, including their personal relationship with the contributor, knowledge of their previous political experiences, as well as aspects inherent in the contribution. For example, when discussing the #BlackOutTuesday campaign connected to the Black Lives Matter movement (See Example 7 in Appendix C), Johan expressed "I have friends who are completely apolitical (...) I don't think they have read a newspaper in their entire lives, yet they also post such things, I think it seems very artificial". Similarly, Benjamin, when asked why he was more welcoming of a post from a politician containing a message he did not agree with (Example 7), compared to David Beckham's post for the #BlackOutTuesday campaign (Example 6), which ostensibly promoted a message he did support, explained:

> I think that it [has to do with] whether the commitment seems real in a way. It's a bit like...I said David Beckham's post seemed false, right? But I think that here at least Sylvi Listhaug has published something she believes, she really stands for this everyday. While, and I don't think David Beckham is racist if you ask him but I don't think he has any active involvement, at least not my understanding of it, that he has a meaningful anti-racist commitment. So while I disagree with the conclusion of Listhaug here and I disagree with the reasoning, or even that it is logical reasoning! But, yeah, she stands for what she believes!

Participants' assessments were guided by notions of authentic interactions; they habitually scrutinized whether the contributor was acting in a way which aligned with their pre-existing image of the user (Lee, 2020).

Due to the complex sociality of political communication flows within online contexts, the concept of worthwhileness becomes highly intricate. Interpretations were influenced by a range of assessment criteria, with users assigning different weights based on their individual values, preferences, and circumstances. The following section will showcase the way these calculation processes proceeded in specific instances. But first, briefly, a note on participants' approaches to navigating information flows.

## 6. CALCULATING WORTHWHILENESS: SITUATED NEGOTIATIONS

Participants generally appeared to understand that their choices of what to watch, "like", or otherwise engage with influenced what they would see in future, and this awareness shaped their perceptions of worthwhileness and resultant engagement patterns. Like participants in Cotter and Thorson's (2022) study, participants relied on flexible heuristics. They moved through different aspects of posts, using available

information to support their verdicts on a case-by-case basis. The participants often arrived at divergent conclusions regarding the worthwhileness of the examples, yet their discussions consistently adhered to similar patterns. They shared common concerns and emphasized comparable aspects of contributions as meaningful or significant, frequently employing identical words and phrases to articulate their interpretations. This section includes extracts from the discussions, chosen because they illustrate varied aspects which participants from across the focus groups drew upon when assessing worthwhileness.

### 6.1. Example 1: "I Donated!"

One of the example contributions shown to participants was an Instagram post which displayed the message: "Thank you for donating to UN Refugee Agency. Your donation will help displaced Afghans in need". Participants were encouraged to imagine the contribution came from various users within their network and to describe their impressions. In the sample below, we see two participants weighing up the perceived impact and the perceived intention behind this contribution:

> IDA: I think it's good!
>
> DANIEL: Yeah and no. Like, ok, you do a good thing, you donate. But posting here, it seems a bit like to bring in sympathy, like, "look, I am a good person", you know.
>
> IDA: I think as long as it's *done* then it's perfectly fine! *She has done it*, maybe she doesn't need to get creds for having done it, but maybe it will inspire others to donate.
>
> DANIEL: It'd be better if it had (...) encouraged people to do it, included a link maybe for other people to do it, then it would be a completely different matter!
>
> IDA: yeah, true. I still think it's fine though!

When evaluating this and several other examples, most participants, like Daniel, were primarily concerned with the user's intention for sharing. Participants from across the focus groups frequently accused contributors of attempting to gain attention or appear virtuous. When making these assessments, they drew upon various aspects, including the communication style, issue, depth of information, and their former impressions of the contributing user.

Regarding the example discussed above, many participants, like Daniel, indicated that they would perceive the contribution more favourably if it included a call to

action for others to donate. Several participants also suggested that their interpretations would depend on who the post came from. For example, Tobias expressed "it really depends on who posts. Like if you know a little how this person thinks, how they act on social media. Like if this had been AOC it would have been better than some random influencer!". Others similarly indicated they would be more accepting of the post if the contributor had a personal connection to the cause. As Kristin put it, "I'd have judged it based on what was written under, had they written 'my family is from Afghanistan, today I donated, please donate' then I would have thought this is a case you really care about. But with nothing written it seems like bragging, even if it is good that you have donated". These participants imply that the same contribution, with the same content may be interpreted differently depending on who has contributed it, and the impression the receiving user has of that individual.

### 6.2. Example 2: "You Get a Cupcake!"

The next example was a TikTok video in which an influencer, known to all but 2 participants, expressed preferences for certain political parties and disdain for others using a viral meme format. Participants across the focus groups came to different conclusions about the value and appropriateness of this contribution. Several participants reacted positively to the humorous approach, commenting on how the post's light-hearted tone aligned with the tone of content they typically encountered on the platform. Some also highlighted how the accessible presentation style made it engaging for the younger, TikTok audience, which might stimulate political interest among first-time voters. Others, were concerned about the role influencers may play in shaping their followers' opinions:

> ESPEN: I think it appears a bit unpolished and it shows that the person may not have uhh sat down so much with politics so much. And I think that's a bit irresponsible, considering…(trails off).
>
> MODERATOR: Do you mean because she is an influencer?
>
> ESPEN: Well, I think (pause) before I talked about that you have a right to express yourself and use it in a way you think sensible, right? I really do mean that! But it's like, you have to actually think before you say something, and really mean what you say, especially if you have a large follower base.
>
> BENJAMIN: It was a bit simple, like "I don't like you" without any reasons. But I don't know if I think that it's such a bad thing. It's a bit fun, I guess. But it's difficult to separate my opinions from it because I also like the same parties. But I think, at least, it is completely unproblematic that the influencers

> share their political views, it's her right, you know? But I do think it would be better to come with more uhh content.
>
> JOHAN: Substance?
>
> BENJAMIN: yes, substance, exactly.

Here, the participants allude to the democratic ideal of inclusivity, acknowledging that influencers, too, have the right to share their political views. Yet, Espen's judgement of the influencer as "irresponsible" points to the ways perceived power dynamics can shape expectations. The participants also highlight their preference for more informative and thoughtfully considered contributions. Other participants had similar responses to this example, with Hilde describing it as "brain-dead", and Amalie expressing "she doesn't even present any arguments!". This reflects a balancing act between two democratic ideals, on the one hand allowing diverse expressions of political opinions and, on the other, the desire for informed, rational political discourse. Benjamin's recognition of personal biases underscores the impact of individual values on assessments of political contributions, a phenomenon which is likely more pronounced in "real-life" evaluations due to the highly personalized nature of social media information flows.

### 6.3. Example 3: "Sign the Petition!"

In the sample below, participants discuss a 1-minute video posted to an Instagram story featuring an Indigenous Sami activist promoting a petition campaign against water pollution in Northern Norway:

> ANDERS: This one is good! The way they present information here is much better for one to get to know what the thing is. So it is easier to form an opinion about the case. Because you get some facts here and then you might go in and see more about the campaign.... If it was a post, I'd throw it a "like", even if it's not a core issue for me.
>
> MODERATOR: [looking towards others] What do you think?
>
> SUSANNA: Honestly, I probably would have skipped it if it had come up. I know that it's a serious and important message, but I, there's too much to process for me, especially with it being in English.
>
> KRISTIN: Well, I also think it's an informative and good video. I probably would've liked it. But it helps that in the video that she stands in her Sami

> *kofta*[3] and talks about reindeer husbandry and the environment, which are things I care a lot about.

Here we see how depth of information can be seen in both positive or negative terms, depending on the user's subjective motivation and interests. Like Anders and Kristin, many participants highlighted the depth and clarity of information as a positive aspect of this particular contribution. But more information also results in greater attention and processing energy, which less interested individuals may not see as worth their while. Susanna's acknowledgement that it is an "important message" suggests that she sees it as a worthy contribution to the discourse, but this does not necessarily mean it is worthy of her own personal time and attention.

Participants perceived the relevance of this contribution differently based on their varying interests and information needs. Some less interested individuals considered the issue not significant enough to warrant attention, while others viewed its relative obscurity positively. Ida, for example, expressed "I think posts like these are important because there is a lot going on that doesn't come on our radar because VG [a popular tabloid newspaper] only takes the biggest issues".

There was a similar difference of opinion between less- and more informed participants when it came to contributions focusing on high-profile issues. For those who relied on social media as a primary source of public connection, high quantities of content circulating about the same issues alerted them to the pronounced societal importance of these issues. Those who regularly read the news, however, often saw such posts as redundant and unhelpful. Ruben, for example expressed, "Most people have heard about the war in Ukraine. There's no need to throw a flag on your picture, it's just to get recognition, without actually saying anything new". Interpretations of worthwhileness, while centred on somewhat shared "ideal" constructs are highly subjective and based on individual information needs and deficits.

## 7. PERCEIVED WORTHWHILENESS EQUATION

Inspired by Schrøder and Steeg Larsen (2010) and based on the trends identified through analysis, outlined above, this section presents a perceived worthwhileness equation which illustrates the multiple factors that play into users' decisions of which political content to watch, listen to, and otherwise engage with on social media. The equation consists of worthwhileness expectations and aspects (See Appendix D for in-vivo quotes representing each element of the equation). Not all factors need be present for a contribution to be considered worthwhile. The weighting individuals attribute to these different factors differs according to specific and inconstant characteristics and circumstances of the user, including their personal values, beliefs, motivations, interests, current physical context, and mood.

3 A kofte is a traditional dress of the Sami, the Indigenous people of Scandinavia and Northern Russia

***Worthwhileness Expectations***:

1. **Public Connection**: whether the content is seen as building the recipient's awareness and understanding of matters of public concern. This depends on the content being perceived as credible, relevant, and informative (enough).
2. **Entertainment Value**: whether the contribution is experienced as amusing or entertaining.
3. **Discursive Value**: whether the contribution is seen as advancing the overall inclusivity and quality of the collective discourse.
4. **Impact or Utility**: whether the contribution stands to advance political outcomes within society or provides practical value to the recipient.
5. **Contributor Intention**: whether the content appears to be motivated by a genuine cooperative intent to inform, entertain, or advance political change.
6. **Contextual Fit**: whether the contribution aligns with users' expectations for content in specific platforms.

Citizens evaluate whether contributions meet these expectations by considering the following ***Worthwhileness Aspects***:

A. **Time and Effort**: whether the expected gratification is worth the time and effort required for processing the information.
B. **Depth and Soundness of Information**: whether the information provided is detailed and substantiated enough for their specific information goals.
C. **Relevance**: the relevance of the topic and message for their own interests and information needs, and aligns to their values, beliefs, and perspectives.
D. **Perceived Effect**: whether the contribution appeared to advance a political outcome, or to meaningfully add to recipients' public connection.
E. **Source Characteristics**: users draw on available information about the source, including personal relationships, to assess the contributor's intention, appropriateness, credibility, authority, and the impact of the contribution.
F. **Communication Style and Tone**: users evaluate the style and tone of a contribution to assess its contextual fit and the intended outcome.
G. **Platform Setting**: users evaluate whether the message is appropriate for the specific platform setting.

The purpose of presenting this multifactor worthwhileness equation is to highlight the complexity that underlies the often-overlooked experience of being an audience member on social media. Including multiple elements in the worthwhileness equation provides a framework for understanding how individuals evaluate the value of political contributions on social media. However, it is important to highlight that the methods employed for this study did not allow for consideration of the role social endorsement (Borah & Xiao, 2018) may play in individuals' assessments of worthwhileness.

## 8. DISCUSSION

This study explored how individuals construct, negotiate, and assess worthwhileness of political contributions on social media. Conducting qualitative mini-focus groups and employing multi-stage analytical coding provided valuable insights into young citizens' perspectives and behaviours in this context. The findings suggest that negotiating the worthwhileness of political contributions can be a complex process influenced by a variety of factors, thereby supporting other recent research (Cotter & Thorson, 2022). Interpretations of worthwhileness are highly contingent on user's individual characteristics, including their interests, preferences, and motivations, but are also influenced by tacit rules for political behaviour online (Gagrčin et al., 2022; Gibbs et al., 2015; Mitchelstein, et al., 2021; Pangrazio, 2019) which are heavily influenced by norms of "offline" social life (Baym & boyd, 2012; Grice, 1989). Assessments of worthwhileness are not solely based on the content of the contribution but also the perceived intentions, motivations, and authority of the individuals behind them (Hansen & Terkourafi, 2023; Lee, 2020).

Like Schrøder and Steeg Larsen's (2010) model, the worthwhileness equation presented here takes insights from uses and gratifications theory (Katz et al., 1973; Whiting & Williams, 2013), highlighting how individuals' evaluations depend on their subjective aims for using a particular platform. Among participants, two prevalent objectives were to enhance enjoyment and foster public connection, and these varied depending on many aspects including the platform and the individual participant. For a particular contribution to facilitate public connection, it should be interpreted as credible, relevant, and informative. However, citizens have differential standards for what constitutes an appropriate "basic" level of public connection (Couldry et al., 2007) and relatedly, individuals' assessments of what is relevant and informative enough (but not too demanding) depend on their different values, experiences, and priorities.

The concept of perceived worthwhileness moves beyond uses and gratifications studies by recognizing the importance of practical and contextual considerations, such as the time and effort required for processing as well as the influence of social norms (Schrøder, 2017; Schrøder & Steeg Larsen, 2010). In the context of social media, worthwhileness assessments are complicated by the socially situated nature of the communication. Social interactions are guided by social norms, which provide individuals with parameters for action, enabling them to navigate different situations. Online social interactions are enabled and constricted by the distinct architecture and usage norms of platforms (Gibbs et al., 2015; Pangrazio, 2019), but are also entangled in more fundamental rules of talk (Grice, 1989).

Specifically, interpretations of political contributions may be shaped by notions of authenticity (Lee, 2020) and the cooperative principle (Grice, 1989). But judging whether a user is motivated by cooperative intentions is far from straightforward. On social media, "conversations" overlap and intersect, and recipients may apply

different interpretive frames to contributions based on their relationship to the contributor and the context in which they arise. Moreover, the perceived purposes of social media are highly subjective, and variable (Whiting & Williams, 2013). Thus, individuals' assessments of others' intentions may be influenced by many factors, including aspects beyond the contributing user's control.

Analysing these processes highlights how seemingly passive spectating on social media can encompass complex processing of information and identity work. This analysis also deepens our understanding of audience logics (Schrøder, 2017) on social media. Essentially, the level of visibility a contribution gains online comes down largely to how many users who encounter it interpret it as worthwhile. Thus, understanding how individual users calculate worthwhileness provides insights into the ways collective audience agency influences what political messages spread within online discourses.

Despite offering novel insights, this study has certain limitations. Given that assessments of worthwhileness are largely unconscious, and therefore inaccessible, key tacit influences may not have come to light, despite attempts at interpretive depth. The pre-selection of materials may have introduced further biases and limited the diversity of perspectives considered. The study also took place in a specific context, among young adutls in Norway. Future research should aim to address these limitations by exploring the phenomenon of assessing worthwhileness of political contributions on social media among other populations using methods that provide greater ecological validity and statistical generalizability.

In conclusion, this study advances understandings of audience logics within the context of social media by exploring the intricate interplay between individual users' personal preferences, interests, objectives, and circumstances, as well as the shared norms guiding their content choices. It highlights how audiences actively negotiate, rather than passively consume, online political messages. The findings contribute to existing literature on social media and political engagement by providing insights into the interpretive experiences through which individuals construct, negotiate, and assess the worthwhileness of political contributions. Additionally, the study illuminates the impact of the complex sociality of online contexts on how users interpret and engage with political messages.

**Elizabeth Solverson** researches audience experiences within social media contexts in relation to understandings of citizenship, political participation, and the public sphere.
E-mail: elizabeth.j.solverson@nord.no

### Acknowledgements
I extend my gratitude to Sophie Skrede for her expert moderation and transcription of focus-group discussions. Thanks also to the students from Nord University and NTNU for their valuable feedback on visual materials. Thank you to the anonymous

reviewers for enhancing the quality of this work. I am also thankful to Astrid Marie Holand, Lisbeth Morlandstø, Melanie Magin, Claes de Vreese, Gina Neff, Chris Peters, Peter Aagaard, Jonathan Tritter, Tone Berg, and Thea Næs Rabe for their insightful feedback on previous versions of this article.

## REFERENCES

Baym, N. K., & boyd, d. (2012). Socially Mediated Publicness: An Introduction. *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media, 56*(3), 320-329. doi:10.1080/08838151.2012.705200

Berthelsen, R., & Hameleers, M. (2021). Meet today's young news users: An exploration of how young news users assess which news providers are worth their while in today's high-choice news landscape. *Digital journalism, 9*(5), 619-635.

Bishop, S. (2023). Influencer creep: How artists strategically navigate the platformisation of art worlds. *New media & society*, 14614448231206090. doi:https://doi.org/10.1177/14614448231206090

Boczkowski, P. J., Mitchelstein, E., & Matassi, M. (2018). "News comes across when I'm in a moment of leisure": Understanding the practices of incidental news consumption on social media. *New media & society, 20*(10), 3523-3539.

Borah, P., & Xiao, X. (2018). The Importance of 'Likes': The Interplay of Message Framing, Source, and Social Endorsement on Credibility Perceptions of Health Information on Facebook. *Journal of Health Communication, 23*(4), 399-411. doi:10.1080/10810730.2018.1455770

Cotter, K., & Thorson, K. (2022). Judging value in a time of information cacophony: Young adults, social media, and the messiness of do-it-yourself expertise. *The International Journal of Press/Politics, 27*(3), 629-647.

Couldry, N., Livingstone, S., & Markham, T. (2007). *Media consumption and public engagement: Beyond the presumption of attention*: Springer.

Enli, G. (2015). " Trust Me, I Am Authentic!": Authenticity Illusions in Social Media Politics. In *The Routledge companion to social media and politics* (pp. 121-136): Routledge.

Enli, G., & Rosenberg, L. T. (2018). Trust in the Age of Social Media: Populist Politicians Seem More Authentic. *Social Media + Society, 4*(1), 2056305118764430. doi:10.1177/2056305118764430

Fern, E. F. (2001). *Advanced focus group research*: SAGE.

Gagrčin, E., Porten-Cheé, P., Leißner, L., Emmer, M., & Jørring, L. (2022). What Makes a Good Citizen Online? The Emergence of Discursive Citizenship Norms in Social Media Environments. *Social Media+ Society, 8*(1), 20563051221084297.

Gibbs, M., Meese, J., Arnold, M., Nansen, B., & Carter, M. (2015). # Funeral and Instagram: Death, social media, and platform vernacular. *Information,*

*Communication & Society, 18*(3), 255-268. doi:https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2014.987152
Goffman, E. (1959). *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. New York: Bantam.
Goffman, E. (1974). *Frame analysis: An essay on the organization of experience*: Harvard University Press.
Grice, P. (1969). Utterer's meaning and intentions. *The philosophical review, 78*(2), 147-177.
Grice, P. (1989). *Studies in the Way of Words*: Harvard University Press.
Hansen, M.-B. M., & Terkourafi, M. (2023). We need to talk about Hearer's Meaning! *Journal of pragmatics*, 208, 99-114.
Hearn, A. (2008). Meat, Mask, Burden: Probing the contours of the brandedself. *Journal of consumer culture, 8*(2), 197-217.
Katz, E., Blumler, J. G., & Gurevitch, M. (1973). Uses and gratifications research. *The public opinion quarterly, 37*(4), 509-523.
Krueger, R. A., & Casey, M. A. (2014). *Focus groups: A practical guide for applied research*: SAGE.
Lee, E.-J. (2020). Authenticity model of (mass-oriented) computer-mediated communication: Conceptual explorations and testable propositions. *Journal of computer-mediated communication, 25*(1), 60-73.
Leonard, M., & McKnight, M. (2015). Look and tell: using photo-elicitation methods with teenagers. *Children's Geographies, 13*(6), 629-642. doi:10.1080/14733285.2014.887812
Mitchelstein, E., Boczkowski, P., & Giuliano, C. (2021). Platform matters: Political opinion expression on social media. *Weizenbaum Journal of the Digital Society, 1*(1), w1. 1.5-w1. 1.5.
Newman, N., Fletcher, R., Eddy, K., Robertson, C. T., & Nielsen, R. K. (2023). Digital News Report 2023.
Pangrazio, L. (2019). Technologically situated: the tacit rules of platform participation. *Journal of Youth Studies, 22*(10), 1308-1326.
Podschuweit, N., & Jakobs, I. (2017). "It's about politics, stupid!": Common understandings of interpersonal political communication. *Communications, 42*(4), 391-414.
Potter, A. (2011). *The authenticity hoax: How we get lost finding ourselves*: Emblem Editions.
Saldaña, J. (2021). *The coding manual for qualitative researchers*: sage.
Schrøder, K. C. (2017). Towards the "Audiencization" of Mediatization Research? Audience Dynamics as Co-Constitutive of Mediatization Processes. In O. Driessens, G. Bolin, A. Hepp, & S. Hjarvard (Eds.), *Dynamics Of Mediatization: Institutional Change and Everyday Transformations in a Digital Age* (pp. 85-115). Cham: Springer International Publishing.
Schrøder, K. C., & Steeg Larsen, B. (2010). The shifting cross-media news landscape: Challenges for news producers. *Journalism Studies, 11*(4), 524-534.

Schwarzenegger, C. (2020). Personal epistemologies of the media: Selective criticality, pragmatic trust, and competence–confidence in navigating media repertoires in the digital age. *New media & society, 22*(2), 361-377.
Skogerbø, E., & Karlsen, R. (2021). Media and politics in Norway.
Slater, M. D. (2007). Reinforcing spirals: The mutual influence of media selectivity and media effects and their impact on individual behavior and social identity. *Communication Theory, 17*(3), 281-303.
SSB. (2020). 11437: Use of social media (per cent), by age, contents and year. *ICT Usage in Households*. Retrieved from https://www.ssb.no/en/statbank/table/11437/tableViewLayout1/
Thorson, K., & Wells, C. (2016). Curated flows: A framework for mapping media exposure in the digital age. *Communication Theory, 26*(3), 309-328.
Whiting, A., & Williams, D. (2013). Why people use social media: a uses and gratifications approach. *Qualitative market research: an international journal, 16*(4), 362-369.

## APPENDIX A – DEMOGRAPHIC OVERVIEW

Gender: 11 female, 9 Male
Age: 7 aged 18-20, 7 21-23, 6 24-15
Education: 6 no university, 8 currently studying undergraduate, 6 currently studying masters
Self-reported political interest level: 7 low, 6 medium, 7 high

**Focus Group Participants**

| Group Number | Participant Number | Age | Gender | Hometown size and Region of Norway | Occupational status | Political Interest Level (self-report) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 1 | 22 | Female | Town, Mid | Undergraduate student, biotechnology | Medium |
| 1 | 2 | 24 | Male | City, East | Masters student, real estate management | Low |
| 2 | 3 | 22 | Female | City, Mid | Media graphics intern | Low |
| 2 | 4 | 21 | Female | Town, Mid | Administrative assistant | Low |
| 2 | 5 | 20 | Male | City, North | Chemical process apprentice | Medium |
| 3 | 6 | 19 | Male | Village, Mid | Call centre employee | High |
| 3 | 7 | 23 | Female | City, North | Masters student, media studies | High |
| 3 | 8 | 20 | Female | Village, East | Undergraduate student, political science | High |

| Group Number | Participant Number | Age | Gender | Hometown size and Region of Norway | Occupational status | Political Interest Level (self-report) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 4 | 9 | 24 | Male | Village, West | Masters student, political science | High |
| 4 | 10 | 18 | Male | City, East | Highschool student | High |
| 4 | 11 | 22 | Male | Village, South | Masters student, physics | High |
| 5 | 12 | 20 | Female | Town, Mid | Undergraduate student, game design | Medium |
| 5 | 13 | 20 | Male | Town, West | Undergraduate student, game design | Low |
| 6 | 14 | 25 | Female | Town, East | Bartender | Medium |
| 6 | 15 | 20 | Female | City, East | Undergraduate student, architecture | Low |
| 6 | 16 | 21 | Male | City, East | Undergraduate student, physics | Medium |
| 6 | 17 | 25 | Female | Village, West | Undergraduate student, geology | Low |
| 7 | 18 | 24 | Female | Town, North | Masters student, organizational studies | High |
| 7 | 19 | 24 | Female | Town, North | Undergraduate student, drama | Low |
| 7 | 20 | 23 | Male | City, West | Masters studies, European studies | Medium |

## APPENDIX B – DISCUSSION GUIDE

**Welcome/Introduction**
Moderator and Researcher introduce selves
Researcher briefly describes the project, data handling, anonymizing procedures
Procedure and ground rules for discussion: encouraged to openly discuss; no right or wrong answers, we are interested in your honest perspectives and experiences; encouraged to voice disagree, but to be respectful; not to mention others not present by name

| Area of interest | Questions asked (sometimes the conversation flowed in such a way that certain questions needed not be asked) |
|---|---|
| Warming Up | ▪ Tell us a bit about yourselves: How old are you, which city do you live in, what do you study/work with?<br>▪ Do any of you know one another from before today? (And if so, how?) |
| Social Media | ▪ Talk a little about your social media habits: What social media platforms do you use? How do you use them?<br>▪ Have you ever posted something online and regretted it?<br>▪ Do you think using social media has had an impact on who you are as a person? |

| | |
|---|---|
| Identity | ▪ Participants did a ranking task, where they ordered items in terms of how important they were for their own self-image. Items included 'political views', 'religious beliefs', 'gender', 'hobbies', 'talents and abilities', etc. |
| Experiences with Politics | ▪ What is your relationship to news? Do you take in news (absolutely fine if not)? (Encourage them to talk a bit about this)<br>▪ What do you think of when you hear the word "politics"? (after discussing their takes, encourage to keep broad notion of "the political" in mind for the interview)<br>▪ Would you say you are interested in politics? (What makes you say yes/no?)<br>▪ How has your relationship to politics changed over time?<br>▪ Do you ever "act political" / participate in politics?<br>▪ Please raise your hand if you consider yourself to be (each raise-hands round was followed by discussion): "on the left side", "on the right side", "a feminist", "conservative", "a socialist", "an activist", "woke"<br>▪ What does being a "good citizen" mean, to you? (and "bad" citizen?) |
| Social Media and Politics | ▪ Does social media play a role in your relationship to politics?<br>▪ How often would you say you see political content on social media? And what kind of political content, from what kind of users?<br>▪ How do you feel about people posting about politics on social media? Are there better and worse ways to do it?<br>▪ Do you show your political views on social media? If yes, how? If no, why not? |
| Photo-Elicitation Examples | ▪ Moderator introduces the PPT with the following, and prompts throughout: We will show the examples in the PPT and discuss them in different ways<br>▪ Have you seen something like this before?<br>▪ What is your impression?<br>▪ E.g. How would you interpret/respond if an influencer, politician, friend, acquaintance, etc. shares this;<br>▪ Could you "react" using any technological functions (like, save, etc.)? |
| Finishing Up | ▪ Do you have anything you feel like saying that we did not come across?<br>▪ Do you have any questions?<br>▪ Thank you so much for your time. Please feel free to contact me anytime if there is something you would like to know or add. |

## APPENDIX C – OVERVIEW OF POLITICAL CONTRIBUTION EXAMPLES SHOWN TO PARTICIPANTS

| Examples | Description of post | User | Platform |
|---|---|---|---|
| Example 1: Donation Instagram post | Post displaying the message: 'Thank you for donating to UN Refugee Agency. Your donation will help displaced Afghans in need' | User hidden | Instagram (post) |
| Example 2: Influencer Tik Tok Meme | Influencer shows preference for left-wing parties in 10-second video with a comedic viral audio-track ("You Get a Cupcake") | Norwegian reality TV star/ influencer | TikTok |

| Examples | Description of post | User | Platform |
|---|---|---|---|
| Example 3:<br>Petition Campaign Video | 30 second video post in which a Sami artist explains, in English, that mining companies are polluting fjords in northern Norway. Includes call to sign and share a petition. | User hidden | Instagram (story) |
| Example 4:<br>Vaccine-Skeptic Meme | Cartoon style meme depicting the year 2030 with a man receiving his 20th Covid-19 vaccine from a doctor who says 'Just one more, trust us, we're the government' | User hidden | Facebook (post) |
| Example 5:<br>Manipulated Advert Satire + comment thread | manipulated image of a campaign advertisement from a political party, the post is marked humour; plus the top 20 comments attached | users hidden | Reddit (post and comments) |
| Example 6:<br>#BlackOutTuesday | Black square posted to Instagram along with '#BlackOutTuesday', part of a popular campaign connected to the Black Lives Matter movement | David Beckham | Instagram (post) |
| Example 7:<br>Politician Facebook Post | Facebook post with link to news story about patient neglect in hospitals, contributor claims this is due to excessive funding for foreign aid and climate policy | leader of right-wing political party in Norway | Facebook (post + link) |
| Example 8:<br>Tweet against JK Rowling | Tweet accusing JK Rowling of hating queer people, calling for boycott of Rowling's books and related merchandise. | User hidden | Twitter (tweet) |
| Example 9:<br>"I voted" Profile Frame | Facebook profile picture with 'I voted MDG' (Green party) | User hidden | Facebook (profile picture) |
| Example 10:<br>Ukraine Profile Frame | Facebook profile picture with Ukraine flag frame<br>**Only shown to 2022 groups (3 of 7)** | User hidden | Facebook (profile picture) |

## APPENDIX D – WORTHWHILENESS EXPECTATIONS REPRESENTATIVE DATA

| Worthwhileness Expectation | Representative data |
|---|---|
| **1. Public Connection** | G5, P13: 'seeing political stuff people post is a good way to keep up with everything'<br>G3, P8, EX6: 'It would have been better to have got some information about it, what do I get from this black square, really?'<br>G6, P16: 'people make a real effort'…'that's how you get an opinion, beyond just what one says, they have done their research' [about political Youtube channels] |

| | |
|---|---|
| **2. Discursive Value** | G5, P12: 'as long as it doesn't break any like guidelines or whatever, people should be allowed to post whatever - even if it's like bad opinions or anything like that'<br>G3, P6, EX8: personal attacks, that's stupid, it does not contribute to anything, like it's not healthy discussion, nothing really. It just stops everything also it becomes just an argument like between kids. While more serious arguments backed up with facts I think are good. It doesn't matter which side it comes from. |
| **3. Utility / Impact** | G3, P6: 'during Black Lives Matter there was a post that showed what you can actively do, like a tutorial: "How to not to be racist". It was a very good way because then you can apply it in what you actually do in daily life'<br>G2, P3, EX6: 'What else happens with a black image? Nothing happens.'<br>G2, P5, EX6: 'It says that it's liked by around half a million, so it will give half a million people who get, how should I put it, who come in contact with it. And if then ten thousand or one thousand or five hundred were not aware of it then there is a possibility that they can, what should I say, find out what is going on' |
| **4. Contributor Intention** | G7, P20: 'For me, it matters like if it seems like it's just to get likes and show "I am a good person", or if you actually mean it'<br>G2, P3, EX4: 'They clearly just want to get reactions, not to spread awareness or information'<br>G2, P5, EX 1: 'if they share it to get other people to donate it's good, but if they share it to seem kind it is silly' |
| **5. Entertainment Value** | RESEARCHER : Can you explain a bit why you find this one particularly good?<br>G3, P6, EX5: Humor. That's a big factor!<br>G3, P8, EX5: Yeah, it's funny, I could share it!<br><br>G6, P14, EX4: Yes it is not so harmful in our feed somehow, but there it is worse. I think it's a little funny me. Fun way to get your point across without being so pushing it in anyone's face |
| **6. Contextual Fit** | G5, P13, EX3: "I wouldn't watch this on Instagram, if I want to watch videos, I go to TikTok"<br>G7, P20: "politics doesn't really fit on apps like snapchat that are just for communication"<br>G5, P12: "TikTok shouldn't have politics because it's just supposed to be fun"... "when political stuff come up it can be a bit much, like 'I didn't sign up for this today'...[but] Reddit is a pretty good place for politics, because there are quite many subreddits that specialize in different issues, and there are often a lot of good discussions and information"<br>G4, P11: "I know people who post things on their public Facebook wall, but it's probably not something I would think of doing...it's a little easier in a closed forum, there is agreement that we should talk about such things |