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"JUST KIDDING… OR NOT?": AMBIGUITY, FAILURE, AND HUMOUR IN THE REPRESENTATION OF INFLUENCERS' SUCCESSFUL FEMININITY ON TIKTOK

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ABSTRACT

The main aim of this paper is to better understand which role humour plays in the self-presentation of three of the top-ranked Spanish TikTok influencers: Lucía Bellido (@itsbellido), Mónica Moran (@monismurf) and Lola Moreno (@lolaloliitaaa). As young, hypervisible girls, they embody an updated version of the postfeminist ideal of a confident, empowered, and successful femininity. At the same time, they are expected to carry out a particular form of gendered emotional labour that involves being pleasant, accessible, and relatable (Hochschild, 2003 [1983]; McRobbie, 2009; Kanai, 2019a, 2019b). This study draws on a qualitative analysis of 300 videos shared by the three analysed tiktokers to explore how they incorporate humour and comedy resources encouraged by the socio-technical features from TikTok in their online self-presentations. I argue that humour is not only a way to foster authenticity and portray a more relatable self for their followers, but also an alibi to navigate gender expectations and engage with emotions that overflow the moderate femininity, such as vulnerability, sexual desire, or anger.

Keywords: social media ▪ TikTok ▪ gender ▪ femininity ▪ humour ▪ emotional labour

1. INTRODUCTION

"Self-expression on TikTok is a story best told through humour." This is the first sentence of a post on TikTok's official website[1] that invites users to "get fluent in the platform's one true universal language." This "universal language" is made of multi-layered jokes, high doses of irony, and self-mockery. Humour is a central element in TikTok cultures and has permeated the content of this platform in a transversal

1 https://ads.tiktok.com/business/creativecenter/quicktok/online/Understanding-humor-on-TikTok/pc/en

manner, from regular users to top-ranked profiles such as lifestyle influencers. In this sense, the typical content associated with lifestyle, fashion and beauty influencers from platforms like Instagram or YouTube, dominated by imperatives of perfection and perpetual happiness (Marwick, 2013), has evolved to a more relatable and authentic representation of the self, incorporating humour as a regular feature.

With this paper, I explore how the incorporation of humour in the content produced by some of the most popular Spanish tiktokers shape the way in which these girls portray themselves. Specifically, this research focuses on three profiles: Monismurf (Mónica Moran, @monismurf), Bellido (Lucía Bellido, @its.bellido) and Lola (Lola Moreno, @lolalolita). They have been creating and sharing content professionally on social media since they were teenagers (Monismurf started at the age of 17, and Bellido and Lola at 14). They began on Musical.ly in 2017, the same year that this application was acquired by the Chinese company ByteDance, and shortly after merged with TikTok. Currently, they hold a privileged status in the Spanish digital content creator industry[2]. They often collaborate with globally recognized artists such as Shakira, Karol G, or Rosalía, co-creating choreographies and trends to promote their new releases. They also have partnerships with international brands such as Nike, Adidas, or Coca-Cola and attend events like Cannes Film Festival or Coachella. Like many other influencers, they cultivate profiles on Instagram, YouTube, or Twitch, but TikTok stands out as their central platform for identity-building and self-branding. TikTok is where they accrue the highest numbers of followers, and the aesthetics and narratives that define their content are inherently connected to TikTok's vernaculars: Monismurf's signature video format is the transition video, a type of content that requires technical skills to edit together short snippets of different clips, creating an illusion of continuity. Lola is famous for her choreographical videos based on synchrony, mimesis, and replicable dance steps, whereas Bellido is well known for her POVs (*point of view*) and acting videos.

Regardless of these differences and specificities, humour is a transversal expressive feature these tiktokers use to portray themselves. In most of their videos, they rely on pinches of irony and self-deprecating humour when sharing their daily lives with their audiences. In this respect, the main aim of this paper is to have a closer look at how Monismurf, Bellido, and Lola incorporate the particular TikTok's relatable and memetic humour into their content and how this shapes and affects their gendered identities.

The aim of exploring tiktokers' uses of humour is translated into three specific research questions that guided the analysis: a) Which role does humour play in representing the feminine identities of the most-followed Spanish tiktokers? b) What are the implications of TikTok's features in the proliferation of this humorous

2 Recently, Lola Moreno was recognized with the Best TikToker Ídolo Award in 2023 and shared the nomination with Lucía Bellido and Mónica Moran. These awards were created by the lifestyle influencer Dulceida and have the aim of recognizing the labour of digital content creators.

content? c) What are the opportunities, potentialities, and limitations of humour when it comes to disrupting feminine stereotypes?

I will argue that humour works as a very effective tool for these influencers to depict a more authentic and relatable self. Moreover, it also intervenes in the portrayal of their gendered identities as hypervisible young girls online, offering a space to negotiate with the values and expectations that regulate the ideal successful femininity in the current neoliberal landscape.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Influencers: Between successful femininity and authenticity

For the past decade, lifestyle influencers have emerged as mediatic figures with a privileged position within the economy of digital content creators (Marwick, 2015; Abidin, 2016). Their content falls within the labels of lifestyle, beauty, and fashion, combining the prescription of goods and products based on their first-hand experiences with the portrayal of their intimate everyday life, which often includes attending exclusive events, fashion shows, and parties. Previous scholarship has framed them as the embodiment of an updated version of the postfeminist ideal, a kind of successful femininity that seems to "have it all," engaging with "interrelated tropes such as predestined passionate work, glam life, and a carefully curated social sharing" (Duffy & Hund, 2015, p.2). Through their content, they portray fulfilling professional careers based on entrepreneurial self-branding and storytelling that renders intimacy, identity, and consumerism.

The three TikTok influencers analysed in this study are part of a larger international ecosystem of TikTok superstars such as Charli D'Amelio, Addison Rae, or Loren Gray, who share a similar pattern of self-representation. As Melanie Kennedy puts it, these girls are "not only young but female, normatively feminine, white and wealthy" (p.1070), sustaining the argument that visual social media applications tend to privilege a cast of hegemonically attractive influencers who are rewarded with metrics of popularity and public recognition (Banet-Weiser, 2015; Caldeira 2020). In their videos, these girls often feature a "happy and care-free aesthetic" (Kennedy, 2020), channelling to what Natalie Coulter (2018) frames as the "perpetual state of fun" that defines contemporary tween culture, "anchoring the activity of consumption as fun" (p.2). In this regard, female influencers are exhorted to carry on a specific form of emotional labour as a part of their job in the creative sector that consists of a continuous showcase of positive emotions and a permanent sense of accessibility for their followers (Duffy & Wissinger, 2017), even when they are exposed to online aggressions such as hate speech or harassment (Abidin, 2019).

This idea of emotional regulation as something that "comes with the job" is rooted in the framework of the feeling rules proposed by Arlie Hochschild (2003 [1983]), which refers to the social norms that stipulate the appropriate feelings to display

in a given context, both in public (emotional labour) and private spheres (emotion work or management). When considering the context of digital media, the work done by Akane Kanai (2019a, 2019b) appears as central to understanding how, under the logics of neoliberalism and postfeminism, these feeling rules shape young girls' self-presentation in digital platforms. In her analysis of Tumblr users, Kanai identifies how young girls carry on "personal negotiations of postfeminist demands" using humour to represent unpleasant feelings such as frustration, weakness, or shame to create value that can be palatable and "circulated in this feminine economy" (2019b, p. 65). As a sort of redemption for not matching the "top girl" ideal (McRobbie, 2009), these users turn their frustrations, failures, and transgressions into relatable and funny "bite-size" moments ready to be consumed by others. In the same manner, Letho (2022) has explored intimate cultures of Finnish momfluencers, and how they navigate the feeling rules to produce pleasant and agreeable selves to their audiences, reducing the tension between their felt emotions (i.e., anxiety, shame or guilt) and the cultural expectations about motherhood. Letho suggests that, although anxiety can be considered a negative side effect of stressful social media work, making it visible can also be a way to capitalize on feeling rules, if done correctly. In this regard, showing a vulnerable and flawed self can be also a source of profit that allows influencers to portray a more "real" and relatable self, in a landscape where authenticity is a central value for success (Duffy & Hund, 2019).

Popular lifestyle influencers need to curate their online personas between two apparently contradictory poles: being successful professional content creators while at the same time staying authentic, behaving as regular users who are on social media for entertainment and fun (Abidin, 2016; Cunningham & Craig, 2017; Duffy & Wissinger, 2017; Salisbury & Pooley, 2017; Arriagada & Bishop, 2021). In this regard, influencers reinforce a sense of authenticity by sharing moments of vulnerability and imperfection and also putting into practice what Crystal Abidin (2017) calls the "calibrated amateurism" a concept that frames certain practices and aesthetics used to "portray the raw aesthetic of an amateur, whether or not they really are amateurs by status or practice" (p. 7). The visual component is central in the laborious recreation of the amateur and spontaneous look, and influencers often rely on audiovisual elements, such as shaky camera work, zooming-in, unbalanced framing or uneven lighting (Bishop, 2018; Maares et al., 2021), to achieve visual authenticity. In their effort to pass as regular users to foster an authentic and relatable self and, at the same time, the need to navigate the feeling rules that regulate which kind of emotions and behaviours are expected from young girls, TikTok influencers engage with these audiovisual elements and with a unique sense of humour that connects with TikTok's cultures, as it will be further elaborated in the following section.

2.2. TikTok, humour and gender

Humour and playfulness are central elements of TikTok's predominant aesthetics

and narratives, which deeply connect to internet meme culture for its sense of replicability, imitation, and transformation (Zeng et al., 2020; Zeng & Abidin, 2021; Zulli & Zulli, 2022). On TikTok, users represent situations from their everyday lives in humorous skits that combine a sharp sense of irony and self-mockery with elements of absurdity and surrealism. Some scholars have defined this sensibility as a generational sentiment, labelling it as a distinguishing "Gen Z humour" (Zeng & Abidin, 2021; Stahl & Literat, 2022), which often implies expressing negative emotions, insecurities, and vulnerability but with a multi-layered humorous and ironical delivery.

The way in which humour is constructed on this social media platform is profoundly influenced by the socio-technical and creative features that the platform itself offers. When creating their content, tiktokers rely on "iconic and audiovisual components that come to constitute the platform's templatability," infusing the final result with a recognizable "TikTok vibe" (Zhao & Abidin, 2023, p. 11). In this sense, humour, and playfulness are encouraged and emphasized through the platform by offering a wide range of expressive and creative tools in its database, where audio plays a significant role. In this regard, TikTok's memetic humour is grounded by elements such as pre-recorded dialogues, funny sound effects, or viral songs that set the narrative center of audio meme templates (Abidin & Kaye, 2021; Kaye et al., 2021). Here, templates are understood as "audiovisual repertoires" that offer an "accessible, expressible, and relatable framework within which ordinary users can create" (Cervi & Divon, 2023, p. 3). In this regard, users engage with these sorts of templates by dubbing dialogues or lyrics from songs that are associated with a specific storytelling or premise. In doing so, they are able to adhere to the preexisting narrative or repurpose it, generating contradictions and adding complexity through new layers of meaning. When these audio meme templates go viral, they become an opportunity for users to connect through in-group affiliations (Vizcaíno-Verdú & Abidin, 2022), taking part in the ongoing "conversation" that defines the process of video creation on TikTok (Bresnick, 2019, p.5).

Together with enhancing relatability and social connections, TikTok's culture of humour emphasizes a sense of performativity and ambiguity. By dubbing a pre-recorded audio or acting in a POV (point of view), users recreate a specific scene, embodying external characters, narratives, and feelings. In these videos, the border between users' real experiences and the acting gets blurred in a playful and ambiguous manner. This performativity and ambiguity offer a fruitful terrain for exploring how TikTok users use humour to highlight and challenge social structures of power and hegemony. In this regard, in their analysis of the parodical TikTok's self-representations of working-from-home Chinese mothers during the Covid lockdown, Han and Kuipers (2021) examine the possibilities of the internet meme as a form of resistance, control, or expression of ambiguity. Through cartoonesque and parodical videos, these mothers find a way to detach themselves from the traditional stereotypes connected to ideal motherhood and femininity, showing contradictions between gender norms and "the harsh reality." In their analysis, the authors identify two main trends of approaching humour, which are highly influenced by

TikTok's socio-technical features: first, a "clownish and physical form of humour" that connects with comedy traditions and genres such as slapstick and relies on body movement, facial expressions, and physical exaggeration. And second, a way of generating comedy through what they define as "intellectual techniques," using discursive resources such as juxtaposition, irony, and self-deprecating humour. As it will be explained in the Methods section, these categories have been useful to analyse and better understand how tiktokers make use of different humourous resources.

3. METHODS

3.1. Research questions

This study aims to better understand how humour plays a role in the representation of the gendered identities of three of the most popular Spanish tiktokers. The research questions that guided the analysis are:

- Which role does humour play in representing the feminine identities of the most-followed Spanish tiktokers?
- What are the implications of TikTok's features in the proliferation of this humorous content?
- What are the opportunities, potentialities, and limitations of humour when it comes to disrupting feminine stereotypes?

3.2. Data collection criteria

This paper is part of a larger research project which focuses on exploring and analysing influencers' feminine identities on TikTok. For the purposes of this paper, three of the most followed Spanish tiktokers were selected intentionally, as the main aim of this research is to explore how mainstream tiktokers incorporate humorous codes in their self-presentation on social media. These three profiles hold a privileged position in the Spanish TikTok ecosystem regarding visibility. Table 1 shows the number of followers and likes of each of the three profiles:

Table 1. Profiles included in the sample.

Username	Followers	Likes	Sampled videos
@lolalolita	11.2M	856.3M	100
@its.bellido	9.8M	874.9M	100
@monismurf	9.5M	392.6M	100

Notes: Number of followers and likes as of November 6, 2023.

The final dataset comprises 300 videos, 100 per each of the three tiktokers, with a duration between 5 seconds and 1 minute, published within a timespan from

January 2020 to June 2022. This time period was defined after conducting a preliminary observation of the content and the frequency of publishing of each tiktoker. Following the practice of previous TikTok analysis, a web scrapper tool was used to download a spreadsheet with metadata from all the videos published by the three tiktokers during the defined timespan. This included publishing time, views, likes, shares and comments, link to the video, hashtags used, duration, filters, and audio resources. From this preliminary crawl, the results obtained were 2.395 published by Lucía Bellido, 2.635 by Lola Moreno, and 969 by Mónica Moran, as her routines of sharing content are more unsteady, even though she has maintained sustained growth in her following and has the same numbers as the other two analysed profiles. To be able to conduct a qualitative analysis, the sample was narrowed down to the 100 most popular videos from each of the three profiles, defining popularity using a combination of the number of plays, likes, shares, and views (Hautea et al., 2021). In this regard, from the 300 videos that conform to the final data sample, the average metrics are the following: from 29.900.000 to 2.200.000 plays, 2.900.000 to 47.300 likes, 31.100 to 0 comments, and from 35.100 to 41 shares.[3]

After selecting the 300 videos for the final sample, clips were downloaded manually and stored in a local data server. A spreadsheet was used to collect data that has been considered for the analysis process, as it intervenes in the meaning-making process of the videos. These data consist of text description or overlay, sound and music effects, emojis, filters, and hashtags. The final dataset was accessed between the 8th and 9th of January, 2023.

3.3. Method of analysis

The unique combination of creative, technical, and social features of the platform confers to TikTok videos a highly multimodal, layered, and intertextual nature. In this regard, multimodal discourse analysis has been applied to identify the elements that intervene in the meaning-making process of the analysed videos, being that audiovisual and textual resources (spoken and written), and other relevant expressive elements in the construction of humour and comedy such as tiktokers' body language and facial expressions. Given the intertextual nature of TikTok videos, "to approach an informed meaningful reading of this platform's content requires exploration of the discursive environment in which they are produced" (Haueta et al., 2021, p. 5). In this regard, the analysed tiktokers often reference other videos made by other users (in formats such as duets or reaction videos), engage with preexisting trends and challenges, and use filters, audios and hashtags. Thus, beyond the multimodal analysis of the 300 videos from the sample, the knowledge from other intertextual references (such as viral trends or challenges, audio memes or filters) has

3 The full database, including metadata from the videos such as date of publishing, full caption text, duration, and quantitative metrics, will be available upon request.

been considered and incorporated alongside the process of analysis to better understand the tensions and contradictions of tiktokers' self-representations.

The multimodal categories of analysis used for the study are participants, actions, processes, perspectives, settings, and compositions (Ledin & Machin, 2020; Bouvier & Rasmussen, 2022). Also, a deductive and inductive approach has been applied to define a classification of humour techniques drawing on previous scholarship researching humour on TikTok with a gender perspective (Han and Kuipers, 2021). MAXQDA software has been used to qualitatively analyse the videos and extract the results according to the predefined analysis categories.

3.4. Ethical considerations

The videos that conform to the sample of this study were created by TikTok content creators who present themselves as public figures. However, following ethical guidelines and recommendations in doing internet research (Boyd & Marwick, 2011; Markham & Buchanan, 2017), I have decided not to include any screenshots of the analysed videos as this study does not have informed consent from the creators.

4. RESULTS

There is a significant predominance of playful, comical, and fun moods in the overall analysed content. The three tiktokers explicitly engage with humour resources, combining elements from physical comedy with more intellectual techniques, such as irony or sarcasm. From the analysis, four main video categories where humour plays a central role have been identified. Table 2 presents an overview of these four categories and the intersections established with humour techniques and TikTok's iconic and audiovisual components:

Table 2. Overview of predominant video formats connected to humour techniques and TikTok's iconic and audiovisual components.

Video formats	**Humour techniques**	**TikTok's iconic and audiovisual components**
a) Portrayal of failures	▪ Exaggerated physical comedy (slapstick, clumsy gestuality, facial expressions) ▪ Unexpected events ▪ Self-parody	▪ Emphasis on body language and gestuality ▪ Unprepared and raw audiovisual aesthetic
b) Explicit contraposition to successful femininity	▪ Self-parody through juxtaposition and incongruity between audio, image, and text	▪ Intertextual narrative (audio, video, and text) ▪ Audio meme templates ▪ Dubbing and lip-synching
c) Reaction to negative comments or hate speech	▪ Irony and sarcasm	▪ Video reply to comments

d) Expression of unpleasant emotions and controversial topics	▪ Performativity, ambiguity, and irony	▪ POV (point of view) format ▪ Audio meme templates ▪ Dubbing and lip-synching

4.1. The portrayal of failures: authenticity and relatability

The analysed tiktokers often post what they label "failed videos, " which can be considered a TikTok video genre in itself. This kind of content is characterized by an emphasised self-parodical tone and a narrative that shows how tiktokers attempt to perform a choreography or a viral trend and, for some internal or external factor, cannot accomplish it. In these "failed videos," tiktokers engage with practices and aesthetics that resonate with the concept of "calibrated amateurism" (Abidin, 2017) as a means to represent a sense of spontaneity, relatability, and proximity with average users, pretending to be just like any other TikTok user. However, despite the emphasis on spontaneity and unpreparedness, when representing their fails and mistakes tiktokers repeatedly rely on audiovisual and narrative elements that come to define a "failed aesthetic" sustained by humorous resources. Some of the central elements that define this aesthetic are drastic zooming-in, close-up shots of tiktoker's facial expressions, and unbalanced or unprepared framing. Here, comedy is constructed in two different ways: a) by engaging with physical humour; or b) because of external reasons, such as interruptions or unexpected events.

Regarding the first category, Monismurf is the profile who engages more often with this kind of comical sensibility. She expresses failure in a very clownish way, relying on humorous resources that are close to the slapstick genre. She constantly falls or slips off in her videos, putting on silly faces and exaggerating parodical gestuality and clumsiness. Examples of this can be found in three clips (9 Jan. 2020, 11 Jan. 2020, and 27 Apr. 2022), in which Monismurf is reproducing a synchronized choreography with other tiktokers, but in the middle of the action, they stumble on each other and end up falling in a very exaggerated way. In the text description of the third video, the failure is foregrounded as the narrative center of the video: "This video is all about failing, so many things gone wrong in this video HAHAHAH." Lola and Bellido also have some videos in which they portray these kinds of physical mistakes. For example, in a video (25 May 2021) Lola and her boyfriend are standing side by side, and when they start dancing, Lola unintentionally punches his boyfriend's face. Similarly, in another video (28 May 2022), Bellido is doing a choreography with a friend where they have to jump and stumble into each other by accident.

In addition to physical mistakes, sometimes videos fail because of external reasons, such as interruptions or unexpected events, giving a sense of unpreparedness and spontaneity. For example, in a clip (22 Dec. 2021), Lola is dancing in her kitchen, and suddenly her father appears carrying a basket of laundry, and the description text says, "Pov: your dad turns up, and you're embarrassed." Similarly, in another clip (8 Aug. 2021), Bellido lip-synchs and mimics a song while sitting in a car. After a few seconds, she stops acting and puts on an exaggerated annoyed face, while the

description text says, "they were looking at me :(." Sometimes, these interruptions are marked by the gendered idea that being a tiktoker is a girly thing that can be a source of jokes and mockery. This is the case for Monismurf, whose social circle is composed mainly of male content creators, who are youtubers and streamers, and she usually has the role of "the girl in the guys' gang". Her male friends very often appear in her videos as a last-minute interruption, distracting her and making fun of the dance steps. This is shown, for example, in a clip (24 Nov. 2020) in which Monismurf starts dancing, but in the middle of the video, she stops and puts on an ashamed face, looking at the camera. Right after, her boyfriend enters the frame and makes a victory sign with his hand in a parodical manner. In the description text, Monismurf complains, saying, "I can't like this hahahaha". In the same vein, a clip (7 Jun. 2020) starts with Monismurf standing alone, and then four other boys, who are her friends, start crossing the frame, making silly faces to the camera. The constant performance of humorous failures has come to constitute a central aesthetic and narrative trope for tiktokers' self-presentation. This element reinforces a strong sense of draft unpreparedness, and authenticity, as tiktokers not only show the final versions of their dances or lip-syncing, but also the process of trial and error.

4.2. Explicit contraposition to the successful femininity

In parallel to using failure and humour to build up a more authentic and relatable self, there are videos from the sample in which tiktokers engage with comedy to disrupt and contradict the model of the successful femininity, based on an empowered and confident self that connects with the postfeminist sensibility (Gill & Orgad, 2015). From the three analysed tiktokers, Monismurf is the one who engages the most with this kind of humour, relying on irony, parody and self-deprecating humour. She uses juxtaposition of mismatching elements to generate contrast between audio, image and text. This can be seen in a video from the sample (11 Jan. 2020) that falls in the definition of "failed videos" explored in the previous section. In the clip, she appears dancing with another tiktoker, performing a choreography with energetic movements, and at the end of the video, both fall. The description text that goes along with this clip says, "I wanted to look like a diva, but I fell." In this case, the concept of "diva" connects with a powerful and glamorous femininity that Monismurf unsuccessfully tries to embody. Here, humour works as a means for Monismurf to detach herself from this empowered femininity, as she makes fun of herself when trying to perform this subjectivity. In another video (5 Jul. 2021), a sense of parody is created through the contrast between the juxtaposition of the audio and the images. We see Monismurf dubbing a pre-recorded audio in which a female voice says, "Good morning! Today I woke up feeling great! Because I can, I deserve it, I'm strong!". While dubbing these self-affirming and enthusiastic lines, Monismurf puts on funny faces and makes uncoordinated movements with her arms while casually eating a sandwich. The evident mismatch between the message given by the audio and Monismurf's

attitudes explicitly presents the gap between the tiktoker and the ideal successful and empowered femininity celebrated by the audio.

This parodical contradiction generated by juxtaposition is used in other Monismurf videos (e.g. 3 Apr. 2020). There, we see her performing complex and energetic choreography without making any mistakes. In contrast to this exhibition of skill and talent, the description text says, "today I believed I was Barbie ballerina HAHHAHAHAH." Here, the description text is used as a sort of final punch line, disrupting the expectations set by the video and as a form of downplaying her flawless performance. Besides disrupting the perfection of her dancing and enhancing spontaneity through capital letters, the text also serves as a way to make fun of herself when she behaves like a "Barbie ballerina." Here, the reference to this doll, widely known to represent femininity in a very stereotypical and hegemonical way, connects once again with the ideal "top girl" (McRobbie, 2009). In these videos, Monismurf shows how she tries and even aspires to be "a diva" or a "Barbie ballerina." But the recurrent use of self-parody and comical juxtaposition suggests that she doesn't take these aspirations too seriously. Humour is used to make the gap between her and the successful femininity very visible and irreconcilable.

4.3 Laughing at negative comments and hate speech

As they have great exposure on social media, influencers are very exposed to toxic criticism and hate speech (Abidin 2019; Valenzuela-García et al., 2023). These comments often focus on their body appearance, the "excessive" use of makeup or their romantic relationships (Duffy et al. 2022). From the three profiles, Bellido is the one who tends to react impulsively, showing rage and anger and making response videos where she speaks directly to the camera, being carried away by emotions. On the contrary, Lola and Monismurf usually stay out of polemics and controversies, and when they answer negative comments, they always rely on humour and irony. This is the case for a video (24 Dec. 2021) in which Lola gives a public answer to a comment from an anonymous user who despises her for being "too silly to not realise that everyone has seen her underwear." The comment refers to a video in which Lola is wearing a very tight and short dress, and while dancing, she shows her underwear by mistake. Speaking directly to the camera, Lola explains in a very ironic tone that what this user claims to have seen is not her underwear but her pyjamas panties. She even pushes her dress up to show the panties as she says, "taraaaaan!" while she laughs loudly, changing the frame to a very close shot. Similarly, in another video (31 Jul. 2021), she answers a comment that criticizes her for wearing too much makeup, saying, "she is ridiculous, her eyelashes are gonna fall for using so much mascara." In the video, she reproduces a simple choreography from a trending audio and, as she smiles to the camera, an overlaid text says, "yes, of course, my eyelashes are bold". The video ends with Lola showing her middle finger to the camera, a disruptive gesture that she softens winking her eye and smiling. In a similar manner,

Monismurf reacts to a comment from a user that says, "I hate this couple, they are the worst, I hope they break up" (referring to Monismurf and her boyfriend). In the video (3 Aug. 2021), she dubs an audio meme with a very comical tone that repeatedly says, "I don't care," putting funny faces and moving her hips in a very comical manner.

From these examples, we can see how Monismurf and Lola use irony and sarcasm to answer to unpleasant or hateful comments from users. Here, humour appears as a means to face these kinds of messages without challenging gendered expectations of being approachable and pleasing (Kanai, 2019b). While the message they are giving is clear, and they respond directly to the users who are attacking or mocking them, the humorous delivery softens the outcome.

4.4. Showcase of unpleasant emotions and controversial topics

Connected to this idea of using humour to wrap up and soften unpleasant emotions to make them palatable enough for social media platforms, there are many videos in which tiktokers express frustrations or undesirable feelings through self-parody and performativity. This is the case for a video (1 Jul. 2021) in which Lola reacts to a challenge about comparing the size of a teddy bear to the magnitude of an infidelity. The video starts with snippets of other users' videos in which they hold small or medium-sized teddies while a voice-over says, "bigger the teddy bear is, bigger cheater you are". The size of the teddy bears increases as we reach the end of the video, and the last snippet shows Lola holding a huge teddy bear, which is bigger than herself, while she laughs, looking directly at the camera. In relation to this idea of confessing own's flaws and failures through the engagement with funny and lighthearted challenges and trends, Bellido has a video (15 Jul. 2021) in which she reproduces a challenge that consists of clapping and table tapping, following a beat. She starts with a slow rhythm, and an overlaid text says, "this is how my jealousy looks from the outside". Then, as Bellido increases the speed of the clapping, puts on an angry face, and the text changes to "this is how my jealousy really is from the inside." Again, the humorous delivery of this video serves as an opportunity for Bellido to show a glimpse of a kind of emotion that would not be suitable in other formats. As in the abovementioned video from Lola making fun of being a cheater, the playful tone of these kind of challenges leave room for followers to interpret if the two tiktokers are confessing a personal flaw (i.e., cheating or being jealous) or if it is only a part of a performance.

Bellido very often takes advantage of this ambiguity to create content about controversial topics such as sexual desire. In this regard, from the three analysed tiktokers, she is the one who depicts a model of femininity that is closer to the Spanish *choni* stereotype. This is a mediatic figure that connects with the "chavettes" in British chav culture (Jones, 2011; Skeggs, 2005), which is considered to be "low-class, low-educated girls with an explicit, unbridled sexual desire" (Willem, Araüna &

Tortajada, 2018, p. 538). It is a stereotype that has had an extensive presence in popular Spanish TV series and reality shows, incarnating the epitome of the unruly femininity (Oliva, 2014, 2018; Moreno-Segarra & Bernández, 2017). Bellido explicitly and proudly aligns herself with the *choni* imaginary in her videos. For example, a video (2 Jun. 2021) starts with her pretending to be worried, with a concerned expression on her face, while a superimposed text says, "they call me *choni* as an insult, but they don't know…" and then the music changes, and another text finishes the sentence: "…✨that for me it's a compliment✨", and she changes her expression for a fiercer and more seductive one. Following the idea of the unruly and unfiltered femininity, Bellido uses humour to create content in which she represents herself irreverently, combining irony with a defiant and provocative tone. To do so, she uses TikTok's performative elements such as dubbing, lip-synching or acting, fostering the performativity and ambiguity of the resultant videos.

For example, a clip (24 Oct. 2020) shows her with her parents in their family living room. Bellido dubs a pre-recorded audio that says: "I might make my parents feel embarrassed, but I would never make them grandparents because I'm a slut, but I'm cautious." The video finishes with Bellido laughing while her parents look at her very surprised. In many other videos, she plays with this concept of "sluttiness" as an opposition to pleasant and normative femininity. An example of this can be found in a video (27 May 2021) where she dubs an audio with a high-pitched comical voice that says, "ohhhh I'm a princess, I'm a little princess… with a slut face", while she suddenly changes her facial expression from a very exaggerated smile to a severe face. In another clip (10 Apr. 2022), she changes the context of a pre-recorded dialogue from a scene in which a male voice asks, "what is your favourite English word?" and a female voice answers laughing, "probably fuck". Bellido alters the meaning of the original audio and sets a new narrative in which she acts as if she is flirting with someone. She adds a superimposed text with the question, "what would you give me if I win?". In the video, she dubs the part from the original audio that says "probably fuck" as a response, implying that she would like to have a sexual relationship in this imaginary flirting situation that she represents. The description text that goes with this video says, "#humour, just kidding… or not?", playing with the ambiguity enhanced by TikTok's performative elements such as dubbing. With this ambiguous representation, Bellido invites the viewers to guess if what she portrays in her acting videos is connected to her real experiences and emotions, or just part of the platform game.

In contrast to this irreverent, playful, and unfiltered representation of sexuality in Bellido's content, Monismurf uses humour to generate an effect of disruption in videos in which she appears as seductive or showing sexual desire. This happens very often in videos in which the lyrics of the songs that she dances and dubs set a sexual and seductive tone. An example of this can be found in a video (9 Dec. 2020) where Monismurf is dancing to a song that says, "*mami chula* let me grab you from your waist, the way you whisper makes me crazy, I would like to make you scream", and the song fades out into a feminine moaning. At this point, a pair of hands holding

Monismurf's cat appears from the corner of the frame, bringing the animal to a very close shot that completely covers the image. The description text of the video says "popper [Monismurf's cat] does not approve the last dance step". Monismurf's cat interruptions as a form of last-minute censorship are a recurrent joke that is used in other videos, such as a clip (17 Aug. 2020) in which Monismurf starts dancing, moving her hips and butt, and the video ends abruptly because her cat jumps to her leg. In the description text she complains "my cat doesn't like my twerking HAHAH #humour". Through these videos, both Bellido and Monismurf navigate the idea of portraying themselves as active sexual agents. While in the case of Bellido humour is a tool for representing explicit sexual desire in a performative and playful manner, in Monismurf's videos comedy serves as a disruptive element that neutralizes the possibility of sexualization.

5. CONCLUSIONS

The content created and shared by these young hypervisible girls is shaped by the unique sense of humour that characterizes TikTok cultures, defined by a sense of performativity, replicability, and ambiguity (Zeng et al., 2020; Zeng & Abidin, 2021; Zulli & Zulli, 2022). The analysed videos are "infused" with the "recognizable TikTok vibe" (Zhao & Abidin, 2023) based on the main socio-technical features that tiktokers engage with, such as dubbing, lip-synching, audio meme templates, formats like POVs or overlapping of image and textual elements.

From one side, humour appears as a very effective way for tiktokers to deal with the tension of being successful content creators and, at the same time, staying relatable and authentic to their followers. While they cultivate a polished and glamorous appearance on other social media platforms, on TikTok, they showcase a much rawer aesthetic and engage with humorous techniques from physical comedy to portray a flawed and imperfect version of themselves. In their "failed videos," they openly represent themselves as "any other user" who makes mistakes and gets surprised by unexpected events. This representation of tiktokers' fallibility is built upon a constant practice of self-parody and connects and expands the concept of "calibrated amateurism" (Abidin, 2017). In this regard, the supposedly spontaneous and unpredictable component of failing is turned into a pattern of aesthetics, codes, and narratives. "Failed videos" are integrated into tiktokers' self-presentation strategies, in combination with the genres that define their content such as make-up tutorials, GRWM (get ready with me) or dance videos.

Besides fostering a more authentic and relatable self, results show how tiktokers put humour in practice to navigate gender expectations connected to the ideal of the successful femininity. Monismurf is the one who most of the times relies on irony and parody to explicitly distance herself from this ideal, by juxtaposing stereotypical representations of empowered femininity (i.e., showing self-confidence, being glamorous and passionate about their jobs) with her actual reality. She uses humour

to emphasize the incongruities between the two sides, but she does not explicitly reject or challenge the model of the successful femininity. In some cases, she even admits aspiring to embody this ideal and makes fun of her failed attempts to achieve it. In this sense, far from being the "great feminist weapon" defined by Maud Cauterick (2020), humour is a coping mechanism or a temporary relief when portraying gender-specific discontents, like Han and Kuipers (2021) sceptically define it in their analysis of humour in the representation of motherhood. In this regard, comedy and humour are a mechanism to navigate the affective dimension of the successful femininity, where young girls are expected to behave in a moderate, pleasant, and relatable manner (Kanai, 2019a). In the videos where tiktokers react to harmful and disrespectful comments, humour acts as a form of emotional labour. In these videos, irony is a way to wrap up sentiments of anger and irritation and metabolize them into little witty jokes. Even though they do not refrain from expressing their disconformity with hate speech, humour is a way to stay out of a more direct confrontation. Thus, humour and comedy are ways to individually cope with online hate speech and negative commentary. Still, there is the underlying idea that there is not much alternative to face these situations, and they must stick to forms of humour such as irony as a way of resignation and self-protection.

Finally, tiktokers take advantage of the performativity enhanced by TikTok features and genres such as POVs (point of view) and audio meme templates to portray and embody emotions that disrupt what could be expected from them under the dictate of the feeling rules (Hochschild, 2003 [1983]; Kanai 2019a, 2019b). Through irreverent humour, irony, and self-mockery, tiktokers confess flaws and frustrations, and engage with controversial topics such as having explicit sexual desire. In many of the analysed videos, tiktokers play and act, leaving the door open for their followers to interpret if the content of the videos is real or just a performance.

In conclusion, this research shed light on how TikTok is a fruitful terrain for representing values and narratives outside from the stereotypical and idealised femininity in a playful and ambiguous manner. Despite this, as hypervisible girls and dependant on the attention economy to maintain their status, the analysed tiktokers must navigate carefully within the limits of what they can and cannot show in their profiles. Humour plays a central role in this negotiation, allowing them to portray behaviours and feelings that expand the limits of the ideal successful femininity, but from an individual and depoliticized perspective that does not represent a challenge for the structural gender stereotypes that prevail in social media.

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‘A MIX OF PARANOIA AND REBELLIOUSNESS’ —MANIFESTATIONS, MOTIVES, AND CONSEQUENCES OF RESISTANCE TO DIGITAL MEDIA

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ABSTRACT

Internet use is the norm in Western societies and only few people consciously abstain. This article explores manifestations of digital resistance, motives for resisting, and consequences thereof. It sets out to map digital resistance through thematic analysis of semi-structured interviews with 16 Swiss adult internet users. Our findings show that a central motive for resistance is viewing services as problematic because of surveillance practices, lack of privacy, data-monetizing practices, or monopoly position. Digital resisters are characterized by low trust in digital corporations, a wish for more regulation, and high internet skills. Unless digital resisters have an understanding social circle, a consequence can be social exclusion. Mostly, digital resistance can lead to heightened self-empowerment and thus greater subjective well-being. This article contributes to a more in-depth understanding of digital resistance in a highly digitized society and lays the ground for appropriate regulatory practices that addresses individuals’ needs.

Keywords: digital media resistance ▪ disconnection ▪ non-use ▪ dataveillance ▪ well-being

1. INTRODUCTION

As long as there have been media, there have been persons not using them. When television first came into private households, traditional factors of social inequality correlated with owning a television and the more privileged were more likely to have one (Syvertsen, 2017). The same was true for digital media. When the internet first spread to private use in the Western world in the late 1990s and early 2000s, individuals with higher level of educational background and income, as well as younger persons and men were most likely to be among users (NTIA, 1995; van Dijk, 2005).

Over time, this digital divide in access to the internet has narrowed and more people across socioeconomic groups have gained access to the internet (Chia et al., 2006). With the increasing internet penetration in our society, our everyday life became increasingly digitized. Today's everyday life entails the widespread and common use of online services: Google for information seeking, Amazon for buying things, Netflix and YouTube for entertainment, and services like Facebook or Instagram for socializing (Reiss et al., 2021).

However, in countries that have high internet penetration rates, a new group of internet non-users emerged. Rather than so-called *have-nots*, who did not have access to the internet, they were *want-nots*, consciously deciding against using these services (Kappeler et al., 2021; van Dijk, 2020). In a society where using such services is the norm, not doing so entails severe consequences like social exclusion (Baumer et al., 2015; Melton et al., 2019). This article aims to explore this group of want-nots that we refer to as *digital resisters*, i.e., individuals who consciously do not use certain digital tools or services as an act of resistance to the increasingly digitized and datafied world they live in. We ask: How does resistance to digital media among internet users manifest, and what are the motives and consequences of such digital resistance? To answer this research question, we thematically analyze data from semi-structured interviews conducted in 2022 in Switzerland, a country with an internet use rate of 96% (Latzer et al., 2021b). By doing so, we identify 1) the ways in which digital resistance manifests, 2) digital resisters' motives for digital resistance, and 3) consequences thereof. Hence, this article contributes to a deeper understanding of a group that copes with the highly digital everyday life in a way that differs from the norm.

2. THEORETICAL BASIS AND PREVIOUS RESEARCH

2.1. Manifestations of Internet Non-Use

Today, the internet is an integral part of our everyday life. In Switzerland, 95% of the population use it on a personal device like a smartphone, tablet, laptop, or computer (Latzer et al., 2021b). In addition, the average daily usage time has increased over the past decade from 1.8 to 4.5 hours per day (Latzer et al., 2021a). At the same time, the gain in importance and normalization of internet use has given rise to conscious forms of internet non-use. It is relevant to study the non-use of digital media (Baumer et al., 2015), be it the involuntary form, lived by the so-called have-nots or the voluntary form, applied by the want-nots (van Dijk, 2020). This article concentrates on the latter group.

The term *(digital) media non-use* is the most neutral term that is used in this research field. At the core, it refers to intentionally not using (certain) digital media, without specifying a time frame in or the extent to which this non-use occurs and without any specific value attribution to it (Hesselberth, 2018; Woodstock, 2014). Such non-use or non-participation can be understood as passively lived or actively

chosen (Casemajor et al., 2015). Today, using the internet and digital media is the norm and individuals can be seen as connected all the time. The term *digital disconnection* signifies a behavior that breaks with this norm (Melton et al., 2019). It has gained increasing prominence in recent research in the field. As a response to this societal change of being always-on, individuals take steps to actively break with this omnipresent connection by not using certain services or technologies (Lomborg & Ytre-Arne, 2021; Nguyen, 2021). In this way, disconnection can help navigating an everyday life that is increasingly characterized by digital media (Light, 2014). A periodic form of disconnection from digital media has recently increasingly been referred to as a *digital detox*, be it in scholarly or popular contexts. This can be understood as a strategy that is applied to reduce involvement with digital media, especially social media platforms. The term digital detox is often used in the context of social media and a temporary disconnection, for instance a week without Instagram or Facebook (Syvertsen & Enli, 2020). The notion detox echoes the purifying aspect that is hoped for and reflects the view that the digital norm is considered as something bad or harmful that needs to be managed (Syvertsen, 2020). In addition to the direct impact on an individual, behaviors of disconnection can be viewed as a political practice rooted in technology push-back and media refusal that affect the social sphere as well (Kaun & Treré, 2020; Syvertsen, 2017). Rejecting (digital) media (Ribak & Rosenthal, 2015), abstaining from using them, disengaging with them (Lomborg & Ytre-Arne, 2021), or quitting digital media use (Mullaney, 2005) can be understood as political non-participation that has an active component (Casemajor et al., 2015). In line with this, the term *digital resistance* is based on the concept of media resistance. This concept refers to the conscious and active non-use of media such as television as a response to their perceived invasiveness in everyday life. As such, resistance can be understood as a self-help strategy to regulate (digital) media use and therefore should be considered as a rational behavior—not lack thereof. What differentiates resistance from other forms of disconnection is that individuals who resist not only do so because of reasons that are situated on the personal or individual level, but also on the collective or societal level (Syvertsen, 2017). The different forms that such digital resistance can manifest in have yet to be mapped.

2.2. Motives for Digital Resistance

In the early 2000s, the lack of internet access and involuntary internet non-use have been associated with social inequalities (van Dijk, 2020). While these digital divides have closed to some extent with increasing penetration rates, stratification of internet non-use has been demonstrated to still be the case, even in highly connected societies (Kappeler et al., 2021). Moreover, digital inequalities in internet use persist (Festic et al., 2021). This also applies to digital disconnection behaviors, the privileged are most likely to consciously disconnect from digital media (Treré et al., 2020). This indicates that considering the possibility of disconnecting from digital media in

a world that is always on is a privilege. The reasons for digital disconnection and digital resistance do not lie in structural inequalities, but rather in discontent with the status quo and the wishes and hopes that individuals associate with their conscious non-use. A central motive for digital disconnection that has been researched in the recent years is perceived digital overuse and connected to this, well-being (Nguyen, 2021; Schmuck, 2020; Syvertsen, 2020). The increasing digitalization of everyday life has been shown to be associated with a feeling of using the internet too much. Such perceived digital overuse is related to a person's subjective well-being (Büchi et al., 2019). Besides perceived digital overuse through non-stop connectivity, feeling that one's personal space is intruded, feeling disconnected from one's authentic offline life and experiencing negative personal impacts can be reasons for discontent with one's digital media use (Syvertsen & Enli, 2020). Our highly mediated everyday lives can lead to technostress for internet users (Enli, 2014). One way in which they can deal with this is through disconnecting from digital services or devices (Nguyen, 2021, 2023; Syvertsen, 2020). Through such practices, internet users regain power over their use of digital media (Bucher, 2020; Syvertsen & Enli, 2020). In this article, we aim to find out whether, besides perceived digital overuse, other motives related to the aspects of the recent digitalization, which is characterized by an increasing datafication, algorithmization and platformization (Latzer, 2022), can be identified as motives for digital resistance as a special form of disconnection. Our world is marked by the societal trends of globalization and a new form of capitalism that relies on the monetization of data, so-called surveillance capitalism (Bennett & Parsons, 2013; Zuboff, 2019). In the course of this development, surveillance through governmental and private actors has come to a new level (Lyon, 2006, 2017). A sub-form of surveillance that is related to this datafication is *dataveillance*, which is characterized by the permanent automated collection and analysis of personal data (Büchi et al., 2022; Clarke & Greenleaf, 2017; Segijn & Strycharz, 2022; van Dijck, 2014). Reacting to a sense of dataveillance, i.e., to feeling watched or listened to online (Segijn et al., 2022), can lead to the self-inhibition of legitimate digital communication behavior, which is referred to as the chilling effects of dataveillance (Büchi et al., 2020, 2022; Penney, 2022; Stoycheff et al., 2019; Strycharz et al., 2022; White & Zimbardo, 1975). Closely connected to tendencies of surveillance and dataveillance is the concept of privacy, i.e., the management of information boundaries (Möller & Nowak, 2018; Trepte, 2016). Privacy protection can be a motive to counter this increasing dataveillance and to react to the threats to privacy that come with it. Behavioral changes in response to dataveillance and motivated by privacy needs need yet to be explored in-depth.

2.3. Consequences of Digital Resistance

So far, studies have shown that not using digital media or being without one's digital devices can lead to frustration. This is especially the case for younger people (Kaun

& Schwarzenegger, 2014). Also, in some cases, not using digital media can be impossible due to external constraints. Therefore, resistance to digital media might not be an option for some people, even if desired (Hesselberth, 2018; Kaun, 2021). For some people, disconnection can lead to involuntary social exclusion, for instance, if one does not use the digital media that one's social circle uses (Helsper, 2021). However, individuals who successfully disconnect can also feel self-empowered, more authentic to their true selves and display greater well-being (Helsper, 2021; Schmuck, 2020; Syvertsen & Enli, 2020). Building on this background, the (anticipated) consequences of resistance to digital media have to be investigated more thoroughly.

2.4. Research Gap and Aim

In recent studies, disconnection has often been studied in conjunction with (digital) well-being. Here, mostly short-term and narrow-scope disconnection, e.g., in the form of a digital detox, is seen as a response to the perceived overuse of digital services and tools, i.e., the feeling that one is using these too much (Büchi et al., 2019; Syvertsen, 2020). However, there are also individuals who resist digital media not only in terms of a specific period in time but in a broader and deeper sense, i.e., by consciously not using certain tools or services at all. This form of active non-participation has a political dimension to it and therefore, motives for it differ from the firstly mentioned (Casemajor et al., 2015). The group of these digital resisters warrant attention (Woodstock, 2014), especially in a society in which using digital media has become the norm (Melton et al., 2019). Disconnection practices should be regarded on an individual basis because on one hand, persons differ in their perception of their disconnection practices and on the other, these practices can also vary according to contexts (Kania-Lundholm, 2021). Therefore, this article aims at exploring the phenomenon of resistance to digital media more in-depth. To contribute to filling existing gaps in the literature, it seeks to investigate the ways in which resistance manifests, digital resisters' motives, and the consequences that resistance to digital media in a world entails, where using them is the norm. To explore this phenomenon in-depth, we conducted semi-structured interviews, to which we applied thematic analysis.

3. METHOD

This section describes the recruitment process, the composition of the sample, the process of data collection and the data analysis.

3.1. Recruitment and Sample

Participants for this study were recruited among Swiss internet users through the research group's wider social circles to find interested persons who vary in their demographics, interests, and values. The interviewer did not know the participants

personally before conducting the interviews. We advertised the study as an investigation into everyday internet. Interested participants filled out a registration form indicating their gender, age, education level and professional background. Moreover, we asked them to tell us the devices they use to go online, the average time they spend online per day, and how they would evaluate their internet skills. We included these questions because a person's sociodemographic background and internet skills have been demonstrated to explain privacy-related behavior online (Büchi et al., 2017) and we deemed this relevant to practices of resistance as well. Those individuals whose profile was adding to the diversity of our sample were then contacted by the interviewer for participation in the study, since we aimed at variance in these aspects (Tavory, 2020). Participants were recruited in a rolling process. After the first interview was conducted, we started with the analysis and recruited further participants according to the approach of theoretical sampling until no new aspects emerged in the analysis and we reached saturation (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). In total, 16 semi-structured qualitative interviews with Swiss internet users were conducted. As the interviews dealt with a clearly focused topic in-depth, we evaluated this number as adequate for the analysis (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The sample was diverse regarding gender (9 female, 7 male), age (24 to 67 years), and educational background (vocational education to tertiary education), as well as regarding internet usage time (1 to 14 hours daily) and self-reported internet skills (sufficient to excellent). Participants lived in urban and more rural areas of Switzerland.

3.2. Data Collection

The interviews were conducted in summer 2022, between end of March and beginning of July. While part of the interviews took place face-to-face, part was conducted via video conference due to Covid-19-related restrictions and related participants' preferences. The flexible participation from interviewees' homes allowed for a natural conversation situation, which is why we consider the virtual setting to be comparable to the in-person one (Heiselberg & Stępińska, 2022). All interviewees were informed about their rights prior to the interviews and gave informed consent in written form.

In this study, we aim at exploring digital resistance: its manifestations, motives for resisting and consequences of this behavior. The interviews were semi-structured according to a topic guide, allowing for openness to emerging topics. The interviewer began the conversation by asking the interviewee to tell a little about themselves, who they are and what they do and proceeded to ask about internet use in their everyday life, before asking about a recent search that they conducted online and how that went. During the interview, personal internet use, attitudes and practices were thematized. At the end of the interview, participants had the chance to mention anything that they wanted to discuss that has not been so far. After being debriefed about the study's purpose, interviewees were invited to ask further questions if they

wanted to. In mean, the interviews took 72 minutes. The language spoken was Swiss German or Standard German. All quotes are translated to English and to ensure participants' anonymity, we only state the essential personal information and use pseudonyms.

3.3. Data Analysis

After each interview, the researcher created a memo with the main insights and striking aspects. While the main analysis was conducted using qualitative analysis software, pen-and-paper mind-mapping was central to the iterative coding process (Maher et al., 2018) and the audio files as well as the memos were taken into account to enrichen the codes identified through thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2022; Clarke & Braun, 2017; Gibbs, 2007). The analysis started with open coding and descriptive codes (Corbin & Strauss, 2015; Strauss & Corbin, 1994) that were then rendered more abstract to identify patterns and generate themes (Braun & Clarke, 2022; Clarke & Braun, 2017; Gibbs, 2007).

4. FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

In our analysis, we investigated how the three aspects of our research question, i.e., 1) manifestations of digital resistance, 2) digital resisters' motives for digital resistance, and 3) consequences thereof, look among Swiss internet users. This chapter presents and discusses our findings.

4.1. Manifestations of Digital Resistance

Our findings show that digital resistance can manifest in different ways, ranging from only using certain technologies under specific circumstances to not using any of the default digital media that are widely used in our digital society at all. While the interviewees did not use the word resister to describe themselves, they showed varying forms of digital resistance.

To begin with, some persons were consciously resisting certain services, while still using other service by the same corporation. They can be viewed as *niche resisters*. For instance, Marc, 62, who considered himself having sufficient internet skills, did not use Facebook, but used WhatsApp to stay in touch with people. He mentioned that he had some close friends who resisted using WhatsApp, which he found rather extreme. A person who would fit this description was Joe, who was more thorough about his non-use. He said:

> "WhatsApp was one of the first things I deinstalled [from my phone] and indeed pretty thoroughly."
>
> Joe, 66 years, good internet skills

He then explained that he did not use any service by Microsoft, Google or Meta and instead actively looked for functional alternatives, which he integrated into his everyday practices. Joe can be understood as a prototypical *thorough resister*: he spent a lot of time and energy researching functional alternatives to the services that he did not want to use. Once he had decided on these alternatives, he stuck to them and talked to his social surroundings to let them know where they could find him if needed.

In contrast to this far-reaching resistance, other individuals limited the use of certain technologies to certain situations. For instance, Dan, 26 years, with excellent self-reported internet skills said he would only use the voice assistant Siri on his iPhone to call someone when driving his car. So, while he had activated it generally, he only used it in this specific context and otherwise *situationally implicitly resisted* using it.

Other individuals displayed forms of partial resistance to a certain service due to practical restrictions. For instance, Claire had moved all her private conversations to Signal with everyone who had the app installed. However, the need to participate in group chats that were exclusively on WhatsApp allowed her to partially resist the service:

> "Many people have moved to Signal, but the group chats with different people are still on WhatsApp."
>
> Claire, 37 years, excellent internet skills

Hence, a total resistance to WhatsApp was not possible for her. Such lock-in-effects showed to be deeply powerful. In a similar way, for Sara, this led to a form of *discontinued resistance*:

> "WhatsApp not being as secure and sharing data was discussed in the media and that was when I thought, I would download it [Signal]. But well, because maybe 20% of my social network or not even that many had downloaded it as well, I found myself constantly going back to WhatsApp and that was when I decided I did not need two things."
>
> Sara, 29 years, good internet skills

Having read about WhatsApp sharing data she wanted to switch to a safer alternative, but due to network effects, she was not able to uphold her resistance and went back to using WhatsApp after all. So, for her, practicality overrode her initial data-related concerns, which led to discontinued resistance for her.

Our findings thus showed that external constraints potentially impacted the way in which digital resistance manifested. Another reason for these various manifestations lay in the motives that different persons displayed.

4.2. Motives for Digital Resistance

Our findings show that the motives for digital resistance varied among individuals.

4.2.1. Subjective Well-Being

Recently, digital media have entered almost every life domain. With their extended range of use cases, increasingly, individuals feel like they use the internet too much, which can go hand-in-hand with reduced well-being (Büchi et al., 2019; Gui & Büchi, 2019), as well as resignation or irritation (Draper & Turow, 2019; Ytre-Arne & Moe, 2021). In addition, not being interested in certain aspects of these technologies can also relate to a person's well-being and lead to conscious non-use of certain digital media. For instance, for Karen lack of interest was the key motive for not using Facebook:

> "For me, the sad thing about Facebook is the self-promotion, appearances do not reflect reality [...] I do not feel the need for this. [...] It can be great for people who want to stay in contact with other people or who want to make new friends. I do not think that this is a bad thing, but personally, I do not use it for myself."
>
> Karen, 55 years, good internet skills

Karen went on to reflect on her internet use and said that she needed to build trust in the different platforms and services, and while she would wish for more transparency regarding data collection and use, she was convinced that the internet added to her everyday life. Therefore, she would not want to miss out on it.

This echoes the findings of a qualitative study indicating that persons disconnected from social media due to a variety of motives like not being interested in using them, feeling that they were using them too much, being concerned about their privacy, overthinking social influences or wanting to ameliorate their work-life balance (Nguyen, 2023). Besides well-being, which has been identified as an important reason for short-term disconnection practices like digital detoxes (Nguyen, 2021), we found that being critical of dataveillance and of data capitalism are major motives for digital resistance.

4.2.2. Surveillance, Dataveillance and Data Capitalism

Our digital everyday life is characterized by increasing dataveillance, i.e., a form of surveillance that is enabled through the constant and automated data collection and analysis online (Büchi et al., 2022; Clarke & Greenleaf, 2017; Segijn & Strycharz, 2022; van Dijck, 2014). Perceiving such surveillance or having a sense of dataveillance, i.e., to feeling watched or listened to online (Segijn et al., 2022), can lead to changes in how one behaves online. As a coping mechanism, individuals can wish for greater privacy protection. According to the privacy calculus approach, changing

the use of digital services or devices can be a way to do so (Kezer et al., 2022). Indeed, research showed that being aware of risks can play a role for applying self-help strategies against privacy-related risks, like adapting one's privacy settings (Kappeler et al., 2023). This echoes with our findings. While persons are conscious about the benefits digital media bring to their everyday life, some users see them as valuable but at the same time problematic because of their data collection and analysis practices. As a consequence, they reflect on ways to circumvent their data being collected. For instance, Zoe said the only way to protect oneself against having one's data collected and analyzed is by not using the internet:

> "Probably simply using the internet less. I think this is the only thing one can do."
>
> Zoe, 27 years, very good internet skills

Limiting data collection is also the reason why she consciously logged out of her Google account and consciously left Facebook to stop using it at all. While Zoe had been using Facebook for a while until she deleted it, Joe deinstalled WhatsApp immediately from the smartphone on which it was pre-installed as a reaction to his critical view of corporate data collection. The origins of such deeply engrained critical evaluation of digital data collection can lie in non-digital spheres. Joe's skepticism towards corporate data collection and use originated in his skepticism towards governmental surveillance, which he felt subjected to in his twenties. Hence, his skepticism had become an important factor of distinction to him:

> "I grew up as an anti-data-trace-being and that is also one of my favorite topics. I marvel at the lightheartedness with which people sell their lives to corporations ideologically."
>
> Joe, 66 years, good internet skills

This quote illustrates that for Joe, being critical of data traces being collected was part of his identity construction. In this way, individuals can view their resistance to digital media as an integral part of their identity, comparable to abstinence in other life domains, like for instance not smoking (Mullaney, 2005). Similarly, disconnection can also be viewed as adding to one's authentic self, for instance in the form of a emporary digital detox (Syvertsen & Enli, 2020).

Closely connected to the notion of surveillance and dataveillance is the idea of data capitalism (West, 2019). For Tim, it was obvious that private actors primarily monetize his data:

> "Corporations just started collecting data and using them. But I think, there are other ways to this, ways where one provides one's data and receives something in return and that is transparent. I think this would change a lot

> and render it more positive [...] If I know that I can choose what purposes my data is being used for and decide what I am okay with and what not for a given service, this would increase my trust."
>
> Tim, 35 years, excellent internet skills

While Tim was to some extent okay with his data being used for commercial purposes, he said he would prefer paying for a service and in turn being able to actively decide which of his data could be used for what purpose and by whom. In this sense, he wished for more transparency and agency for individuals to control their data.

Other individuals displayed a more pronounced negative attitude towards data capitalism. For instance, Claire especially viewed the collection of data for one purpose and it subsequently being used for another one as problematic:

> "You know, when data from my supermarket's loyalty program would be shared with my health insurance and they evaluated that you eat too much unhealthy food like chips and this led to an increase in your premium, such things. As far as I know and I hope, this is not the case yet. Like in China, these circumstances that they have there [...] If they [health insurances] really wanted to evaluate everything that you are doing, like when you engage in risky sports and this then leads to an increase in your health insurance premium."
>
> Claire, 37 years, excellent internet skills

For Claire, extended data use beyond the original intent, for instance related to marketing, was what she viewed as most questionable. In a similar fashion, individuals also viewed the algorithmic curation and personalization of content that was aimed at maximizing the time users spend on applications and thus monetizing their attention as problematic. For instance, Barbara who did not use Google for searching for information or any social media platforms like Facebook or Instagram, said, referring to these services:

> "This is a huge machinery, where they use data for political purposes and what not, for campaigns and so on [...]. In addition, I just think, it's not necessary that everyone knows everything about everyone. Even though I have nothing to hide, I do think that we should not share everything [...] For certain communities this can become really dangerous, like in Russia, where homosexuality has become forbidden."
>
> Barbara, 39 years, very good internet skills

As a consequence, individuals like Barbara did not want to be affected by these processes or contribute to the increasing monetization and potential misuse of private data. They deemed the collection of increasing amounts of personal data as

problematic, not only for them personally, but even more from a societal perspective. Hence, they decided to resist digital media and used them in a more conscious way (Beattie, 2020; Crogan & Kinsley, 2012; Lanier, 2018; Odell, 2019).

4.3. Consequences of Digital Resistance

Consequences of digital resistance can be positive and negative. On one hand, not using certain digital media can lead to a feeling of content and freedom. For instance, Barbara did not feel restricted by her resistance:

> "I feel free [...] I use everything that I want, I do not let this limit myself. Whenever there is an alternative for something that I would judge a nasty corporation, I use the alternative."
>
> Barbara, 39 years, very good internet skills

Indeed, a consequence of resisting digital media can be that the disconnection leads to a restriction of choices: As soon as a person has decided against using certain technologies, for instance social media, they can feel liberated and thus, their well-being can increase (see Pojman, 1985 on Kierkegaard's philosophy of freedom). In a similar way, short-term forms of disconnection like periods of digital detox have been shown to lead to greater well-being (Nguyen, 2021). In that sense, digital resistance can be viewed positively.

On the other hand, resisting certain digital media can also lead to negative consequences, like social exclusion. In fact, we found that this anticipated consequence can be a barrier to resistance. Lock-in effects can lead to a person not resisting the use of certain digital media, even if it is wished for. If a person like Claire did not want to use WhatsApp because of dataveillance concerns, but her children's school communication took place in a group chat or a teacher reached out through this channel, she was not able to switch to an alternative service like Signal despite being aware of its existence and preferring to use it. One way to circumvent this was through *proxy-use*, i.e., when another person passed on the information that was shared through certain channels. In this way, one person's resistance was enabled by the means of another person's participation. Hence, when discussing resistance to digital media, we should bear in mind that this practice is not accessible for every individual to the same degree. Ribak and Rosenthal (2015) have pointed out that individuals who resisted digital technologies such as smartphones needed to consciously deal with the pressure of not using a service or device that was the norm. This required determination and strength. Furthermore, if a certain technology became the standard, not using it could signify missing out on information or socializing needs and ultimately, could even have led to social exclusion.

4.4. Digital Resistance in an Always-On Society

In that sense, we can think of disconnection as a paradox (Kuntsman & Miyake, 2019). On one hand, individuals engaging in disconnection attributed hopes and benefits, such as leaving fewer data traces, increasing their privacy, not contributing to data capitalism, an increase in authenticity or autonomy and greater well-being to their behavior. On the other hand, they needed to deal with the costs that this resistance came with, like informing themselves about functional alternatives and talking to their social networks about switching to these. We saw that an individual's personal characteristics, their attitudes, the social context and the expected benefits played a role for weighing the costs and benefits of engaging in a certain behavior—or deciding against doing so (Ajzen, 1991; Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975; Katz et al., 1973). This applies especially to individuals' behaviors like digital media resistance that diverge from social norms (Berkowitz, 2004), like the constant connectedness and digital media use in a highly digitized society. At the same time, research indicated that privacy concerns did not necessarily lead to behavioral changes that entailed greater privacy protection, a phenomenon that has been discussed under the term privacy paradox (Barnes, 2006; Barth et al., 2019). Instead, internet skills were crucial (Büchi et al., 2017; Lutz et al., 2020). Our results showed that a prerequisite for resisting was being a highly skilled internet user and being able to employ alternatives to address one's needs. This illustrates that the application of resistance practices should be regarded as easier for individuals who have a higher digital capital. In that sense, social and digital inequalities can be perpetuated (Ragnedda, 2020). In addition, it has been demonstrated that many individuals did not react to risks related to their privacy with increased privacy protection, but rather with privacy pragmatism, cynicism, or resignation as they felt that there was nothing they could do (Draper, 2017; Hoffmann et al., 2016; Khan et al., 2023; Lutz et al., 2020; Lutz & Newlands, 2021; van Ooijen et al., 2022). Also, the notion that persons who were discontent with the role that digital media played in their life could 'just say no' neglects the norms and interwovenness of such tools in our digital everyday life (Karppi et al., 2020). Hence, digital resistance must be seen as a privilege and from a governance-perspective, it should therefore not be considered as the only or preferred way to deal with risks that the living in a highly digitized and datafied society entails.

Hence, on a societal level, digital resistance practices can be viewed critically as their application furthers a shift of responsibility to cope with societal challenges such as increasing dataveillance and debating the role that technology should play in our lives onto individuals: they need to actively opt-out of the norm of connectivity if they are dissatisfied with it (Kaun, 2021). In fact, while digital detox, as a temporarily limited practice, may actually help in keeping the status quo of an increasingly connected everyday life, digital resistance is a practice that aims at breaking with these conditions (Hesselberth, 2018; Odell, 2019). Hence, digital resistance can be understood as a tactic to challenge the existing power structures. In that sense, resistance

to digital media questions the expectation that individuals need to constantly participate online. However, while resistance to digital media or certain social media platforms can be viewed as performative (Portwood-Stacer, 2013) it is questionable, whether individuals' disconnection practices can lead to social change (Karppi et al., 2021) or if they lead to the perpetuation of the status quo by serving the neo-liberal self-optimization narratives.

5. CONCLUSION

This article set out to explore resistance to digital media, i.e., manifestations of digital resistance, motives for resisting, and the consequences thereof, among internet users in a highly connected society, where using digital media in everyday life is the norm. We applied thematic analysis to semi-structured interviews with 16 Swiss adult internet users to investigate digital resistance. Our findings showed that resistance to digital media manifested in not using certain services (e.g., Google Search), not using any service by a certain corporation (e.g., Meta), or not using a certain type of tool (e.g., fitness watch, voice assistant). The extent of such resistance practices varied: it ranged from partial to total and even discontinued resistance and included niche as well as thorough resistance. Also, it took on explicit but also implicit forms, by only using certain applications in certain situations. This conscious non-use was accompanied by functional substitution (e.g., switching from WhatsApp to Signal) or renouncing from obtaining certain benefits (e.g., by not using a smartphone at all). A central motive for resisting was viewing services as problematic due to their surveillance practices, lack of privacy, data-monetizing practices, or monopoly position. Digital resisters were unhappy about these side effects of our digitized everyday lives. In addition, they had low trust in these services and the respective private corporations and wished for more (governmental) regulation. Digital resistance is an active behavioral choice with which individuals cope with aspects of their digital life. Hence, it can be understood as an active form of non-participation and refusal to digital norms. At the same time, this choice was highly contingent on personal characteristics and contexts, like a person's level of internet skills and their social circle. Indeed, an understanding group of close people was crucial, as without it, resisters would have been excluded from their social network. As a consequence, digital resisters could feel excluded from certain contexts. At the same time, however, they felt self-empowered as they perceived themselves doing something against the status quo that they found problematic, like increasing surveillance capitalism.

This article explored the phenomenon of resistance to digital media from an individual-centered-perspective. By doing so, it deepens our understanding of conscious non-use of digital media as an act of resistance in a society that operates heavily digitally. This exploration identified individuals' perceptions and wishes and hence can inspire regulation that suits these needs.

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VALENTINE'S DAY AND POST-FEMINISM IN VOGUE SPAIN'S COVERAGE

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the relationship between romantic love, consumerism and post-feminist sensibility in the discourse of Vogue in the Spanish context. This study examines the characteristics of post-feminist sensibility in media discourses using the method of thematic analysis and shows that both femininity and female identity are deeply linked to the body.. Vogue presents self-care consumption as a solution to individual problems and portrays romantic love as necessary for women but not men. This work reveals a reinforcement of hegemonic gender norms, with an emphasis on normative bodies, heteronormativity and the association of female empowerment with product consumption.

Keywords: gender studies ▪ media studies ▪ post-feminism ▪ women's magazines ▪ stereotypes.

1. INTRODUCTION

Media industries construct the symbolic paradigm from which other social forces emerge (Bernárdez Rodal, 2018). Therefore, this discourse plays an essential role in shaping individual identities, and it is crucial to research its articulation from an academic perspective. In this mediatised universe, women are under tremendous pressure to meet the demands and requirements linked to gender, arising from the social structures portrayed in media discourses (Gallagher, 2014). In recent decades, traditional female roles have been mixed with expectations emerging from neoliberalism (Rottenberg, 2014) and consumerism (McRobbie, 2020). For instance, the act of shopping is associated with happiness and the fulfilment of certain expectations that capitalism and patriarchy impose on women.

In this context, where neoliberalism appropriates cultural movements and claims (McRobbie, 2020), Valentine's Day has commodified romantic love. The neoliberal paradigm links purchasing with empowerment and liberation from patriarchy (Banet-Weiser, 2018; Rottenberg, 2014). Love is tied to consumption through the purchase of products as the key to successful couple relationships. These discourses

incite women to buy to succeed in love, as the media depicts romantic relationships as necessary within the patriarchal system (de Miguel, 2015). Media loads public discourses in the interest of capitalism and relates happiness to products, and these messages are even more prominent when targeting women.

In recent years, post-feminism has emerged as a pivotal term in the lexicon of Feminist Studies (Litosseliti et al., 2019), and the concept has been widely debated as well (Gill, 2016; Litosseliti et al., 2019; Riley et al., 2017). This paper addresses post-feminism as a sensibility (Gill, 2007; 2016), a cultural phenomenon that is both an object of study and a lens (Riley et al., 2017). The post-feminist media culture is characterised by contradictory messages that entangle feminist and anti-feminist discourses. This paper approaches the intersection between post-feminist media culture and Valentine's Day in women's magazines as an object of study contributing to gender media studies with an analysis of how the commodification of love penetrates the post-feminist culture, appropriates its concepts and generates social pressure on women. Earlier work on post-feminist sensibilities has focused on Anglo-American media (Riley et al., 2017). In contrast, the paper will contribute to filling the gap in other language contexts, focusing on Spanish content. This analysis focuses on *Vogue*, one of Spain's most widely read women's magazines (AIMC, 2023). The analytical method of analysis is the thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Clarke & Braun, 2013) from a post-feminist sensibility (Gill, 2007; 2017). This research aims to understand how post-feminist sensibilities intersect with media representation of messages that encourage women to consume on Valentine's Day to fulfil expectations of love. The paper demonstrates how *Vogue* frames capitalist messages about romantic love within a post-feminist sensibility and generates new social pressure on women.

2. POST-FEMINIST MEDIA CULTURE

Post-feminism (Gill, 2007) is essential to Feminist Media Studies (Díaz Fernández, 2021; Riley et al., 2017). The term has been widely discussed among scholars (Riley et al., 2017), and there is still a lack of consensus on its meaning. In this research, I approach post-feminism as a sensibility that characterises a wide range of discourses in popular culture and is also profoundly connected to neoliberalism (Gill, 2007, 2016; Rottenberg, 2014). As Gill argues (Banet-Weiser et al., 2020), in the post-feminist media culture, we can find celebrations of 'girl power' and female success intertwined with the scrutiny of women in the public eye. These are, therefore, opposing discourses on issues that can affect gender constructs. The construct of post-feminist sensibility offers new ways of understanding ideal femininity within conflicting messages in different media (Riley et al., 2017).

The researchers use the notion of post-feminism in several ways. According to Lia Litosseliti, Ros Gill and Laura Favaro (2019) there are four main perspectives: (1) as an epistemological break within feminist movements; (2) as an evolution from the perspectives related to the second wave of feminist; (3) to denote a backlash against

feminism; (4) as a cultural sensibility linked to feminism and neoliberalism. In this research we approach post-feminism as: "a cultural phenomenon (a set of ideas/representations of women circulating in media) that has itself become an object of study, as well as a lens (a sense-making framework or an analytic tool) for recognising and analysing that object of study" (Riley et al., 2017, p. 2)

Following Gill (2007), post-feminist media culture places a great emphasis on the body, portraying a 'sexy body' as the key to success and the ultimate expression of femininity. The body is presented as a source of power that requires constant scrutiny, discipline and monitoring, which can be reinforced by the messages conveyed by media culture. The property of the female body is closely linked to the sexualisation of culture, which involves the spread of discourses about sex across media platforms where all women's bodies are a potential subject to sexual coding. Women are also responsible for making their sexual and emotional heterosexual relationships desirable and pleasing to men. In post-feminist media culture, women are legitimised to play with their sexuality, and this represents a shift in the way power is perceived in relation to the female body. Rather than being sexualised by an assumed male gaze, women are now able to look at themselves from a self-critical perspective. In addition, the 'girlification' of adult women promotes youth as desirable. If female success is associated with desire and youth is perceived as sexier, age will be an impediment for women to avoid.

In the neoliberal subjectivity in which post-feminism is embedded, sexual objectification and body surveillance can be represented as freely chosen by women rather than a patriarchal imposition (de Miguel, 2015). According to this assumption, women are pleasing themselves by removing hair or undergoing cosmetic surgery instead of pleasing society. This notion of 'free choice' is central to post-feminist discourses. Building upon the ideas of Gill (2007), every aspect of life is presented as an individual will and self-determination. According to Catherine Rottenberg (Banet-Weiser et al., 2020), well-being and self-care are key to building the work-family balance every woman should have. This means that self-care is almost a must for women, who must attend to every aspect of their lives and take care of themselves. The debate on intersectionality has always revolved around post-feminist contexts (Riley et al., 2017), arguing that the female subject on which post-feminist media culture has focused its attention is a white, middle class and heterosexual woman (Banet-Weiser et al., 2020; Litosseliti et al., 2019). The research on intersectionality concludes that the women described are less likely to be excluded from the discourses (Evans el al., 2010).

In the current post-feminist media culture, intense self-surveillance leads to the requirement to "transform oneself and remodel one's interior life" (Gill, 2007, p. 155). All of the aforementioned is meant to follow the advice presented in media discourses as if every aspect of a woman's life is an individual choice. In addition, Gill (2007) refers to the content related to the nature of gender differences based on the "battle of the sexes". These discourses emphasise sexual differences and erotise power relations between men and women. Feminism is now part of the media

agenda, but it offers contradictory constructions of feminism mixing feminist and anti-feminist ideas (Banet-Weiser, 2018), such as equality and the 'battle of sexes'. As Banet-Weiser (2020) stated, personal choice and individual entrepreneurship are key to the success of neoliberal culture, in which companies use women's individual problems as a key selling point for products. Women's identities are embedded in a neoliberal paradigm based on consumerism associated with empowerment, freedom and power.

Post-feminist media culture is integrated into neoliberal society and shares common characteristics discussed in this section. In summary, these features include the surveillance and self-surveillance of women's bodies, individualism as a means of success, a heterosexual, white and middle-class perspective, consumerism combined with self-care, and youth as a valuable quality in women's lives.

3. COMMODIFICATION OF ROMANTIC LOVE AND WOMEN MAGAZINES

The purchase of products in this paradigm presupposes the triumph of love (Blanco Ruiz, 2018), and happy relationships are represented in symbolic spaces as desirable and needed for women (de Miguel, 2015). Therefore, it is interesting for a media analysis from a feminist perspective to study how the need to consume on Valentine's Day is represented in media targeted at women.

The main media focused on a female audience are the 'women's magazines'. The reference to 'women's magazines' implies a type of magazine that focuses on what is considered 'feminine' (Rodríguez Sánchez, 2018). Given that this naming is based on a gender construction, as women and men can be interested in the same topics, the term has been widely discussed among scholars. As Rodríguez Sánchez (2018) claims, there is a group of 'women's magazines' but no group of 'men's magazines', considering 'masculine' interests as universal and 'feminine' as 'otherness' (de Beauvoir, 1949). The feminine adjective refers to a type of interest based on gender construction in which women are associated with beauty and romantic relationships, while men are concerned with business and leadership (Bernárdez Rodal, 2015). The history of these journals is an example of how femininity has been constituted as a separate space for women (McRobbie, 2020). This type of magazine has always paid attention to issues related to fashion, beauty, society or celebrities (Martín García, 2017), with a strong interest in advising on how to achieve beauty, love or happiness through the purchase of products (Rodríguez Sánchez, 2018). And while some scholars (Gallego, 2013; Rodríguez Sánchez, 2018) argue that including this type of magazine under the "lifestyle" category would be more accurate without distinguishing between men's and women's interests, the change has not yet occurred in the Spanish media industry, and 'women's magazines' are still considered a distinct category.

In neoliberal societies, romanticism and consumerism are closely linked through the media. Valentine's Day is a trend that, according to the Google Trends tool in Spain, receives maximum attention during the month of February. The press recognises the

high volume of traffic that this event generates to drive visitors to their content. In this context, the concept of romantic love is portrayed as a social and cultural construction based on an exclusive and unique feeling to a significant one often associated with heterosexual couples, thus perpetuating gender stereotypes (Blanco Ruiz, 2018). The commodification of love has turned it into a powerful marketing insight that is used to sell products, mainly on special days such as Valentine's Day.

The purchase of products is associated with the triumph in love (Blanco Ruiz, 2018), and Valentine's Day incentivises many consumers to give away gifts to their loved ones (Close & Zinkhan, 2006). For example, in 2023, Spaniards spent four times more money on Valentine's Day than on the sales season in Januay (20 Minutos, 2023). Brands and media are aware of this power of consumption and fuel it with advertising campaigns around the display of romantic love. On the other hand, Valentine's Day could be a reminder of a 'single status' (Close & Zinkhan, 2006). Mass media are also aware of this situation by spreading messages with a new meaning for February 14 based on self-care or 'empower yourself' discourses. The media discourses find their way to relate products to Valentine's Day and commoditise love – be it couple-oriented or self-care.

4. METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH AND CORPUS OF ANALYSIS

The magazine analysed in this paper is *Vogue*, as it is the most widely read women's magazine in Spain with 1,259,000 readers (AIMC, 2023). This research focuses on the online edition as its information does not expire and is always accessible in the online space (Rodríguez Sánchez, 2018), unlike the print version, which is less available for consumption. This magazine, in its digital edition, is composed of 10 sections: fashion, beauty, living, shopping, fashion shows, celebrities, television, brides, *Vogue* 365 and business. The frequency of publication varies: the sections with a higher publication frequency are fashion and beauty, while *Vogue* 365, business, and celebrities are the least frequently published.

The corpus chosen for this paper consists of the issues published in the online version of *Vogue* Spain in the year 2023 under the topic of 'Valentine's Day'. The period between January and February 2023 was chosen because it contains the most recent articles on Valentine's Day. During this period *Vogue* published thirteen items in the following sections: fashion (2), shopping (10) and beauty (1). It is noteworthy that ten are published in 'shopping' section. These articles provide information on gifts, mainly perfumes and jewellery. Additionally, we have one article in 'beauty' regarding a list of 'treat-yourself' plans to spend Valentine's Day regarding beauty treatments, fitness or shopping, and two in 'fashion', which also focuses on jewellery and fashion. A detailed list of articles is included in the appendix in which each item is given a code to be referred to in the analysis.

This research aims to understand how post-feminist sensibilities intersect with media representations that encourage women to consume on Valentine's Day to

fulfil expectations of love. This research will explore the relationship and interaction within post-feminism, capitalism and the commodification of love. There are certain expectations and achievements that women are expected to achieve during this period, and the study illuminates how these are materialised in the *Vogue* discourses.

This paper approaches the corpus using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Clarke & Braun, 2013). This qualitative method allows this research to explore a corpus of data (Escudero, 2020) and provides the tool to identify and analyse media patterns (Scharp & Sanders, 2019). The approach consists of six phases: (1) familiarisation with the corpus; (2) generation of initial codes; (3) search for themes; (4) review of themes; (5) definition and naming of themes; (6) producing the report (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Each of the phases consists of the following:

(1) Familiarisaton with the corpus and (2) generation of initial codes: The first phases involve an initial exploration of the corpus in order to establish the approach.

(3) Search and (4) review of the themes: This work also approaches the research from the post-feminist sensibility (Gill, 2007): "Post-feminism has proved an enduring and productive term for feminist scholars in media and cultural studies, among other disciplines, helping to furnish analytic tools and critical insights for the interrogation of gender in neoliberal societies." (Litosseliti et al., 2019, p. 10). These stages deal with the in-depth analysis to which the postfeminist sensibility is applied. This allows to explore the interrelation between postfeminism and the topic being analyzed. For this purpose, these phases will focus on patterns under the features that Gill (2007) defines as the main elements of this sensibility:

- Femininity as a bodily property: a sexy body is depicted in post-feminist media culture as crucial for women in order to construct an identity;
- Self-care, self-surveillance and empowerment: The self-care market and the "love yourself" messages encourage women to please themselves using beauty or going shopping;
- Makeover paradigm: Women seem to be in an eternal need to evolve by following the advice of lifestyle experts or with new consumer habits;
- Sexual differences: Sexual differences continue to be present in the media, associating certain characteristics, ways of socialising or spending leisure time and preferences according to gender constructs.

(5) Defining and naming the themes; and (6) writing the report: This final stage involves naming the themes and conducting the analysis presented in the following section.

Given the underdevelopment of intersectionality that some scholars argue about post-feminist analysis (Riley et al., 2017), this paper unravels which model of woman is portrayed in the visuals. Following the post-feminist model of woman that is usually portrayed in the media (Banet-Weiser et al., 2020; Litosseliti et al., 2019), which

is heterosexual, white, with a normative body and middle class, this research will focus on these features.

5. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

5.1. Consumerism as the queen

Women are put under the pressure of having to meet the expectations of Valentine's Day: “it's just around the corner, and that means starting to look for the perfect gift and the perfect look” (V7). From messages like: “Still no gift?” (V1) to the commitment to buy some products: “12 jewellery brands you should have under your radar for Valentine's Day” (V2), women are encouraged to consume in order to celebrate the day, and to meet certain standards (McRobbie, 2020). Ten of the thirteen articles in the corpus are published in the 'shopping' section, which allows me to analyse the close relationship between Valentine's Day and consumption. In addition, articles in other sections (‘fashion’ and ‘beauty’) also feature consumable objects.

As previously noted (Blanco Ruiz, 2018), consumerism is closely linked to demonstrations of affection and love. It may seem impossible to show affection without spending money on it: “nothing says 'I love you' like a perfume that smells (really) good” (V1). All the items analysed in this research associate the triumph in love with consumerism, mainly through material gifts: “accessories loaded with love” (V9). This consumption is associated with success in love, either with one's partner or with oneself. This urge to consume is cloaked in a narrative that places love at the centre: “Although the most important thing on February 14 is to celebrate love, we all like to receive a little something” (V1). All the messages lead to the acquisition of products in order to succeed in love. In the neoliberal agenda, a set of discourses that supplement identity with capitalist actions is emerging (McRobbie, 2020). This is closely linked to the idea of consumption to achieve an identity (Banet-Weiser, 2018), which is only possible if the products that media presents as necessary are acquired.

The gifts presented in *Vogue* for success in love are luxuries that not everyone can afford, so the target audience is middle/upper class. Thus, as presented in the analysed discourse, love would be reserved for a few who have two very valuable qualities in the neoliberal era: time and money. The role model in Spanish *Vogue* is the same as in previous research -- middle/high class, young, successful at work, happy family balance (McRobbie, 2020), and aware of the latest trends. Consumerism is essential to a constant makeover paradigm seen as a success requirement for women.

5.2. Being single on Valentine’s Day: self-care as the guardian angel

While gift buying is planned from the beginning of January onwards, the articles focusing on self-care are published in the final stretch of Valentine's season. As the day approaches, we find two issues (V12, V13) about plans for 'treating yourself' on

the 13th and 14th. This way, plans that are exclusively advertised for self-care require less planning than the effort to please others. Although self-care may seem to be the first choice, it only takes place when women have not found a person to spend the day with. These discursive strategies develop women's fear of not having a partner, a subordination mechanism that places men in a situation of power (de Miguel, 2015). The self-care need in case of being single on Valentine's Day only occurs in the case of women since instructions and guidelines on how to take care of themselves, in case they do not find a partner, are exclusively aimed at them. Love is presented as something necessary for women.

Self-care is also presented as an attempt to spend Valentine's Day in a way that does not lead to "despair" (V13). In the days leading up to February 14, the countdown begins to receive a postcard of love or, in the worst case, to find a remedy: "There are only a few hours left to celebrate Valentine's Day. Most of you will not have received a card (I've never received one on this day, and I don't expect that to change). If this is your case, don't despair: we know how to take control of the situation" (V13). The way to take control of the situation is to acquire beauty and fashion products and thus become a self-monitoring subject (Banet-Weiser et al., 2020). Self-care is linked to monitoring the physical self, and the body becomes a window into the individual's inner life (Gill, 2007). Following these assumptions, the suggestion from the magazine implies that the only way for single women to get through Valentine's Day's unwanted loneliness is to take care of their bodies.

These plans are mandatory if you are single and optional if you have a partner: "you must practice self-care every day, because you know that too (the logistics of putting it into practice is another story). If you feel up to celebrating the day of love alone this year, you can, and you must" (V12). It is underlined that it is okay to be single, however, the discourse still points out that if this is the case, it is very likely that the woman will come to this day in a low mood: "especially if you are in a very stressful time or have arrived at February 14 a little low in spirits" (V12). Being single on Valentine's Day presents a double perspective in which you can enjoy the day with 'treat-yourself' plans, but you would enjoy it much more if you were in a happy couple.

Single women are included in the gift items for couples through the assumption of 'self-care'. The items are first presented as a gift for others, and the second option is to 'treat-yourself": "to succeed or to treat-yourself on this special day" (V1). For example, the products of a Valentine's fashion collection are posted (V3) as clothing for couples; however, during the text, the prefix 'self' is also included several times in front of 'gift' in order to integrate single women. This occurs in most articles presenting products for women, but there is no allusion to 'self-gifts' in the issues targeted to men (V10), thus reinforcing the notion of gender differences, addressing gendered products and presenting 'self-gift' as an option only available for women (buying 'women's products'). Women can 'please themselves' using beauty treatments to make themselves feel good (Gill, 2007), but this is not the case with 'male

products' such as technology or sport items as these are presented exclusively to the gift to other's category.

5.3. She is a fashion lover, and he is a technological fan

Vogue distinguishes between gifts for women and gifts for men. Women are supposed to be interested in beauty, and men like comfortable clothes, technology, and sports. Items for women follow the maxim: "Diamonds Are a Girl's Best Friend" (V8), according to an article on February 4. Gifts for women include perfumes, jewellery, elegant clothes, bags, and decorative or beauty items. For men, there are also perfumes, but there are also technological, entertainment, and leisure items, comfortable clothing, and sportswear. In this way, differences are based on the characteristics of hegemonic femininity and masculinity constructed around gender.

Sport is masculinised, and beauty treatments are feminised in the items analysed, although it may be something that both men and women like equally. This establishes a difference in which men like sport and not the self-care that is imposed on women. The only time a sports plan is recommended for women is when it is presented as something unappetising: "Doing a workout may not exactly fit into your idea of a Valentine's Day wishful thinking project at first, but don't rule it out just yet" (V12). In addition, the purchase of an outfit is portrayed as the primary motivation: "which is the perfect excuse to buy yourself a nice sporty look - can there be any greater motivation?". However, when it comes to spending an afternoon at a spa, there is no doubt that a woman may not feel like 'focusing on herself' in that setting. The plan is presented as universally appealing to every woman, unlike sports.

The products targeted at women are related to the body, shouting the preoccupation of the media culture with the female body (Gill, 2007). The messages convey rigid gender models (Vega Saldaña et al., 2019) and reinforce gender stereotypes based on the hegemonic ideas of masculinity and femininity.

5.4 Women as heterosexual, young, white, and empowered

The only representation of non-heterosexual couples is placed in the article about the new *Lefties* collection (V3, Figure 1), which features photos from the promotional campaign.

Figure 1: Lefties, Source: (V3)

The remaining pictures depict heterosexual couples (V4, V5, V10, Figure 2). The article on men's fragrances is focused on women, so it is depicted from a normative gaze: "it all depends on your partner's personality and even yours, because more and more women are using masculine scents and vice versa" (V5).

Figure 2: Heterosexual couples in Vogue. Source: Edward Berthelot vía Getty Images (V4 & V10)

Most women and men in the images are white, Caucasian, and have normative body types. The only case in which racialised people appear is the article about Lefties, whose images come from a photo shoot by the brand. In the general discourse of the

magazine, women who do not respond to a normative body and youthful appearance are not represented. Product consumption is associated with empowerment and sexiness: "Several studies show that the colour red makes us more attractive to others and is also capable of making us feel more powerful" (V7). This confirms the previous discussions, showing that the female empowerment is a motif that allows capitalism to make some moves and profits (Dimulescu, 2015; McRobbie, 2020).

6. CONCLUSIONS

This paper has considered the interplay in media discourses of Valentine's Day, consumerism, and the post-feminist sensibility. The analysis has shown that the expectations of achieving romantic love are aligned with the post-feminist sensibility in media culture. Romantic love is portrayed as a female need to be fulfilled through consumerism. This discourse reinforces hegemonic gender frameworks that entrench sexual difference and heteronormativity. Products are presented according to gender, and messages are primarily directed at heterosexual couples.

Even though self-care is presented as the perfect plan for single women who do not need a partner, discursive strategies turn it into an alternative and consolation plan if they do not have a couple. Therefore, in post-feminist society, women are expected to have a significant other. Through self-care treatments and the purchase of certain products, women are encouraged to change certain habits to join the makeover paradigm that will make them more empowered and successful in all aspects of life. In the discourse analysed, special attention is given to the body, since most of the products and plans advertised are clothes, accessories, or beauty treatments. The purchase of these products is presented as necessary to 'please oneself', and it is therefore obligatory for women to spend a large amount of money on their self-care.

The women portrayed are white, heterosexual, upper-middle-class women who can afford the products advertised to achieve the values associated with them. These women are also portrayed as young and successful in their careers. Heterosexuality is the protagonist, with most images showing normative male-female couples. Intersectionality is, therefore, not a part of the discourse. Gifts are differentiated between men and women based on gender stereotypes, according to which women are fashion and beauty lovers, and men are sporty and techie. It stands out that when sport is considered valuable for women, it is presented as something that is probably unappetising but becomes more appetising because it is associated with the purchase of a new outfit for the workout.

Valentine's Day discourses in *Vogue* merge the post-feminist media culture, romantic love, and consumerism. These are framed within the consumerist environment that characterises neoliberalism, in which every personal triumph is associated with the purchase of certain products. Valentine's Day *Vogue* constructs and reinforces gender frames, claiming romantic love as a necessity for women in the post-feminist media culture associated with consumerism. The messages disseminated in women's

magazines present love as a need and consumption as a way to achieve the fulfilment of such needs.

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APPENDIX – THE CORPUS

Code	Headline	Section	Topic	Date	Url
V1	Still no gift? Here you have the best perfumes to surprise on Valentine's Day.	Shopping	Gifts	24.01.23	https://www.vogue.es/compras/galerias/mejores-perfumes-regalar-mujer-san-valentin
V2	12 jewelry brands to keep in mind for Valentine's Day	Shopping	Gifts	25.01.23	https://www.vogue.es/compras/articulos/marcas-de-joyas
V3	'SWEET TALK', the Valentine's Day collection you will fall in love with	Fashion	Clothes	26.01.23	https://www.vogue.es/moda/articulos/lefties-sweet-talk-coleccion-san-valentin
V4	Valentines Day 2023: the ultimate gift guide	Shopping	Gifts	26.01.23	https://www.vogue.es/compras/galerias/ideas-regalos-san-valentin-mujer-2023
V5	We compile the best men's perfumes to give away in Valentinesday	Shopping	Gifts	30.01.23	https://www.vogue.es/compras/galerias/mejores-perfumes-hombre-san-valentin
V6	9 heart shape necklaces (not cheesy at all) to give away (yourself) as a gift	Fashion	Gifts	02.02.23	https://www.vogue.es/moda/articulos/collares-corazon-colgantes-regalo-san-valentin
V7	10 perfect red dresses for Valentine's Day	Shopping	Clothes	03.02.23	https://www.vogue.es/compras/galerias/tendencias-vestidos-rojos-san-valentin
V8	Valentines Day 2023: the best jewelery to surprise this year	Shopping	Jewelery	04.02.23	https://www.vogue.es/compras/articulos/san-valentin-regalar-joyas
V9	Valentines gifts that match with a fashion lover	Shopping	Gifts	04.02.23	https://www.vogue.es/compras-regalos-san-valentin-mujer-moda
V10	29 Valentines gifts so original that even he doesn't expect them	Shopping	Gifts	06.02.23	https://www.vogue.es/compras/articulos/mejores-regalos-san-valentin-hombre
V11	The most trendy bag is also the most appropriate to give (yourself) as a Valentine's gift	Shopping	Gifts	11.02.23	https://www.vogue.es/moda/articulos/bolso-corazon-san-valentin-alaia

V12	You are not alone, you are with yourself: 4 treat-yourself plans that you will be truly into it at Valentine's Day	Beauty	Plans	13.02.93	https://www.vogue.es/belleza/articulos/san-valentin-planes-sola-madrid
V13	I can buy myself flowers: 10 gifts to celebrate self-love (and love yourself better than anybody else)	Shopping	Gifts	14.02.23	https://www.vogue.es/compras/galerias/regalos-amor-propio-san-valentin

AUTHENTICITY AND MULTIPLICITY: UNDERSTANDINGS OF AUTHENTICITY IN THE ERA OF SOCIAL MEDIA

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ABSTRACT

There are many ways authenticity is understood, and in the context of social media, often a dichotomy between a virtual copy and a real life original is suggested. This article pays attention to the complexity of the real life self, thus, it explores the relation between authenticity, multiplicity (one having multiple identities or aspects of self), and social media. For that, 20 semi-structured interviews with respondents living, working, or studying in Riga, Latvia, were conducted. The results offer a nuanced outline of different ways people reflect about their authenticity, and how these different definitions impact the way people perceive their own authenticity both in real life and in the context of social media. It suggests multiplicity is acknowledged as a dimension of authenticity in real life context, however, in the context of social media, the representation of the essence of one's self is questioned.

Keywords: authenticity ▪ interpretative phenomenological analysis ▪ multiplicity ▪ phenomenology ▪ qualitative research ▪ self ▪ self-presentation ▪ social media

1. INTRODUCTION

In the context of social media, the concept of authenticity has often been seen as dealing with the dichotomy between the virtual copy of a (necessarily more authentic) real life original (Frankel & Krebs, 2022). Furthermore, the lack of authenticity has been perceived as people presenting only the positive aspects of themselves (Bailey & Iyengar, 2023) or, when speaking about social media influencers, as lacking transparency of sponsorship (Audrezet, De Kerviler, & Guidry Moulard, 2020).

The juxtaposition between the authenticity of the real self and the digital self can lead to overlooking the unclear and ambiguous definition of authenticity itself (Boyle, 2003; Balaban & Szambolics, 2022). Furthermore, such approach can also impede being aware of the complexity of the real self. There have been debates whether one has one or multiple selves (Baumeister, 1998), nonetheless, there are

not as many questions about one having multiple domains – roles, self-aspects, or facets (i.e., McCall, 1982; Burke & Stets, 2009; McConnell, 2011), which can be conceptualized as multiplicity within oneself.

The interaction of the concepts of authenticity, multiplicity, and social media has mostly been interpreted in theoretical assumptions, analyzing how context-collapse (Marwick & boyd, 2011) being one of the aspects that characterizes social media contributes to the interaction. As the audience or the recipient is one of the key elements in the enactment of the role identities one has, context-collapse contributes to the emergence of new settings and, thus, new aspects of authenticity become of importance. Some authors (i.e., Marinucci, 2010; Miller, 2011; Brekhus, 2020) have offered their perspectives of how the influence could be, but they rarely, if at all, include any empirical evidence. Having said that, it is crucial first to understand the interaction between the three main concepts – authenticity, multiplicity, and social media.

2. AUTHENTICITY AND MULTIPLICITY

As noted, the definition of authenticity, despite being a trendy research object, is fluid. It is very often understood intuitively and, in general, people are confident they could recognize it (Thurnell-Read, Skey, & Hermanova, 2022). The majority of attempts to explain authenticity include a reference to being real, genuine (Selby, 2022). That means, as a concept it aims to capture dimensions of truth or verification (Newman, 2019). Furthermore, it has a processual nature, meaning it can be seen as an objectification of the process of representation, where one's actions represent an ideal or an essence (Vannini & Williams, 2009). Authenticity is also frequently explained through the opposites – in relation to the ideas it is contrasted with, which requires defining how inauthenticity looks like (Thurnell-Read, Skey, & Hermanova, 2022), thus, authenticity can mean being not fake or copied (Selby, 2022).

Although authenticity is more often seen in the context of inner values and beliefs (i.e., Smallenbroek, Zelenski, & Whelan, 2017), the feelings of an individual, thus, her motivation and behavior as well, are influenced by the dimensions of authenticity that are linked to the roles she takes, as well as group memberships (Wessel et al., 2020). Therefore, one could say that the ambiguity of the concept of authenticity is furthered by the possible coexistence of two reference points – authenticity toward one's inner essence and authenticity toward being a part of a group, which can result in a clash if one tries to simultaneously fulfill both authenticity dimensions that include contradictory goals (Brekhus, 2020).

The sense of authenticity as a concept helps to solve and reconcile the juxtaposition of unity and multiplicity. The term of role differentiation, widely used in psychology, includes an idea that even if behaviors required by various roles are different, it is not to be seen as contrary to integrity, because the indicator of personality fragmentation is not how different the roles are, but how skewed they are from the sense of authenticity (Sheldon et al., 1997). That makes it worth exploring

authenticity through the context of one's multiplicity, which becomes even more interesting on social media, as the context-collapse makes multiple of one's identities equally salient.

3. SELF ON SOCIAL MEDIA AND SELF IN REAL LIFE

Before paying attention to how authenticity functions in the context of social media, understanding the self on social media and its' distinction from real life self is important. In the beginning of internet era, the potential of the cyberspace was seen as a possibility to construct multiple selves (or multiple windows if defining the selves as a part of computer interface) in contrast to the one self that the real life offers (Turkle 1997; Bolter and Grusin 2000). Later a concept of a detached self was also offered (Zarghooni, 2007) to emphasize the two distinct environments between which a person constantly commutes, while the idea of blended identity (Baker, 2009) stressed it is not just a real life self that is presented online, but also the impressions given off online contribute to the construction of an identity that has consequences in real life, thus, the aspects perceived online and offline add equally important meaning to the self.

Yet, since the rise of social media and mobile technologies, people adapt to 'always on' relationship, which can be conceptualized as the source of a tethered self (Turkle 2008), which leads to the thought that the online and offline self are inextricably intertwined (Davis 2014) and connected by 'iterative feedback loops', allowing to assume that it is either impossible or unnecessary to essentially distinct online and offline components of the self (Granic, Morita, and Sholten, 2020).

At the same time, presenting oneself online still includes construction of messages and, as a semiotic practice, it permits falsification and an intentional reveal or concealment of facts (Moreno Berreneche, 2019), meaning that the online presence of the audience that one knows in real life can be a motivation to be congruent and 'true', but it does not ensure that. Despite that, it does not imply that one is definitely more authentic in real life – in some cases, lack of an immediate feedback can encourage one to show more of one's 'real essence' (Hu, Kumar, Huang, & Ratnavelu, 2017).

Moreover, the dichotomy between authenticity on social media and in real life becomes even more interesting when seen in the context of one's multiplicity.

4. AUTHENTICITY, MULTIPLICITY, AND SOCIAL MEDIA

The interaction between the three concepts has mostly been interpreted through theoretical speculations. The co-presence of people linked to one's multiple identities on social media can result in reveal of even those aspects that one finds uncomfortable, and by promoting such potentially uncomfortable situations social media might foster more authentic ways of expressions (Marinucci, 2010) and promote a creation of a merged collage of interests, connections, and thoughts (Hodkinson,

2011). Although self-censorship is possible and often used (Hogan 2010), social media hinder adaptation to just one role that is more comfortable. Furthermore, although social media allow creation of idealized presentation, they also enable using such identity strategies that integrate the multidimensional aspects of self instead of "commuting between them." (Brekhus, 2020)

The real-time communication challenges the perspective of postmodernism that praises fragmentation, offering a new way for one to understand herself – the constant presence of others offers one a new perspective about one's self as a whole, instead of the fragmented self that one sometimes chooses to present in other circumstances (Wandel & Beavers, 2010). These assumptions pertain to the discussion of the way technologies reveal a new perspective on self and, thus, create a space for empirical data in order to understand how authenticity, multiplicity, and social media are seen and experienced together.

The statements presented in the previous paragraphs form the research gap, within which this article aims to explore the way people understand authenticity and its relation to multiplicity, and how they reflect about their own authenticity in the era of social media. With social media being part of people's lives for almost two decades, it is possible to say that their effect is to be observed not merely in the digital environment (Bartura, 2010; also implied by the concept of (deep) mediatization – Couldry & Hepp, 2013; Hepp, 2020). Therefore, social media in the context of the article are seen not (only) as a variable (i.e., comparing the perspectives on authenticity in real life versus authenticity on social media), but also as a definition of the current era that shapes the social interaction and the understandings of people, including the way they see the connection between the essence of the self, aspects of the self and communicating them (perspective on authenticity and multiplicity), the way they see themselves managing this interaction (perception on one's own authenticity) and how they interpret it in the context of communication on social media.

The research questions are as follows:

RQ1: How do people define authenticity in the era of social media, and how is it linked to multiplicity?

RQ2: How do people perceive their own authenticity and what are the points of reference for measuring it?

RQ3: How do people see the difference between (their) authenticity in real life and on social media, and what is the role of multiplicity in this context?

According to phenomenological approach (Tracy, 2020), the research questions and the manner of conversation focuses on lived experiences and one's interpretation of it.

5. METHODOLOGY

To provide answers to the research questions, 20 semi-structured interviews were conducted. The age range of the interviewees was 23 – 45; there was an equal number

of both male and female respondents. A purposive sampling approach (maximum variation approach) was chosen to represent broader variations of the phenomena (Tracy, 2020), the categories being a wide spectrum of the activity of social media use, active versus passive use (Chen et. al. 2014), use of anonymous or pseudonymous profile, influencer status (seeing them as users that have gathered a following on social media – Campbell & Farrell, 2020) or usage of social media for personal business, as well as a variety of occupations held by the participants (i.e., a journalist, a lawyer, a teacher, a biology student, etc.), family status, and religious beliefs. In some cases, the interviewees were asked to suggest other possible participants that fit one or other criteria, i.e., if they know anyone who maintains an anonymous account. A criterion that was common to all participants was that they were living, working, or studying in Riga, the capital city of Latvia. Table 1 offers an overview of the main parameters of the respondents (gender, age, and occupation), which will also be used for reference later.

Table 1. Main parameters of respondents.

No.	Gender	Age	Occupation
1	Male	23	Student
2	Female	23	Biologist
3	Male	24	Teacher
4	Male	25	Social media influencer
5	Female	25	Social media influencer
6	Male	25	Occupational safety specialist
7	Male	26	IT specialist
8	Male	26	Social media influencer
9	Female	29	Working in a Christian NGO
10	Male	30	Leading a digital marketing agency
11	Female	30	Lawyer
12	Female	31	Working in state administration
13	Female	32	Hairdresser
14	Male	33	Journalist, lecturer
15	Female	33	Working in state administration
16	Male	36	Software development engineer
17	Female	37	Librarian, musician
18	Male	40	Tech influencer
19	Female	43	Working in state administration
20	Female	45	Teacher

As the interviews also covered other concepts related to multiplicity and social media, their length varied from 33 to 71 minutes. To make the interviews more structured both for the interviewer and the interviewee, as well as to add more concreteness to the idea of multiplicity, the participants were asked to draw an identity map

(similar approach has been used by Flennaugh, 2016; Bentley et al., 2019) marking the role identities or facets of the self they find important to themselves. Although only role identities were given as examples, the respondents were not specifically discouraged from drawing any other facets (i.e., traits or abstract perspectives about themselves, i.e., "a materialistic person"). Throughout the conversation, the map was used as a point of reference when talking about contradictions or conflicts between various facets or characteristics they consider present in all the facets.

For analyzing the interviews, interpretative phenomenological analysis was used, which allows to discover the uniqueness of individuals' lived experiences (Dowling & Cooney, 2012). For this article, mostly the answers (or questions) that included the keywords "authentic" or "authenticity" were used, but, in some cases, answers to other questions were also considered to broaden the context and to better understand the interviewee's perspective. A conceptual overview of interview analysis is shown in Fig 1, explaining how the further analyzed variables are interconnected.

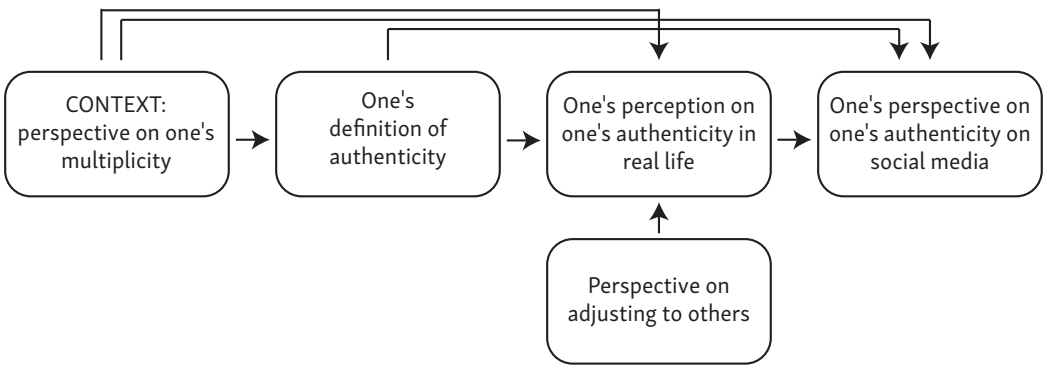

Fig 1. Conceptual scheme of interview analysis.

When describing the results, the number of interviewees that support an opinion is rarely mentioned since the paper does not aim to offer a generalizable categorization of different perspectives. Instead, it ponders on the ideas, which would otherwise appear fragmented.

6. DEFINING THE AUTHENTICITY

When describing the course of the interviews, it must be said that, many times, the definition of authenticity was changed by the participant when further questions were asked (i.e., in the context of their various facets). Hence, the multiple definitions offered by a participant were, in some cases, contradictory to each other and the statements about whether or not one considers herself authentic depended on which of the perspectives that had been discussed was used as a point of reference. That leads to think that, even if "authenticity" has become a buzzword (Thurnell-Read,

Skey, & Hermanova, 2022) and "everyone would like to think they are authentic" (male respondent, 30 years old, leading a digital marketing agency), there is not only no common definition between the research participants and, moreover, in the academia or society in general (Pöyry et al., 2019, Lehman et al., 2019), but the understanding of it is also often constructed within a conversational context and can be changed during the course of a conversation.

Among the explanations and definitions of authenticity that were offered by participants, there was a variety of different formulations that, during the analysis, were structured in three main directions. There were some common keywords that were often stated in different interviews, such as being *who you are, true, natural, real*, that goes well together with the usual attempts to conceptualize authenticity (Wood et al., 2008; Selby, 2022). Even so, when asked to further develop the thought and explain what being oneself or being true means, different perspectives emerged.

The various definitions drawn from the interviews were categorized in three main categories, which suggested different understandings about the ontology of authenticity. Two of the categories see authenticity as a specific trait – either being original or being direct. The third category shows authenticity as what could be called a metaidentity – communicating all facets (i.e., role identities) one has. Additionally, the categories reveal different perspectives on what is one's essence to be communicated truly in order to be seen as authentic, leading also to divergent perspectives on the connection between the self and its' adjustment to external influences that will be explored further.

Being authentic = being unique, original. This branch of answers included the notion that one is authentic if she is different from everyone else and/or possesses a characteristic or trait that makes her special. It was seen as (1) being a part of a subculture (i.e., being a skater), (2) going against mainstream (i.e., being homosexual or listening to a completely different music) to contrast what can be seen as a homogeneous, standardized and, thus, inauthentic (Thurnell-Read, 2019), (3) having ambitions and courage to do great things, as well as (4) having a distinct and unique way of doing things. Furthermore, within this perspective, there was an interviewee who said she is not used to using the term in relation to people, but rather when speaking about places or things, which connects to the perspective on authenticity as a quality of human experience with art, products, tourism, etc. (Wang, 1999, Lindholm, 2008)

> I understand what authentic means, but I find it super weird to say it about a person. Anyway, in my past, I thought that I needed to go against the system in every possible way and listen to the music that no one listens to. [..] I didn't want to become the sheep that follows the crowd, but, then again, it is comfortable and profitable to live in the system. So, am I as authentic as David Bowie? Nope.
>
> (Female respondent, 33, working in state administration)

This marks a paradoxical understanding of authenticity that has become relevant especially in the era of social media, as such kind of originality is expected in self-representations, where one must fit in and stand out at the same time, even more so for influencers. What makes it paradoxical is that, as Reckwitz (2020) has well stated it, in the society where authenticity is a central social expectation, people are forced to present themselves as singular, and social recognition depends on being perceived as uniquely authentic.

Being authentic = saying everything you think. Another perspective on what being authentic means stems from its relation to being true, thus, being direct and honest, which many interviewees associated with "having no filters" and stating one's opinion in an unapologetic way even if the views on whether it is desirable differed.

> I am authentic in private relationships – with my girlfriend and in my family, but not in the public context. [..] For example, in university, I can't show off my discontent with some of the students. I think being authentic would be if I said what I think, like, "You can't pass this course, go away, because you annoy me."
>
> (Male respondent, 33, journalist, lecturer)

> I would like to think that without filters, but it is not that simple. [..] But all in all – the more honest and direct, the better. If not better, then, at least, more authentic.
>
> (Male respondent, 40, tech influencer)

Being authentic = showing all sides of you. In this context, it was mentioned that the difference between being authentic and being true is that if the latter implies not lying, then being authentic means also not hiding something and, thus, showing the multifacetedness of oneself, regardless of whether it is understood as characteristics, roles, or personal facts (i.e., illness). Similarly, in some theoretical positions, the quest for authenticity implies a search for meaning in the multiplicity by making sense of one's own various aspects (Lifton, 1993), and the multidimensionality – having a unique combination of facets one possesses – is what makes one "interesting and authentic" (Brekhus, 2020).

> I think that being authentic means that some of your characteristics pass through all your positions. [..] It means not hiding something. You don't pretend to be someone else.
>
> (Male respondent, 24, teacher)

> I guess, truthfulness means when you are being true. But authenticity is a "meatier" concept. You are not only true, but you let your various features

> to manifest and bring them to life. Then you are an authentic person. You live your life with no cognitive dissonance.
>
> (Female respondent, 30, lawyer)

The last sentence from the quote connects the thought to another aspect that emerges in the interviewees' perspectives – a state of no conflict, where the aspects of oneself and their expressions are aligned to the values one has. Furthermore, in some of the interviews, it was stated not only regarding expressions and performance, but also as congruence between the possessed identities and the values one has.

> It means not being ashamed of your values. Not trying to please other people but being yourself and not coming into conflict with your consciousness and yourself. With your beliefs. Living in coherence with yourself.
>
> (Female, 29, works in a Christian NGO)

> Maybe it is a banal answer, but I think it is about the values that do not change in different environments. Your values, interests, characteristics. If I see my self as an empathic person, then I see myself as such in every environment, because it is something that is important to me.
>
> (Male respondent, 30, leading a digital marketing agency)

Likewise, in the literature one being authentic is often connected to one behaving in ways that represent their true motives, values, and idea, thus, allowing to call the person's behavior autonomous, congruent, and genuine (Harter, 2002; Smallenbroek, Zelenski, & Whelan, 2017; Selby, 2022).

7. TO ADJUST OR NOT TO ADJUST

A perspective that cannot be completely distinguished, as it partly overlaps with all three aforementioned perspectives, is **being authentic = not adjusting to others**, which became a discussion topic in many of the conversations, as there are some ambiguous aspects in the idea. While some of the respondents stated that adjusting to others is the opposite of the authenticity, others stressed it is the ability to adjust to the other partner of communication that promotes social interaction and is a "natural" thing for people.

> I know that it is something very natural that we don't communicate completely freely, but, instead, we think about how we want to be seen. [..] I would like to say that we are never fully authentic, but I think it is a good thing that enables us to socialize.
>
> (Male respondent, 23, student)

> Authentic means real. Not performing? I think so. I think I am for 95% like that, because you can't 100% forget that you are not just talking, but you are talking with a specific person. [..] We are always mirroring each other, looking at each other. And it is not even performing, it is just something...
>
> (Female respondent, 45, teacher)

It must also be mentioned that the respondents stated that it is only possible or right to adjust to the other person or situation if one does not find it contradictory to herself. For instance, for one person it means trying to avoid longer conversations with people who hold completely different world views, because mirroring them would feel inauthentic.

At the same time, there was also a view held by a few interviewees that not adjusting to others is possible if one possesses specific characteristics – self-confidence or natural tendency toward leadership. In that situation, "others adapt to you, instead of you adapting to them" (female respondent, 23, biologist).

> If you have a "big" personality that is charismatic and extraverted enough, that can attract other people, if you have knowledge and intelligence, and other important characteristics, then the group will adjust to you. And you won't need to adjust to the group to be liked by them.
>
> (Male respondent, 25, occupational safety specialist)

However, it must be mentioned that, in the three cases when authenticity was linked to a natural position of leadership, it was also emphasized that it requires humility and a position of equality with the others, otherwise it would be interpreted as a bad quality, i.e., as being bossy instead of being authentic.

8. DISTINCTION BETWEEN AUTHENTICITY ON SOCIAL MEDIA AND "IN REAL LIFE"

The conversations turned to the topic of social media in the interview's second part, however, the topic was not purposefully excluded from the first part either. In some cases, respondents talked about digital communication in the first part of conversation (when asked about authenticity in general); it was done so more often by those participants that identified with the social media influencer status or social media was significantly liked to their job. Nonetheless, every participant was asked how authentic they think they are on social media. Thus, this section explores the differences in the perspectives about authenticity in real life and on social media within a participant's opinion.

There were participants for whom there is **no difference between both kinds of authenticity**. Mostly, it was like that for those interviewees for whom authenticity means being direct and saying everything you mean, therefore, authenticity on

social media equals posting your opinion and having "no filters." Interestingly, such expression of authenticity was mostly linked to Twitter (the different "affordances of authenticity" offered by various social media will be explored in a further section).

Furthermore, there were respondents who explained the similarity between both kinds of authenticity by stating that, in real life, one has both a public face shown to everyone and a more private version of herself (a more authentic one) that is only revealed to the closest people. In such perspective, it was claimed that the same applies to social media – the public profile represents the public face, but private messaging or use of privacy tools ("close friends" function or use of a private profile on Instagram, for instance) gives space for the authentic personality to be expressed.

However, a majority of interviewees held an opinion that the **authenticity is less likely when it comes to social media**, which can be illustrated by a statement that "social networking sites are simply not constructed for us to be authentic." (Male respondent, 36, software development engineer) The argumentation behind why the participants see themselves as less authentic in social media communication differed and, again, some directions can be drawn.

For some of the participants (three female respondents), it was the felt requirement to only share positive aspects of their lives that was an obstacle to feel authentic on social media. Paradoxically, although sharing everything (including the sad and hard moments of life) was called "having no borders," at the same time, not doing that was linked to being less authentic. On the other hand, some other articles claim that sharing mostly positive aspects of users' lives may "facilitate rather than exacerbate subjective authenticity" (Kreling et al., 2022), as they are still grounded in reality (Toma, 2017).

Another view on authenticity on social media was offered by two participants who use social networking sites very rarely and passively (very little self-presentation). Both used a metaphor of paintings in a gallery (similar to approach of Hogan, 2010) to describe how little meaning and information about one's authentic essences the posts on social media reveal.

> My social media profile is not connected to my personality at all. Even when I post pictures of myself, I don't really think that's me. [..] I think you can see equally much emotion in some painting. Maybe you see the idea of the artist, but you don't understand the person that is portrayed. Like Mona Lisa. You just see a random person in a dress, and it says nothing about her.
>
> (Male respondent, 26, IT specialist)

> In general, the profiles of normal people are about nothing. [..] Of course, the content that is posted gives you something to associate the person with, but it's nothing special. It is like "an average of a person" that is controlling what is posted.
>
> (Female respondent, 43, working in state administration)

When it comes to the social media influencer context, two more aspects of authenticity are added to the discussion. First, the ability to portray oneself as a unique personality, which is connected to the first definition of authenticity in the first section of research results; it is the ability to post the content through the lens of one's individual style that makes one worth following to. Second, it is the question about sponsorship and collaboration, as the interviewees see the need to balance the requirements of the sponsors and their own personality and approach to social media content, thus, that is seen as a potential endangerment to authenticity (similar results can be seen in Audrezet, De Kerviler, & Guidry Moulard, 2020).

Furthermore, there were participants who were dubious about their authenticity on social media because they only tend to share content published by others, instead of posting their own content that would present their personality. Although "what you share reveals how you see things and what is your goal" (male respondent, 25, occupational safety specialist), if one's profile consists only of shared content, it has less potential to reveal one's "full personality" or multifacetedness that will be explored in the next section.

9. SOCIAL MEDIA AND MULTIPLICITY

While showing all sides of one's self in some of the cases was seen as one of the definitions for authenticity, it seems not as important or challenging when it comes to social media.

Facets or identities that seem to be uncomfortable in real life tend to stay hidden on social media (except for private conversations) or expressed anonymously (not supporting the ideas that were described in literature review about the social media as fostering integration). One example for such aspects is one's insecurities, for instance, a fight against extra weight or a mental illness that could be a source for a successful content, but, as people do not want to be associated with it, it is safer to create a private profile that is open only for the closest people, or an anonymous profile, which is only dedicated to the specific topic. Another aspect is beliefs or reflections that go against an identity that one holds important; in this sample, two respondents, who were Christians, said they felt uncomfortable with publicly expressing their liberal perspective, thus, one of them chose to maintain an anonymous blog, while the other saw herself as very self-censoring.

When speaking about the choice to maintain an anonymous profile, what is interesting is that in other cases it was seen not as a mean to keep one facet separated from the rest of the personality as in the previously described situations, but the other way around – to keep the other aspects of personality separated in order not to impact the way the message communicated though the anonymous profile is perceived.

> On these other accounts I can express myself in a different way. Like, on Twitter, I don't want it to be seen as Tom's opinion [name changed]. I want it to be seen as an opinion of a neutral, random person, because it changes the

> way it is interpreted and how the intonation is imagined. If I post it from my real profile, it is seen as something sarcastic, so, when I want a discussion and a neutral context for that, I post it from a fake profile.
>
> (Male respondent, 25, social media influencer)

> There is nothing secret on my "anonymous" profile. My colleagues know it's me. It's not that I am hiding from the people I know in real life. [..] I just don't want every random person to know who I am, where I work and then to write to my work, as it has happened to some other people I know. [..] I just don't want the conversation on Twitter to reach my personality. But it always reaches one's personality. [..] In the end, in case there is a public argument, they find some personal information about you and bring it up.
>
> (Female respondent, 45, teacher)

Furthermore, some facets of the self are hidden out of the fear that they could be taken out of the context and, instead of representing the multifaceted self, the individual can get reduced to that specific post or facet, which can be seen as the result of durability and searchability – two of four main affordances of social networking sites (boyd, 2011).

> I think that it is very hard to be authentic on social media, as people create an impression of you not from your personality, but from the specific things you decide to post. [..] I think that in real life I feel myself seen as a personality and as a whole. If I see any questions emerging or a confused face, I can explain what I mean and how it goes together with the other sides of me. But when I post something on social media, then it's done - the post has a life of its own and I have no possibility to impact the impression of me it has created.
>
> (Female respondent, 30, lawyer)

Moreover, when speaking about how important it is to present the multiple role identities on social media in order to say one is being authentic (in the context where being authentic = showing all facets of oneself), it was told that, in a way, it is not hard to present all the roles per se, however, it is harder to present the essence of the self. Such dimension could be interpreted as a core self that holds the deepest emotions and values (Turner, 2010).

> I think that the authentic "me" is the one that gets censored the most [on social media]. It includes my sense of humor or my observations about the world. Even if I do have an opinion, I don't express myself, I don't intervene. It impacts more of "my essence," not the roles I possess. I think I show those.

> If you follow me, you know I am a volunteer, I am a daughter and a sister, and I am a lawyer for sure, because that's how I express myself.
>
> (Female respondent, 30, lawyer)

At the same time, there were also opinions that go well together with a more senile statement of Turkle (1997), where she claimed that the internet and the anonymity it can possibly provide gives space for more authentic expressions of the essential self. The tools that social media offer (i.e., choice of one's logo or avatar, as well as a nickname on some of the sites) allows such self-expression that is not possible in real life, and it would take a lot of time to reach the topic. Thus, some of the respondents that have been maintaining a (semi) anonymous profile, see it as an authentic self-expression.

> For my anonymous account, I wanted to keep my real name, but the surname represents what the content on the Twitter account is about [urban planning], I thought that the combination is witty. [..] I also created the picture (logo) myself with the help of an AI service that took my photograph and created a similar picture. Then, I chose one that could represent my essence if you look at it. So, it is not me in the photograph, but it might as well be me.
>
> (Male respondent, 36, software development engineer)

> On the street, I wouldn't go to the people and tell them that I wrote my master's thesis about a specific shroom. But I have it on my Twitter picture. [..] Also my nickname is the Latin version of an animal that is personally close to me. It is like in a masquerade – you choose a mask, and you go. Thus, I haven't been hiding, maybe I have shown myself even more.
>
> (Female respondent, 45, teacher)

Moreover, in the context of a non-anonymous presentation of the self, it was said by an interviewee (male respondent, 23, student) that "social media give one a possibility to construct an internet personality, which might rather portray how one wants to be seen" (the ideal self) and it says something equally important about the person as it reveals his deepest desires and perspective on life, even if it differs from the "authentic side of her" or how one would be perceived in real life.

10. THE AFFORDANCES OF AUTHENTICITY BY VARIOUS PLATFORMS

Although discussing every platform with every participant would be inefficient, there were some nuances about various platforms that were brought up by the interviewees themselves. They were relevant in the specific context to reveal how the

technological tools, as well as the main premises of the platforms promote or, perhaps, hinder authentic expression of one's self.

Twitter. As it has been mentioned in some of the statements in the previous sections, Twitter is often used as an example to perform authenticity if it means saying things directly. What is more, authenticity on social media is associated with honest tweeting also by those for whom it was not the first definition of authenticity in general, while censoring one's thoughts is seen as lack of authenticity.

> You won't post on Facebook that you just came back from your state's financed psychiatrist and that you just paid only quarter of the price for your medicine, because you have a mental diagnosis. There is no honesty there in that sense. So, on Twitter there is more honesty, but at the same time, it is sad and depressing.
>
> (Female respondent, 32, hairdresser)

When commenting on expressing oneself on Twitter, some interviewees noted that they share their thoughts in a provocative way there and are often told in real life that they are not as mean as they seemed on the platform. That, in turn, is not seen as a fake performance, but as a self expression that is adjusted to the "rules of the platforms." As is seen by them, one must be provocative to raise awareness about certain issues, as well as there is more potential for heated discussions to take place and for one to become a part of them.

> On Twitter, in any minute you can meet wide circles of people who get heated up. I think that, in real life, I could be as passionate about topics that are of interest to me, but I just don't meet those people. I think that is the main difference.
>
> (Male respondent, 40, tech influencer)

In previous research, Twitter has indeed been associated with "authentic talk" or dialogue, which stands for an unscripted, spontaneous communication, which as such has a greater potential to reveal one's real thoughts (Margaretten & Gaber, 2014). Seeing spontaneity as a companion of authenticity allows seeing blunders or human errors in social media communication as a positive aspect (Lee, Lee, & Choi, 2020), which, in broader context, could also imply that being too harsh or sharing what could otherwise be seen as a too personal information can be justified by being authentic.

Facebook & Instagram. Although there are differences between both platforms that are owned by Meta, in this context, they can both be analyzed together. A significant similarity between them that came up in the interviews was the fact that the respondents have a variety of social circles as friends / followers there, furthering a simultaneous activation of multiple identities, which is also of particular interest

in the book "Facebook & Philosophy" (ed. Wittkower, 2010), the chapters of which have been referred to in earlier sections of this article.

On the one hand, by some the platforms were seen as offering a sense of freedom to be one's full self in her multifacetedness, as people there, in most cases, already know the person in the context of the role identities they possess. Therefore, there is less need to focus only on a specific niche or facet of the self as it can be on, i.e., Twitter if one has dedicated her account to a more specific topic or "mission." For social media influencers and digital content creators, it felt almost like a pressure to present a very versatile version of self and to show off the various role identities they possess to be more interesting for the followers, even if they are considered niche content creators (i.e., focused on tech content or cake production).

On the other hand, the presence of the various circles was also seen as restricting and inducing more self-censorship by other interviewees, thus, they reported hiding some aspects because it could be seen contradictory to other facets or identities they possess. For instance, a woman working in state administration said she felt bad publishing her private travel content on these platforms, because there could be negative comments about how "the money of tax payers" is used.

The privacy settings of Facebook were never mentioned in the interviews, while the possible privacy strategies on Instagram were mentioned quite often – to create a private profile so that it cannot be accessed from Google or as an alternative to a more generic profile, as well as the usage of "Close friends" option so that the potential presence of various circles has less impact on one's sense of freedom for her authentic expression.

TikTok. The platform was seen as putting less emphasis on the people one knows in real life, although it does not mean purposively hiding from everyone one knows, even if some of the interviewees said they do not use their real name on the platform. In the cases people were actively using the platform to create their own content, it was seen as a "chance to make a documentary of one's life", staged or unstaged, where one's opinion and the small details of one's life acquire meaning and can be potentially interesting to others, even in cases one is not a celebrity or an influencer.

> I try to be a documentarist by offering as natural content as possible, because I think that TikTok has enough imitators and staged content. I offer glimpses that I have naturally recorded.
>
> (Female respondent, 37, a librarian)

> On TikTok, I can be perceived as just another adolescent that is getting ready for school tomorrow and simply creates some videos before going to sleep. I am your internet buddy.
>
> (Male respondent, 25, social media influencer)

This could be linked to the idea of "calibrated amateurism", which is a concept offered

in the context of microcelebrities to describe a meticulous use of tools offered by the platforms to craft a "contrived authenticity", that is, a natural looking, yet purposeful performance (Abidin, 2017).

BeReal. It is specifically interesting to explore the affordances of authenticity by BeReal, which is the newest among the analyzed platforms and has claimed to promote authenticity and spontaneity (BeReal 2023). It must be mentioned that from the interviewees, only four stated they use the platform. With the platform being that new, there is also a lack of academic research on it, even more so – regarding authenticity. Therefore, it is worth paying attention to nuances even in the little number of perspectives.

Although BeReal has no tools to visually enhance the photo taken, it could be seen as imposing portraying a raw (Reade, 2021) version of oneself and, thus, guaranteeing authentic self-representation, the interviewees did not see it as a necessarily the most authentic platform - three of the four were rather skeptical about the level of authenticity the platform can ensure or promote.

One of the respondents was doubting her authenticity on there or, rather, a correct usage of the platform because she still tried to look good in the pictures and, if needed, retook them due to the presence of specific people (for instance, her ex) on the app. Furthermore, it was said by another interviewee that even if it is a messy corner of the room that is shown in the photo, it is still a staged or specifically chosen corner of the room. Another reason the platform's capacity to offer a possibility of self-expression was questioned was because the random moments of one's life, even if they supposedly show a very private context (i.e., one's room), provide very little information about the facets one has and little meaning.

For the one interviewee that was highly positive regarding the promotion of authenticity by the platform, it was the randomity of the events presented there and the narrow circle of friends connected that makes the social medium different from others.

> Of course, you censor something and sometimes you post it late, but, in general, I post stuff I wouldn't post on other social media there, of course, being aware that it is a very restrictive and selectively chosen network that I have there. On my timeline, I have a doctor posting a BeReal next to a friend eating lunch at a super luxury restaurant, and it all happens at the same moment. It is like a very human "inside" to reality.
>
> (Male respondent, 30, leading a digital marketing agency)

Therefore, it can be said that every platform and the tools it provides provide a different possibility of authentic self-expression and, furthermore, the affordances can be linked to the different definitions of authenticity that are presented both in this and other articles.

11. CONCLUSION

The article aimed to discover the different perspectives people have regarding authenticity and its relation to multiplicity, as well as how they reflect about their own authenticity in the era of social media. It provided a rather detailed overview on how the perspectives are interconnected and how the people's perspectives represent a variety of views that have been presented in theoretical literature and other research.

First research question aimed to explore the ways in which people define authenticity, especially focusing on the context of one's multiplicity. Three main directions were suggested – one being unique or original, one saying everything one thinks, and one showing all facets of oneself. The latter perspective implies communicating one's multiplicity as a prerequisite of being authentic (opposed to disclosing just some selected aspects of the self), while the first two categories have no connection to one's multiplicity.

The second question focused on how people perceive their own authenticity. The answers led to think that the various definitions of authenticity impacted one's evaluation of his/her authenticity. Altogether, it can be said that people saw themselves as rather authentic (mostly implying that there is room for improvement), however, this question led to another question – whether adjusting to other people in communication does not make one inauthentic. Here, the results implied that adjustment to the communication partner is mostly seen as no opposite to authenticity.

The third research question resulted in the conclusion that often social media is seen as an obstacle to one's authenticity in communication. Authentic expression of one's multiplicity seemed to be one of the dimensions of authenticity identified by interviewees, however, it had less significance in the context of social media. Even though many authors have been positive about the potential of social media to integrate the separate parts of one's self (Wandel & Beavers, 2010; Miller, 2011, Hodkinson, 2017, Brekhus, 2020), the research showed that social media rather challenge one's capacity to present the "essence" of self. At the same time, social media may also offer more potential for authenticity in case it is understood as saying everything that one thinks.

Different attitudes towards authenticity in the context of various social media platforms formed additional interesting results, which have a potential to be researched and analyzed further.

12. LIMITATIONS OF THE RESEARCH

Although there is a lot of research pursued to analyze authenticity and there are many scales and inventories offered that test the theoretical concepts of authenticity that are linked to aspects of multiplicity, especially in the field of psychology, nevertheless, there is lack of empirical investigation regarding authenticity, multiplicity,

and social media. For this reason, this article provided a crucial insight into the topic, discovering the multitude of contradictions between the perspectives and its consequences.

The advantage of qualitative methods and phenomenological approach lies in the ability to represent the tiniest nuances in the understandings, as well as to see the process of interpretation and meaning assignment behind them. Thus, in this context, it allowed not only to explore the various definitions regarding authenticity in the era of social media, but also the way how the interpretation of authenticity further impacts the way in which people reflect about their own authenticity and multiplicity.

However, having that done, use of quantitative methods would be valuable. It is not to say that data gathered by qualitative methods always need a generalizable expansion by quantitative methods, but, in this case, it would allow testing how relatable all the perspectives are to a larger sample and make the perspectives comparable, which is less plausible at the moment due to the very diverse understandings.

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

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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.

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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? ▪ 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? ▪ Have you ever posted something online and regretted it? ▪ 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) ▪ 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) ▪ Would you say you are interested in politics? (What makes you say yes/no?) ▪ How has your relationship to politics changed over time? ▪ Do you ever "act political" / participate in politics? ▪ 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" ▪ 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? ▪ How often would you say you see political content on social media? And what kind of political content, from what kind of users? ▪ How do you feel about people posting about politics on social media? Are there better and worse ways to do it? ▪ 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 ▪ Have you seen something like this before? ▪ What is your impression? ▪ E.g. How would you interpret/respond if an influencer, politician, friend, acquaintance, etc. shares this; ▪ 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? ▪ Do you have any questions? ▪ 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: 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: 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: 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: #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: 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: 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: "I voted" Profile Frame	Facebook profile picture with 'I voted MDG' (Green party)	User hidden	Facebook (profile picture)
Example 10: Ukraine Profile Frame	Facebook profile picture with Ukraine flag frame **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' G3, P8, EX6: 'It would have been better to have got some information about it, what do I get from this black square, really?' 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' 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' G2, P3, EX6: 'What else happens with a black image? Nothing happens.' 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' G2, P3, EX4: 'They clearly just want to get reactions, not to spread awareness or information' 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? G3, P6, EX5: Humor. That's a big factor! G3, P8, EX5: Yeah, it's funny, I could share it! 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" G7, P20: "politics doesn't really fit on apps like snapchat that are just for communication" 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" 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