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SİYASET BİLİMİ VE ULUSLARARASI İLİŞKİLER ANABİLİM DALI**



Social Media in Today's Conformist Society

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A Case Study on Germany's Social Media Activism and its Genuineness

Sarah MUSTAFA KUBBA

**MASTER THESIS
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LİSANSÜSTÜ EĞİTİM ENSTİTÜSÜ YÜKSEK LİSANS TEZ KABUL VE ONAY FORMU

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YÜKSEK LİSANS TEZİ

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ÖZET

Sosyal medya ve kullanıcı sayısı arttıkça, sosyal medyanın önemi de artıyor. Sosyal medya platformlarındaki influencer'lar, bu tür platformları tam zamanlı meslek olarak kullanarak artıyor. Günlük sosyal medya kullanımının merkezinde yer alıyorlar - izleyicileri onlardan paylaşımlar, videolar, fotoğraflar ve bazen de açıklamalar bekliyor. Asıl soru, influencer'ların bu beklentileri karşılayıp karşılayamadıklarıdır.

Sosyal medya, dünyanın dört bir yanındaki insanlar üzerinde günlük ve sürekli bir etkiye sahip olduğu için siyasi alan için daha fazla araştırılması gereken yeni bir fenomendir. Özellikle genç nesiller bu etkiyle karşı karşıya kalmakta, siyasi görüşlerini ve eylemlerini şekillendirmekte ve oluşturmaktadır. Araştırma sorusu "Almanya'da sosyal medya aktivizmi, sosyal meselelere yönelik tutum ve etkiye katkıda bulunan inançları nasıl yayıyor ve bu aktivizmin gerçekliğini veya bir eğilimin takip edilmesini ne ifade ediyor?" karşılaştırmalı bir vaka çalışması ve metin ve belge analizi yoluyla incelenmiştir.

Ana sonuçlar, çevrimiçi aktivizmde etki sahiplerinin gerçekliğinin ya durumla olan ilişkilerine ya da adalet olarak algıladıkları şey uğruna yapmaya istekli oldukları veya yaptıkları fedakarlıklara ve risklere bağlı olduğunu derlemektedir. Ayrıca, sosyal medyadan başka geliri olmayan etkileyicilerin bu riski alma olasılığı daha düşük olduğundan ve sessiz kalmayı tercih ettiklerinden, finansal riskler veya motivasyonların gerçek aktivizm üzerinde güçlü etkileri vardır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: sosyal medya, influencerlar, online aktivizm, siyasi aktivizm, etkilenebilirlik.

**HASAN KALYONCU UNIVERSITY
GRADUATE EDUCATION INSTITUTE
DEPARTMENT of
POLITICAL SCIENCE AND INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS**

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ABSTRACT

As social media and its user count grows, the importance of it grows along with it. influencers on social media platforms are increasing, using such platforms as full-time occupations. They are central to every day social media usage - their audience expects posts, videos, photos, and sometimes, statements. The question is whether or not the influencers are able to fulfill these expectations.

Social media is a new phenomenon for the political sphere, which needs to be researched more, as it has an everyday and constant influence on people all over the world. Especially younger generations are confronted by this influence, shaping and forming their political views and actions. The research question "How does social media activism in Germany diffuse the beliefs contributing to attitude and influence towards social issues, and what implies the genuineness of this activism or the following of a trend?" is studied, through a comparative case study and textual and document analysis.

The main results compile that genuineness of influencers in online activism, depends on either their relation to the situation or the 'sacrifices and risk they are willing to take or have made for the sake of what they perceive as justice. Additionally, financial risks or motivations have strong influences on genuine activism, as influencers who have no other income than social media, are less likely to take this risk, and prefer to stay silent.

Keywords: social media, influencers, online activism, political activism, influenceability

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Scientific and Societal Relevance

“Some things are in our control and others not. Things in our control are opinion, pursuit, desire, aversion, and, in a word, whatever are our own actions. Things not in our control are [...] whatever are not our actions.” (Epictetus, 1800). We are in control of our actions and reactions. So how do we manage our actions, if we are seen and observed by thousands or sometimes millions of people, with the power to influence them?

As social media and its user count grows, the importance of it grows along with it. Influencers on social media platforms are increasing, using such platforms as full-time occupations. They are central to every day social media usage - their audience expects posts, videos, photos, and sometimes, statements. Especially the case of declaring support or spreading awareness on conflicts or situations has grown larger. Influencers are judged and the audience expects responses to situations, international issues and conflicts. Whether the influencer is educated on that topic or not, is not of importance. Even on and through social media, used all over the world, by billions of people, the importance of politics and political participation has increased immensely in everyday life. And along with it, has made it more transparent.

It is also important to mention that the greenness and influenceability of the young, who use social media from an early age onwards, sometimes without parental observation, put their political stance and participation and their development at risk of being dominated by social media's influencers. Are the views and opinions shared by the influencers genuine? Are they informed about the topics they discuss online? Or, is the political participation of the influencer online only a means to the purpose of likes, followers and sympathy? Do they intend to provide a solution? To be an ally? Do they want to create awareness? Or is it all *performative activism*? And, most importantly, how much and in what way, are their audiences *actually* influenced?

It is also important to mention that this thesis provides new information on political behavior in the social media ‘sphere’, online activism, which is a very recent phenomenon that has not been studied thoroughly enough yet.

1.2 Research question and Subquestions

Since the Israel-Palestine conflict has worsened steadily, it was common to observe different people, whether influencer or not, from the west, or other parts of the world, with different ethnic and cultural backgrounds, and how they have acted and reacted to this politically and socially on a global level impacting conflict. Especially interesting to me was for instance the continuity of spreading information and awareness after a span of time has passed, increasing, decreasing, stopping or staying the same. Everything is presented.

This research is specifically limited to the case of Germany and German influencers, its comparison to US influencers, and their activism on social media, as the author is fluent in German and profit off both English as well as German literature and data. The US case is also an interesting point to compare as most of the highest ranked influencers, with regards to follower and like count, are from the US.

The research question this thesis has focused on is as follows. *“How does social media activism in Germany diffuse the beliefs contributing to attitude and influence towards social issues, and what implies the genuineness of this activism or the following of a trend?”* Important to note here is that the term ‘influencer’ would describe someone that affects wider audiences or (a certain amount of) followers by utilizing social media and sharing their ideas and thoughts on it. ‘Genuineness’ implies the authenticity of the influencer’s activism, and what the intention behind it is. In later chapters these concepts are defined more in depth.

This thesis follows a line of sub questions answered by each chapter and section. The questions are as follows.

1. What are the most prominent theoretical perspectives on influencers’ political performance, its genuineness on social media and the impact on audiences?
- 2.

- a) How can genuine social media activism and its influence on users be conceptualized and assessed?
 - b) How can these concepts be applied to Germany's influencers?
 - c) How can these concepts be applied to US influencers?
3. What results out of both cases compared?
- a) What are the differences?
 - b) What are the similarities?

1.3 Limitations: Weaknesses and strengths of the research

Difficulties I have faced while conducting the research were using posts and stories and other actions on social media as Data. It is disadvantageous to the researcher as some posts are deleted automatically after 24 hours, and others may be deleted or archived by the influencer themselves. The only chance to find this data again is if social media users or journalists have documented them. Therefore, to know, for instance, whether an influencer has responded to a situation or not, is problematic, as they may have done so, but in a 'Story' that was only online for one day. Additionally, the conflict chosen is still ongoing, which means that the data on social media is continuing constantly; people posting and sharing, making it difficult to find an end to the research.

Besides that, to assess the accurate genuineness of an influencer does also not seem to be possible, because whatever they may say about themselves and their activism online could be ingenuine, and the indicators discussed that show genuine activity, are only theoretical. A weakness this research has is choosing two cases, the US and Germany, that are almost identical in their conditions and characteristics, resulting in the findings to be quite similar to each other.

Yet, due to the deficiency in sufficient literature in this topic, as social media has only been around for about 15 years since Facebook, and influencer are a phenomenon that is still new, this thesis might serve as a contribution to further research on the topic of social media activism, and the political sphere online.

Lastly, the greatest disadvantage to this research was choosing a case that made it difficult for me to be neutral and only observant about, because I am, as much as probably

anyone else is in this generation, due to the algorithm on platforms, in my own ‘bubble’ or world, bearing complications for an objective research.

1.4 Outline of the study

First, the conceptual framework is conducted which consists of the literature review, the conceptualization or categorization, and lastly, the expectations and hypothesis. The third chapter explains how the thesis’ research design and methodology is organized, including the empirical data. Next, are the chapters on Germany and the US, which analyze the categorization and concepts created before adapted to the cases’ chosen influencers. Lastly, the chapters comparing both cases and the conclusion are presented.

2. THEORETICAL AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

This chapter first, deals with the existing literature on political performance on social media platforms and then the efficacy of it. After reviewing all the literature incorporated into this study, the information found is conceptualized and categorized, to analyze in later chapters. And lastly, the hypothesis and expectations for this study are presented.

Different authors are discussed, who conducted researches on performative activism, influencer culture and their effectivity in influencing audiences. Some of the most important ones of these researchers, for this thesis include Thimsen (2022), Kutlaca (2022), and Wellman (2022). Important to consider were the years of the publications, as the topic of this study, social media and influencers in the political sphere, need a theoretical basis that incorporates information of recent years, in which social media has reached a wider audience and become more accessible than it has before. Deriving from this literature that is reviewed, concepts are created that complement the theory of this research.

This topic and creating a theoretical framework for it is important insofar as social media is a part of everyday life and has an influence on the political opinion of the public, sometimes without sufficient security over propaganda or harmful views, increasing the need for further research on it. Especially as younger generations are exposed more to political content online, sometimes without exactly knowing or understanding what it is or does to them, meaning the influence it has on them, a greater need for coverage of these research gaps exists.

The literature that is analyzed in this chapter consists of peer-reviewed journal articles, case studies, online articles, and books. These were acquired through internet research, especially by utilizing Google Scholar, explicitly searching for literature that included the ideas and theory concerned with the key matter. Overall this theory discusses the subjects' performative online activism by influencers, the reasons for its performativity, and its impact on the public and political participation online.

2.1 Literature review

The theoretical framework of this thesis is concerned with the phenomenon of 'performative activism' on social media and the influenceability of online audiences. This

literature review portrays a brief overview of the existing theoretical perspectives regarding the genuineness of political activism on social media and the impact on the audience.

For these phenomena to be understood, it is important to include different factors that explain what makes activism genuine or ingenuine, and that show how influenceable audiences are and what difference performative or non-performative activism can make in impacting the public. Therefore, the current state of research is on performative activism and social media user influenceability is explored. This also necessitates the inclusion of a variety of perspectives to highlight repeating trends occurring in literature of different authors. These ideas and findings are discussed, rethought and contrasted if necessary. The literature is carefully selected stemming from recent years, due to the ‘new’ topic of social media, and more specifically its use for political activism.

It is essential for this research to conduct this literature review as it serves as a theoretical basis that assesses themes helping to explain online behavior of audiences and influencers. Moreover, it helps display the already acquired information and solutions to issues similar to the one this research is concerned with.

2.1.1. Performative activism and the genuineness of influencers’ social media activism

For a concrete analysis concerning the phenomenon of performative activism, other authors and their perspectives need to be put under consideration. For instance, A. Freya Thimsen (2022) explains in detail what so-called ‘performative activism’ is, which is one of the phenomena focused on in this study. performative activism, according to Thimsen (2022) is about social activism serving the influencer’s own interests not because of, or at least not *solely*, genuine and altruistic reasons. ‘Performative’ here therefore is about the actions that are just for show; a performance to impress or to appeal to the audience (Thimsen, 2022 & Kutlaca, 2022). Various authors suggest that one of the main motivations to be politically active on social media is for prestige or more so, to stay relevant and remain ‘attractive’ to the audience (Thimsen, 2022). For the influencer, social activism on social media becomes another way to promote themselves, in this case as a caring and empathetic person, that wants to help the disadvantaged ones, as different authors explain (Thimsen, 2022 & Kutlaca, 2022). This behavior is called ‘virtue signaling’ and mentioned by McClanahan (2021), in

which the influencer wants to be applauded for the act on social media, focused on the personal benefit of being more appealing to the audience and liked for their act of alleged empathy and selflessness. Which means that the goal of the activism is not justice but is used for personal gain.

For instance, the reason for when an influencer stops talking about the issue online suddenly after posting regularly for a certain time, could be that it was *popular* or *a trend* at the time or because it was expected from them, and they were pressured to do so by their audience (Wellman, 2022). Yet, this pressure projected by the audience can be more damaging than expected. That is because expecting an influencer to post about a certain topic before they feel 'prepared' or ready to do so, makes their activism 'meaningless' and more importantly, perhaps harmful to the cause. Information sharing without educating themselves beforehand on the topic, positioning oneself on one side or blindly reposting other's posts and hashtags just for the sake of posting and satisfying the masses, does not help the issue at hand, according to Wellman (2022). Therefore, we see that pressure from the public increases the risk of ingenious activism that might even impede the activism of others, as Wellman (2022) has portrayed on the example of *BlackLivesMatter*, for instance.

Thimsen (2022) and other authors also critique the easy factor of social media activism, which makes it even more performative. That is because of the cost-benefit ratio. A variety of posts, stories shared by influencers, or hashtags added to pictures is not comparable to the effort and costs demonstrators on the streets bare, who may protest nights long, or get regulated physically by the police or get arrested (Kutlaca, 2022 & Thimsen, 2022). This critique suggests that most influencers who use social media as a tool for activism, generally portrays the only source of activism they partake in. Thimsen (2022) echoes the audience's concern with this issue because it does not seem genuine to them to only 'talk' about a situation, instead of 'doing' something actively against or for it.

This point also calls for the differentiation between normative and non-normative acts, explained by Kutlaca (2022), saying that there are actions taken regarding social activism that do not cross the borders of norms and regulations, which for instance, includes social media activism, and actions that break known rules and norms, even laws. Again, the cost-benefit ratio is observable here (Kutlaca, 2022). While the post on the internet or the signing

of a petition or the small donation you make, takes only seconds to complete, the non-normative acts can portray the clear opposite. As the latter might include for instance, dangerous, violent, extremely expensive or very time-consuming actions, the costs to partake in social activism in this manner, requires more costs (Kutlaca, 2022) and may even lead to physical, financial, prestigious and other sorts of harms.

On the other hand, it is also important to acknowledge that in some cases the online activism of the influencer alone can be damaging to *themselves* enough to reveal a clear genuineness in their action. An example for that would be Bella Hadid, a model that has a strong online presence, with a high following, acting therefore as an influencer, who has lost jobs after speaking out online by advocating for Palestine (Ayoubi, 2022). She highlights that ever since she started to publicly state her political views and advocate for Palestine on social media many different brands fired or ended deals with her (Ayoubi, 2022). Additionally, the social media platform allegedly censored her posts and content from then on (Ayoubi, 2022).

Both of these consequences are insofar significant, as for most influencers their accounts, posts, brand deals, sponsorships and platforms in general portray their full-time jobs and their whole income is dependent on how ‘well’ they perform or do on social media. Engaging in social activism on social media aware of the consequences they might have to endure, including possible high financial losses resulting from brand disapproval and from disapproval of audiences and therefore follower decreases, the risk of being censored. The loss of friends, as Bella Hadid has experienced as well after her social activism online (Uddin, 2022) receiving hateful responses and despite even more negative outcomes, one can say that even a single post alone, which seemingly does not require many efforts, demands more sacrifices than at first seems. The genuineness of an influencer in this case cannot be refuted only due to the simplicity of the activism, as one post alone can lead to their whole career being ruined, for the sake of activism.

This is also touched upon by Kutlaca et al. (2022), explaining that personal motives for instance are not to be simplified in the sense that, the activism is immediately ingenuine as soon as it was motivated by personal reasons. Whether this applies to for instance the need for broadening intercultural understanding or to increase their self-esteem; because they are doing it ‘for themselves’ they may be even more motivated to continue with their social

(media) activism for a longer period (Kutlaca et al., 2022). It could even be more genuine than any other motivation, as a personal reason could be an emotional or personal connection to the situation, creating a need or passion to improve the negative situation.

There are several conditions that need to be considered when trying to assess the genuineness of an influencer's activism on social media. For instance, for how long does the influencer continue to post about the situation? What is the influencer sharing? Do the posts exceed viral Hashtags, and uncommented news sharing (Wellman, 2022)? Wellman (2022) here critiques influencers that do this; social media activism as a trend, without the intention to genuinely help, which leads to more damage than benefits for those in need of justice. The author criticizes the trend's sudden nature, in which the influencer needs to participate only after it becomes 'popular' to be an ally, that is as if the movements, wars, discrimination, and overall societal issues have not been existent before the trending hashtag (Wellman, 2022). How genuine can an influencer's social media activism be if it is limited to a short time, and dependent on the popularity of the political situation? Thus, it is important to consider the frequency and durability of activity on the topic by the influencer, when assessing the genuineness of their political activism.

The literature continuously mentions different motives and motivations the influencers have behind their social media activism. Some of them, as mentioned above, are (the feeling of) obligation due to guilt, validation and virtue signaling, credibility maintenance (Wellman, 2022). Another one may be some kind of financial gain, which would end in the so-called 'optical allyship' in which social activism is only motivated by monetary advantages (McClanahan, 2021). And more authentic ones, which include altruism; here the influencer partakes in social activism on their account despite knowing the (possible) negative consequences for them, because this is what seems to be the morally right thing to do, which is another motive showing genuineness; morals (Wellman, 2022).

2.1.2. The influenceability of the online audience

Some aforementioned aspects with regards to the genuineness of an influencer are of importance to the effectiveness in influencing the audience as well. How do followers and political actors react? Is social media Activism of influencers met with appreciation or hate?

The literature presents different perspectives and factors playing into the effectiveness of their online activism. McClanahan (2021) elaborates on the concern that the audience can be influenced easily, which means that the influence can be negative as well. The author here suggests that whether they can be influenced or not, is not the question, but in what way the users are influenced; which depends on the Creator they follow online (McClanahan, 2021). Therefore, an influencer that never partakes in social activism online, influences the user just as much as the Creator that posts every day about societal issues, according to McClanahan (2021).

Nevertheless, this is not entirely true. Followers that observe missing activism from an influencer they like, are not necessarily going to stay out of activism as well, they are more likely to put pressure on the influencer and demand activism (Wellman, 2022), that is if the user is interested in, affected by or politically active regarding the topic.

The audience's influenceability is also dependent on the performance of the influencer and how genuine it seems to be (Thimsen, 2022). Thimsen (2022) shares that often critique on activists online contains the missing authenticity; the sole posting on the issue, is not of importance to the social media user, self-reflection and activism beyond social media is demanded by the public. Activism that requires more effort and sacrifices than a simple post. Yet, in contrast to that, sometimes the extra activism is criticized as well, if for instance a picture of attending a demonstration is posted, which makes it even more difficult for an influencer to show their genuineness. The audience's reaction is never predictable, as Wellman (2022) explains for instance, if an influencer randomly starts to post about an issue, they would call it ingenuine, being outraged about the sudden concern on a situation that has been existing for a longer time, but not posting anything is also not acceptable to the follower, as that seems ignorant to them and selfish.

Although, important to mind here, is that as explained before, even a single post, can lead to financial, career and popularity losses. One factor might be that the follower simply has a different opinion than the influencer they follow, which makes them keen to unfollow the actor online fast, and sometimes even more drastic, make the effort to report their page, to shut it down completely or shadowban them (Brix, 2021). To add to this idea, there are also influencers disputing with each other on political and social situations, in which

followers are affected by their followed social media creator, to such a degree, they find several ways to shadowban the ‘opponent’, which for instance includes activity spam, such as likes, reports and more (Captions AI, 2024).

In conclusion, the impact an influencer has on the audience is quite diverse and dependent on how the user’s predisposition to the situation at hand looks as well as how genuine the Creator’s activism seems to the audience.

2.2 Conceptualization/Categorization

The concept this research is concerned with primarily, is the effectiveness of an influencer’s social media Activism or online activism. Yet beforehand some essential parts of the research need to be defined to clarify the scope this research is based upon.

‘*influencer*’ as defined by the Cambridge Dictionary (n.d.), concerns “someone who affects or changes the way that other people behave”. To specify more with regards to the cases at hand and to limit the scope of the research, an influencer is based upon the following characteristics.

The most essential factors to assess an influencer are *Followers, Likes, Views, Follower engagement/responses and Activity*. First, a minimum follower count of Ten Thousand followers is specified to count as an influencer in this research. This number is broadly defined as the maximum of followers of a so-called ‘nano-influencer’, which is still a high amount of people, that may even be closer to the influencer and are affected more deeply than a high number of followers that are not as close to the influencer (Grin Contributor, 2024). The average engagement rates of the different platforms according to Grin Contributor (2024) are regarded and high engagement rates assessed. The platforms also must be put into consideration individually because of their different features and popularities.

‘*Social media*’ defined in this research includes Instagram, which is the most popular platform in Germany, X (formerly Twitter), TikTok, and YouTube. There are more social media platforms existent, but these are more commonly used for online activism, as can be observed. These platforms are essentially similar to each other but have some features that differ. For instance, X only allows a limited character count for every tweet, making it less personal and the activism more effortless, according to McClanahan (2021). Every platform

now has the Story feature, which allows users to share a post for only 24 hours. Picture, video and text is all supported by every platform. The ability to share, like and comment is also available on all platforms. Only, YouTube and X allow dislikes.

'Decision makers', include a scope starting from people above the legal age to vote in a democratic state until political actors and leaders.

'Genuineness' can be assessed by the (expected) motivations of the influencer posting on the topic, as listed below, as well as factors, such as the durability and frequency of activity on the issue, as well as costs and consequences of the online activism.

2.2.1 Soft media power

A definition that has been developed decades before by Nye Jr. (2008), is important to note here. 'Soft power', as explained by Nye Jr (2008), is the political power to persuade, using words, speech, communication and networking, to reach political goals. This concept is insofar interesting to apply to, or more so, reconceptualize for this research as it was meant to explain political influence in political leaders or states (Nye Jr, 2008) and not civilians. Yet, an underage girl, with nothing more than a poster, boycotting school in front of the Swedish Parliament, was able to create a global strike, with nothing but a hashtag and words (Fridays for Future, n.d.).

The assumption here is that with the utilization of social media, being able to amplify one's voice and possibly reach an internationally wider audience, a new power is given to the citizen. If a person that is not a political leader or organization or anything of that sort, takes on the role of an influencer, they create for themselves a tool to influence the public on different levels in different aspects and one of these aspects is politics. social media platforms can easily be utilized to mobilize protests offline, to persuade political actors, spread information and awareness on certain topics, share political views and more. The use of the platforms is not very restricted, besides a minimum age demand, and people can publicly state their stance more transparently, faster, easier and to a broader audience than ever.

Soft media power here is about influencers that have the power to create movements by posting one picture or video, one hashtag or one temporary story, sometimes in a span of minutes or even seconds. Followers are persuaded to donate to an organization, because their

favorite influencer has asked them to in their post with simple words, and the self-promotion of allegedly donating as well. Why is it that the public seems to be more prone to listen to and be influenced by influencers on social media in terms of Politics, than by actual political leaders?

It is a feeling of empowerment, according to Pătruț (2016) that many social media users have. Poell et al. (2018) explain that people viewing and sharing the same things feel connected that way. This seems more like a motivation to increasingly participate in these social acts than a political leader that calls for it, without being on the same 'level' as the users might feel with other influencers. Maier (2021) entails that the use of pictures and videos on social media by influencers to spread awareness and information or share moments of the issue at hand, is one tool for activism online to indulge the audience more into the topic.

Maier (2021) also touches upon the 'live' feature of social media, in which the influencer can start live video sharing, with users also able to comment, like and send gifts as well. Here, the special aspect is, that the audience receives the 'power' to ask and comment live, anyone watching being able to read it, making it difficult for the influencer (which can sometimes be a politician) to escape the possible inconvenience of question (Maier, 2021). It is not comparable to a political event with Questions and answers, that are organized, the questions filtered, security and organizers coordinating and more. Yet, important to mention is that the influencer still has the advantage to turn the comments off, which presents them the opportunity to just say and share what they want without interruption or feedback.

Yet also important is that a political leader or actor can be a successful influencer as well. It is often observed that political leaders instrumentalize social media to amplify their voice, to connect to the audience, or more so, possible voters for instance (Pătruț, 2016). They make use of it to bring forward their own thoughts and political statements regarding situations and conflicts in seconds via online posts and can therefore more effectively and fast influence their voters and react to situations as soon as they have happened. It also seems as if the social media user would feel more connected to and on the same level with the political actor on social media persuading the voter more of them and their campaign, as well

as having a new introduction to the political world through a medium they know well and use every day (Pătruț, 2016).

Poell et al. (2018), also shares that social media gives movements the opportunity and power to be connected over transnational borders, organizing more effectively and serving as fast and helpful communication tools.

Abdalla et al. (2022) explains the phenomenon of “Cancel Culture” that has been present on social media for some time now. They define it as “publicly sham[ing] those who deviate from social norms” (Abdalla et al., 2022). Nevertheless, not only social norms are important for cancel culture but that which is preferred by the majority of people or supported on social media at the time. For instance, if we take Germany and the Israel-Palestine situation as an example, we will see that for Germany as a country it is the “norm” to support Israel and its fight against Palestine, as Germany has politically made itself the responsibility to ensure Israel its existence; this “officiality” makes it a social norm (Lpb, n.d.). Yet, if we look at “blocklists” created on social media by users, in which people in Germany collectively not only unfollow but block certain influencers because they did not respond in favor of Palestine or did not respond whatsoever to the crisis (Barduhn, 2024), we can see that the cancel culture here is not according to the norm at the moment.

Therefore, cancel culture has different powers to either have a positive or negative effect on a situation and influencer. It can be used to ‘cancel’ discriminatory behavior or influencers or to bring forward a political message as seen in the previous example, which says that political participation is demanded by those with reach. It is a form of blackmailing almost, in which the users show the influencers the consequences of their decisions, also implying that their online career is dependent on them and whether they follow them or not. Yet, with regards to Abdalla et al. (2022) cancel culture also has characteristics that are harmful to social movements and activism. The fear it creates among social media users, which does not only mean influencers, for being judged and shamed for having an opinion that goes against the majorities, hinders genuine conversations and discussions on topics, because everyone fears being ‘canceled’ (Abdalla et al., 2022).

Cancel culture is also not exclusive to the social media ‘world’. An influencer that shows and proves injustice from certain groups or actors, may influence their followers to

cancel them or boycott them as well. This can be seen in brand boycotts for instance, where followers would suggest or prove a brand's connection to the disliked party, making the followers boycott them in everyday (offline) life (Ethical Consumer, n.d.).

2.2.2 Effectiveness of influencers' social media Activism

This concept on the effectiveness of influencers' social media Activism bases itself upon the reaction of the audience which includes also that of the political actors. For instance, are there legal consequences as responses? Are the posts, accounts censored or deleted? Are influencers being arrested for their online activism? Does the audience approve of the influencer's activism online? Are they admiring, appreciating or criticizing it in the comments? If so, why do they criticize or appreciate it?

Now, the Effectiveness of the influencers social media Activism is theorized as follows.

Wellman (2022) states that influencers taking part in activism online often do so without informing themselves which creates the idea that they are seemingly only following a trend. Here, the author takes the example of the BlackLivesMatter movement in 2020 and the sharing of black squares as posts with uniform hashtags (Wellman, 2022). What this has led to was important information that drowned under all the black squares with the same hashtags that were usually used to spread this information (Wellman, 2022). Influencers were criticized due to their lack of efforts in educating themselves further on the issue enough to not bring damage to it and actually spread awareness through their online activism (Wellman, 2022).

Yet, it is also important to acknowledge that 'every publicity is good publicity' in the sense that every kind of sharing and post is one step further and that it is better than to do nothing (Wellman, 2022). I would also suggest and expect that the user's and follower's personal relation to the situation is an important factor for the way influencers' activism affects them. If they are personally and emotionally affected by the situation, and like the influencer, they are more prone to feel personally attacked by an opinion of that creator they did not expect or cannot combine with their own belief (Wellman, 2022).

It is important to keep in mind that effective can mean different things, for instance related to marketing or business strategies as well, which is because an influencer is in the

end a full-time occupation in most cases and they have to consider most of their activities and what benefit it has to them in their ‘workplace’ which is in this case, social media.

The first type, as discussed before, is perhaps the goal to change something in a positive way about the situation at hand. This could either be observed then in changes of legislations, positive reactions of politicians, or just simply, an improvement of the situation, which would also include the audience's positive reaction. Yet, the other ‘effectiveness’ of an influencer’s social media activism could be to simply get any engagement from the audience. Thus, a pro-Israel influencer, for instance, posts regularly about Israel and Palestine, with fifty percent of the comments involving Palestine positive sayings. This engagement leads to a wider reach, as posts and accounts are dependent on constant engagement, not the follower count, as this does not influence the algorithm (QuickFrame, 2024). Therefore, sometimes it may only be the engagement itself an influencer aspires, even if the reactions are not positive. That in mind, financial intentions or motivations could be the reason for an interest in responses such as higher engagement, more money, more virality for the influencer.

On the other hand, the altruistic intentioned or motivated influencer would also appreciate the engagement and understand it as a success even if the audience is not positively reacting to their activist content. That is, because again their reach widens, making their social activism become more viral, and heard more. Here, it is also important to go back to the effectiveness connected to politicians, according to Maier (2021) social media is a helpful tool to popularize a topic that is not talked about on mainstream media and news channels. Therefore, assisting in putting it on the agenda ‘reminding’ people of the existence of the issue, increasing its importance not only for the general public but also the political sphere (Maier, 2021). That is because, after citizens observe influencers and other creators making the effort to talk about issues leaders have not talked about yet, pressure might be projected on the politicians to respond to the neglected issue. Awareness spreading as such can be seen on accounts such as Jess Natale’s so informed (so informed, n.d.) or Impact (impact, n.d.), in which posts can be found thematizing updates on global issues and situations and spreading awareness (so informed, 2024).

The effectiveness of an influencer’s activism online also shows itself in demonstrations, or collective actions on- and offline, after influencer’s call for mobilization

(Maier, 2021). Maier (2021) shows how social media has simplified the mobilization and organization process of protests, and also important, the documentation of it. The last point is a very essential contribution social media has made to Activism, which is the documentation. Demonstrators on the streets can film and prove anything that has happened at a protest, which includes for instance police brutality, leading to other movements online, in which videos and pictures of protests are shared and made aware of online. These are also often commented on with on-site experiences. All of this shows the contributions online activism has on offline activism, and with it increasing its effectiveness, as other issues are realized as well. as it is protected, in the sense that, protestors or happenings at demonstrations cannot be falsely reported by “opponents” or corrupt journalists. These tools are also used and effective in demanding responses and reactions from politicians and authorities (Cadena-Roa et al., 2021).

Abdalla et al. (2022) also shares, that some influencers only participate in social media Activism due to peer pressure; not wanting to be excluded or disliked by their group or peers because they did not follow their actions, even if it is not what they believe to be the right or effective way. As a result of that, the activism is not reflected and perhaps faulty, creating again more harm than good to the cause (Abdalla et al., 2022).

The last thing I want to add is the ‘Story’ feature on different social media platforms. Stories are posts that are only online for a maximum of 24 hours, if not deleted before this period, which makes them only temporary. Therefore, any activism shared with this feature, is only ‘provable’ if documented, which means in this case, if there are savings of it or recordings of the influencer posting the story. This is insofar important, as the influencer can ‘satisfy’ the audience’s demand for reaction to a situation, without the risks of a digital footprint (IBM, n.d.) that could be traced back to them, without being criticized for their unwelcomed response to the situation by audience’s that do not approve, or even legal consequences. Nevertheless, this can be even less effective than other forms of social media activism or no activism at all, as it may be suggested that this form requires even less effort than the already criticized ‘normal’ posts, as explained before. Nevertheless, other than this feature, activism created online is often reposted, discussed and resistant, constantly

“retained, recycled, and renewed” (Cadena-Roa, 2021), creating room and an environment for political discourse.



3. RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

This Master Thesis' research design and methodology, the cases and data are explained in the following sections.

3.1 Research design

This thesis is conducted as qualitative research and a comparative Case Study. The two cases here are US and German influencers and social media audiences. The research is based on academic literature used to assess a necessary theoretical framework for the analysis, also containing scales, parameters and concepts created to apply the data on. This is followed by the collection of data on social media and online articles. The data and themes collected are then applied to the theory and cases for analysis purposes.

Conducted is a textual and document analysis, collecting data and repeating themes on social media platforms that are defined further in the next section. After that, concepts are created based on literature and data. The universe and scope of this research encompasses mainly Germany, German influencers and audience. These again, are specified more in the following. As a comparative case, is social media in the US and their influencers included as well, whereas the main focus lies on Germany.

Important to highlight here is that the analysis is only limited to two cases, two countries. This makes it difficult to generalize the outcomes and results. Also because of choosing one specific (main) case this may imply a researcher bias. These specific cases were chosen because, for the case of Germany, the author is fluent in German, therefore understanding German media, posts and influencers to her advantage. For the US case, it portrays an effective comparison as some of the most known, most followed, and influencers with the widest reach are from the US. Some of these influencers, that are at the same time widely known celebrities, are sometimes politically active as well. The intention for a second case to compare to, was a wider spectrum of data and information to find more accurate results instead of a biased not generalizable (one) case study. Nevertheless, the findings will not be completely generalizable for this research still.

3.2 Empirical data

As the data in this research consists of social media posts and articles online, both primary and secondary data are used. This data is collected through textual and document analysis, to assess an influencer, also considering their engagement rate.

The data mostly consists of Tweets from X (previously Twitter), posts and, if possible, Stories shared on Instagram, as well as sharing on the platforms TikTok and YouTube. Nevertheless, these platforms and the data or posts on them, must be considered individually, as their natures are different and similar at the same time. Even if all platforms now have the same functions, such as videos, pictures, text sharing, and comment and like functions, the engagement rate and the popularity of an influencer can vary from platform to platform. Also, keeping in account that the ‘dislike’ function only exists on YouTube and X.

Besides that, articles online and third-party records concerning the posts by influencers and celebrities are considered, and data extracted as well. This is insofar important for this thesis, as many posts may either be deleted or, the posts are stories, which have the characteristic of being only online for a maximum of 24 hours, if not saved as a ‘highlight’ on their pages. Therefore, a lot of data gets lost, if it is not saved by online articles or third parties, commenting on these social media contributions, with the recordings or screenshots of them.

Yet first a sampling of the influencers this research is concerned with is conducted using Google Sheets, which can be found in **Table 1** below. It consists of 65 German influencers and 65 US American influencers who have been politically active online on social media concerning the Israel-Palestine issue.

Table 1: Influencer sampling Germany and the US

German influencers	PRO - or Neutral	# of posts regarding conflict (>/< 10 posts)	US influencers	PRO - or Neutral	# of posts regarding conflict (>/< 10 posts)
Serhat Sisik	Palestine	>10	Bella Hadid	Palestine	>10
Jürgen Todenhöfer	Palestine	>10	Alana Hadid	Palestine	>10

Ahmad Mansour	Israel	>10	Nemahsis	Palestine	>10
Ahmad Ahmad	Palestine	>10	Macklemore	Palestine	>10
Judith Scheytt	Palestine	>10	Msrachelforlittlekids	Palestine	>10
Pauline Jäckels	Palestine	>10	Khaledbeydoun	Palestine	>10
Mudiblick	Palestine	>10	Elise_gravel	Palestine	>10
Hanno Hauenstein	Palestine	>10	Adame_media	Palestine	>10
Hebh Jamal	Palestine	>10	Jasminefares	Palestine	>10
Alena Jabarine	Palestine	>10	Hamzahs1948	Palestine	>10
Sophia Hoffman	Palestine	>10	Djsnake	Palestine	<10
Tarek Baé	Palestine	>10	AOC	Palestine	>10
Kübra Gümüşay	Palestine	>10	Amandaseales	Palestine	>10
Yaseminacr	Palestine	>10	Bassel_nasser	Palestine	<10
Sawsan Chebli	Palestine	>10	Anwar	Palestine	<10
Migrantischewut	Palestine	>10	Drjillstein	Palestine	>10
Younes_abou	Palestine	>10	Nabela	Palestine	<10
Ryad Aref	Palestine	>10	Thenewyorknest	Palestine	<10
Alice_haruko	Palestine	<10	Amanda asad	Palestine	>10
Deborah_feldmann	Palestine	<10	Loren asad	Palestine	>10
Elhotzo	Palestine	<10	Withloveleena	Palestine	>10
Elkhatibjules	Palestine	>10	Yaknowme_hatomi	Palestine	<10
Frederic Todenhöfer	Palestine	>10	Amy schumer	Israel	>10
_sophiamaier	Palestine	>10	Sammy Obeid	Palestine	>10
Kaya Yanar	Palestine	>10	Huda	Palestine	>10
Tomerdr	Palestine	>10	Marcia Cross	Palestine	>10
Dr.hatun	Palestine	>10	John Cusack	Palestine	>10
Amiya_am	Palestine	>10	Pedro Pascal	Palestine	<10
kids.doc.de	Neutral	<10	Jesse Williams	Palestine	<10
Issam_bayan	Palestine	>10	Rowan Blanchard	Palestine	<10
Vincent Lilienthal	Palestine	>10	Sara Foster	Israel	<10
Garciagizem	Palestine	>10	Mandanadayani	Israel	>10
Der_neukoellner	Palestine	>10	Yourfavoriteguy	Palestine	>10
Nalaversum	Palestine	<10	Gal Gadot	Israel	>10
Haylimaria	Palestine	<10	Daizygedeon	Palestine	>10
Enissa_amani	Palestine	>10	mxryium	Palestine	>10
Nisrinchen	Palestine	<10	devotedlyyours	Palestine	<10
Olaf Scholz	Israel	>10	nombeah	Palestine	>10
Annalena Baerbock	Israel	>10	Ericamena	Palestine	>10
Dieterhallervorden	Palestine	<10	Missmayim	Israel	>10

Missgammour	Palestine	>10	Lizzysavetsky	Israel	>10
Zeina.boxer	Palestine	<10	Collegenutritionist	Israel	<10
Gerd Buurmann	Israel	>10	weworewhat	Israel	<10
Linda teuteberg	Israel	>10	Mrmichaeldickson	Israel	>10
Nurder Koch	Palestine	>10	Ritchie Torres	Israel	>10
rebew_lexa	Neutral	>10	Nitsanraiter	Neutral	<10
Dr. Markus Krall	Israel	>10	Chelseahandler	Israel	<10
Fabian Goldmann	Palestine	>10	Mark ruffalo	Palestine	>10
Nasir Ahmad	Palestine	>10	Ilhan Omar	Palestine	>10
Sandymoelling	Palestine	<10	Rashida Tlaib	Palestine	>10
Ischraa	Palestine	>10	Linda Sarsour	Palestine	>10
Ayliva	Palestine	<10	Mia Khalifa	Palestine	>10
Hany439	Palestine	>10	Sarah Silverman	Israel	>10
Jasminshakeri	Neutral	<10	Mandy Patinkin	Palestine	>10
Dunjahayali	Neutral	<10	Yara Shahidi	Palestine	<10
Negah_amirii	Neutral	<10	Hasan Minhaj	Palestine	>10
Duzentekkal	Palestine	>10	Bernie Sanders	Palestine	>10
Andrea.sawatzki	Israel	>10	Amanda Hirsch	Israel	<10
Noriyanori	Palestine	>10	Daniel Ryan Spaulding	Israel	>10
Jenna_miller	Neutral	<10	Moribyan	Palestine	<10
Kristin_helberg	Palestine	>10	Shereen Idris	Palestine	>10
Khaledd.pali	Palestine	>10	Moti	Israel	>10
LeFloid	Neutral	<10	Eitan	Israel	>10
Yana Clare	Neutral	<10	_amberalexander	Palestine	>10
Lucas Febraro	Palestine	>10	aaashleyk	Palestine	>10

*the accounts/references of all samples can be found in the bibliography section

These samples include influencers that vary from the fitness scene on social media, lifestyle bloggers, family influencers, political influencers, models to celebrities and politicians, to have a broad spectrum of data. Moreover, the influencers differ in their political stance regarding the Palestine-Israel conflict, creating, as possible as can be, unbiased data. They are either pro-Palestine, pro-Israel or neutral, which means that they have not clearly positioned themselves on one specific side, and instead made general statements demanding peace for everyone involved.

The table also includes the number of posts the creators have published, categorized as either more than ten posts (>10) or less than ten posts (<10), as a guideline for this research. Based on that, a comparison is also made of the different political stances and their number

of posts from the different cases to see, whether a repeating themes are observable or not, and their significance to this research. Does the political position have any importance concerning the genuineness of their social media activism or not? If so, what could be the reason?

In **Chart 1**, below, the number of posts of German and US influencers is compared in percentages with in form of pie charts, also created by using the data from Table 1 with Google Sheets.

Chart 1. German and US Influencers number of posts (>/< 10) categorized by political position, shown in percentage (%)

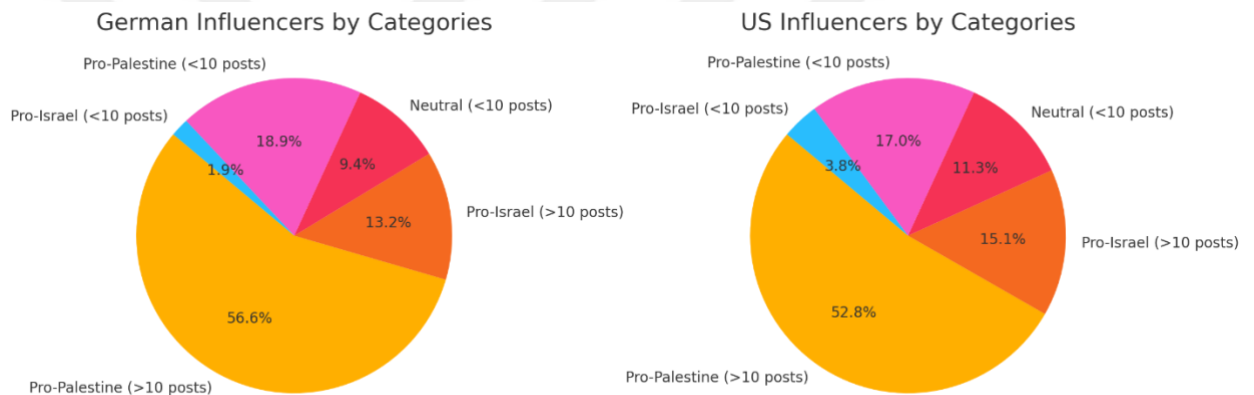
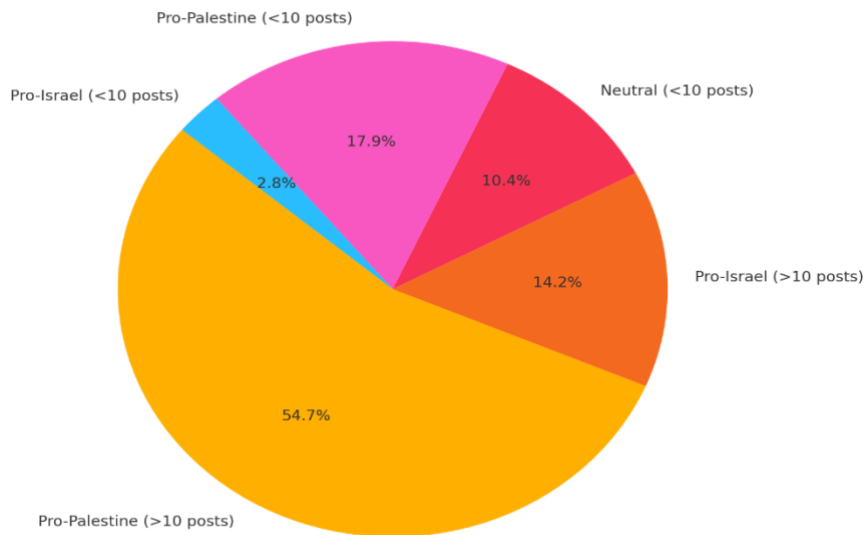


Chart 1 depicts the comparison between German and US influencers, how they position themselves and their frequency of activism online according to their political stance. Very minimal differences can be observed. The highest difference can be assessed in pro-Palestinian influencers that exceed ten posts in Germany, which are almost four percent higher than those in the US. The others are very similar, not differing more than two percent. These differences and similarities and reasons for their occurrence are further analyzed in the analysis sections of this research.

Chart 2. Total social media activism, as number of posts (>/< 10) categorized by political position, Germany and US influencers combined, shown in percentage (%)

Total Social Media Activism by Influencer Categories



3.3 Scale/Parameters

The following questions assess the most important factors concerning social media, influencer and the social media users (audience).

3.3.1 Social media

1. *Is free access to social media available in the selected case at hand?*
2. *Do any legal frameworks restrict the usage of social media?*
3. *Does the public show interest in/care about influencers on social media? Do they show any reaction to their activity/inactivity?*

3.3.2 Influencer

1. *Does the influencer have any financial motivation for their social activism?*
2. *Does the influencer persist in their activism and is there any visible result?*
3. *Are there (legal) consequences for the influencer to endure for speaking about the situation?*
4. *Is the influencer's online activism more effective than politicians' actions?*
5. *What does their activism look like?*

3.3.3 Audience

1. *Does the audience's reaction create an impact in Decision-making?*

To assess the genuineness of an influencer's social activism online a scale of questions concerning the motives of their online activism is proposed and whether their activism is performative or not is suggested.

ACTIVISM MOTIVATED BY...

1...*MONEY/FINANCIAL GAIN* (ingenious/self gain)

- + Is the influencer sponsored by certain brands? VS Does the influencer risk *losing money* by supporting on social media?

2...*ACCEPTANCE/APPLAUSE* (virtue signaling)

- + Does the influencer show real engagement with the topic/situation?
- + Has the influencer given sources or accurate information on the topic?
- + Is the influencer clearly showing that they are educated on the situation?

3...*PERSONAL RELATIONS* (genuine)

- + Has the influencer any personal relations to the situation?
- + Religion, culture, family, background, friends, acquaintances? Passion?

4...*SELFLESSNESS/ALTRUISM/GENUINE CONCERN* (genuine)

- + Is the influencer engaged and public with their opinion despite negative backlash?
- + Is the influencer engaged and public with their opinion despite financial harm?
- + Is the influencer not intimidated by the risk of being censored? (Algorithm)

5...*DUTY/RESPONSIBILITY/OBLIGATION*

- + Do any circumstances oblige the influencer to take part in social media activism?

Table 2. Summary of questions and scale regarding motivations and assessment of genuineness of influencers

Category	Subcategory	Question	Analysis Notes
Social media	Free Access	Is free access to social media available in the selected case at hand?	
	Legal Restrictions	Do any legal frameworks restrict the usage of social media?	

	Public Interest	Does the public show interest in/care about influencers on social media? Do they react?	
Influencer	Financial Motivation	Does the influencer have any financial motivation for their social activism?	
	Persistence	Does the influencer persist in their activism and is there any visible result?	
	Legal Consequences	Are there (legal) consequences for the influencer for speaking about the situation?	
	Effectiveness	Is the influencer's online activism more effective than Politician's actions?	
	Description of Activism	What does their activism look like?	
Motivations	Financial Gain	Is the influencer sponsored by brands, or do they risk financial harm for activism?	
	Acceptance/Appause	Does the influencer show real engagement and share accurate, educated insights?	
	Personal Relations	Does the influencer have personal ties to the situation (religion, culture, family, etc.)?	
	Selflessness/Altruism	Is the influencer public despite backlash or financial risk?	
	Duty/Responsibility	Are there circumstances that oblige the influencer to take part in social activism?	
Audience	Impact on Decision-Making	Does the audience's reaction create an impact in decision-making?	

3.4 Expectations/Hypothesis

Hypothesis:

H1: Social media activism fluctuates as new conflict arises or erupts that push the preceding one to be forgotten.

Expectation 1:

Influencers only post about a certain issue, as long as it seems 'popular' or 'relevant' to their targeted audience.

Expectation 2:

Influencer's genuineness regarding their political activism on social media depends on their relation to the situation.

Expectation 3:

The audience's political view and action is effectively directed by influencers social media Activism.



4. SOCIAL MEDIA AND INFLUENCERS IN GERMANY

This chapter encompasses the analysis on German influencers' social media Activism, aiming to assess their motives and how genuine they are, as well as the analysis on whether these genuine or ingenuine motives are effective or not based on the reaction of the audience.

4.1 Activism motives and effect on audience

4.1.1 Financial Gain

Financial motivation is a very important factor for genuine or ingenuine behavior, that can be assessed in paid partnerships, or content and similar. In general, there is no financial dependency for Germany on Israel or Palestine, but concerning Israel the other way around (Lpb, n.d.). Germany is Israel's third most important trade partner, arming them with weapons and sending regularly compensational money for the crimes of the second World War (Lpb, n.d.). Yet, it is also important to know that Germany is not the only country providing Israel with weapons, which makes their dependency not as significant. Besides that, taken from this, it would actually be a financial relief for Germany to take action against Israel, cutting ties with them and therefore ending funds, exports and any other financial responsibility, therefore saving money. Yet, German politicians do not take this 'opportunity' out of financial motivation in their decision-making, but rather the opposite by continuously sharing their support for Israel and devastation by any damage it experiences online on social media (Baerbock, n.d. & Scholz, n.d.).

Yet, there is one important actor to mention. That is the 'WerteInitiative' organization, which is a Jewish NGO, with the goal to ensure Germany's pro-Israel stance and the hearing of Jewish voices (WerteInitiative, n.d.). In a paper the NGO's members wrote, they claim Germany would not fulfill their responsibility and obligation to ensure and support Israel's existence on international level, due to their votes in UN decision-making processes, allegedly voting for 'anti-Israel' resolutions, as they claim them to be (WerteInitiative, 2022). They do not give an example of a specific resolution only a day, and do not exactly state what they suggest being 'anti-Israel', not saying what the UN has demanded or requested exactly. The only characteristics they allege these resolutions have been against their right for self-

defense, as well as antisemitic, all while emphasizing their disappointment in Germany and the whole United Nations for choosing the wrong vote (WerteInitiative, 2022). The NGO also very clearly points out that Germany should not miss the *opportunity or chance* to strengthen their ties with Israel, cooperate and partner up with them, at the same time questioning the UN's credibility, because of these resolutions, and shaming them for their resolutions (WerteInitiative, 2022). Also, important to say is that this NGO, which can be seen at the bottom of the website, is funded by the Federal Ministry of the Interior and Community (Bundesministerium des Inneren und für Heimat), due to a decision made by the German Bundestag (WerteInitiative, 2022). And lastly, they highlight the fact that they are working together with German actors and politicians to effectively achieve their goals (WerteInitiative, 2022).

Looking at the 'Lobbyregister' of the Bundestag we can also observe the amount of financial support the NGO receives from Germany and their political actors is around eight hundred thousand euros (Deutscher Bundestag, 2024). All these points show that a financial motivation might not be the case for a Germany influencer and politician to advocate for a certain party in case of the Palestine-Israel conflict, as financial compensation is one-sided from the German side. But it more importantly shows a moral and prestigious dependency on Israel by Germany. Even if the opportunity for German politicians is now given to cut ties to Israel and free themselves from this financial burden, they do not. Instead, the German leaders and politicians, even if not all, advocate for Israel, which seems to be an indicator for a *genuine* concern and activism in favor of Israel coming from Scholz (n.d.) and Baerbock (n.d.).

Nevertheless, as will be seen in further sections, financially an influencer may face financial losses, consequences or charges legally, if they decide to speak out for a specific party, because of governmental disapproval or societal 'taboos' regarding certain political positions, in this case being pro-Palestinian concerning the war with Israel. An example for that is Serhat Sisik (n.d.) who often highlights in his posts and stories that social media platforms shadowban him or delete his posts and account entirely, losing his most important financial source as an influencer and journalist. Yet, even after these losses he continues his Social Activism online, regularly updating the audience on news regarding the situation. He

calls for help from his audience because his last income source, which was his TikTok account was deleted by the platform, after advocating on social media in favor of Palestine (Sisik, 2024a).

4.1.2 Acceptance

In order to assess real motivations and therefore genuineness in an influencer, it is necessary to analyze whether they show real engagement with the topic or situation they post about. The content creators generally show differentiated observations and information that take different kinds of sources into account. News is shared from media channels of different countries on social media and Political Leader's posts and quotes from all over the world reposted, shared and commented on.

Tarek Baé (n.d.) and Serhat Sisik (n.d.), who are both journalists, are very invested in social media activism, and continuously share on their platforms news and information, and criticize new events and politicians' reactions to situations. Any news they share is shown with its source, screenshots are often presented as proof for critique and information they publicize, and they usually tend to use different sources from different countries and news channels (Baé, n.d. & Sisik, n.d.).

To shut down critique targeted at them, they take arguments from the opposing side and disprove them with proof and publicly available information (Baé, 2024a). Tarek Baé for instance sometimes criticizes the articles by journalist colleagues specifically, but not solely, from the German tabloid newspaper BILD, because of missing or wrong information (Baé, 2024b).

But sometimes, an influencer's social media activism can be very one sided; only incorporating reposts without any comment, further information or context, sometimes only using emojis to express certain emotions, which takes away from professional and serious activism. This can be seen in influencers that are not also working in sectors such as journalism and therefore are not professionals with regards to social activism. Yet, this can also derive from shock and disbelief about the situation; people being 'at a loss for words' and not knowing what to say or how to react. Therefore, to still post, even if it is nothing more than a repost, it still means that this influencer made a small effort to engage in this

situation, because one repost is more than nothing, even if the activism should be more investigating, informative and differentiated to share the most accurate information possible.

Online activism is also used sometimes to show their offline activism, by for instance posting pictures during protests (Lilienthal, 2024b). This also serves as proof to the audience that the influencer gives an effort to be active offline as well, therefore engaging more with the topic concerned.

It is also essential for the influencer to show their engagement with the situation by providing sources, therefore it must be asked, whether the creator gives any sources or accurate information on the topic or not?

Generally, when social media activism is done, it contains reposting or sharing of other account's posts, whether that would be a news channel's account, a journalist's, politician's or similar (see appendix). By doing that, the 'source' the influencer used to receive this information is shared automatically every time. They would also share screenshots of or links to articles sometimes, for instance Lilienthal (2024a) shows every article and highlights every point he shares as he speaks on it in his videos.

Nevertheless, there is also the risk of sharing misinformation. Such a mistake can happen very easily because of the easy and fast factor of social media, in which information and posts are spread so radically, that controlling them is not possible most of the time. But, in addition to that, Instagram for instance has installed the feature in which false information can be reported on a post, which leads to an evaluation, and then to a 'warning' of the audience before consuming this information (see appendix). That way the user is at least pushed to question whether the post they read at that moment might contain misleading content or not. Even politicians in leading positions such as Baerbock (n.d.) has spread false information, whether intentional or not, which Tarek Baé criticized online, also as part of Social Activism in favor of Palestine (Baé, 2024a). Not the case for Baerbock, but other influencers that might spread wrong information by mistake, are 'prone' to do that, if they were pressured into posting something about the situation that they were not knowledgeable about to begin with, leading to more damage than good.

A bias is an important factor when it comes to conflicts and whether someone educates themselves on the topic or not. Which leads to the question of whether the influencer observed is educated or educating themselves on the topic or not?

One observable bias is seen in some German politicians such as Baerbock (n.d.), Scholz (n.d.) and Teuteberg (n.d.) that are clearly positioning themselves as pro-Israel, explaining that as a result of Germany's war crimes during the second World War, ensuring the existence of Israel is part of Germany's responsibilities, and therefore also its politicians. They also argue with Hamas being a terrorist organization that attacks Israel, resulting in Israel's right to defend itself (Baerbock, 2023). Yet here we can observe a simplification issue and stereotyping. They only mention Hamas as if the only affected group by Israel's defense is Hamas, and not all of Palestine. This shows a lack of knowledge or more so, the refusal to correct themselves and educate themselves on the issue, as they are stuck due to their bias. Helberg (n.d.) explains this in one of her tweets by saying that Palestinian people should be viewed as such again instead of only summing them up with Hamas or seeing them as numbers (Helberg, 2024). She also posts about the Palestine flag and how it has been demonized to be a terrorist symbol of Hamas and antisemitic and anti-Israel in Media and by actors (Helberg, 2024).

Even if the use of swear words, inappropriate language and explicit photoshop pictures of Netanyahu (see appendix) are intended to show the seriousness of the issue, it is what takes away from the credibility of the influencer, as the use of language like that, is what makes activism unprofessional and distracts from the main cause. Accordingly, making the activism seem uneducated and vulgar. Apart from that, sharing educational information sheets (So informed, 2024), or credible news channel's posts (Airado, n.d.) and revealing the sources used to collect the shown information (Lilienthal, 2024a) are indicators for an influencer educating themselves on the issue they talk about online.

4.1.3 Personal Relations

Many influencers actively advocating online politically mention their highlight their activisms to be related to personal reasons. One of them is Ahmad (n.d.) who has a Palestinian background, talking in a speech about his relatives in Gaza, who he has now lost due to this

conflict, and wanting justice and continuing to fight for it, as he claims that it is not a new issue but one that he remembers from an early age onwards, shaping him and his life (Ahmad, 2023). He talks about the losses this situation has brought him, calling for support and others to spread awareness (Ahmad, 2023).

Muslim influencers for instance suggest that their empathy and motivation to post and share on the topic of Gaza is that they are Muslim and feel connected to and sad for a predominantly Muslim country and population affected by war (Sisik, n.d.). Baé (n.d.) and Sisik (n.d.) for instance show very explicit videos and pictures of Gaza sometimes, and comment on them with religious quotes or creating an atmosphere of guilt regarding other Muslims that do not respond to the situation, that do not take part in social media activism and therefore are ‘not good Muslims’, and they should not forget their siblings (Palestinians) (see appendix). Connected to this Muslim empathy the German influencer would also often suggest that as a *human* one should start to be actively advocating online, as it is a human rights issue (Judith, 2024). Accordingly, anyone that is human should feel personally related to this situation.

The same goes for non-Muslim influencers that explain their social media Activism by reasoning with their humanity and that any human loss is a crime against humanity affecting everyone around the world, which everyone should feel related to (Judith, 2024). In order to make the audience and other influencers feel guilty for not feeling personally responsible to act on this matter, the influencer would blame or shame non-activism by publicly stating that everyone would care if it was about their own people and their own country (Airado, n.d.).

German influencers that have a German heritage feel personally related to this situation as they have the obligation to not forget the lessons learned from history, which describes the compensation for the war crimes against Jews in World War II as a German to Israel and all Jews. It is a feeling of guilt and shame connected to ‘ancestors’ crimes against the Jews, that affects them personally (Scholz, 2023).

4.1.4 Altruism

Sometimes, activism online is solely of altruistic nature, which makes their activism very genuine. That is observable if the influencer is continuously engaged in social media

Activism and public about their opinion despite possible negative backlash they have encountered or serious consequences.

This has happened to Serhat Sisik (n.d.) and Tarek Baé (n.d.) who have both been criticized and negatively written about in articles by journalist colleagues, to the point in which Sisik was compared to terrorists and portrayed as a ‘radical Muslim’ by incorporating quotes of Sisik he shared online on his religion in connection to the conflict (Schibilla, 2023). The journalist is accused to hinder media and journalistic freedom and to be an antisemite who agitates against the Jewish community and Israel online (Schibilla, 2023). These are very serious accusations that could even lead to Sisik experiencing prestigious and legal consequences, which could include future employers that might not consider him as a candidate and legal issues for alleged antisemitic behavior. Sisik also lost his last financial income source on social media which was his TikTok account with almost eight hundred thousand followers after advocating for Palestine, because of reports that his posts on TikTok would harm community guidelines (Sisik, 2024a). His persistence after experiencing all these negative consequences for his activism online is what indicates altruistic and genuine concerns and intentions for his activism.

Many influencers also share their views on being ‘blacklisted’ by audiences for not being pro-Palestine, making them lose followers and potentially shadowbanned if the users report them as blacklisted influencer (Handke, n.d.).

Other influencers also share videos of protests and demonstrations offline with police brutality that could lead to legal consequences for them, this has happened to Lilienthal (2024b) who has received several fines after speaking out and sharing videos of police brutality against pro-Palestinian demonstrators on his social media account, also helping others that were harmed during these protests even sharing names of policemen in his posts and stories (Lilienthal, 2024b). Even despite the fines and reports against him he continues to participate in activism online as well as offline.

Ahmad (n.d.) also shares posts with captions such as ‘Where has humanity gone’ (Ahmad, 2024b) or “his heart breaking” (Ahmad, 2023), showing his empathy for the cause and being genuinely concerned for Palestine. Additionally, Ahmad also talked about his financial losses on his Instagram account. In his post, he explains that he has been in a legal

dispute against the social media platform TikTok, which has banned him from there and therefore his main income source, leading to huge financial losses and damage to his career on social media (2024a).

4.1.5 Duty/Responsibility/Obligation

The feeling of obligation can be a motivation for some influencers to be active on social media bringing awareness to a situation. If we look at German influencers, one very strong obligatory factor is the ‘Lessons from history’ and the ‘duty to never forget’, which concerns the war crimes against Jewish people during World War II, conducted by Germany (Lilienthal, 2023). It is a ‘German guilt’ that is projected onto every German, also having the responsibility to always ensure the existence and securement of Israel and the Jewish community (Lpb, n.d.). It all results in a debt and duty Germany and its citizens have towards Israel and Jews, to support them whatsoever. Scholz, Germany’s chancellor, calls for the duty to save the hostages and to fight those that are harming Israel and its existence, which is Hamas, declaring unwavering support for Israel in the fight against terrorism (Scholz, 2023). Accordingly, German influencers seem to have the *duty* and *responsibility* to advocate for Israel online. This obligational factor is also discussed often by influencers and sometimes criticized, as it may take away from the genuineness of the activism, because these Creators support one party because of duty instead of informing themselves and critically questioning the situation they advocate for (Lilienthal, 2023)

Due to this dual duty and dilemma, as there seems to be a responsibility and obligation towards both war parties, shaming on both ends to each other for not fulfilling their duty to humanity or as humans, people have been segregated in parties of support, despite having the same intention, yet towards different actors and parties.

4.2 Scale

4.2.1 Social media

First, there are several points to consider regarding social media in Germany. The legal framework in this country and how it regulates, enables or hinders social media and the use of are some of them. Germany provides free access to social media, no platform is prohibited

or banned. The freedom of speech, the press and information, as found in Article 5 of the Grundgesetz (German Basic Law) should prevent any restrictions of using social media, to the point it does not hurt or offend anyone, limited by laws protecting the rights of everyone (Deutscher Bundestag, 2021). Nonetheless, the restrictions of the platforms themselves may interfere with German law, to the extent that it limits or censors content, because of their own regulations, that would normally be considered protected by freedom of speech (Deutscher Bundestag, 2021). Due to these guideline protections, censoring, removal or ‘overblocking’ (meaning extensively blocking) of content is done, which leads to violations of freedom of speech regulations in Germany and censorship discussion (Deutscher Bundestag, 2021). Moreover, the Network Enforcement Act (NetzDG) in Germany, lacks procedures that could prevent or manage false censorship on these platforms to secure users’ rights to free speech online (Deutscher Bundestag, 2021). Germany’s Media State Treaty (MStV) demands transparency from social media networks, as they are defined as media intermediaries affecting the public’s opinion, on how their algorithm works and on how content is managed (Deutscher Bundestag, 2021).

Other treaties, such as the Medienstaatsvertrag (Interstate Media Treaty) and the Unfair Competition Act in Germany, also regulate influencers’ content sharing on social media (Feldman et al., 2020). They oblige content creators to be transparent about paid, advertising or sponsored content, or otherwise they may face legal consequences under these treaties (Feldman et al., 2020). These disclosures need to be obvious and easy to understand by any social media user, for instance by marking content with words such as ‘Werbung’, meaning advertisement (Feldman et al., 2020). Yet, if an influencer is only recommending something without a payment or contract with a brand, they do not need to do so, as was decided by the German Federal Court of Justice in 2021 (LIM, 2021). Content creators are also observed by ‘Landesmedienanstalten’ (state media authorities), controlling whether they adhere to the law (Feldman et al., 2020). Germany is part of the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and implements the Telemedia Act (TMG), which again, ensure data collection transparency and security of influencer advertising (Feldman et al., 2020).

New features on the platforms also prevent political content from influencers to go viral or reach users that do not follow them, according to Sisik (2024c) that is buying having to

choose the option to see political content on social media. Yet, influencers and politicians, such as Jürgen Todenhoefer, state that the government has passed a new law that makes the arbitrary deletion of posts by activists possible on parts of the government, if it thinks that the posted information is not true (Todenhoefer, 2024). This law restricts political activists online, insofar as they are censored, and their freedom of speech is taken away.

It is also questionable if the public even cares about influencers and their opinions on political matters. Are audiences interested in creators' posts on social media dealing with political situations, and more so, do they show disapproval of silence regarding those?

When the Youtuber LeFloid (2023) posted a video as a response to the October 7th attacks by Hamas, he explained that he felt pressured to give a statement on the situation as fast as possible through messages and comments he received constantly. He revealed that he did not want to respond at first because he feared the possible consequences and opinions of the viewers, especially fearful of being called an antisemitic (LeFloid, 2023). This shows that parts of the public care about influencers or at least their views on certain topics. This also depends on their own opinion regarding the situation, accordingly, wanting your favorite influencer to think the same way as you do or at least 'validate' your thoughts on the situation. Because of the idolization of influencers and at the same time picturing them in a certain way as your friend somehow, or as a specific kind of person, the audience wants and expects *specific* answers from them (Wellman, 2022). In LeFloid's comment section comments vary between viewers thanking him for his response and many people criticizing him (LeFloid, 2023). This critique also does not entail further than stating he should have ended the video at a certain point, meaning that most of the users did not agree and like his input to the situation.

Taking a closer look at the comment sections of influencers shows us whether the viewers are satisfied with the influencer actions and if they wanted them in the first place. Comments on a post by Ayliva (2024) in which she posted a picture with a watermelon brooch, which is the symbol for the Palestinian movement, to show her solidarity with the Palestinians, also captioning it with the phrase "Never lose your humanity", indicate a lot of appreciation by the audience, calling her a 'Queen', 'having a heart of gold', saying how

proud they are of her, thanking her for using her range and platform to spread awareness, being courageous and praising her for using her revenue for donations. All of these comments show relief and satisfaction, therefore indicating that they had expectations of her beforehand and now comment whether these were met or not.

Another indicator that the public takes interest in influencer and their activism, and opinions are so-called 'blocklists' created by social media users. These blocklists include accounts of influencers that either did not respond in any way or responded in favor of Israel to the conflict (Barduhn, 2024). This also shows the demand and need of the public to have influencers with range talk publicly about issues that are important to them; it is due to the importance of the situation they feel that they expect others to help and support the cause. Otherwise, parts of the public who may not care as much about this specific situation or politics in general might be so desensitized anyways (as explained in previous sections), that they do not care whether the influencer takes part in online activism or not; maybe even prefer if they did not at all, because they see too much of it already.

Handke (n.d.) also responded on her account to all the demands and questions, as to why she would not make a statement, why she does not choose a specific party publicly, and her having to post about the issue therefore taking part in social media activism. She answered by stating that it was in no way possible to satisfy anyone, that she does not want to choose a side, and that she does not support or endorse any civilian loss, regardless of who it is (Handke, n.d.). Yet, she still receives hateful comments and messages for not supporting one side, highlighting that whatever an influencer would do in such a situation they are not able to make anyone happy, and that it is not effective to pressure an influencer into activism because there may be a lack of knowledge and genuineness in this activism (Handke, n.d.).

The influencer Ahmad (n.d.) was also shown in a documentation on YouTube by the publicly available channel Arte, which was concerned around the topic of antisemitic and terroristic protesters and demonstrations dedicated to pro-Palestinian support (Ahmad, 2024c). Despite peaceful demonstrations and speeches, the channel's reaction is to lay the focus on connecting it to terrorism, therefore disapproving of their actions (Ahmad, 2024c).

Clare (2023) also shares that she has received a lot of criticism and backlash for not speaking out about the conflict and knowing after reflecting on these comments and messages

by her viewers that she should have done so from the beginning, learning from her mistakes and will respond to future situations timely.

After understanding, that there is an interest in influencers content creation concerned with political matter, it is also essential to question as to *how* society is impacted by political activism online. In many cases social media activism approached by influencers with wide ranges has the ability to mobilize parts of society. Lilienthal (2024c) for instance regularly reminded users and called for them to participate in offline demonstrations to advocate for Palestine. The same goes for Sisik (n.d.), who is also vocal about injustices happening to himself because of his Media activism, resulting in people collectively standing up for him online.

This can be seen in his post, explaining that his bank account was closed without any previous warning, not reaching any support contacts, and not receiving any response as to why this has happened (Sisik, 2024d). That was until his audience has started to spam the bank's account with comments shaming them for doing something as such, allegedly closing Sisik's bank account due to his open online support for Palestine, saying they would not use this bank anymore, wanting to leave this bank and that this bank seems to be 'genocide supporter' (N26 Deutschland, 2024). After this collective action by Sisik posted a video saying that in the end he was able to reach someone, through different connections, and the reason was that business accounts were not allowed (Sisik, 2024e). Yet, this was criticized as well by the commenters as many of them were using the bank for business reasons for years and never has such a thing happened, as well as the bank advertising business accounts on their website (Sisik, 2024e). Here, we can see the mobilization of people happen in minutes, taking action without hesitation in the easiest, fastest and most efficient way possible.

This is another important impact; the relief social media activism has on offline activism. It eases Social Movements, its organization and the safety of the protestors. The first points are simply explained by communication methods with which people can call for necessities, where people are needed, what has to be done, what time anything starts, and so on. The need for flyers or anything of that sort, is gone. Lilienthal (n.d.) for instance, often

shared demonstration dates and places, urging people to come and protest together. Additionally, if something were to happen at these demonstrations, such as physical confrontations or any injustice of any kind, then these would at least, most of the time, be filmed and shared on social media.

This has happened many times, one of which can be seen now, during pro-Palestinian demonstrations that went viral on social media, after showing footage of police brutality against the protesters by different influencers, such as Lilienthal (2024b), or Khaled (2024) and Sisik (2024b), all showing explicit scenes of police officers, sometimes sharing the context of the situation, therefore showing whether there was any provocation by the demonstrators or not.

4.2.2 Influencer

To analyze the influencers' intentions further, motivations of financial nature would present ingenuineness or perseverance despite financial loss, genuineness. As already discussed in previous sections, it may not be a direct financial gain that motivates the influencer to provide social activism online. But to have the security that you will not lose anything you already have, because the possibility to lose follower, your whole career or high amounts of money because of fines or court cases, as has happened to other influencers, such as Ahmad, Sisik and Lilienthal, is a motivation to not speak up or at least not in favor of your real conviction.

Persistence in influencers in their social media activism despite negative consequences is an indicator for their genuine concern regarding the issue they try people to be aware of. And whether this determination leads to any visible results is also a question of concern; are they successful or not? Do they create an impact with their perseverance?

Some of these influencers include Lilienthal (n.d.) and Sisik (n.d.). Both of them have endured financial losses and still persisted even without having a direct relation or human loss that could motivate them to do so. Ahmad (n.d.) was banned from TikTok, which has also happened to Sisik, both losing their main financial sources. Yet, despite legal issues and being publicly framed and compared to terrorists (see previous sections), they persist and

continue to be active on social media, sharing information regularly and carry on with what they believe to be for justice.

In contrast to that is LeFloid, who only once shared a statement video concerning the situation (LeFloid, 2023), which was not met with the most positive feedback, and therefore immediately returned to his old activities, because he fulfilled his ‘duty’ with his statement.

Legal consequences influencers might face display a challenge and the reason for not taking part in activism online for some of them. Or, additionally, it might be the opposite, and influencers show persistence in their activism despite negative consequences. It seems content creators are bearing legal consequences mostly connected to offline activism.

Yet, looking at some articles written about influencers that have been advocates for Palestine, these Creators are often compared and connected to terrorism and terrorist groups, as Schibilla (2023) has done so, comparing some of the most public advocates on social media for Palestine in Germany, also accusing them of antisemitism. This has happened in another article as well, accusing Sisik of terrorism or radical Islamism and Nora Achmaoui of antisemitism and both of lying about the conflict intentionally to stir up hate against Jews and Israel (Gitter, 2023).

Due to consequences as such influencers are scared to speak up or partake in social activism online. They do not want to say what they are convinced of if this might go against the Government's ideology, because they might risk their career and financial stability, as it happened to Sisik, Ahmad, and Lilienthal, who have all been fined and sued for their online and offline activism in favor of Palestine (Sisik, 2024c). The same goes for the effort to satisfy the audience’s expectations, which does not seem possible to some influencers, which is why they decide or tend to not respond to the situation at all, because they do not want to endure the consequences of not being able to satisfy all viewers at once. This has happened to Handke (n.d.). Yas (2024) also reported on social media that the German police came to her house with a court order to not take part in social activism anymore for three days, because of her previous activism.

When it comes to political matters online, influencers and their activism on these platforms have grown in significance. Because of that the question if an influencer's activism online can be as or perhaps more effective than a politicians' actions? In this case influencer's activism online does not seem to be more effective than Politicians' actions. Politicians have more political power than civilian influencers, and most of the time do not get intimidated by them or their impacts. Otherwise, why would Scholz, the chancellor of Germany, and Annalena Baerbock, Germany's Foreign Affairs Minister, still insist on supplying Israel with weapons (Baé). Even after Creators managed to call for people to attend in high amounts demonstrations against their decisions, after immense social media backlash, in which people would comment under their posts that they should resign from their positions, and online and offline campaigns.

Besides that, political decision-making procedures are more complicated than an influencer protesting and posting, and their followers supporting them with likes, follows and engagement. These decisions are not only made by one person alone and undergo several processes. There is collective decision-making that is also impacted by the consequences history had on Germany, with the War Crimes committed in WWII, leading to today's responsibility and duty to ensure Israel's existence and security, as discussed previously. Therefore, binding German politicians to his moral guideline somehow. Yet, if we take Jürgen Todenhöfer (n.d.) for instance, he goes against this thought and criticizes Israel's actions and Germany's support openly on social media.

Also in addition to that, even if the influencer is not directly in the position to change as much as the Politicians can or has the power to influence decision-making decisively, they can still connect better to their audiences than politicians can, influencing them on a deeper level, because of their similar circumstances; being part of the public society and not a politician. Besides that, as mentioned before, the audience often tends to idolize, or see the influencer as a friend, and ascribe them a certain character, resulting in the follower aspiring to be like them, follow their pleas and support them no matter what.

An important point is, that the difference between the impact of an influencer constantly posting their activism on social media and a Politician's actions that the audience is not constantly confronted with may lead to desensitization of the social media user, as

explained before (Abdalla et al., 2022). The audience on social media is overstimulated, overwhelmed and is frustrated with all the posts concerning the same topic all the time. In situations as such, the impact of the influencer is insofar more severe than that of the Politician, as the follower might step back from political and social activism, due to desensitization.

Nevertheless, in contrast to that, the constant social media activism by some influencers also is more effective in the sense that it reaches more people faster, because the viewers of news channels and readers of newspapers have decreased essentially, meaning people tend to acquire their information on global news from social media and research from this as a starting point onwards (Karamat et al., 2016).

Content creators can build their media personalities on very different main themes or topics. For instance, this includes, political, lifestyle, sports, art, religious or chef influencers, and more variations. Therefore, their political activism can vary because of that as well, fitting to their background and social media personality and theme. Social media activism can vary immensely, which is also due to the different skills and characteristics of the influencer and creator that take part in online activism. This opens the question of how their internet activism looks like?

Pictures, videos, statements and information are shared, but all in different ways. For instance, Pictures and videos could be taken at the scene, those of bombings or injured people, such as Airado's (2023) post, with clips and pictures of war scenes and demonstrations in and for Palestine, played with music.

Information sheets, that are either aesthetically edited or simple black and white, are also shared for updates on situations (Todenhoefer, 2024)

Some influencers use dramatic descriptions and comments in their activism as can be seen in Todenhöfer (2024) comparing Germany's new regulation to 'stasi' law, and sometimes to the point that they utilize hyperboles (see appendix) or would compare the conflict to other ones in history, as Sisik (2024f) has done, when comparing the Palestine conflict with the crimes of WWII.

Similar tools used to bring their point forward is the use of sarcasm and rhetoric, asking questions he already knows the answer to (Sisik, 2024f).

Rap-influencers also create rap songs concerning the situation to spread awareness and show their solidarity with one of the parties (Pashanim, 2024). Pashanim (n.d.) and Airado (n.d.) are also examples of influencers that highlight a series of stories on their profile, with videos, pictures, reposts, statements and pleas to the public and their audience to not stay silent.

4.2.3 Audience

After considering influencers and their actions it is also of importance to analyze the audience's response to it. Is the audience's reaction to influencers' social media activism creating any impact in decision-making?

If we consider the position that deviates from the government's position, because the audience is trying to change the state's norm, the pro-Palestinian stance is taken into account. As we can observe in Germany the audience's reaction to the social media activism of influencer has not yet created an impact in Decision-making. That can be seen as Germany has not changed their position towards Israel after collective boycotting (Baé, 2024a), social media backlash and critique of the government's decisions (Todenhoefer, 2024b), protests and direct appeals to the country's leading politicians (Baé, 2024a). Germany continues to support Israel morally and materially, even after the United Nations has instructed all nations and firms to stop supplying Israel with arms, as this may lead to complicity in violations of international human rights laws (United Nations, 2024).

5. SOCIAL MEDIA AND INFLUENCERS IN THE US

5.1 Activism Motives and effect on audience

5.1.1 Financial Gain

Financial motivation presents an essential aspect for the analysis of genuine political activism, as money can bind a creator to share a certain opinion due to contractual and paid partnership.

The American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) is a lobby organization with the purpose to improve US-Israel relations, increase and ensure pro-Israel politics, funding candidates and their campaigns, who will support and advocate for pro-Israel relations during their candidacy (AIPAC, 2022). AIPAC (2022) openly publishes the purpose and results of their lobbying and candidate support, revealing that 98 percent of the general election's candidates that won, are funded and supported by AIPAC. Their campaigns and sponsorship is also explained with claims such as 'Keeping congress pro-Israel' and regularly stating to 'defeat' those that would hurt the pro-Israel environment of the US government and leadership (AIPAC, 2022). They are claimed to be the 'single most influential big money group in democratic electoral politics' (AIPAC, 2022), which shows their influence on and power over US politics, decision-making and actors, through monetary means. They are in control over any decision made in US politics as almost the entire congress is funded by them and would lose this financial security and candidates their careers, by not obeying their demands.

The US decision to vote against the UN's resolution to demand Israel's immediate ending of illegally occupying Palestinian territory in the span of one year, is therefore a result of this dynamic (UN News, 2024).

Besides that, some influencers state that they were offered money to take back their support for Palestine and glorify the Israeli state online on their platform and tell their followers to support Israel as well (YourFavoriteGuy, 2023c). YourFavoriteGuy (2023c) for instance did not take the money and chose to continue his support for Palestine, which makes his online activism more genuine, as he did not accept a high compensation to change his beliefs. ParsToday (2023) reported similar events in which Israel has offered influencers

compensations to spread lies about Palestine and Hamas being connected to ISIS, a terrorist organization, additionally advocate for Israel and publicly take back their support for Palestine.

Other influencers have experienced something similar, in which they have sacrificed opportunities to earn money. One of them is Macklemore who protested by canceling shows to boycott and demonstrate that the money he would have earned for this event is not more important to him than the injustice it would have indirectly supported if he performed there (Ben, 2024b). Nevertheless, he still performed in Germany, which is the main supplier of arms to Israel who he is boycotting against, which is hypocritical behavior, deciding to boycott Dubai (Ben, 2024b) but not Germany. Besides that, he also released songs that concern Palestine, showing videos of the situation there and demonstrations for it in the music video, while donating all proceedings to a Palestine relief fund by the UN (Ben, 2024a). Ben (2023) also emphasizes he would not prioritize ‘business, career, or Instagram followers’ over being an advocate against injustice, also meaning that he does not care about financial or career losses.

Hamzah (2024a) also lost his main account, which had more than one million followers, creating an immense loss for his career. Another influencer and singer, Nemahsis, was dropped by her management and almost risked her whole career due to her activism (Nemahsis, 2024d).

5.1.2 Acceptance/Applause

To assess the intentions of influencers further, it needs to be questioned whether real engagement with the political situation posted about is shown.

Influencers constantly share different videos, statistics, pictures and reports by journalists to present a variety of information and sources they take into consideration when taking a position. This shows real engagement, as the time and effort are taken to create a spectrum of sources to trust information shared and not misinform anyone accidentally. Especially posts and pictures of journalists that are on-site, are shared and reposted to show reliability as an activist on social media.

Sometimes an influencer promoting one party chooses to take the arguments and information of the other party, to refute their position and to show that the other side's perspective was also put under consideration. This is an effective way to seem more persuasive in their activism as the influencer portrays themselves in a more reliable way.

Nevertheless, their activism online also tends to be more emotional and not based on facts, but instead about showing their own emotions and reactions to the events, as can be seen when Nemahsis for instance shares a picture of her crying eye (Nemahsis, 2023). This serves to connect to the audience on a personal level, presenting them a type of engagement that goes beyond facts and information, but includes empathy and, perhaps, pity, making this another form of engagement with the situation.

Apart from personal posts as mentioned before, concerned with feelings about the situation, is current and accurate information shared by the influencer or not? As mentioned before, influencers' continuously shared information of news channel's social media accounts, most of the time reposting, sharing and quoting especially 'Aljazeera English', as this is an Arab news channel, showing perspectives allegedly free of corruption and one that is different from western media.

This form of activism is mostly used in the story function, reposting up-to-date developments of the situation for limited amounts of time, not exceeding 24 hours, if not saved on their profile.

Sometimes activism online by influencers is not very informative, not based on facts and not very professional, but tends to be colloquial, using swearwords, or not using any language at all, but express their emojis only through a picture without commenting on it or only through emojis, as can be seen (Mariam, 2023c).

One important factor for genuineness to be seen in an influencer's activism online is whether they (show that they) educate themselves on the topic they post about or not. In order to display that, these creators use different methods, to persuade the audience on their knowledge and interest in the situation. For instance, to show their education on a certain topic, influencers try to show a variety of different sources and accounts they repost and share

content from. This is done by influencers such as Bella Hadid who compiled all her activism on her profile in story highlights, for them to not be deleted and constantly seen by viewers (Hadid, n.d.). The variety they aspire to reach often includes reposts of on-sight journalists or commenting on politicians' social media posts in stories or sharing different news channels' social media posts with updates on the issue (Hadid, n.d.).

Sometimes influencers use provocation as a tool to prove their point, with for instance caricatures, that are very dramatic, use swearwords and very explicit depictions, without context (see appendix), which is more damaging to the social activism than good. That is because a contextless caricature or insult to a, for instance, politician such as Netanyahu, does not show their knowledge on the situation but more so their emotions, frustration and is simply not informative, but could seem more accusatory to the viewer. Even to the point as the media might accuse the movement of agitation towards specific parties and slander the movement. Therefore, activism needs to be based on facts, it should be educational and create calm discussions and peaceful protests. Words need to be used that are rational and professional as much as emotions are important, they should not interfere with the rationality of a movement.

5.1.3 Personal Relations

A variety of influencers are also motivated by personal reasons to post and be publicly vocal on the matter. An example of that is Bella Hadid (n.d.) who is of Palestinian descent because of her father. She is one of the most famous models, internet personalities and influencer in the whole world, who has also been an advocate for Palestinian rights for years, as can be seen in her older posts and stories compiled in highlights on her profile on Instagram (Hadid, n.d.). She has also shared that deals and brands cut ties with her and dropped deal contracts with her after beginning her activism on her platform (Ayoubi, 2022), which is because they did not want to be associated with her and her beliefs, as they might lead to disadvantages for their brand.

Another Palestinian influencer and singer is Nemahsis who regularly posts and shares information on how to donate or what is currently happening in Gaza, and her struggle with this situation (Nemahsis, 2024b). The last one, is Mariam, who is an influencer sharing

recipes and dishes, but started to be a strong advocate for Palestine after the conflict started, also sharing her personal hurt and connection to this crisis, calling those affected ‘My People’, for instance (Mariam, 2023a). As already observed in the German case, Muslim influencers associate themselves with Palestinians and their struggle because of religious and cultural connection and similarities, stating that what the people of Palestine have to go through resembles the issues of Muslim countries all over the world. Others in the sampling, such as Jibawi (n.d.), Mariam (n.d.), and Tlaib (n.d.), are also personally affected due to their Palestinian heritage, whereas the first out of the three did not take as much action as the latter online.

Influencers from the other party, such as Ben Shapiro, also feel connected to Israel due to religious and cultural reasons, as he is of Jewish heritage for instance (Shapiro, n.d.). One of the most important influencers is also Gal Gadot, who is originally Israeli and is a big advocate for Israel and the Jewish community, also compiling stories on her profile regarding the Israeli hostages and spreading awareness on the alleged rapes and murders of Israeli women by Hamas (Gadot, n.d.).

5.1.4 Altruism

To participate in social activism solely out of altruistic reasons, those that are personally affected in terms of heritage are being left out. It is people and celebrities such as Mark Ruffalo, Ramy Youssef, Rosie O’Donnell and over 700 members of the SAG-Aftra Union, with all kinds of celebrities and influencers, that participate in social activism online, due to altruistic reasons (Pina, 2024). They all signed a letter to their union revealing that they have received serious threats, were scared for their careers and families, and were intimidated by very powerful and known people in their industry, all after advocating for a ceasefire online (Pina, 2024).

The singer and influencer Macklemore, also persistently advocates for a ceasefire and Palestine despite knowing of possible consequences he might have to endure (Ben, 2023). In addition to that are influencers who continue and start to advocate for a ceasefire despite knowing that the possibility of being shadowbanned and criticized exists or even after they have experienced it (Uddin, 2022).

5.1.5 Duty/Responsibility/Obligation

Creators tend to depict their activism as an obligation, responsibility or duty to someone or something. Most influencers say for instance, that the Palestine conflict is a human (rights) issue in which everyone should feel obligated to advocate for and feel responsible to use their voice online, as Obeid (2024a) has discussed in an Interview with someone that has felt the same way about the Vietnam war. Mariam (2024) shares pictures, videos and tweets from and as other creators, blaming those that do not speak up, after seeing the injustice, making themselves complicit to the crimes. This guilt that influencers try to create in social media users, with pictures and videos of children in war scenes, or giving numbers of death tolls followed by direct appeals to the viewer, is again a guilt that should be felt as a human being.

As was observed in the German case, here as well do Muslim influencers highlight their and everyone's responsibility to speak out for the cause and participate in social media activism. Wahab (n.d.) for instance has compiled a story highlight concerned with Palestine, which includes posts from a variety of sources, appeals to humanity and projection of guilt on those who do not take part in online activism, saying that they are complicit to the damage done by staying silent, even though they are responsible to spread awareness.

5.2 Scale

5.2.1 Social media

As much as anything in society, social media as well is systemized by a legal framework, which is explained further. The United States provides free access to social media, yet there might be consequences and limitations, and an influencer's activism be corrupted, if community guidelines are violated. This can be seen in Bella Hadid's (2024b) post, in which she showed refugee children talking about their dreams and wishes for their future, which was reported for missing or wrong context, now covered with a warning, to not be misinformed. Besides that, the US also passed a law to ban TikTok from the country, because they allegedly think it is harmful to their children (Sisik, 2024c). This has not been finished, as TikTok, a Chinese owned social media platform, is suing the United States for this ban (Sisik, 2024c).

As much as in the ‘offline’ world, freedom of speech is also a very important right on social media, to the point it does not endanger, harm or offend anyone (Weiss, n.d.). Freedom of speech is stated under the first amendment in the US and allows influencers to convey their opinions freely as long as misleading content is not presented (Pinarbasi, 2024). Moreover, the aforementioned risks when using social media for activism are always a form of restriction as anything can be reported by a large number of people leading to censoring.

Legal frameworks, such as the Federal Trade Commission (FTC), created the FTC Endorsement Guides, which include instructions for consumer protection and transparency (Federal Trade Commission, 2019). The FTC requires influencers on social media to be transparent about sponsored or paid partnerships and product promotions (Federal Trade Commission, 2019). These disclosures need to be obvious enough for anyone to understand and see, for instance by using hashtags, such as #ad (Federal Trade Commission, 2019). If these guidelines are violated both the influencer and the brand are held accountable by the FTC (Federal Trade Commission, 2019). The commission also may hold the platforms themselves accountable if their policies enable violation of legal frameworks (Williams, 2024).

Lastly, the United States does not have a concrete and complete framework on data privacy protection, as Germany does for instance with the General Data Protection Regulation, which is why content creators need to follow the laws specific to the state they are living in (Pinarbasi, 2024).

Nonetheless, it can be questioned whether this effort is even needed in creating all these rulings surrounding influencers. That is, by asking whether the public even cares about them and their activity or inactivity regarding the political issue.

The civil audience awaits the responses of influencers to situations, as was seen in the German case as well. Here as well they expect influencers they love or follow to be like-minded and to have the same position. If they turn out to be not, they are disappointed and unfollow. Followers put pressure on influencers because they are convinced that they have the responsibility to bring awareness to situations the viewers themselves are passionate about; otherwise, they would be seen as ignorant. This can be seen observing the comment

sections of Bella Hadid and Mariam, for instance, who are both constantly praised for their courageous activism online and not being scared of the consequences in their comment sections (Hadid, n.d. & Mariam, 2023b). This desire by viewers for influencers to position themselves online and taking action on their platforms can also be seen in ‘blocklists’ created by social media users, listing a variety of celebrities and influencers who did not respond to the crisis and therefore need to be boycotted by blocking them (Shamim, 2024).

With regards to Politicians reacting to influencers’ social media activism; they care about the results of it; what it does to the public, whether they start to demonstrate or not, to boycott and how the turnout looks. Yet, politicians' affinity towards influencers or whether one of their decisions might be influenced by influencers’ actions is difficult to assess, as they would not publicly share that their decisions have been affected by social media.

Nevertheless, even if social media activism of influencers has no *direct* effect on politicians, is there any other noticeable impact the internet personalities have on them and the general public?

Social media activism mobilizes society. For instance, after influencers have collected and shared brands and chains that should be boycotted to show solidarity for Palestine, their sale rates have dropped and the results of their collective action have been shown (Wahad, n.d.). That way consumer behavior is improved or changed in order to take power from or hurt those that take part in the political issue.

In addition to that, this also creates a feeling of community that provides social media users a means to connect over shared issues, that would otherwise not be possible without online activism. This leads to solidarity between people all over the world that can therefore act collectively. And through mobilized action the audience puts effort into pressuring political actors with power, to implement their demands and receive responses to their requests.

Social media activism has the power to change minds and public perception. Social norms, stereotypes and prejudices might be challenged, by activism online that is viewed by people all over the world. Information they might not have acquired by other means than social media and influencers’ activism, as people might not put effort into informing

themselves through traditional media channels. This challenging of stereotypes and prejudices can be observed in the case at hand. Political influencers such as Dr. Jill Stein (n.d.), share posts that the Israel-Palestine conflict is not a war between Jews and Muslims (Stein, 2024a), by that ensuring that activism is not further feeding into stereotypes and prejudices which should not lead to more hate against certain groups, such as Muslims or Jews, that are either equalized with Hamas or the Israeli government.

Stein (n.d.) also spreads awareness by sharing on-sight support requests of people in the conflict zone, with accounts and donation links. This kind of impact shows influencers' ability to reach a wide range of the public with no cost or effort, spreading awareness through those affected directly, which might not be possible with the help of mainstream or traditional media outlets, such as television, radio or newspapers. These have not the resources or possibility to spread awareness the same way in seconds time, specifically regarding information or stories that are as personal. This impacts the audience insofar as it may shape their opinion, educates and informs them through scenes and perspectives that might not be viewable through other means. These include for instance, people living inside the conflict, journalists or political activists that report from on-sight in live-time by live-casting or continuously sharing on their accounts.

Essential to this sort of information sharing in contrast to news channels for instance, is that most of the time emotions are involved, personal and unique stories of people or families affected, sometimes sharing these themselves through the influencer's account. Contrasting to that are traditional media outlets, sharing news and information stoically with general, macro-level information on the situation. As less focus is laid on traditional media, people tend to take their information and news from new media; social media. Here information and updates are shared in live-time. While these are shared by influencers and content creators online continuously, they would also influence the public into acting offline as well, which includes many ways, besides attending demonstrations. Ms Rachel (n.d.) for instance, shares with her audience her donations and advises them to do so as well, posting links and organizations to donate to. Bernstein (n.d.) also urges people to call representatives and take action by demanding from political actors hostage releases collectively.

Besides being positively impactful on the public, social media activism could have harmful results as well. It may be a tool for propaganda, to push people into ‘bubbles’ with no differentiated opinion on the situation. That may be done by showing viewers false information and telling lies about the opposing side, which was done by Silverman (n.d.), sharing a video of the Israeli army reporting crimes against children conducted by Hamas that were found to be false. Even if Silverman did not knowingly try to misinform anyone, she still did not correct her mistake or did not put enough effort into informing herself before influencing her audience in this matter.

The public decides who they follow, and therefore who gets to influence them in the first place. They can pick and choose who to listen to and watch, whether with a prepared opinion in their mind or based on their affection for the influencer they watch. The risk remains that influencers knowing or unknowingly feed into stereotypes and push people into certain opinions. One example of that could be the equalization of being pro-Palestine with being anti-Jew or antisemitic. Or Bernath (2023), posted that TikTok is not a safe platform for Jews since the October 7th attacks, due to antisemitism, linking the Israeli army and Israel to Jews and pro-Palestinians being antisemitic and spreading hate against the Jewish community.

5.2.2 Influencer

US influencers’ intentions can be controlled by financial motivations, and therefore, corrupt the genuineness of their activism online. The question is whether this can be observable for the case at hand?

Israel has once paid students to defend the government online, hinder the viewers from boycotting Israel with the intention to pay them or provide them with scholarships in exchange (Unknown, 2013). Other influencers also have spoken up online about their offers by Israeli groups to take their Palestine support back publicly and instead advocate for Israel (YourFavoriteGuy, 2023c). Gedeon (2023) as well shows a compilation of influencer showing proof of financial offers to pledge their support towards Israel and publicly declare their boycott against Palestine.

Irrespective of financial motivation or none, it is important to assess if the influencer's activism is persistent despite for instance, hindrances and whether it offers visible results?

Influencers such as Bella Hadid and Nemahsis have shown their persistence in advocating for their beliefs, despite losing brand deals and being shadowbanned several times for her activism, in case of Hadid (Ayoubi, 2022 & Uddin, 2022), and for Nemahsis, continuing even after her management ended their contract with her and dropped her for her advocacy, losing her job (Nemahsis, 2024d). Reading the comments of these influencers, they are often filled with positive and approving messages by viewers, showing how people have been able to find like-minded people through influencers advocating, creating collectives and inspiring people to take part in social activism as well.

Additionally, persistence in social media activism, might include the risk of facing consequences, sometimes legal ones specifically. Some influencers social media activism not only consists of sharing information and posts on the topic but also what they have experienced as consequences after starting to do so online. They explain that there are official groups actively working against those that advocate online for Palestine, sharing their private information on their website and making the effort to expel them from school, university or get them fired from their jobs (YourFavoriteGuy, 2023a). In addition to that, influencers' comment sections and private messages are often filled with critique, insults or offensive allegations, which might include being a racist or antisemite (YourFavoriteGuy, 2023b). Whether an influencer is expecting such hateful comments and allegations or not, can be sometimes seen when they disable or limit the comment function, as Hadid and others would do for her Palestine related posts (Hadid, 2024b).

Social media has grown in functions and importance. If applied to the political sphere, it can be questioned whether the main actors of the *social media world* can be as powerful or create more effective results than politicians with their actions?

Social media activism of an influencer is not entirely more effective than politicians and their actions, but it does evoke discussion and disputes on social media. Besides that, due to social media being used on a daily basis constantly, people tend to be confronted with

politics and activism more than they would be with, for instance, debates that are live broadcasted or newspaper articles, because in these cases it is up to the audience to watch or follow these media.

With social media on the other hand, if one uses it, anything can be on their timeline or '*For You*' page at any time, even if they do not want it, eventually one post about a political issue will come across them.

This political activism online is a recent phenomenon and can be conducted in different ways, according to the influencer's characteristics or image they created online.

Sometimes activism on social media is aspired to look aesthetically pleasing to the viewer, with pictures that are old and captions that involve younger generation's slang and seem more attractive to them. This can be seen in a variety of Bella Hadid's posts regarding the Israel-Palestine conflict, posting a picture of young boys with their wishes for the future and captioning it with 'Gaza on my mind' (Hadid, 2024b) or posting a picture of a valentine's day candy with the inscription 'Will you free my Palestine' (Hadid, 2024a). Influencers try to appeal to their viewers in ways they know will draw their attention to the situation. Especially the young audience on these platforms, may not be intrigued by on scene photography or videos, and complicated, political information that is shared, but rather simple words, even if they might not be as informative.

Hadid (2024b) and her post were reported for misinformation or missing context, receiving backlash and hateful comments regarding her online activism, criticizing the movements, because it is allegedly tricking people and brainwashing. Similar types of activism are for instance, the expression of their feelings towards the crisis; here Nemahsis (2023) has shown a picture of herself crying followed by pictures from the past with peace, that she said made her cry.

Singers and rappers would also create songs and donate all the proceeds to Palestine relief funds, as Macklemore (Ben, 2024a) and Nemahsis (2024c) have done, including information about the situation in their songs, and videos of on-sight events, or show their love for the country affected, as Nemahsis has done. Other influencers also use their platform according to their occupation. Obeid (2024b) for instance, is a comedian, using humor and

jokes to prove his points and make viewers aware of the seriousness of the situation in a satiric and comedic way.

Muslim influencers also use their platform connected with their religion, appealing to other Muslim influencers, by sharing prayers regarding a timely ceasefire, and their obligation to advocate to be a good Muslim and human (Wahad, n.d.). Besides that, their online activism involves posts with explicit pictures and videos of dying children, fire, bombs, blood and victim's life stories and their names to appeal to their humanity in general, as can also be seen in Macklemore's video to his song (Ben, 2024a).

5.2.3 Audience

The audience's appeal to influencers' activism online and their demand for it has been observed. What is left, is to question whether the public's reaction to an influencer's online activism creates an impact in decision-making?

The US is still officially supporting Israel, as can be seen in the UN General Assembly's demand against Israel's illegal occupation in Palestine, which the United States voted against, together with 13 other nations (UN News, 2024). It may be that the social media users protesting, posting and campaigning because of and with influencers together, they affected other countries that responded positively to the resolution of the UN, but the USA's support was not changed, after social media campaigns and backlash, criticizing the government and its decisions, as can be seen in Ocasio-Cortez' (2024) post, criticizing the US government for their support to Israel, being complicit in genocide.

Yet, even if it is not a direct influence on decision-making, Wahad (n.d.) shares how franchises and popular brands have dropping rates and sales due to boycotts everywhere in the world, for which influencers usually share brands that should be avoided to participate in the boycott.

6. COMPARISON OF THE CASES

Now, based on the findings, the differences and similarities between the cases at hand, the United States and Germany, are considered.

6.1 Similarities

In both countries are influencers partaking in social media activism because of their personal relations to the conflict, whether this concerned Muslim, Palestinian or Jewish influencers. Most influencers, who were not personally related to this issue, also shared common fear of the public's criticism and whether they would be canceled and lose their career. Especially being shadowbanned or banned completely from social media platforms is a concern for a variety of influencers in both cases.

A similarity observable between the cases regarding their legal framework for social media usage and influencers, is the demand for transparency. Especially or specifically focusing on paid content and advertising, both Germany and the US necessitate influencers to disclose paid promotions and partnerships to ensure the transparency of advertisement, influencer content and consumer protection.

In Chart 1, the similarity in online activity with regard to political stance on the matter of the Palestine-Israel conflict is visible, showing that the majority consists of pro-Palestine influencers with over ten posts, followed by pro-Palestine influencers with less than ten posts with about fifteen percent. The reason for this is the sampling itself, that includes more pro-Palestine influencers in the first place. Yet, other important factors for this occurrence might be the similar identity traits of the influencers, resulting in equal amounts of posts, due to, for instance, the personal relations attached to them regarding the subject. Therefore, pro-Palestinians or pro-Israelis being and acting the same way online regardless of the country they live in.

Lastly, to explain *why* the cases offer similarities in some respects, is due to their, first, almost same conditions the countries have, with regards to their governmental structures. And in addition to that, their governmental bias towards Israel, both supplying the country with arms and publicly declaring their support for it as a nation. Due to this alike positioning

of the cases, the influencers have similar reactions, with regards to critique against their governments. Or their statements on possible consequences for their online activism that goes against the state's stance.

Moreover, the data selected offer a lot of similarities. Both cases have Muslim influencers, political influencers, Jewish, Palestinian and journalist influencers. The possibilities of categorizing these samplings were therefore according to the previous characteristics, analyzing whether these traits have an influence in their online activism. This is also again due to their similarity as countries itself, as both Germany and the US have diverse populations influencers from varying backgrounds. This way groups or categories of influencers are created that are similar to each other in both countries. If one of the cases selected would have been a country with a homogenous population, such as for instance, Japan, the results would have been quite different.

Another crucial argument is that social media is *without borders*. This means that as the activism occurs online, influencers' actions can offer many similarities, as the platform goes beyond state borders. For instance, the German Muslim influencers and US Muslim influencers act similarly because the country they live in and post from is not necessarily of concern, but the identity or image they choose as an influencer *on social media* in that instance is. According to that, they are all just Muslim influencers in the social media *world*. That means that the user is confronted with all kinds of people from different nationalities, cultures, religions, and places, at the same time, without crossing any border. The influencers can experience the same events or consequences because they are in the same place at the same time, namely being the social media 'world'.

In addition to that is the censorship influencers in both countries face, even with different legal frameworks. That is due to the platforms they are acting on, as these interfere with freedom of speech because of their community guidelines. Both German and US influencers voice concerns for censorship on social media, after attempts of social activism online. This censorship is therefore most likely independent of the state regulations, as both emphasize the importance of freedom of speech as democratic states. Specifically, Germany criticizes the interference of the platforms in influencers' freedom of speech. Nonetheless,

the state still does not act against this interference but rather supports it as can be seen in legal lawsuits put against German influencers after speaking out.

Lastly, Chart 1 and Chart 2 are reviewed, as they both show extreme similarities between both influencer samplings. They show the similarities between the number of influencers according to their political stance. About seventy percent of the sampling in both cases is in favor of Palestine, about twenty percent pro-Israel and about ten percent is neutrally speaking out for no specific side. This almost same sampling might influence the results to be similar as well.

Yet, why they support Israel on governmental levels, is due to different motivations and reasons, their both intertwined relations to Israel, which will be explained in the following section.

6.2 Differences

If we compare the two cases at hand now, we can observe some differences and similarities. It is also important to assess as to why the findings in cases may be different or similar, what are or could be the reasons for it?

The aforementioned historical weight on Germany concerning Israel and Israeli existence, is a major factor for differences between them and the United States. That is because the US simply does not have this debt or guilt as a burden from history, their subjection politically to Israel and the Jewish diaspora is welded in AIPAC, which finances almost all politicians in congress at the moment. Therefore, both countries send arms to and support Israel but with different motivations.

Another difference found is that the United States has some of the most followed and liked influencers globally, which makes the characteristics of the influencer different from the smaller influencer's. They are not as connected to their audience anymore and have more of a celebrity status. Additionally, they tend to live under other conditions than the smaller influencers seen in Germany, which means that they might not be completely dependent on their work as an influencer due to other occupations that include modeling, acting, singing and so on. Therefore, these other occupations serve as further financial sources that give a

sense of security if the online activism is destructive to their social media presence. Yet also important to consider is, the more an influencer has to offer, the more can they lose, whether these are deals with brands that do not agree with their opinion or do not want to be associated with that, or other jobs that might suffer under backlash and critique of the influencer online.

Germany and the US created very different legal frameworks for social media. For instance, the freedom of speech is covered differently in both cases. Germany controls the freedom of speech with stricter rules, creating difficulties and specific guidelines for influencers and online activism. Whereas the US highlights the importance of unhindered freedom of speech in the first amendment with more room for liberty on social media for influencers in content creation (Radtke, 2022). With regards to Germany's legal framework, it not only is strict with freedom of speech, but almost every other aspect as well. That is to ensure that influencers provide complete transparency about their content on social media. While in contrast the US provides more flexible regulations that are according to the FTC guidelines and are not applied as strictly as Germany's. Their laws on data protection display another important difference, as the United States does not deliver any concrete regulations to protect users, whereas Germany follows the GDPR framework to ensure security. The implementation of these laws is also stricter than the US', regarding media and paid content. The US focuses on observing compliance through the FTC and concentrates more on using extreme cases to set examples.

Important to highlight here is that despite violations of freedom of speech through censorship reported in both cases, only the US tried to counter it by legally banning one platform, allegedly violating data security, namely TikTok, which is a Chinese social media app. Nevertheless, the US still does not interfere with Instagram or X, both US-owned platforms, creating a rather unreliable picture for concerns about data security and freedom of speech. That is because censorship, shadowbanning, and the random deletion of accounts have also been done on both X and Instagram.

Lastly, the reason as to *why* these differences occur is assessed. The differences in their legal frameworks are one factor for the differences the influencers and the two cases display. Even if both countries present cases of censoring, it seems that influencers in Germany face

more offline consequences, with fines they have to pay and court trials after reports or consequences through the authorities.

Another reason is the sampling of the influencers, as the US ones are more diverse with regards to occupations, with almost no micro-influencers. Whereas half of the German influencers consist of influencers that have a reach not exceeding fifty to a hundred thousand followers. Because of that, predispositions of the influencers are not given that would otherwise ensure a more efficient comparison. The number of followers might result in enough confidence and reassurance for an influencer that weighs the cost-benefits of being vocal through online activism. Whereas in Germany smaller influencers with fewer followers have existential fear over losing their occupation, which is sometimes their only source of income, making them less likely to take the risk, if not for their relation to the situation. Despite that German content creators deviate from US ones insofar, as they provide political content online or are journalists anyway, making social activism part of their occupation.

Lastly, a summary of the findings is compiled in the following section containing the table template of Table 2.

6.3 Overview

Category	Subcategory	Question	Analysis Notes
Social media	Free Access	Is free access to social media available in the selected case at hand?	Both countries provide free access to social media.
	Legal Restrictions	Do any legal frameworks restrict the usage of social media?	Community guidelines in both cases lead to censoring. Yet, emphasis on free speech in both cases.
	Public Interest	Does the public show interest in/care about influencers on social media? Do they react?	In both cases, disappointment is shown for a deviating opinion of their favorite influencer, or in case of silence about the issue
Influencer	Financial Motivation	Does the influencer have any financial motivation for their social activism?	Both cases show influencers with financial and occupational risks if participating in online activism. The US also has a clear financial dependency on Israel through AIPAC, corrupting the political stance of 98% of the political actors who are sponsored by them.

	Persistence	Does the influencer persist in their activism and is there any visible result?	Both countries provide cases of continuous online activism, despite shadowbanning, loss of followers, and loss of contracts and income sources. Demonstrations are held with high numbers of attendance, pressure is on policymakers.
	Legal Consequences	Are there (legal) consequences for the influencer for speaking about the situation?	Several cases in Germany have shown legal consequences, including fines and court hearings. The US also showcases consequences but not on legal levels. These included loss of paid partnerships, followers, their accounts, contracts, and private relationships.
	Effectiveness	Is the influencer's online activism more effective than politicians' actions?	Both cases show effectiveness through mobilizations of the public. Neither shows a direct effect in policymaking or decision-making processes, as a politician would be able to. Yet, through the public's demands initiated through influencer online activism, politicians are put under pressure to respond
	Description of Activism	What does their activism look like?	The activism 'style' mostly consists of reposts of information from credible news accounts, call-outs, demonstration invites, boycott calls, opinion and awareness spreading through text, sarcasm or critique, and caricatures. Sometimes aesthetic language and picture is used to appeal to younger generations. Songs and videos are edited and published donating their proceedings to
Motivations	Financial Gain	Is the influencer sponsored by brands, or do they risk financial harm for activism?	Several influencers have spoken out on their loss of financial income after online activism, especially being shadowbanned or losing followers, or losing their whole accounts.
	Acceptance/Approval	Does the influencer show real engagement and share accurate, educated insights?	The activism is mixed, containing accurate and important information on the matter, as well as more

			emotion-led posts that are intended to display and receive empathy to the people affected.
	Personal Relations	Does the influencer have personal ties to the situation (religion, culture, family, etc.)?	Religious influencers in both cases show their personal affection towards the situation as either Jew or Muslim, not necessarily being on specific sides. Besides that influencers of Palestinian or Israeli descent showed strong dedication to the subject.
	Selflessness/Altruism	Is the influencer public despite backlash or financial risk?	As critiques are made in both countries equalizing anti-zionism with antisemitism, influencers put themselves at risk of speaking out for their opinion. At the same time influencers speaking in favor of Israel are targets of pro-Palestinian advocates and hate. Missing education on the matter leads to increases in hate against Muslims and Jews, as both are prejudiced against them.
	Duty/Responsibility	Are there circumstances that oblige the influencer to take part in social activism?	Pressure is put on influencers through blocklists in both the US and Germany, demanding public statements that are otherwise met with mass blocking and boycotting.
Audience	Impact on Decision-Making	Does the audience's reaction create an impact in decision-making?	Pressure is created and people all over the world are educated on topics they might have otherwise not been aware of. As persistence prevails demands for responses and actions by politicians get more likely.

7. CONCLUSION

This chapter presents the end of this research. Here, the research's weaknesses and strengths are taken into consideration and what future research on this topic may consider for further improvement. After that, the concluding words will close the research and answer the research question stated at the beginning.

To answer the research question stated at the beginning, '*How does social media activism in Germany diffuse the beliefs contributing to attitude and influence towards social issues, and what implies the genuineness of this activism or the following of a trend*', one can respond that there are different possible motivations implying whether or not an influencer is genuine in their activism, such as monetary reasons or personal connections to the cause, as well as that there is not only one way the activism can affect the audience, as different factors affect the either desensitization of the audience, or their approval, as well as their enthusiasm to do the same.

One point that was not expected to be as critical to the research, is the relation between social media activism to financial incentive and security. This is a crucial factor for influencers that depend on their social media presence entirely, as they have to weigh whether they can take the risk of losing money or their career in general or not. If financial income is secured apart from their online occupation, the Creator has the opportunity to be more content in their choice.

Lastly, to respond to the hypothesis, that *Social media activism fluctuates as new conflict arises or erupts that push the preceding one to be forgotten*, one can say that due to the ingenuine activism of many influencers, with activism that only lasts for a little number of posts and does not exceed simple reposts without reflection or comments, there is definitely a pattern of 'checking off' conflicts to not be criticized for not speaking up at all, followed by continuing with their old content. Yet, this also stands in contrast to Creators with genuine Intentions who do not stop sharing Information, with their normal content together. This also answers the first expectation, on *influencers only posting about a certain issue, as long as it seems 'popular' or 'relevant' to their targeted audience*, which depends on the incentive of the influencer to post in the first place.

The second expectation stated whether *influencers' genuineness regarding their political activism on social media depends on their relation to the situation*, is true insofar, as an influencer, that is directly connected to the conflict, through heritage, culture or nationality, will persistently talk about the issue, and share their sentiments on it. This was a striking assessment as genuine and persistent activism online was mostly conducted by those who felt any kind of connection to the matter, despite knowing that this might result in negative consequences. That is, equally so for US and German influencers; the religious or cultural heritage, created feelings of solidarity leading to a greater likeliness of persisting activism regardless of consequences.

Yet, other creators without relations to the cause have also been shown to spread awareness online continuously, for altruistic purposes or a feeling of connectedness through humanity.


The third and last expectation about whether *the audience's political view and action is effectively directed by influencers' social media activism*, turns out to not be true, as audiences usually already have their opinion on the matter, intentionally following those that support or advocate for it, which can be taken from blocklists, where social media users unfollow those that do not match their opinion. Disappointment and disapproving comments online also depicted the previously formed opinion that was intended to be validated by the influencer they follow.

A suggestion for future research would be a more diverse sampling concerning the political stance of the influencers, with at least a balanced division of them.

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9. APPENDIX

ATTACHMENT 1: Netanyahu photoshopped in diapers.



ATTACHMENT 2: Netanyahu photoshopped in a jail cell and clothing, with the headlines ‘War criminal’, ‘Child killer & Genocide’, and the name ‘Satanyahu’; implying him to be ‘Satan’.



ATTACHMENT 3: A story with the comment ‘Be thankful to Allah and do not forget your siblings (meant are Palestinians)’



ATTACHMENT 4: Comparison of today's Palestine conflict with the Holocaust



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İŞ DENEYİMLERİ

Yıl	Kurum	Görevi
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