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## **Master Thesis**

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### **SOCIAL MEDIA FRAMING IN THE GERMAN FEDERAL ELECTIONS CAMPAIGN 2021 (on the example of Instagram posts published by The Free Democratic Party and Alliance 90/The Greens)**

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## TABLE OF THE CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION.....	3
1.THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK.....	7
1.1. Framing as a media effect.....	7
1.2. Media frames.....	8
1.3. Political communication.....	16
2. SOCIAL MEDIA IN THE GERMAN FEDERAL ELECTIONS .....	28
2.1. The role of social media in the German Federal Elections 2017.....	28
2.2. Social Media in the German Federal Elections 2021 .....	29
3. SOCIAL MEDIA AND FIRST-TIME VOTERS IN THE GERMAN FEDERAL ELECTIONS 2021.....	31
3.1. The role of first-time voters in the German Federal Elections .....	31
3.2. The topics relevant to the youngest group of the German voters.....	32
3.3. Social media framing in Instagram and first-time voters.....	44
CONCLUSIONS.....	51
BIBLIOGRAPHY .....	53

## INTRODUCTION

Modern digital technologies constitute an integral part of our everyday life. Digitalization as a process has a significant impact on society, contributing to its development and transformation (Morze, 2021). Plenty of changes have been caused by the emergence of social media, since nowadays every smartphone user has access to an unlimited amount of information.

Therefore, social networks have become an integral part of politics - they are said to have great potential for social transformation. In the last two years, social media have become effective platforms for political communication. Instead of spreading informative news, complex analysis and political messages from a specific position, as traditional media (television, newspapers, radio, etc.) do, social media presents information from different angles at the same time. The spread of social networks allows interactive format between voters and parties, then expands communication on the net and win new supporters in society. The advent of social media has radically changed political communication, especially during election campaigns.

There is increasing talk in political circles that the transformation of the media landscape through social media is leading to an increase in political polarization and division in society. The public debate surrounding bots or fake news is evidence of this growing concern. The global COVID pandemic has significantly changed people's way of life, but it has also prompted the development of digital skills among the population in Germany. During this time, the role of social networks as the important communication channels has continued to increase. Likewise, the ability to disseminate information quickly without verification has increased.

It is worth mentioning here that social media has become a convenient platform for extreme and populist movements that are having increasing influence on the population and the electorate. A good example of this comes from the study of the use of social media by populist political forces, where it was found that far-right parties used “malicious bots” most frequently in 2018 (Silva, 2020). Populist parties were able to exploit the opportunity to manipulate information, which led to the political views of Germans and an increase in the electorate of these parties. In German politics, such activities are presented by the AfD party, which has used social media such as Facebook and Instagram more successfully than the other parties, according to Deutsche Welle analysis (AfD, 2021). These changes have increased scholarly interest in more populist and “extreme” political forces, which is not the case with classical liberal parties. The FDP positions itself as the central political party that focuses on liberal values and approaches. The Free Democrats showed a successful result during the 2021 federal election. With its strategy, the party was able to mobilize most first-time voters, which is difficult to imagine without digital strategies. In comparison with the previous federal election, there were teams organized and many people engaged for the digital communication of the political parties. In general, many candidates have developed more understanding of the digital space that could be traced back to the effects of the Corona crisis where more tools and communication channels were used. What is more, plenty of data analyses were conducted in order to process information up-to-date for the election campaign (Jörg Schönenborn, 2021).

Some of the most popular online platforms like Instagram let people modify, comment, criticize, expand and share information without limits. In addition, the format of the presentation with the photos, videos and stories is entertaining and easy to accept. Uncontrolled and chaotic debates on social media often lead to a multitude of opinions and information overload. It is worth noting here that the



information overload can lead to increasing confusion among panelists as to the truth of the facts behind particular events or news. Here, social media takes on both the role of platform for spreading the news and discussion and the role of agenda setter, presenting certain issues in a certain light. Social media is now shaping the focus and influencing the opinions of users, which in turn affects political engagement.

This thesis aims to show how a liberal-oriented party managed to develop social networks (using the example of Instagram) into an instrument of successful political communication and which frames were used for this. The investigation is carried out using the example of the German Free Democratic Party and Alliance 90/The Greens during the last three weeks before the 2021 federal election.

In order to answer the research question and justify the results, critical content analysis and discourse analysis were carried out, not only to determine and list the frames, but to thematize and describe them with the examples from the social media platform due to the approach to different topics two profiles that are relevant to the chosen target group.

The paper is mainly built in relation to the communicative media theories, namely the theory of agenda setting and the framing theory, in which media are described as setters of the main topics. For a critical analysis, agenda-setting theory becomes particularly important because it allows one to grapple with specific issues and trace the connection between the presentation of priorities and the election results. The theory of the uses-and-gratifications approach could be helpful, which could explain the strong loyalty of supporters to the party. This theory deals with the relationship between users and social media, which puts the emphasis on followers and their activities on social media.

The paper deals with the question whether the frames that the FDP and Alliance 90/The Greens use in social media (on the example of the official Instagram pages of both parties) during the last three weeks of the 2021 federal election campaign in Germany appealed to the youngest voters' group aged 18-24 and could influence the voting.

The aim of the paper is to describe the topics relevant for the first-time voters of the German federal elections 2021, describe the communication of the parties' agenda through the frames of the digital election campaign 2021 by Free Democratic Party and Greens/Alliance 90 based on the summary of the existing studies and the analysis of the selected Instagram posts (based on the limited period).

## **1. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

### **1.1 Framing as a media effect**

The popularization of the concept of "frame" came in the 70-90s of the XX century thanks to the work of the British-American scientist Gregory Bateson ("The message 'this is play'" 1956), American researcher in the field of artificial intelligence, Marvin Minsky ("Frames for Representing Knowledge" 1974) and the American sociologist Irving Hoffman. It was they who laid the foundations of the theory of frames, which originated in the psychology of communication and later developed in other sciences. But due to the fact that the methods, approach and goals of research in different disciplines differed from each other, the understanding of the term frame was ambiguous. This contributed to various interpretations of the concept of "frame" and the theory of the frame. This is partly why this concept does not have a precise definition, and the theory of frames has not acquired concrete forms.

The theory of framing states that the media tells a person exactly what to think. Any event is structured by the media in the form of a frame and presented in a simplified form. The use of frames – in fact, the manipulation of public opinion – allows the audience to focus on specific issues, forcing them to think in the right direction.

It should be said that framing is not misleading the audience. After all, setting a certain framework, the media only cuts off the unnecessary - the information is not distorted, but rather silenced. In this way, it is possible to present readers with their content in the most attractive and profitable light without overloading consumers with "extra" details. In order to adapt the frames to the beliefs of the target audience, it is necessary to study their preferences. Thus, the media has

the opportunity to provide even the worst information, while receiving the absolute support of the public.

But there is a negative aspect to this: by driving the audience into a "framework", the media limits the set of alternatives so much that after a while the audience gets used to these frames and begins to "squeeze" any information about social reality. Robert Entman explains that "to frame" means "choosing certain aspects of reality and making them more visible in the communicated text, thus promoting a certain definition of the problem, interpretation of its causes, moral assessment and possible solution" (Entman 1993: 52). The potential of the framing concept is to focus on communicative processes. The researcher also noted that the haven of the frame is: communicator, text, recipient of information and culture. Each of these components is an integral part of the framing process, which consists of separate stages: the creation of the frame, the establishment of the frame and the consequences of framing at the individual and social levels. According to Entman, individual frames are defined as "clusters of ideas stored in the mind that guide the processing of information by people" (Entman 1993: 57).

Two reference systems can be used to interpret and process information: global and long-term policy views and short-term reference systems related to specific issues. While global political views are the result of certain personal characteristics of people and have very limited influence on the perception and interpretation of political problems - short-term, problem-based frames can have a significant impact on the perception, organization and interpretation of incoming information. as well as the conclusions that a person draws from this information (McKane 2006).

## **1.2 Media frames**

As for media frames, William Gamson and Amadeo Modigliani conceptually defined the media frame as "the central formative idea or storyline that gives meaning to the spectrum of events unfolding. The frame suggests what is at stake and what its essence is". Considering media or news frames as a necessity to turn meaningless and unrecognizable events into a significant event, Gay Tuckman proposed a similar definition of media frames: "A news frame shapes everyday reality, and a news frame is an integral part of everyday life." capacious description of news "(Toffler 1997: 91). Media frames are also working procedures for journalists, they allow journalists to quickly identify and classify information, and at the same time "package it for effective communication to their audience" (Giltin 1980). According to this concept, the intentions of the creator of the frame may be obvious, but the motivation remains unconscious. Similarly, Sol McLeod and his colleagues used the concept of individual frames to describe how audiences perceive political news. They conceptually defined individual frames as cognitive devices that "act as non-hierarchical categories that serve as forms of key headlines in which any future news content can be placed" (McKane 2006) .

Another researcher of the influence of the frame was Claes de Vreese, who distinguishes between factors that are internal to the process of news production, and external, both of which affect the process of building the frame. Internal factors are editorial policy and news values that shape the daily work of journalists. For example, the value of focusing on domestic consequences may lead a journalist to present a story about an international event in terms of domestic economic branches. Similarly, the value of news of human interest often translates into a story about an event focused on a specific person. External factors are the influence of stakeholders such as elites, interest groups and social

movements. Elite influence becomes apparent when journalists use parts of political speeches or audio clips to illustrate a problem (Claes 2005 ).

When researching motivation and types of frames, it is impossible not to mention their typology. Entman suggested that news frames can be explored and identified by "the presence or absence of certain keywords, standard phrases, stereotypes, sources of information, and sentences that provide thematic clusters of facts or judgments" (Entman 1999). Hamson and Modigliani define "framing tools" that concentrate information and offer a "media package" of problems. They identify metaphors, examples, winged phrases, stereotypical images, and visual images as means of framing. The most complete empirical approach is offered by James Tankard who offers a list of 11 frame mechanisms or point foci to identify and measure news frames:

1. headings
2. subheadings
3. photos
4. captions to photos
5. main characters (leads)
6. choice of source
7. selection of quotations
8. excerpts's quotations
9. logos
10. statistics and charts
11. concluding statements and paragraphs.

In conclusion, scientists in the empirical approach to frame measurement agree that frames are specific textual and visual elements or "framing devices". These elements are significantly different from other news, which can be considered the main news facts.

As for the typology and means of frames, I would like to mention a few researchers who tried to identify and structure them. Baldwin van Gorp was the first to try to do this, he proposed the concept of a frame package - a set of logically interconnected mechanisms by which, in fact, creates a frame that is broadcast by a journalist. The structural elements of the "frame-set", according to the scientist, are:

- a) obvious / explicit techniques of framing (the manifest framing devices) - vocabulary, metaphors, examples, descriptions, visual images;
- b) obvious or latent methods of argumentation (the manifest or latent reasoning devices) - substantiation of causal relationships;
- c) hidden cultural subtext (implicit cultural phenomenon) - places the described object in the space of cultural archetypes and values common in this society (van Gorp 2007).

Following this further, Holly Semetko and Patti Volkenburg singled out five news frames that dominate news reports:

- conflict
- human interest
- attribution of responsibility
- morality
- economic consequences (Semetko / Volkenburg, 2000)

A conflict frame emphasizes conflict between individuals, groups, institutions, or countries. The frame of human interests brings a human face, personality history, or emotional angle to the presentation of an event or problem. The accountability frame presents a problem in such a way as to attribute responsibility for causing or resolving either the government or an individual or group. The frame of morality interprets an event or problem in the context of religious dogmas or

moral precepts. An economic impact frame is an event or problem in terms of the economic impact it will have on an individual, group, institution, region or country.

With the development of media, these types have acquired their subtypes and are often combined with each other. Caitlin Jamison emphasizes the theme of conflict, or race, emphasizing that it is a shell filled with diverse contexts, such as focused on victories and defeats, include the language of war and competition, contains "performers", critics and viewers ", focus on the candidate's style and perception, and give weight to the polls and ranking of candidates (Hirschman 1983). Regarding the definition of frames in the news, there is no consensus among researchers which of the methods is considered the most accurate. Claude de Vries, already mentioned by us, proposed two approaches to the separation of frames: inductive and deductive. The inductive approach assumes that the researcher analyzes the material without predefined frames, and therefore the "framework" he seeks and identifies in the research process. The deductive approach assumes that the researcher analyzes a text or news item using frames already defined and applied by someone. De Vries notes that the deductive method of working with frames is considered more practical, because in the case of inductive, the sample may be too small (Claes 2005).

Speaking of framing, Irving Hoffman was one of the first scientists to develop a general concept of framing. Attention to this theory has arisen due to concerns about how the media chooses media content and how this choice affects the public. Hoffman calls frames "schemes of interpretation," a framework that helps turn a meaningless sequence of events into something meaningful" (Hoffman 2003: 118).



Later D. Laughey defines frames as tools that help journalists organize vast amounts of information and "effectively package it for their audience." He describes frames as "constant models of cognition, interpretation and presentation, choice, emphasis and exclusion, organizing information for both journalists and their audience" . According to Entman, the framing process has two stages:

- 1) the creation of the frame and its emergence in reality (frame-building);
- 2) interaction of created frames with individuals, representatives society, the audience that does not participate in the creation of the frame, but are its recipients (frame-setting).

In the process of transition from one stage to another, the frame can be changed and adjusted according to the characteristics of the audience. Given that the theory of framing deals with the ways in which the media selects and presents news, the fundamental interests of scholars are the study of how news representations can transform the audience's perception of social issues. Controversial and actively discussed is the degree of activity of the audience in the process of forming and adjusting the frame, and, accordingly, the degree of influence caused by the frames. Hoffman and Entman stated that there is a direct link between the way a phenomenon is described in the media and the public perception of it. Entman states that "the media design their news in such a way as to achieve the appropriate / desired response in the audience" (Entman 2005: 269). Among many researchers, it is widely believed that the population generates most of its knowledge through representations in news content.

The connection between communication and politics has always been very close, in a certain way, politics is unthinkable without communication. Some scholars even tend to define politics in terms of communication. Nevertheless, the

interface of political science and communication science has only really manifested itself in the last few years - especially the connection between politics and conventional mass media. In 1998, the political scientist Max Kaase stated that the lack of interest in political science could be explained by the omnipresence of the mass media and that they therefore "revel below the necessary attention threshold as a social matter of course"(Kaase 1998: 100). In addition, the increasing "mediatization of politics"<sup>89</sup> calls into question the previous view of the obedient role of the media in the political process. Furthermore, Thomas Meyer criticized the "colonization of politics" by the media even more drastically.

Taking in consideration that every user of social networks today is an active media maker, he tries to draw attention to his posts, make them more relevant, more popular among other users and those that cause the biggest wave of discussion. In order to attract the audience's attention, the message must be interesting, relatively new or in a new interpretation, easy to understand and sufficiently rich despite its small volume. This is why framing is used - to attract the attention of as large an audience as possible.

Framing in social networks is used to simplify the interpretation of the text, "selectively marking and coding objects, situations, events, experiences and sequences of actions within their current or past experience" [9]. Thus, the contributor purposefully "frames" actions in order to mobilize potential supporters to get their support and positive feedback, and - if necessary - destabilizes opponents, forcing them to justify or defend themselves.

As a rule, framing differs from simple media making by the "expertise" of judgments: the user of social networks confidently operates with facts, turns to "authorities of thought", provides "indisputable" evidence, appeals to legal or moral norms, and so on. Due to the passivity of perception of information on the

Internet, unwillingness to spend time searching for additional information or for other reasons, in most cases the frameworks. The purpose of such framing is to spread various information, raise the issue in the moral universe, provoke social activity, attract attention, and so on. And although framing contributes only to the short-term and superficial interest of the communicative community in information or problems, it still remains one of the most active forms of modern communicative behavior.

It is generally accepted that framing is understood in the context of a cognitive concept. However, emotional and affective interpretations are not taken into account in these concepts. This already appears subjectively incomplete and does not correspond to the results of the analysis of strategic frames. Benford's studies in particular showed that strategic frames are often mixed with emotions and are therefore an important part of the message spread by the communicator. Studies by Gross show that media frames not only trigger cognitive but also emotional reactions and accordingly lead to different results/opinions (Matthes 2014: 75). For example, emotional attributes can significantly change the opinion about an object: Emotions generated by strategic frames can influence information processing and thus the formation of opinions.

Moreover, it is worth mentioning how and to what extent emotions triggered by media frames influence the judgment formation of a person has already been frequently examined in psychological studies. Emotions triggered by frames have an influence on the formation of opinions in the sense that recipients prefer or select information that most closely corresponds to their own emotion, i.e. is identical to the affective reaction. This connection is also described as affective priming.

What is more, Kühne's framing model of emotions goes one step further and shows that media frames lead to certain cognitive assessments which can then, in a second step, evoke emotions. Basically, two different emotions can be triggered:

(a) Anger arises when one comes to the conclusion that something is negative but controllable. The facts have a high probability of occurrence and the guilt can be assigned to an individual;

(b) Sadness arises when an issue is negative and difficult to control. The situation also has a high probability of occurrence, but there is no personal responsibility.

It is worthy to mention that an emotional reaction of the recipient is all the stronger, the more important a topic is interpreted individually. Additionally, emotions are more likely to arise when events occur through people's actions rather than through situational circumstances. Thus, affective framing can be summarized in a three-step process (Mattes 2004):

- 1) Media frames evoke cognitive interpretations.
- 2) Cognitive interpretations lead to emotions.
- 3) Subsequently, emotional responses to general mood lead to congruent attitudes and behaviors. Thus, with certain topics, a cognitive and emotional cycle can develop that constantly underpins and even potentiates the frame.

Whether a frame is set up textually or visually should not play any role, since it is a frame, but because framing research has so far ignored visual frames, an independent branch of research has emerged. Visual framing takes on the fact that frames are not only defined textually and has developed independent research methods. Visual frames have three important properties (Kühne 2013):

- 1) Visual frames are indicators of ideological beliefs.

- 2) Visual frames can go beyond textual frames. Visual frames can exaggerate and exaggerate.
- 3) Visual frames can direct attention.

### **1.3. Political communication**

Political communication is an extremely important aspect of inculcating and promoting politics in society. With the help of various means are communicated about values, ideals, certain points, views, events, facts, attitudes, reforms in society and reactions to them. At all times, communication was an important factor in politics, and in the conditions of the transition to information society, its role became paramount. Subjects of politics turn into subjects of the communicative process, and the quality of political decisions directly depends on the volume and quality of information. One of the priority goals of political communication today is legitimization, democratization of power structures, bringing them closer to society, adequacy to the challenges of time and situation, which makes it an object of political science study. Scientists face the problem of reaching a new level of understanding political communication as a factor capable of actualizing the interests, needs, worldview orientations and values of the participants in information interaction, providing the desired support for the political system, or, on the contrary, inciting society against the subjects of power. Speaking about the emergence of the concept of "political communication", it is directly related to the development of Western society after the Second World War.

The separation of political communication research into a relatively independent direction was called political communicativism and was caused by the democratization of political processes in the world in the second half of the 20th century, the emergence and growth of the role of new information technologies, as well as the development of cybernetic theory. In many ways, thanks to

cybernetics, the term "communication", which was previously used mainly in technical specialties, military affairs, turned into an interdisciplinary term. Following this further, the first theoretical developments regarding political communication appeared in the late 1940s and early 1950s and were associated with the post-war wave of democratization, the emergence and development of cybernetic theory, the emergence and active use of new communication technologies and systems (QUELLE). Political communication is understood as the process of transmission and exchange of political information, which structures political activity and gives it a new meaning, shapes public opinion and political socialization of citizens, taking into account their needs and interests (Genesa 1977 : 162).

There is an opinion that F. Ratzel used the term "communication" for the first time in a political context. He was talking about the fact that the dissemination of information in the political space is the most important of all communication processes. As N. Wiener believed all the phenomena of the surrounding world can be explained from the point of view of information exchange, information circulation. In his opinion, this process represents the creation, sending, receiving and processing of messages that significantly influence politics.

The mentioned action can be both direct and indirect, its results can be manifested both immediately and after a certain time. You can talk about direct or immediate actions to speak about such types of political activity as a call to participate in elections, an appeal for support for this or that political course, a proposal to approve and accept, or reject any draft law. The indirect effect of messages is that they can be used to create some "ideal models", "images" of reality and stereotypes that influence the political consciousness and behavior of political elites and the public. Creators and senders of messages can be politicians, journalists, representatives of interest groups, or individual

individuals. It is fundamentally important for the author that the message has a political result, affecting the consciousness, beliefs and behavior of individuals, communities, institutions, as well as the environment in which they exist (Grachev 2004: 119).

K. Deutsch interestingly defined political communication as the "nervous system of public administration", considering political messages to be a factor determining political behavior. According to J. M. Cottre, the role of communication in the political life of society can be compared to the importance of blood circulation in the human body. Indeed, political communication is the link that connects the various parts of the political system of society and allows them to function as a whole.

Note that the authors most often consider "political communication" mainly through a three-pronged approach – the process of transmission, processing and exchange of political information. H. Lasswell described the communication process using five key characteristics of messages: who transmits, to whom he transmits, what he transmits, through which channel, with what result. This is a classic communication paradigm that was developed by an American political scientist in 1948. It is based on successive questions related to the transmission of information: who transmitted what, through which channel, to whom and with what result. Accordingly, six main variables of the communication process are distinguished (Lasswell 1969: 161):

1. The sender (communicator, coder) is a person or group of persons who initiate the transmission of information. And therefore they are responsible for the exact wording of the message intended for the recipient. Accordingly, it requires the communicator to possess communication skills that would enable him to code

the message so that it was correctly reflected in the mind of the recipient, and the information made an appropriate impression.

2. A message is a set of verbal and non-verbal symbols that make up the information that the communicator wants to convey.

3. A channel is a way (means, path) by which information gets from the communicator to the recipient. The following communication channels are distinguished: natural (verbal, non-verbal) and artificial (iconic, symbolic), artistic (graphics, sculpture, painting, architecture, etc.) and technical (video, television, printing, etc.)

4. The recipient (recipient, target audience, decoder) is a person or group of persons for whom the communicator's informational message is intended. The receiver is characterized by the ability to listen and properly perceive the received message and the ability to provide feedback to the sender.

5. Perception is the receiver's understanding of the communicator's message. An error in the perception of a message by the recipient occurs when encoding and decoding occur in different symbol systems: during the transmission of the message, the communicator chose an incomprehensible or unknown encoding system for the recipient.

6. Feedback - the recipient's reaction to the message. It is a guideline for further communication and provides an assessment of the effectiveness of communication. Feedback is a necessary component of the communication process, in its absence it is simply informing about certain events, phenomena or processes, which does not require identifying the recipient's attitude to this message.



In addition, H. Lasswell drew attention to the fact that mass communications perform three most important social functions: first, they acquaint the audience with current events, influencing "setting the agenda"; secondly, they interpret the meaning of messages, forming perspectives from which events will be viewed; and, thirdly, they also play an important role in the socialization of individuals by forming certain attitudes and beliefs.

A significant contribution to the development of this approach was made by other American scientists, in particular, P. Lazarsfeld and B. Berelson, who studied public opinion and the ambiguity of the social audience's reaction to information. Subsequently, F. Ball, critically developing the scheme of H. Lasswell, introduced the concept of feedback, that is, direct or indirect detection by the recipient of his attitude to the communicator's information. The development of this understanding of communication was also facilitated by the research of T. Newcomb, who investigated the influence of mutual interests and expectations of the communicator and the recipient, and substantiated the possible convergence or divergence of their positions.

This understanding of communication makes it possible to distinguish between the one who communicates (wants to establish contact with the recipient) and the very fact of communication itself (that is, establishment of the desired contact). Here is the opinion of some researchers about the peculiarities of communication as a type of two-way communication: it is "the essence of mutual influence, interaction" of subjects; "communication differs from information processes in that it is a two-way communication carried out in the mode of dialogue, while information processes are unidirectional and there dialogue is not mandatory".

Summarizing different approaches and interpretations, the following definition can be formulated: political communication is a complex process that includes

the creation, transmission and processing of various forms of multidirectional messages, which are exchanged at the horizontal and vertical levels through direct and indirect communication between by various political subjects and elements of society as a whole.

It is believed that political information can be transmitted in three main ways of communication: through mass media, through organizations and informal contacts. In the first case, we are talking about printed (newspapers, magazines, books, posters, postcards) or electronic (television, radio, computer, etc.) media. In the second case, they mean the communicative capabilities of state institutions, political parties, public organizations, movements, pressure groups, etc. The latter are used as two-way channels of exchange of political information between the political system and the environment.

Political communication is understood as the process of transmission and exchange of political information, which structures political activity and gives it a new meaning, shapes public opinion and political socialization of citizens, taking into account their needs and interests. It contains all the components of the classical paradigm of communication, but several of its main features can be formulated:

- 1) Subjects of political communication are: citizens, groups, political institutions and political actors (external and internal) (voters, formal and informal groups, associations of citizens, public organizations, associations and movements, political parties, lobbying structures , bodies of state power and local self-government, regional, interstate and international organizations).
- 2) The categories of subject and object of political communication overlap, because depending on the type of communication, the subject of political communication can become its object (for example, communication in the

system of power relations can take place in the direction from state authorities (subject) to political parties (object), while the initiator of electoral communication in parliamentary elections is a political party and its object is the voter).

- 3) Political communications also differ in their content, those messages that are disseminated during communication with citizens in the political sphere.
- 4) Implementation of political communications takes place in different directions. External and internal political communication can be distinguished.

The political message is a key aspect of politics, because most of the politically relevant information a person receives is precisely because of disseminated messages and not at all from personal experience. Availability of information about the past and predictions about future events is possible only during the transmission of messages. Political communication is considered as a functional property of one of the components of the political system of society, its special subsystem, which establishes connections between institutions of the political system.

The process of communication through informal contacts is characterized by two stages of information transfer. The audience receives information not directly from the source of information, but from opinion leaders. So, the first wave of information mainly affects the leaders of public opinion, and the second is already spreading from them. Public opinion is formed primarily under the influence of mass media. It is clear that the political, and especially the ruling, elite is trying to convince the majority of the population of the correctness of their actions and the expediency of their stay in power.

In this context, ascertaining (neutral) and persuasive (calling for certain actions) political information are distinguished. Persuasive information, in turn, can be aimed at activation ("pushing" to constructive actions) and destabilization (destruction of political structures, norms and forms of behavior or activity). Considering the political information from the point of view of the used means of argumentation, we can distinguish between logical and emotional persuasion. Logical persuasion is based on rational, evidential, scientific argumentation. Emotional persuasion is designed to influence feelings and emotions. The purpose of emotional persuasion is to force the individual to act in the right direction by changing the system of value orientations (Bebyk 2005: 211),

Political information received by the consumer can be perceived completely, partially or not at all. In this context, according to scientists, the social group to which the information consumer belongs plays a major role. They talk about the following features of the influence of a socio-cultural group on the perception of political information by an individual: a person is encouraged to observe certain group standards and is punished for violating them; if an opinion is "voiced" in the audience, it is more difficult to change it than a personal view; group discussions and decisions help to weaken internal resistance to a certain opinion; the support of even one person weakens the pressure of "group thinking"; the most orthodox supporters of the group are the least ready to accept information that contradicts its norms.

In addition, it is worth paying special attention to the "packaging" of political information, in accordance with the consumer standards of various population groups. If the information is presented "packaged" in standard clichés (ideological, linguistic and cultural, etc.) of the given group, you will have a much better chance of successfully assimilating this information by the aforementioned

group. All these psychological features of information perception should be kept in mind, wanting to be heard.

Talking about the place of political communication (external or internal), internal political communication occurs within a group, political institution or political actor between its structural elements. External political communication takes place in the following directions: group - citizens, political institution - citizens, political actor - citizens, citizens - group, citizens - political institution, citizens - political actor, group - political institution, group - political actor, political institution - group , political institution - political actor, political actor - group, political actor - political institution, group - another group, political institution - other political institution, political actor - other political actor.

According to the actors of communication, three levels of information flows in the system of political communication can be distinguished. The first level serves authorities and management (circulates mainly official information). The second - forms an informational environment for the activities of parties, trade unions, and social movements (circulate programs, statutes, and information about their activities). The third appeals directly to public opinion, mass consciousness, and political behavior.

In addition, different types of actors create different political communication: authoritative, when one of the parties is the government; actually political, in which political institutions necessarily take part; civil, when the exchange of information takes place between citizens regarding political issues. A special type of political communication is election communication, which is actively carried out in the pre-election period and activates all political-communicative subjects, and especially political parties or candidates, between whom the struggle for victory is conducted.

The basic principles of political communication include (Bebyk 2005: 212):

- priority of cultural values (hierarchy);
- equal rights of all citizens to receive information (democracy);
- closeness to the culture of the nation, ethnic group, denomination, class, etc. (identity);
- consideration of moral and ethical norms (ethics).

The nature of political communication in society, the level of its development are determined by the level of the general and political culture of society, mediated by their values and norms. But there is also an inverse relationship: it can be said with certainty that political communication determines the level of the political culture of society, and therefore the peculiarities of the functioning of the political system of society. Actually, this is exactly her role. The functions of political communication, which are distinguished by researchers, include (Bebyk 2005: 58-79):

- dissemination of ideological and political values, knowledge,
- political information;
- formation of political consciousness;
- spread of norms of political culture, implementation of political and cultural exchange, development of political culture of political subjects (individuals, groups, political structures);
- integration and regulation of political relations;
- preparation of the public to participate in political activity.

Therefore, political communication should be a means of coordinating social and political interests on the basis of full information, respect for individual rights and

freedoms, democratic political culture and freedom of mass media from power structures.

R. Schwarzenberg singled out three main methods (channels) of political communication based on the use of various means :

1. Communication through mass media: printed media (press, books, posters), electronic media (radio, television). Such communication is implemented through holding press conferences, briefings, sending out press releases, placing political advertisements.
2. Communication through organizations, when political parties, interest groups, social organizations and movements serve as a link of transmission.
3. Communication through informal channels using personal connections (Schwarzenberg 1992: 29).

## **2. SOCIAL MEDIA IN THE GERMAN FEDERAL ELECTION**

### **2.1. The role of social media in the German Federal Elections 2017**

When referring to the German Federal Elections 2017, it should be mentioned that Facebook and Twitter played a larger role during the previous election campaign, therefore most of the studies in this field are based on examining these two social platforms. In their article, Wolfgang Koenig and Mathias Koenig (König, 2018) stress that the use of Facebook and Twitter was important during the 2017 election campaign, because “it became clear that all parties represented in the current Bundestag are now using Twitter and Facebook as a communication channel in addition to classic election campaign tools to reach their voters”. Moreover, at that time social media was recognized as the communication tool for the election campaign: “The findings from 2017 show that social media are becoming an instrument of having finally established election campaign communication. The majority of the candidates are present on Facebook and/or on Twitter” (Schmidt, 2017).

One of the points that stands out in the previous federal election campaign is that the right-wing AfD dominated in social media, according to the report of Serrano et al. (Serrano et al., 2018). Both Twitter and Facebook, as mentioned in the study (Serrano et al., 2018), the party could communicate their agenda to a larger number of users. It is suggested their success at the 2017 elections relates to their popularity in social media.. In 2016, it was suggested that “the rise of the AfD can be associated with an amount of social media coverage and user engagement that is unprecedented in the German political landscape” (Shelter, 2016) .

Moreover, digital manipulation mechanisms were used to influence the German election campaign and its outcome on Twitter. Although it was challenging to measure to which extent the aftermath that the social media bots, fake news and foreign intervention methods influenced the German electorate, the results were



consistent with the study on fake news stories (Neudert et al., 2017), where it was explained that the bots were used to improve the results of the AfD.

What is more, it was found out that “the German public is less prone to being affected by online misinformation than the US public” (Serrano et al., 2018). This way, it was concluded that the fake news did not influence the election to a great extent. “The top shared news on Facebook and Twitter connected to political parties had only a few misleading stories and no completely fabricated news” (Serrano et al., 2018), with the immigration being the field for the most effective speculations and manipulations through misleading messages.

The last finding is that the German political structure is correctly represented in the social media platforms. This is confirmed by looking at the behavior of the Twitter users retweeting the political parties and the Facebook users liking the posts of the pages. Moreover, the online media landscape mirrors the media consumption by users with different political views.

## 2.2. Social Media in the German Federal Elections 2021

Due to the ARD/ZDF research from 2020, the social media platforms have had an enormously large reach: Facebook was used by over 18 million and Instagram by over 14 million people in Germany at least once a week (Meyer, 2021). This fact lets us conclude that the role of Instagram has grown to become a strong communication channel for agenda-setting.

In comparison to the previous election 2017, the role of the advertisement has significantly grown due to the development of this option on the social media channels, therefore, social media were used more actively and target-groups oriented. The fact that parties reached certain age groups or genders particularly was especially important for their paid postings that were shown to the users who fell in their target audience group. The reason for that, however, could also

be that the parties had many fans in this group or Facebook's advertising algorithm played an additional role.

What is more, according to the study by the Leibniz Institute for Media Research, more and more people are using social media as a news platform: in 2020 there were 37 percent of the surveyed, in 2019 the number was 34 percent (Hölig, 2020). Within the group aged 18 to 24 year olds, 56 percent used social media channels in 2020 to search for the events in the world. According to the study, this corresponds to an increase of six percentage points compared to the previous year. This fact leads to the realization that social media played a significant role in the decision-making during the election campaign 2021.

### 3. SOCIAL MEDIA AND FIRST-TIME VOTERS IN THE GERMAN FEDERAL ELECTIONS 2021

#### 3.1. The role of first-time voters in the German Federal Elections

2.9 million young people took part in the federal election for the first time on September 26<sup>1</sup>. First-time voters account for a total of 4.6% of those entitled to vote. In addition to the younger generation electorate, there are 8.4 million young voters who were under 30 years old and were only voting in a federal election for the second or third time this year. These young voters are interested in democratic processes and want to get involved: 92.4% of young people say that democracy is important to them. This was the result of a representative survey by "Unmute now"<sup>2</sup> among 2,649 under-30-year-olds. "Unmute now" was a new campaign that had an aim to strengthen the democratic participation of young people in the federal election year 2021.

However, the young generation shows great political engagement, but at the same time the proportion of non-voters is alarmingly high too. While the total turnout in the last federal election 2017 was 76.2%, it was significantly lower among young and first-time voters, namely only 69.9% in the year 2021. The enormous differences between the separate federal states are striking: Bayern comes off best with 75.1% turnout, Bremen comes in last with only 58.6%. That's more than 16% points difference<sup>3</sup>. It could be also observed as a difference between North Germany and The South Germany.

Generally, among the first-time voters, the FDP and the Greens are the most popular (Figure 1).

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.hessenschau.de/politik/bundestagswahl/warum-haben-so-viele-junge-menschen-die-fdp-gewaehlt,junge-fdp-waehler-100.html>

<sup>2</sup> <https://unmutenow.org/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.br.de/nachrichten/deutschland-welt/generation-merkel-wie-erstwaehler-ueber-die-zukunft-mitbestimmen,SjLHVtS>

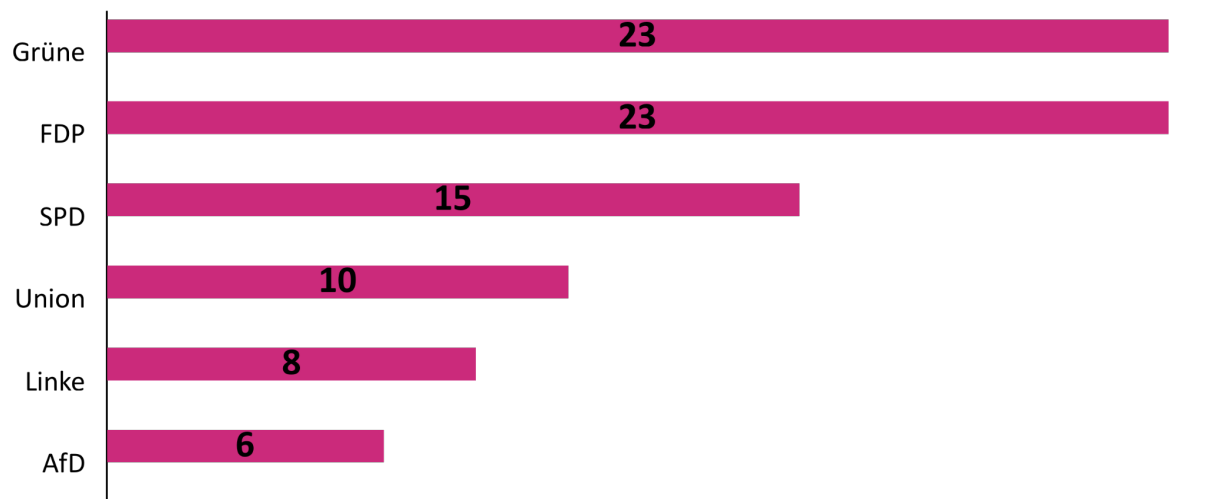


Figure 1. Voting shares of first-time voters of the federal election on September 26, 2021 (in %)

These election results were surprising, because FDP has never shown such support from the young electorate, while the party Grüne was popular among those who take part in the activities and demonstrations to prevent climate change and to follow the sustainability direction for the country. However, FDP this time has actively used social media to gain the younger generation of voters and to make them their electorate.

### **3.2. The topics relevant to the youngest group of the German voters**

#### **Innovative media technologies**

With the development of electronic mass media, information technologies and the improvement of computer technology in political science, questions regarding the place of political information in the life of society, the expansion of the functions of mass communication, and the role of media technologies in the system of political communication are becoming more relevant. Since the information space affects all spheres of public life, it is important to find out the role played by innovative media technologies in the system of political communication. Political issues are important to many young people, but only a

few are permanently involved in parties. According to the survey for the federal election of Vodafone Stiftung<sup>4</sup> 2021, more than two-thirds of 14 to 24-year-old people find out about political events at least once a week. 29% even do this daily or several times a day. The federal election was accordingly an important event for young people. 85% of those surveyed expressed interest in their outcome and more than half (53%) said they regularly obtained information about politicians and parties during the election campaign. Before the federal elections Bundestagswahl 2021 several surveys and studies were done on the most important topics for the young generation.

Speaking about “top” topics among the young generation, climate change has high priority. Floods, forest fires, rising temperatures - climate change has long been a reality. The dramatic events of the past few weeks have made many people in Germany more aware of climate change and the far-reaching consequences of the climate crisis.

So, the containment of climate change has the highest political priority for many young people in Germany. According to a recent youth study Jugendstudie 2019<sup>5</sup>, 85% of the young people surveyed find environmental and climate protection as one of the most important problems in Germany. Especially for the youngest – the 16 to 25 year olds – curbing climate change is a top priority, for 45% it is very important and for another 33% rather important. Many young people are primarily concerned with the climate, but also with other political issues. In addition, many young people in Germany are concerned about the effects that climate protection measures could have on their own lives and the lives of people in Germany.

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<sup>4</sup> [www.vodafone-stiftung.de/wie-junge-menschen-den-wahlkampf-erlebt-haben](https://www.vodafone-stiftung.de/wie-junge-menschen-den-wahlkampf-erlebt-haben)

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.bmu.de/download/ausgewaehlte-ergebnisse-der-bmu-jugendstudie-zukunft-jugend-fragen>

Fridays for Future (in German: "Freitage für die Zukunft"<sup>6</sup>) is the name of a movement of students, pupils and other young people who are committed to climate protection worldwide. Every Friday there are strikes worldwide to ensure that the climate targets that the states have agreed in the UN World Climate Agreement 2015 (Paris Agreement) are met. Above all, limit values for air pollution and temperature rise were set there. Following this further, the young generation claimed that the state needs to reduce domestic plastic waste.

This movement is particularly huge in Germany, but such "Friday for Future" is also active in around 150 other countries<sup>7</sup>. The aim of the students in Germany is to put the government under pressure with the strikes. They want to continue their protests until Germany meets the Paris Agreement and the 1.5 degree target. Among other things, they are calling for the phase-out of coal by 2030, a fully renewable energy supply by 2035 and a CO<sub>2</sub> tax on all greenhouse gas emissions.

By September 2019, the movement was growing in Germany. New sub-groups were also founded during this period: more and more adults joined the pupils and students under names such as "Scientists for Future", "Parents for Future" or "Entrepreneurs for Future"<sup>8</sup>. On September 20, as the cabinet debated climate protection measures, more than a million people took to the streets in the "Fridays for Future" protests. However, recently, the activists recorded a drop in the number of participants in Germany, but on the eve of the 2021 federal elections, the participation of young people increased, because it was at such a pre-election time that young people could once again announce their messages and needs from the future government. Nevertheless, "Fridays for Future" in

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<sup>6</sup> <https://fridaysforfuture.de/about/>

<sup>7</sup> [https://www.t-online.de/nachhaltigkeit/id\\_87404904/fridays-for-future-die-groesste-jugendbewegung-deutschlands-klima-lexikon.html](https://www.t-online.de/nachhaltigkeit/id_87404904/fridays-for-future-die-groesste-jugendbewegung-deutschlands-klima-lexikon.html)

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.bpb.de/kurz-knapp/lexika/das-junge-politik-lexikon/320328/fridays-for-future/>

Germany are still active and regularly organize climate protests. Moreover, older people have now also joined the Fridays for Future movement. They too want climate protection to finally be implemented.

This all shows that a dedicated and interested generation is growing up in Germany. At the time of the survey, 80% of those surveyed were familiar with the Fridays for Future movement. Around a quarter have already taken part in the Fridays for Future climate strikes, and almost all of them, namely 90 %, can imagine doing so again in the future (Jungesstudio 2019<sup>9</sup>).

Apart from this, it could be observed that social issues are also crucial to young people. 87% of those questioned state that they are very or rather interested in the coexistence of people, solidarity, justice and help for others. From the point of view of young people, environmental and climate protection has a positive effect on social goals. For example, for 65% it is particularly important that future generations would be burdened with massive environmental problems without sufficient environmental and climate protection. So, social engagement and activism in the field of social movements, issues and environmental

The topic of "digitization and Internet infrastructure" is also a decisive factor for 43.5% younger millennials, 18-29 year old, and for 36.3% of the segment of 30-39 years old (Civey 2021<sup>10</sup>). In the run-up to the federal elections, many surveys of the population were conducted on "painful" topics. Digitalization was one of those that required transformation and reforms. According to the results of Forsa Studie 2019, over 80 percent of Germans saw digitization as an opportunity and recognized the advantages.

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<sup>9</sup> <https://www.bmuv.de/download/ausgewaehlte-ergebnisse-der-bmu-jugendstudie-zukunft-jugend-fragen>

<sup>10</sup> <https://civey.com>

The Corona pandemic has accelerated the digital transformation of German companies, the digitization of the economy and the educational system. In some cases, the way of working was changed within a few days and new business models were developed in a very short time (e-commerce). And many companies have recognized that digital change is not an end in itself, but a necessity in order to be able to survive now and in the future.

But the Corona crisis was not a driving force in all areas. In some areas, the degree of digitization fell far short of potential and what was necessary. There is still a major shortage, especially with authorities and schools, and the degree of digitization remains low in some medium-sized companies.

In other words, digitization is conversion of analog data into digital formats. Instant access to electronic documents, instant money transfers, online education and media literacy are some of the important advantages of implementing the digitization process in the state.

Young people in particular see a wide range of potential in digitization. However, transparency and control over the stored personal data are particularly important to them. These are the findings of a study on digitization that PwC conducted in cooperation with the International School of Management (ISM)<sup>11</sup>. It is worthy to note that in this study digitization is understood as the integration of digital technology into people's daily lives. The analysis deals with the digital needs, fears and expectations in German society. According to the result, Big Data and Artificial Intelligence were the most important future trends. Electronic payment followed in third place. At the beginning of the 2021 the young respondents wanted companies to offer simple and standardized payment methods, also on

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<sup>11</sup> <https://www.pwc.de/de/digitale-transformation/pwc-digitisation-market-research-update.pdf>



the Internet. So, there was already a need for a movement in the direction of the digitization of Germany from the younger generation.

Digital engagement is not limited to the use of digital infrastructure, but also affects work on digital technologies. Young people are often pioneers in this. Commitment to topics in the digital world is increasingly becoming the focus of young users of innovation and technology. More than one in four respondents of the BMFSFJ study<sup>12</sup> declares that they want to make the digital world better for everyone through their involvement (28.9%, "fairly important" or "very important"). Topics such as data protection, the fight against hate, helping to shape the digital world, and the civil society that is being transformed by digitization play an important role.

The other important issue for the younger generation is the protection in the Internet space. With the emergence of social networks in everyday life and active use by the young electorate, the question of protecting private data online, as well as protection against cybercrimes, has arisen. Almost half of the total population in Germany is represented on social media. According to a study by the Federal Statistical Office<sup>13</sup> 61% of the Internet population in the 10 to 15 age group take part in social networks for private communication, in the segment of 16 - 24 years it is already 89% social media users. Talking about most popular social media platforms (without just messengers like WhatsApp), the ranking in the ARD-ZDF online study<sup>14</sup> has a clear winner – Instagram (Figure 2). In 2020, the app was used ahead of Facebook for the first time. Moreover, the majority of 14-29 year olds use Instagram on a weekly basis. German users rely less on Facebook

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<sup>12</sup> <https://www.bmfsfj.de/resource/blob/111558/4eaae8f22ae4f591b551a2a9df5c5c4d/wertewandel-in-der-jugend-und-anderen-gesellschaftlichen-gruppen-durch-digitalisierung-data.pdf>

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.destatis.de/DE/Themen/Gesellschaft-Umwelt/Einkommen-Konsum-Lebensbedingungen/IT-Nutzung/Tabellen/internetaktivitaeten-personen-alter-ikt.html>

<sup>14</sup> [https://www.ard-zdf-onlinestudie.de/files/2020/Kacheln/16zu9/ARD-ZDF-Onlinestudie\\_2020\\_Infografik\\_16-9\\_06.jpg](https://www.ard-zdf-onlinestudie.de/files/2020/Kacheln/16zu9/ARD-ZDF-Onlinestudie_2020_Infografik_16-9_06.jpg)

when using social media apps compared to previous years. According to the ARD-ZDF online study, the daily use of Facebook has decreased in 2021, but the use of Instagram has increased.

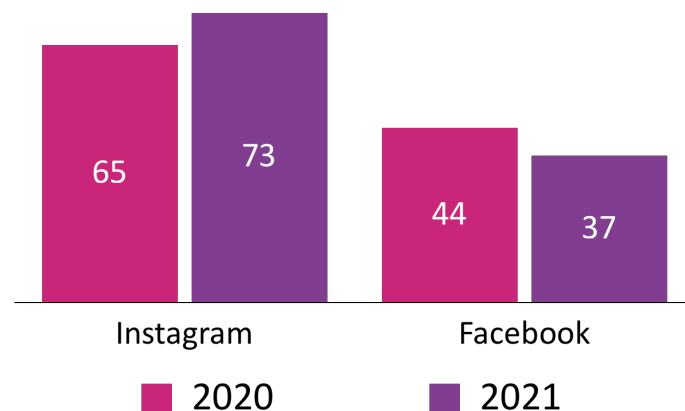


Figure 2. Percentage of users of social media platform in age group 14-29, Germany (%)

Speaking about different cybercrimes that affect the young generation in the online world, the most popular is cybermobbing or cyberboulting. Whether as perpetrators, victims or observers, 51% of young people between the ages of 14 and 17 in Germany have experienced cyberbullying. This is shown by the results of the 2021 Sinus youth study commissioned by BARMER<sup>15</sup>. In it, 14% of the approximately 2,000 respondents reported that they had been directly affected by cyberbullying. At least 5% admitted to having been bullied themselves. Teenagers most frequently said they had observed bullying attacks by others (43%). This all means that people from 14 years old have a risk of being victims of the cyber attacks that could have consequences, affecting the emotional, psychical and mental level. That is the reason why the younger generation is demanding from the future government more action in the direction of cyber security, especially the safety strategy in the space of social media platforms.

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.sinus-institut.de/media-center/presse/barmer-cyberbullying>

Apart from the problem of climate change and the need for digitization, German youth are also interested in changes in the education system. Since young people are the "consumers" of this system, they are convinced that the authorities should negotiate with them in this matter. DEMANDS from the young electorate to the government begin with the withdrawal from the system of school education, higher education, approaches to student financing during studies, investments in universities for institutions of higher education, as well as the creation of affordable living conditions during studies.

Young people see school as the central institution of the education system, from which they hope to acquire basic skills as well as life-world and professional orientation (Study of Vologne University 2021<sup>16</sup>). In Germany there have been and are efforts at national level to give as many schoolchildren as possible access to the Internet. For this purpose, from 1996 to 2012, the Initiative Schulen ans Netz e.V., in which the federal, state and local authorities were involved. The sponsor of the initiative was an association that emerged from a joint initiative of the Federal Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Technology (today the Federal Ministry of Education and Research – BMBF) and Deutsche Telekom AG. The aim of the initiative, to provide all schools in Germany with free Internet access, was thus achieved. By the end of 2001, all of the approximately 34,000 general and vocational schools in Germany were connected to the Internet. In the period that followed, the focus was on the implementation of projects such as information portals for teachers and pupils, further training opportunities and the integration of new media into everyday school life.

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<sup>16</sup> <https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.642616/full>

In 2016, the BMBF launched the "Education offensive for the digital knowledge society" (BMBF 2016<sup>17</sup>). The strategy of the Federal Ministry is intended to identify opportunities and fields of action that digital change offers for all areas of education, from early childhood education to school, vocational training and university to further education. There is also the digital qualification platform, which offers extensive information on the use of digital media in vocational qualification. Since 2019, the DigitalPakt Schule<sup>18</sup> has also been in place, with which the federal and state governments ensure that schools are better equipped with digital technology. Previously, the federal government made a total of five billion euros available over a period of five years; together with the financial contributions from the federal states, the total funding amounts to at least 5.5 billion. School authorities had an opportunity to apply for funding from the federal states. With the DigitalPakt School, the federal government provided financial resources for the development of digital educational infrastructures.

Moreover, the federal states control the development of media-pedagogical concepts by the schools, take care of the qualification of teachers and check that municipalities as school authorities and independent school authorities have concepts for ensuring operation, support and maintenance. In the course of the Corona crisis, the federal and state governments have added three additional agreements to the DigitalPakt Schule.

In turn, young people have repeatedly stated the need to launch a Digital Pact 2.0 for schools with a term of validity until 2030, which aims to improve the outflow of funds, as well as "new sustainable development", replacement and purchase of new hardware, replacement of outdated technology and. In addition, young people require improved computer skills and media literacy. In this way, learning

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<sup>17</sup> [vgl. BMBF 2016](#)

<sup>18</sup> [DigitalPakt Schule](#)

in the context of the increasing digitization of society and the working world as well as critical reflection on it should become an integral part of the educational mandate. Digital media should contribute to the development and use of new teaching and learning processes as well as to providing pupils with even better individual support and thus supporting efforts to achieve more equal opportunities through education.

As for higher education, funding for the council became a priority for young people. The reform of BAföG must be comprehensive to become a full subsidy so that students are no longer forced to go into debt to finance their studies. Students consider studying as a full-time job, which is why young people protest against encouraging or even requiring part-time employment to finance their studies. Another aspect is to strengthen universities and their financial support. In the past 20 years, German universities have experienced a massive increase in students, while at the same time the basic resources are falling and the demands on universities are increasing. This chronic underfunding is wanted to be counteracted<sup>19</sup>. The slight tendency towards greater involvement of the federal government in higher education funding must be maintained and significantly increased. Following this further, the focus should be on strengthening the basic funding of the universities on the one hand, and on the other hand the quality of studies and the promotion of discrimination and socio-economic disadvantage of affected students.

The next requirement of the youth is the creation of affordable accommodation opportunities. The situation on the student housing market has been constantly tense for years and the situation is getting worse rather than better. We expect a housing policy that also thinks about students. They have particularly few

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<sup>19</sup> <https://www.fzs.de/2021/10/27/was-wir-studierenden-von-der-neuen-bundesregierung-erwarten/>

subsidy options, often only have a short time to find a room at the beginning of their studies and income that is usually below what is needed.

Young people are also asked to pay attention to the topic of research in universities and institutions of higher education. Sustainable university teaching must be different than before, because education is more than just lectures, seminars and exams. There needs to be a much closer link between research and teaching, more interdisciplinarity. This means promoting accessibility in every respect, allowing mistakes and wrong turns and the end of the standard period of study as a benchmark. Legal foundations must be revised equally in all the German states, moderated by the federal government.

All in all, the digitalisation in the educational system needs to be changed, as the Corona Pandemic showed how important it is to be flexible during the studying process and to develop digital skills for learning and researching.

Equally important issues are the state of education and social justice issues. The living conditions and the chances and possibilities should be approximately the same for all people in a society. It is similar to the issue of intergenerational equity (24.8% to 20.9%)<sup>20</sup> in the age group 18-29. In general, 87% of the participants of the Youth study by the Institute for Ecological Economy Research (IÖW) stated that they were very or somewhat interested in social issues such as people living together, solidarity, justice and helping others. According to the study, living in a democracy is important to 87% of young people.

The younger generation do not want to accept the gap between rich and poor and the destruction of the environment. They want a state that takes measures

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<sup>20</sup> <https://www.businessinsider.de/politik/deutschland/internet-umwelt-und-die-rente-das-sind-die-wichtigsten-wahlthemen-der-jungen-generation/>

to redistribute wealth in society and to protect the environment, nature and the climate. However, only a small minority of them believe that this will happen. Most assume that the “economically liberal” scenario will materialize. From their point of view, this is a negative vision: no forward-looking environmental policy, no solution to social problems, no adequate and sustainable change.

Intergenerational justice stands for the idea of justice between different generations, which includes social, political, ecological and economic aspects. Intergenerational justice means that all generations can lead a life worth living. That is why it is crucial to build communication between younger and older generations in order to pull together in the same direction. Intergenerational justice is intended to ensure that future generations will also live in a world in which they have sufficient material resources, opportunities and quality of life at their disposal. It is essential to align current actions with the principle of sustainability, and sustainability, in its turn, is a strategy that satisfies the needs of mankind today in such a way that the natural foundations are preserved in order to also meet the needs of future generations.

Another point is chance equality. The unequal starting opportunities from the very childhood is a top priority for young people. An example of this can be found in the education system: children who have demonstrated the same basic intellectual and mathematical skills in tests do not attend the same type of school in this country. In fact, the social, economic and cultural status of the parents plays a decisive role: if the parents belong to the upper quarter of society, the children have almost six times the chance of going to high school than the offspring of the second quarter. Unequal opportunities also result from the distribution of wealth.

These social issues are interconnected, so it is not surprising that young people need improvement in each of these areas. Such a social sphere is a guarantee of the present for young people and a contribution to their future.

### **3.3. Social media framing in Instagram and first-time voters**

In order to prove whether there is a connection between the political parties' behavior in Instagram, their communication with one of the target groups through agenda-setting and frames and the result of the voting, we examined the publications made by the official pages of the Free Democratic Party and Alliance 90/The Greens within the last three weeks before the election day which are characterized by a higher level of competition and active attempts to persuade population to vote for the party. Our task was to search for the examples of publications topically corresponding to the agenda which is of the highest importance for the first-time voters.

This way, Alliance 90/The Greens especially promoted the frame of necessity of climate change and climate protection, having posted 20 publications related to this topic within three weeks before the election day, appealing to the target audience concerned with environmental problems (@die\_gruene, 2021). Although the agenda-setting concerning environmental issues was at the core of the Greens' election campaign, it is worth mentioning that much attention was paid to the social issues (feminist rights, gender equality, acceptance etc.) - namely seven publications. The topics of digitalisation and innovation and education were also mentioned, however, within the last 21 days before the election only two posts per each topic were published. Generally, we could come to the conclusion that the Greens actively worked on setting frames connected to the climate protection and environmental issues, persuasively appealing to the voters who took part at the election for the first time.



***Du willst, dass  
Klimaschutz  
nicht nur ein Wahl-  
versprechen bleibt.***



“You want that climate protection does not remain just a promise”

@die\_gruenen, 2021 Instagram, 12.09.2021



“Do you want to reach the climate goal by 2030?” @die\_gruenen, 2021

Instagram, 09.09.2021



“The best education for every child.” @die\_gruenen, 2021 Instagram, 16.09.2021



“For diversity, equal rights and recognition!” @die\_gruenen, 2021 Instagram, 19.09.2021



“We foster green technologies, made in Germany” @die\_gruenen, 2021  
Instagram, 08.09.2021

The Free Democratic Party, in its turn, was setting an agenda based on the economic aspects, innovations and freedom, and putting more emphasis on digitalisation, technologies (9 publications within the last 3 weeks of the election campaign) and education (11 Instagram posts) while appealing to the younger group of voters. The topics of climate protection and social issues were also mentioned, but less frequently - 1 and 2 publications accordingly. Therefore, we can conclude that the party used Instagram feed to promote its election campaign among young people focusing the messages on the topics connected to education, innovations and creativity.

**BLUTSPENDEVERBOT AUFHEBEN.**

**BLUT IST NICHT  
SCHWUL, BI, TRANS  
ODER HETERO.**



**ALLE  
STIMMEN  
FÜR DIE  
FREIHEIT**

“Blood is not queer, bi, trans or hetero” @fdp, 2021 Instagram, 21.09.2021

**#SCHNELLERSCHNELLESINTERNET**

**DEUTSCHLAND BEI  
INTERNETGESCHWINDIGKEIT  
WEIT ABGESCHLAGEN**

**SINGAPUR**



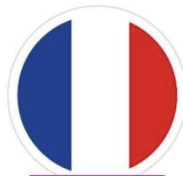
**265 MBIT/S**

**RUMÄNIEN**



**215 MBIT/S**

**FRANKREICH**



**200 MBIT/S**

**DEUTSCHLAND**



**126 MBIT/S**

Quelle: Speedtest Global Index, Juli 2021

“Germany is at the speed of the Internet far behind” @fdp, 2021 Instagram,  
22.09.2021

**KLIMASCHUTZ  
MUSS WIRKSAM  
UND FAIR SEIN.**



“Climate protection must be efficient and fair” @fdp, 2021 Instagram, 22.09.2021



“More fun at inventing rather than prohibiting” @fdp, 2021 Instagram, 05.09.2021



**LEUCHTTÜRME FÜR CHANCENGERECHTIGKEIT**

# **TALENTSCHULEN IN GANZ DEUTSCHLAND AUFBAUEN.**



“Lighthouses for equal opportunities. Building up talent schools all over Germany” @fdp, 2021 Instagram, 14.09.2021

## CONCLUSIONS

To sum up, the processes that took place in the world over the last decade contributed to the active spread of digital technologies that have a significant impact on social development and our everyday life. The worldwide Corona crisis 2020-2021 played a great role in accelerating the digitalization all over world, including Germany. The rising importance of online technologies strengthened the use of social media as communication channels that influenced the way the German political parties started using pages on Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, TikTok and other platforms and turned them into the opportunity to reach the target groups and potential voters. Studies proved that there is a noticeable difference between the use of social media by politicians during the election campaign in 2017 and the last campaign in 2021 emphasizing the importance of these platforms.

Both the increasing role of popular social media as communication channels and a higher level of interest and involvement of the youth in politics contributes to the fact that Instagram is being recognized as a platform for communicating election campaign programs and encouraging target groups to take part in the elections and vote for the parties. What is more, the previous works on the topic helped us emphasize the shift of popularity of social media among young people from Facebook to Instagram that made our analysis up-to-date.

With the help of the example of the first-time voters group, which is aged 18-24 years and shows peculiarly high level of presence on social platforms, we listed and described the topics that wake their interest in politics and compared them with the frames that were used by the two parties that obtained particularly successful result among the young (each more than 21 percent) - the Federal Democratic Party and Alliance 90/The Greens.

The fact that the topic of German federal elections 2021 has not yet been widely studied, makes it a promising area for future research that can be applied not only for the analysis of the elections process in Germany, but also contributes to the understanding of the connection and mutual influence of the social media, election campaign, results of the elections and politics generally that makes the topic attractive not only for the political studies, but also for interdisciplinary studies including psychology, marketing, sociology etc.



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