American Behavioral Scientist

Special Issue Call for Papers

Social Media Influencers: Content and Effects on Citizens' Attitudes and Behavior

Guest Editors:

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Social media influencers (SMI) have been defined as individuals who attract a large number of followers by posting specific (self-produced) content. SMI regularly share personal information, connect with their followers (see Schmuck et al., 2022), and promote products, brands, organizations, and ideas on their social media profiles (Hudders et al., 2021). However, SMI also post content on politics and other "serious" issues, like climate change, gender and racial inequality (Fischer et al., 2022; Maares & Hanusch, 2020).

Initial research showed that SMIs' content can influence followers' attitude formation and civic behavior (Harff et al., 2022; Heiss & Rudolph, 2022), and following SMI can mobilize young adults to engage in politics and to develop pro-environmental behavior intentions (Dekoninck & Schmuck, 2022; Schmuck et al., 2022). On the other hand, following some SMI may increase the perception that political problems not complex and easy to solve. Lacking the necessary expertise, some SMI may also post misleading or inaccurate information and misinformation shared by SMI may increase followers' mistrust in official sources (Harff et al., 2022)

These initial results provide important insights regarding the role of SMI in modern media environments. However, many aspects remain unclear and unexplored. The aim of this Special Issue to be published in *American Behavioral Scientist* (https://journals.sagepub.com/home/ABS) is to find answers to the most pressing issues and to bring together leading scholars working on the topic.

Key goals

The first goal of the Special Issue is to get a better picture of SMI in general. Which social media platforms do they use, and what types of SMI are there? Which subtypes of SMI can be differentiated? For example, one sub-category of SMI may only post on politics in times of major elections. Others may frequently post on various (political) topics. Another subtype of SMI may again post solely on selected political or societal topics only (e.g., gender or racial inequality; see Suuronen et al., 2021). Also, from a comparative perspective, are sub-categories of SMI similar across different cultures and nationalities (e.g., North America, Europe, Africa, and Asia)?

The second goal of this Special Issue is to better understand what type of content SMI post (see Suuronen et al., 2021). That is, how often does content relate to political and other civic, environmental, or health-related topics and what kind of

topics do SMI discuss (e.g., party politics, elections, political candidates, like human rights, identity, gender, global warming, health, or social inequality)? Furthermore, we know little about the quality and factual accuracy of the contents that SMI post. Do some SMI tend to spread misleading or inaccurate information, and with which intentions? Also, what kind of language, visualizations, narratives and forms of entertainment or humor do SMI use (i.e., entertainment packaging, see Fischer et al., 2022), for example, to attract audiences that do not regularly follow the news?

The third goal of this Special Issue is to assess how social media users and the followers of SMI are affected by posts and contents of SMI. For example, how does content provided by SMI affect followers' opinion formation and followers' political behavior? Do certain types of content promote topic engagement and can SMI's posts affect online or offline civic action? Under which circumstances does SMI content harm trust in politics and social institutions and can following SMI increase ideological and affective polarization in relation to key sociopolitical issues? Also, what short- and long-time consequences are there for following SMI?

Timeline

- **Date of abstract submission: <u>December 15, 2022</u>**
  (PDF, APA format, 300 words + references, appendix;
  please add a title page w/ author and contact information)
  Please submit abstracts (for internal review) via email to
  Christian von Sikorski (vonsikorski@uni-landau.de) and
  Pascal Merz (merz@uni-landau.de)

- **Invitation to selected authors to submit full paper:** January 12, 2023

- **Full paper submission** (for external peer review): July 3, 2023

- **Target publication date:** Spring 2024

Questions and comments about the special issue should be addressed to Christian von Sikorski (vonsikorski@uni-landau.de) and Pascal Merz (merz@uni-landau.de).

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