RESEARCH ARTICLE

Psychology Marketing WILEY

Is authenticity key? Mobilization by social media influencers versus celebrities and young people's political participation

Darian Harff[1,2] | Desiree Schmuck[1,2]

[1]Department of Communication, University of Vienna, Vienna, Austria

[2]School for Mass Communication Research, KU Leuven, Leuven, Belgium

Correspondence
Desiree Schmuck, University of Vienna, Währinger Straße 29 (Room 7.30), 1090 Vienna, Austria.
Email: desiree.schmuck@univie.ac.at

Abstract

Popular personalities like social media influencers (SMIs) and traditional celebrities can not only be used in the context of for-profit marketing, but also help non-profit campaigns address young audiences. Across three experiments (N_{Total} = 1233), we compared the effectiveness of SMIs' mobilizing appeals in relation to a humanitarian issue to those made by traditional celebrities. Inspired by meaning transfer theory, we expected SMIs and their endorsements to be perceived as particularly authentic, elucidating their possibly unique influence on young people's participation. In Study 1, mobilizing appeals from popular personalities generally increased participation intentions among young people, but SMIs were not more effective in this role than celebrities. Study 2 and Study 3 showed that effects of the two source types are dependent on gender. Controlling for source and endorsement authenticity, we found that SMIs were better at directly mobilizing young women for political participation than celebrities. In contrast, young men were more easily convinced by celebrities to engage in political action, due to higher authenticity attributed to celebrities' endorsements. While SMIs were not consistently perceived as more authentic than celebrities, the success of popular personalities' mobilizing appeals can generally be well explained by perceived source authenticity and perceived authenticity of endorsements.

KEYWORDS
authenticity, meaning transfer theory, mobilization, social media influencers, youth

Speculations about Taylor Swift's possible endorsement of the Democratic Party during the 2024 US election campaign have again sparked discussions about the influence that traditional celebrities can have on political attitudes and behaviors of their (often young) followers (Grynbaum, 2024). Yet, also personalities referred to as social media influencers (SMIs)—defined as ordinary people who acquire public visibility via social media—may have a persuasive political effect on their fans. Like celebrities, they act as inspirational role models for (young) people (Gleason et al., 2017), but may

additionally appeal to audiences due to their intimate communication (Berryman & Kavka, 2017) and self-presentation that is geared toward emphasizing uniqueness (Whitmer, 2019). While SMIs are well-known for promoting products and brands to their followers (Brooks et al., 2021), they have also repeatedly used their reach to raise awareness for sociopolitical issues (Newman et al., 2023), sometimes even actively recruiting their followers for political participation (Gayle, 2018). The use of popular personalities—traditional celebrities and SMIs—in campaigns may especially

represent a promising avenue for non-profit marketing and enable political actors to reach disengaged citizens. Political content from these entertainment figures may be particularly relevant for young people, that is, individuals in the stages of late adolescence to early adulthood (Rounsefell et al., 2020): This age group is often seen as disconnected from the political system (Weiss, 2020), but consults popular personalities for news (Newman et al., 2023).

While mobilizing political and prosocial messages from SMIs have not yet received much scholarly attention, similar activism by celebrities has been studied (Friedrich & Nitsch, 2019). While the civic voluntarism model suggests that messages with a mobilizing character from popular personalities should generally raise prosocial behavior among youth (Verba et al., 1995), we argue that SMIs' activism may have a greater impact on young people's civic involvement than that of celebrities due to perceived genuine intrinsic motives associated with SMIs' engagement with a social or political cause (Gräve & Bartsch, 2022). Following a serial mediation logic inspired by meaning transfer theory (McCracken, 1989), we hypothesize that this *perceived authenticity of endorsements* might be higher when youth are exposed to SMIs than when they see posts from celebrities, since we expect SMIs to be seen as a particularly *authentic source* due to their focus on "calibrated amateurism" (Abidin, 2017, p. 1), self-disclosure, and self-branding. This possible advantage of SMIs over celebrities is yet to be explored in the realm of issue advocacy.

This study addresses these crucial research gaps by investigating how mobilizing political messages from SMIs and celebrities affect youth using three online experiments. In the first experiment, we investigated the general effectiveness of recruitment attempts from unfamiliar SMIs and celebrities. In the second experiment, we studied the potential serial mediation of the relationship between source type and participation via source and endorsement authenticity, again exposing participants to fictional posts and fake profiles. In the third experiment, we replicated Study 2 with real-life well-known SMIs and celebrities, testing whether the effectiveness of mobilizing appeals may depend on receiving these messages from known and popular endorsers (see, e.g., Jackson, 2018). In Study 2 and Study 3, we also tested whether mobilization effectiveness varied by gender, given that research shows that men and women prefer different media role models (Gleason et al., 2017). Overall, this study deepens our understanding of effects of political mobilization by popular personalities and offers practical advice for those actors seeking to collaborate with them.

1 | MOBILIZATION OF YOUTH VIA SOCIAL MEDIA

According to the civic voluntarism model, recruitment—that is, efforts to encourage others to take political action—is, next to prior political engagement and available resources, an important determinant of political participation (Verba et al., 1995). Recruitment for political, social, or humanitarian causes occurs not just through organized campaigns, but also through everyday interactions (Vissers et al., 2012) and civic institutions (Verba et al., 1995). As identification with such institutions wanes—particularly among youth (Weiss, 2020)—social media offer new mobilization channels by broadening social networks, potentially including politically active contacts. Even celebrities and SMIs become parts of these personal networks, as users form friendship-like relationships with them (Centeno, 2010). Both SMIs and celebrities receive media attention but for different reasons. Celebrities, such as actors or musicians, usually have a specific skill or occupation that is subject to coverage in legacy media (Khamis et al., 2017), while SMIs build their audience on social media through self-branding, relying on their ability to craft a unique identity that attracts other users (Khamis et al., 2017). These personae can spread political messages to large audiences without bypassing gatekeepers.

Content on social media that promotes participatory behavior may specifically resonate among young people, as they show an interest in "news events with a strong mobilizing character" (Schwaiger et al., 2022, p. 620) and increasingly use social media and personalities on these sites for information (Newman et al., 2023). Studies have also shown that mobilization efforts online can be effective to recruit people for participation (e.g., Vissers et al., 2012). Accordingly, both celebrities (e.g., Austin et al., 2008) and SMIs (Dekoninck & Schmuck, 2022; Harff & Schmuck, 2023; Naderer, 2023) have been found to have a mobilizing effect on (young) people. Their influence is often explained through frameworks like parasocial opinion leadership, assuming that popular personalities can have a persuasive impact on people who feel closely connected to them (e.g., Harff & Schmuck, 2023). While some work in the celebrity endorsement literature is more pessimistic (e.g., Friedrich & Nitsch, 2019; Frizzell, 2011; John et al., 2019), personalities' political messages do seem to have a positive effect on participation when factors such as endorser popularity and likeability are accounted for (Jackson, 2018; Pease & Brewer, 2008). Based on the civic voluntarism model and the presented empirical research, we thus expect:

> **H1** Mobilizing political messages by popular personalities on social media, that is, SMIs and celebrities, increase young people's political a) participation intentions and b) behavior.

2 | PERCEIVED AUTHENTICITY AS A SPECIAL QUALITY OF SMIS

Our overview of the literature up to this point (see Table 1) demonstrates that mobilizing calls in relation to a political or humanitarian issue by SMIs and similar appeals by celebrities have so far only been studied separately, but never in conjunction. In this study, we close this research gap by comparing the effectiveness of mobilization attempts coming from these two sources. Making this comparison, we argue that SMIs' and celebrities' non-profit communication may be perceived differently due to variances in perceived authenticity associated with these personalities and their

TABLE 1 Summary of the key literature on political social media influencer (SMI) and celebrity endorsements.

Authors	Method	Findings
Austin et al. (2008)	Cross-sectional survey study (US)	Receptivity to political celebrity endorsements can reduce complacency among young prospective voters
Dekoninck & Schmuck (2022)	Two-wave panel study (Austria)	Results support the gateway hypothesis, as following political influencers or greenfluencers can inspire offline political participation through more online participation
del Mar Garcia de los Salmones et al. (2013)	Cross-sectional survey study (Spain)	Positive attitudes toward non-profit ads that feature a celebrity are determined by celebrity-NPO fit and perceptions of celebrities' altruistic motivation
Friedrich & Nitsch (2019)	Experimental study across five European countries	No clear evidence for a link between celebrity endorsements and greater vote intentions or political attitudes; celebrities' support of campaigns can even backfire when they are disliked
Frizzell (2011)	Experimental study (US)	Celebrity endorsements can backfire, as participants showed lower support for the advocated position when the statement came from Bono (the celebrity in the study)
Harff & Schmuck (2023)	Two-wave panel study (Germany)	Following SMIs who mainly talk about politics positively associates with young people's political participation over time, particularly when young people think that SMIs simplify political topics for them
Jackson (2018)	Experimental study (US)	Those exposed to celebrities' opinions hold higher agreement with celebrities' statements when favorable views are held toward endorsers
John et al. (2019)	Experimental study (UK)	Volunteering is not significantly greater among students when they are given examples of celebrities or politicians who volunteered than when no such examples are given
Naderer (2023)	Experimental study (Austria)	Under some conditions, even nonpolitical SMIs can efficiently inspire political action through perceived similarity; matchup hypothesis moreover supported, in that topic fit is correlated with action intentions
Nownes (2012)	Experimental study (US)	Celebrity political activity can influence some citizens' views of political parties, but effects vary between individual endorsers
Pease & Brewer (2008)	Experimental study (US)	Those who like a celebrity endorser are more likely than others to intend to vote for a candidate endorsed by the celebrity
The present study	Three experimental studies (Germany)	Perceived authenticity of endorsements can explain the success of popular personalities' mobilizing appeals and is itself predicted by source authenticity, but SMIs are not consistently seen as more authentic than celebrities; while men may be more open to celebrities' calls for participation, women are more receptive to SMIs' appeals when the authenticity variables are held constant

endorsements. In the following, we propose a process in which perceived authenticity of the source and perceived authenticity of the endorsement sequentially mediate the relationship between the *source type* of mobilizing messages and young people's participation intentions and behavior.

Authenticity of a person can be defined as the "practice of being true to one's self" (Vannini & Franzese, 2008, p. 621). Public figures such as SMIs, celebrities, and politicians use social media to attempt to elicit perceptions of authenticity among audiences to gain trust or supporters for certain causes (e.g., Manning et al., 2017). In marketing studies, perceived source authenticity is an important concept, as it can explain why consumers follow recommendations of celebrities or SMIs (e.g., Ilicic & Webster, 2016).

Endorsement literature suggests that celebrities can build authenticity by creating a consistent self-image (e.g., Moulard et al., 2015). Similar arguments have been made in relation to SMIs

(Balaban & Szambolics, 2022), who have been described as experts at managing expectations to appear authentic (Nah, 2022). Here, we hypothesize that consumers may perceive SMIs as even more authentic than traditional celebrities. We forward three arguments in support of this idea.

First, SMIs tend to opt for an amateurish self-presentation style (Berryman & Kavka, 2017), conveying a "raw aesthetic" and a sense of "unfilteredness" (Abidin, 2017, p. 7), which Abidin (p. 1) refers to as "calibrated amateurism" and can lead followers to perceive them as authentic. In contrast, traditional celebrities tend to uphold a professional image, predominantly sharing aspects related to their occupation with audiences (Eyal et al., 2020).

Second, unlike traditional celebrities (Eyal et al., 2020), SMIs often engage in self-disclosure, highlighting vulnerable aspects of their personality (Wang & Picone, 2023), which can foster source authenticity (Nah, 2022). Relatedly, SMIs, who draw their celebrity

capital from their strong community affiliation (Brooks et al., 2021), are frequently described as more approachable and responsive than traditional celebrities (Xu et al., 2023), which may also strengthen perceptions of source authenticity.

Third, SMIs' origin of fame is rooted in self-branding, which is described as the "conscious construction of a self-image to produce cultural or material profit" (van Nuenen, 2016, p. 194) and is aimed at conveying a public image that is unique (Whitmer, 2019) and largely achieved without mediation by institutional gatekeepers (Khamis et al., 2017). Conversely, traditional celebrities tend to profit from the presence of "commoditized third parties" such as agents (Xu et al., 2023, p. 371), who often manage their media image. The influence of these parties may diminish perceived source authenticity, as audiences may sense a disparity between the manufactured image and their true selves, leading traditional celebrities to be perceived as less authentic than SMIs (e.g., Zhu et al., 2022).

3 | GENUINE ADVOCATES OF THE CAUSE? AUTHENTIC SOURCES AND THEIR ENDORSEMENTS

Audiences may consequently expect authentic sources like SMIs to engage in authentic behavior and endorse brands and causes which they genuinely support. Accordingly, research in marketing has shown that consumers tend to associate altruistic motives with SMIs' (for-profit) endorsements—despite SMIs' often commercial intent (Aw & Chuah, 2021). Inspired by a popular definition of brand authenticity (Moulard et al., 2016, p. 423), we describe the perceived authenticity of endorsements as the perception that endorsers are intrinsically motivated "in that they are passionate about and devoted to" the cause or product they promote. Here, we postulate that SMIs' endorsements may not only be perceived as genuine as a result of possible endorser-topic fit (del Mar Garcia de los Salmones et al., 2013; Naderer, 2023), but also because SMIs may themselves be considered highly authentic for the reasons described above (see also Gräve & Bartsch, 2022).

This argumentation draws on meaning transfer theory, which was developed to address the concern that source credibility theory and related conceptual work may not be sufficient to explain the success of celebrity endorsements (McCracken, 1989). Meaning transfer theory postulates that consumers link traits and symbolic values that they connect with endorsers to the brands or products which the latter promote (McCracken, 1989). For instance, if a celebrity who advertises a brand is seen as classy, consumers may make similar inferences about the brand, which consequently affects their buying behavior (Batra & Homer, 2004). Such a "rub-off effect" was also observed for authenticity in a study by Park et al. (2021), who found that perceptions of SMI authenticity positively affected purchase intentions through brand authenticity. Yet, when ostensibly authentic SMIs or celebrities engage in political issue advocacy, the issue itself can arguably not be seen as 'authentic' in the sense of the definition above. Still, audiences may "form cognitive associations between the celebrity and the political message" or endorsement (Friedrich & Nitsch, 2019, p. 4877). Recipients may

consequently expect an authentic source to endorse a cause out of genuine interest rather than strategic or self-serving motives (Manning et al., 2017). In this context, the meaning associated with the endorser (here: authenticity) then transfers to the endorsement itself, rather than to a product or brand.

4 | PERCEIVED AUTHENTICITY OF ENDORSEMENTS AND MESSAGE EFFECTIVENESS

In turn, the perceived authenticity of endorsements becomes "critical to the success of a [non-profit] campaign," influencing how political mobilization by popular personalities affects young people's participation (Schartel Dunn & Nisbett, 2023, p. 566). We advance a serial mediation process: We hypothesize that SMIs may be perceived as more authentic than celebrities, impacting the perceived authenticity of endorsements, which consequently reduces reactance to messages and makes compliance with mobilizing appeals more likely (Tukachinsky Forster et al., 2023). In research on for-profit marketing, Gräve and Bartsch (2022) showed a similar mechanism explaining positive product evaluations in response to SMIs' endorsements with low perceived manipulative intent of the sponsored content, which they ascribed to the ostensibly authentic self-portrayal of SMIs. Accordingly, we pose the following hypothesis postulating a serial mediation (see Figure 1) of mobilizing messages by SMIs on participation intentions and behavior via source and endorsement authenticity:

> **H2** Mobilizing political messages by SMIs have a stronger effect on young people's political (a) participation intentions and (b) behavior than those of traditional celebrities due to higher perceived authenticity attributed to SMIs and, consequently, their mobilizing appeals.

5 | STUDY OVERVIEW

To test our hypotheses, we conducted three online experiments in Germany in April 2022[1] and March 2024. All experiments were approved by the ethical commission of KU Leuven [G-2022-4768-R2(MIN), G-2023-7464-R3(MIN)]. The supplementary data of all studies, including a copy of the pre-registration of the first study, are available on OSF: https://osf.io/uytnh/. Our three studies and their goals are summarized in Table A1 in the Appendix. The main purpose of Study 1 was to test H1a, investigating the general effectiveness of mobilizing appeals by popular personalities on social media in a design that employed fake/unknown celebrities and SMIs. With

---

[1]The original (i.e., first) experiment was pre-registered on OSF, but the hypothesized model was simplified in this manuscript. The original experiment additionally considered differences between NGOs and celebrities/SMIs. To reduce the complexity of our model, comparisons between NGOs and the other groups were neither investigated nor reported here. Instead, in the manuscript, we more closely specified the relationship between source authenticity and young people's participation.
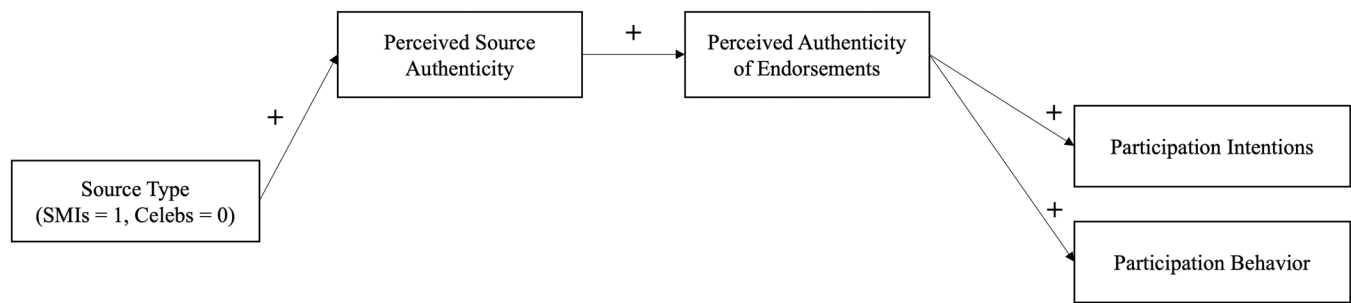
FIGURE 1 Theoretical model (Hypothesis H2).

Study 2 and Study 3, we sought to replicate H1a and test the remaining hypotheses. While we studied participation intentions in Study 1, we additionally investigated actual behavior (clicking a link to a petition) in Study 2 and 3. Using the same fictional personalities from Study 1, we aimed at maximizing internal validity in Study 2 by holding variables such as the number of followers constant between groups. Contrarily, Study 3 maximized external validity, using well-known SMIs and celebrities (but fake mobilizing posts) and letting participants choose personalities whom they truly know and like—which may be important conditions for mobilizing appeals to be impactful (e.g., Pease & Brewer, 2008).

Before the launch of the first experiment, we conducted a pre-test (N = 100), which showed that the fake SMIs and celebrities used in Study 1 and Study 2 were correctly identified, although we did not explicitly label them as such. These personalities were also perceived as similar in terms of perceived attractiveness and likeability across groups (Appendix A1), supporting the internal validity of the study.

6 | STUDY 1

6.1 | Method

To test H1a, we conducted an online experiment in Germany in April 2022. We relied on a 2 (presence of mobilizing appeals) x 2 (source of mobilizing appeals; SMIs vs. celebrities) between-subjects factorial design.[2] Inclusion criteria were informed consent, using at least one social medium as well as age between 16 and 22, representing youth (Kahne et al., 2012).

6.1.1 | Sample

An a-priori power analysis for a linear multiple regression (1 – β = 0.90, α = 0.05) for detecting small to medium effect sizes (see e.g., Knoll &

Matthes, 2017; lowest boundary: $f^2 = 0.06$) resulted in a total sample size of N = 241. Participants were recruited via a private survey company (i.e., TGM research). After data cleaning based on slow response times (i.e., median + 1 SD) and straightlining (i.e., same response across 11 dissimilar items), N = 285 cases remained. The sample (age between 16 and 22; M = 19.74, SD = 1.68; 50.9% women) was educationally diverse with 30.9% of participants in lower or middle secondary, 28.1% in higher secondary, 20.7% in lower or medium tertiary, 11.2% in higher tertiary education, and 9.1% not currently in any of the above forms of education.

6.1.2 | Procedure

Participants were first given definitions for SMIs and celebrities. After answering questions about political predispositions, they were randomly assigned to one of the four groups (SMIs and mobilizing messages n = 65, SMIs and no mobilizing messages n = 72, celebrities and mobilizing messages n = 74, celebrities and no mobilizing messages n = 74). We then exposed respondents to the profile of the respective source and four nonpolitical filler posts. In the mobilizing experimental conditions, we additionally showed participants a mobilizing political message by the respective source type between filler post 3 and 4. Afterwards, the same procedure followed for a profile and posts of an SMI/celebrity of a different gender (order was randomized).[3] We then assessed the dependent variable (i.e., *issue-specific political participation intentions*) using nine items on a 7-point Likert scale (e.g., "I would consider collecting or donating money online for this political issue," M = 3.80, SD = 1.44, α = 0.91; Vissers & Stolle, 2014). Last, participants responded to statements used for the manipulation checks and were debriefed.

6.1.3 | Stimulus material

We based the stimulus material (Appendix A5a) on existing but foreign SMI and celebrity profiles. The use of real posts from real

---

[2]Originally, this was a 2×3 design, with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) as the third source type. To reduce the complexity of our design and to focus on testing the differences in effects between exposure to SMIs and celebrities instead, we only analyzed four out of six conditions.

[3]We exposed participants to two profiles in each case, ensuring that differences between groups would be attributed to the source type rather than to the individual SMI/celebrity. We varied the gender, so that both men and women could identify with a source of the same gender.

profiles served to enhance the external validity of the design, while the use of foreign profiles (and making them seem like German celebrities/SMIs) reduced the potential influence of intervening factors, such as familiarity with popular personalities, their perceived likeability, or parasocial relationships developed with them. Similarly, the political messages were inspired by original political posts from SMIs and celebrities. All posts were presented as screenshots from Instagram, keeping factors such as number of followers constant between groups. The filler posts were chosen based on extant content analyses (i.e., SMIs' focus on private lives showing their own home, celebrities' focus on professional lives such as singing in the recording studio; Eyal et al., 2020; Ferchaud et al., 2018). The subject of the mobilizing messages used in the experiment was the humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan (UNHCR, 2022), urging recipients to sign a petition and, respectively, donate money or food to help the people in the country. Afghanistan was selected as a suitable case despite the ongoing conflict in Ukraine during data collection, as previous research indicates greater mobilization potential on low-salience issues in such situations (Atkinson & DeWitt, 2016).

6.1.4 | Manipulation and randomization checks

To determine whether our manipulation of source type was successful, we used items that explicitly asked for the presence of the different sources (i.e., SMIs, celebrities) and items that were meant to identify differences between them with regard to their origin of fame (Khamis et al., 2017). ANCOVAs showed that participants in each group could discern the source type they were exposed to (Table A2 in the Appendix). Moreover, participants exposed to mobilizing political messages reported having seen mobilizing political content to a higher degree compared to those not exposed to such messages ($b = 30.82$, $SE = 3.51$, $p < 0.001$). Finally, the randomization checks (e.g., regarding political predispositions) turned out successful (Appendix A2, Study 1). Thus, no covariates were included in the analyses.

6.2 | Results

We used multiple regression contrasting the mobilizing political message conditions with the nonpolitical message conditions, while controlling for source type (with the celebrities as the reference group) as well as the interaction between the mean-centered factors. **H1a** was supported, as there was a significant positive link between mobilizing messages and young people's political participation intentions ($b = 0.35$, $SE = 0.17$, $p = 0.043$). However, there was no interaction effect between the presence of mobilizing appeals and source type ($b = 0.07$, $SE = 0.34$, $ß = 0.01$, $p = 0.829$)—suggesting that SMIs' and celebrities' mobilization efforts did not significantly differ in their effectiveness.

6.3 | Discussion

Findings from Study 1 revealed that mobilizing political messages from popular personalities on social media can raise participation intentions in relation to a humanitarian cause, compared to when young people see only lifestyle-related posts from SMIs and celebrities. The theoretical rationale for this relationship is rooted in the civic voluntarism model (Verba et al., 1995), which argues that recruitment is an important predictor of participation behavior and intentions. This link has also been shown in prior research on political celebrity endorsements (e.g., Austin et al., 2008) and in research on SMIs, with studies finding that their messages have the potential to mobilize people to politically participate (Harff & Schmuck, 2023; Naderer, 2023). Yet, this study did not examine the underlying mechanisms of this effect and whether they vary by source, and it only measured intentions to participate, not actual behaviors.

7 | STUDY 2

7.1 | Method

To study effects on actual participation behavior (H1b) in addition to participation intentions and to address the limitations of Study 1, we conducted another experiment in Germany in March/April 2024 with young adults between 18 and 30 (representing young people; Rounsefell et al., 2020). Additionally, we delved further into the mechanisms behind personalities' sway, testing the serial mediation effect hypothesized in H2a and H2b. We manipulated source type (SMIs vs. celebrities vs. a nonpolitical control group), resulting in three experimental groups.

7.1.1 | Sample

We recruited participants via Prolific resulting in $N = 485$ valid responses, who passed two different attention checks ($M_{Age} = 24.54$, $SD_{Age} = 3.37$, 54.64% male, 59% had obtained or studied toward a university/college degree).

7.1.2 | Procedure

We first randomly assigned participants to one of three groups (SMIs' mobilizing message $n = 161$, celebrities' mobilizing message $n = 163$, nonpolitical control group, i.e., profile of a food magazine $n = 161$). Second, respondents were exposed to two nonpolitical filler posts of the respective source. Third, participants in the treatment groups were exposed to a mobilizing political message by the respective source type, while participants in the control group saw another nonpolitical filler post related to food. Note that in the treatment groups, female participants saw a female SMI

or celebrity, while male participants saw a male SMI or celebrity. This choice was made since young people have a strong tendency to select same-gender celebrities as their favorite media personalities (Bui, 2017). Moreover, showing only one profile helps to keep participants attentive and avoid order effects. We then assessed the main dependent variable, which was actual *participation behavior*, measured as a binary variable. Since the celebrities and SMIs in the posts promoted a (fake) petition, we gave participants the choice to click on a link to sign the petition or to proceed to the next page instead. Both options were also presented to the people in the control group. If they clicked on the link, participants were thanked for showing their willingness to sign the petition.[4] Then, participants in the treatment groups filled out questions in relation to their perception of the personality as well as of the endorsement (e.g., perceived source authenticity, perceived authenticity of the endorsement). We then assessed participants' participation intentions to further support the cause and included manipulation checks before thanking and debriefing them.

7.1.3 | Stimulus material

Profiles were based on the same real but foreign celebrity and SMI accounts that were used in Study 1. Factors such as the likes on posts or the number of followers of an account were not only kept constant between groups, but also between genders (i.e., the male SMI profile had the same number of followers as the female SMI profile). The essence of the mobilizing appeal was kept the same as in Study 1 (call to help Afghani people) but updated to be in line with recent developments in this country (Appendix A5b). In the nonpolitical condition, we used a real profile and real posts of a prominent German food magazine (essen&trinken). We manipulated the profile to feature the same number of followers as the accounts in the treatment groups. The three posts in the control group were all nonpolitical and featured recipes or news about published print versions of the magazine. These posts were slightly adapted so that factors such as the post's number of likes were comparable across groups.

7.1.4 | Measures

Mediators
We first measured *perceived source authenticity* using eight items (e.g., "This person is an authentic person," $M = 3.57$, SD = 1.00, $\alpha = 0.88$; Xu et al., 2023) and then the *perceived authenticity of endorsements* using four items (e.g., "This person gives me the feeling that he/she really backs this cause," $M = 4.34$, SD = 1.44, $\alpha = 0.94$; Lee & Eastin, 2021) on a 7-point Likert scale.

---

[4]As part of the debriefing, participants were given further information about actual petitions they could sign to support the cause.

Dependent variables
Participation behavior was measured as a binary variable. Inspired by previous research (McEntire et al., 2015), we assessed participants' engagement with a petition by recording whether they clicked on a link that would supposedly lead them to the petition (recorded in the embedded data; 0 = link not clicked; 1 = link clicked; 24.95% link clicks in total). *Issue-specific political participation intentions* ($M = 3.09$, SD = 1.40, $\alpha = 0.92$) were again measured toward the end of the survey, using ten items.

7.1.5 | Manipulation and randomization checks

Manipulation checks indicated that participants were able to recall which source type they had seen and whether they had been exposed to a political post (Table A3 in the Appendix). Randomization checks for general variables such as age, education and gender indicated that groups were similar in these regards (Appendix A2, Study 2).

7.1.6 | Data analysis

To test H1a, we ran a multiple regression with dummy-coded variables with the control group as reference group. To test H1b, using participation behavior as a dependent variable, we ran logistic regression analysis. Testing H2a and H2b, we ran two path models investigating the indirect effect of source type and participation intentions/behavior through the authenticity variables. The choice of the estimator (maximum likelihood for H2a and diagonally weighted least squares for H2b; Brown, 2006) was determined based on the scale level of the dependent variable. We used 95% bias-corrected and accelerated bootstrap confidence intervals based on 1000 bootstrap samples to determine presence of indirect effects. Since participants were exposed to SMIs/celebrities of their own gender, we performed multi-group analysis with the pooled data.

7.2 | Results

Regarding **H1a**, we found that neither participants in the celebrity condition ($b = -0.20$, SE = 0.16, $p = 0.205$) nor respondents in the SMI condition ($b = -0.21$, SE = 0.16, $p = 0.175$) indicated higher participation intentions than people in the control group. In the multi-group analysis, results were also not significant. Thus, H1a was rejected.

In relation to **H1b**, we found that, overall, participants in the celebrity ($b = 0.32$, SE = 0.26, $p = 0.217$) and the SMI condition ($b = 0.31$, SE = 0.26, $p = 0.241$) were not significantly more likely than respondents in the control group to click the petition link. However, multi-group analysis revealed that men were significantly more likely to click on the link when they were exposed to a post from a celebrity than if they were in the control group ($b = 0.50$, SE = 0.22, $p = 0.025$). Thus, H1b was partially supported.

Contrary to **H2a**, we found that celebrities were perceived as more authentic than SMIs ($b = -0.34$, $SE = 0.11$, $p = 0.002$). As expected, source authenticity predicted higher endorsement authenticity ($b = 0.91$, $SE = 0.06$, $p < 0.001$), which was linked with higher participation intentions ($b = 0.33$, $SE = 0.06$, $p < 0.001$). We also found a significant serial mediation effect of exposure to mobilizing messages of celebrities and participation intentions through source and endorsement authenticity ($b = -0.10$, $SE = 0.04$, 95% CIs [-0.19, -0.05]). However, multi-group analysis revealed this serial mediation effect only for men ($b = -0.13$, $SE = 0.05$, 95% CIs [-0.26, -0.06]). Overall, H2a was rejected.

Regarding **H2b**, we found a significant relationship between perceived authenticity of endorsements and participation behavior ($b = 0.26$, $SE = 0.06$, $p < 0.001$). The serial mediation effect of celebrities' mobilizing messages on participation behavior via source and endorsement authenticity was also confirmed ($b = -0.08$, $SE = 0.03$, 95% CIs [-0.16, -0.03]). In the multi-group model, we found the serial mediation effect for men ($b = -0.09$, $SE = 0.05$, 95% CIs [-0.20, -0.02] and for women ($b = -0.07$, $SE = 0.04$, 95% CIs [-0.19, -0.04]). We additionally found a direct link between exposure to the SMI and participation behavior for women when source and endorsement authenticity were held constant ($b = 0.43$, $SE = 0.21$, $p = 0.043$). Overall, H2b could not be supported.

7.3 | Discussion

Study 2 does not support the overall mobilizing potential of SMIs and celebrities found in Study 1. Yet, in contrast to Study 1, we did not compare the absence and presence of mobilization appeals, but instead compared the mobilization of SMIs and celebrities with an unrelated control group. The fact that participants were asked to sign a petition (i.e., the actual behavior measure) in the control group as well may have been understood as a call for participation in itself that could have spilled over to the questions on participation intentions, explaining the less visible differences in this study. However, we did find some gender-specific effects: Young men displayed higher participation behavior when they were confronted with a mobilizing appeal from a celebrity than when they were exposed to a lifestyle post (i.e., control group; see Figure 2, Panel B). In line with meaning transfer theory, we found a subsequent serial mediation through source authenticity and endorsement authenticity. A reason for this finding could be that men may inherently associate the ascription 'influencer' with more adverse qualities, such as an intent to persuade, which they do not associate to the same extent with celebrities (De Veirman et al., 2024). Such negative connotations could potentially impact authenticity judgments of an unfamiliar SMI and his endorsements, rendering their mobilizing appeals comparably less effective. Additionally, we found a direct effect of mobilization by an SMI on participation behavior among women, which was not explained via source or endorsement authenticity and points to additional underlying processes not investigated in this study.

8 | STUDY 3

8.1 | Method

Essentially, Study 3 was a replication of Study 2, but we this time relied on real profiles, with which (most) participants were familiar. In this experiment, we again relied on a design with three groups.

8.1.1 | Sample

We strove for the same sample size as in Study 2. We collected $N = 463$ valid responses from young adults (between 18 to 30 years old) in Germany in March/April 2024 ($M_{Age} = 24.50$, $SD_{Age} = 3.29$, 52.70% male). Again, participants in the sample were relatively highly educated (61.55% had a university/college degree or were in the process of obtaining it).

8.1.2 | Procedure

Following some sociodemographic questions, participants were randomly assigned to one of three groups (SMIs and mobilizing messages $n = 142$, celebrities and mobilizing messages $n = 158$, nonpolitical control group/ food magazine $n = 163$). In the treatment groups, and based on their gender, participants were asked to select an SMI/a celebrity from a list (see a full list in Appendix A5c). For example, female participants assigned to the celebrity group were provided with the names of five female celebrities and were asked to select the person whom they knew best and liked most. If they did not know any name on the list, a personality was randomly assigned to them ($n = 34$). The SMIs and celebrities on the list all had at least one million followers on Instagram. We also ensured that these lists were heterogenous: For example, the list of female celebrities included models, a TV presenter, and a singer. Participants in the treatment groups then answered some general questions about the person and were afterwards shown the stimulus post. Like in Study 2, all participants were then asked to either click on a link to sign the petition or proceed to the next page. Both options were also presented to the people in the control group, who had previously been exposed to an unrelated nonpolitical post. Further participation intentions were again assessed, before participants responded to statements used for the manipulation checks and were, in a last step, thanked and debriefed.

8.1.3 | Stimulus material

In essence, the same mobilizing appeal as in Study 2 was used. Moreover, account details were changed to look as if the personality whom participants had selected (or had been assigned to) had posted it. For instance, male participants who chose footballer Toni Kroos consequently saw a mobilizing message from him (see Appendix A5c for examples). The stimulus post was—aside from the account name and profile picture—not only identical between but also within the treatment groups. Meanwhile, the profiles of these personalities
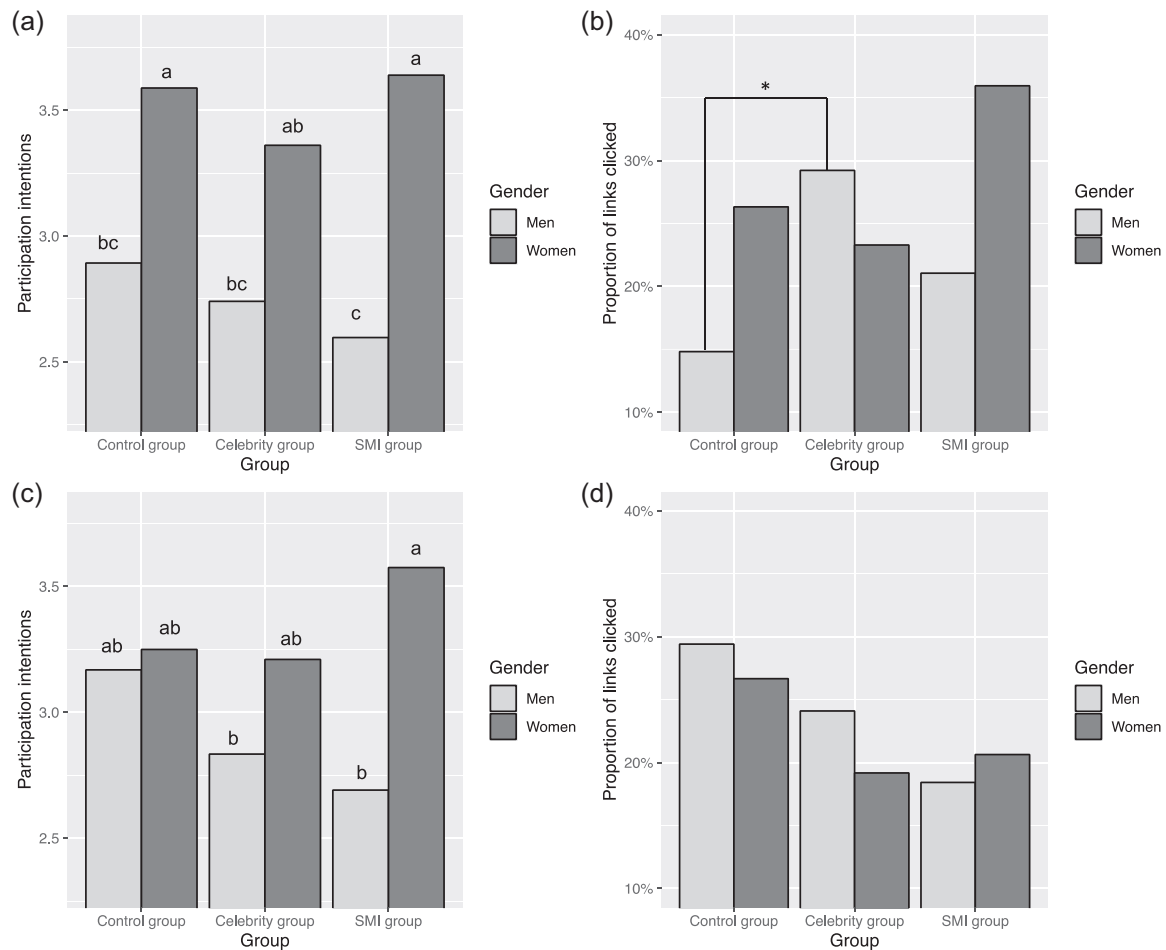
FIGURE 2 Mean differences between groups in participation (Study 2 and 3). Panels a and b show results from Study 2, panels c and d show findings from Study 3. ANOVA-based results: Panel a, $F(5, 475) = 8.18$, $p < 0.001$; Panel c, $F(5, 454) = 4.08$, $p = 0.001$. Different letters indicate significant differences between groups. Panel b and d show the proportion of link-clicks per group. In Study 2 (Panel b), higher link clicks were registered among men in the celebrity group than in the control group ($b = 0.50$, $SE = 0.22$, $p = 0.025$).

remained largely unchanged, except that the link to the petition was added in the Instagram bios.

8.1.4 | Measures

Mediators
The same mediators as in Study 2 were used, namely *perceived source authenticity* ($M = 4.50$, $SD = 0.97$, $\alpha = 0.88$) as well as *perceived authenticity of endorsements* ($M = 4.83$, $SD = 1.46$, $\alpha = 0.93$), and were measured in the same order as in Study 2.

Dependent variables
Like in Study 2, *participation behavior* was measured as a binary variable, assessing whether or not participants clicked on the petition link (23.54% link clicks in total). *Issue-specific political participation intentions* ($M = 3.11$, $SD = 1.36$, $\alpha = 0.91$), were also again measured, using the same items as in Study 2.

8.1.5 | Manipulation and randomization checks

The manipulation checks were again successful (Table A4 in the Appendix) and there were no differences on variables such as education, age, and prior familiarity with the popular personalities between groups (Appendix A2, Study 3).

8.1.6 | Data analysis

The same data analysis methods were used as in Study 2. To determine significance of indirect effects, we again used 95% bias-corrected and accelerated bootstrap confidence intervals based on 1000 bootstrap samples.[5]

---

[5]Please note that the data analysis approach was identical to the one adopted in Study 2.

8.2 | Results

Neither participants in the celebrity condition ($b = -0.19$, $SE = 0.15$, $p = 0.216$) nor respondents in the SMI condition ($b = -0.11$, $SE = 0.16$, $p = 0.497$) indicated higher participation intentions than people in the control group. Multi-group analysis showed that male participants in the SMI condition even indicated significantly lower participation intentions than those in the control group ($b = -0.48$, $SE = 0.21$, $p = 0.024$). Thus, **H1a** was rejected.

Mobilization by a celebrity ($b = -0.26$, $SE = 0.26$, $p = 0.321$) or an SMI ($b = -0.44$, $SE = 0.27$, $p = 0.109$) also did not result in higher actual participation behavior compared to the control group. There were also no differences between conditions in the multi-group analysis, leading us to reject **H1b**.

Regarding **H2a**, we found that exposure to SMIs and celebrities did not differentially affect perceived source authenticity ($b = 0.03$, $SE = 0.11$, $p = 0.791$). Yet, again as expected, perceived source authenticity predicted higher endorsement authenticity ($b = 0.51$, $SE = 0.08$, $p < 0.001$), which was linked to higher participation intentions ($b = 0.36$, $SE = 0.05$, $p < 0.001$). Yet, we found no serial mediation effect ($b = 0.01$, $SE = 0.02$, 95% CIs [−0.04, 0.05]).[6]

However, the multi-group analysis revealed that men considered SMIs significantly more authentic than celebrities ($b = 0.30$, $SE = 0.14$, $p = 0.037$). Consequently, for men, the indirect effect of mobilizing messages by SMIs on participation intentions via perceived source authenticity and endorsement authenticity was also significant ($b = 0.03$, $SE = 0.02$, 95% CIs [0.01, 0.10]). Therefore, **H2a** was partially supported. Yet, we also found that, despite SMIs' advantage in source authenticity, mobilizing messages by celebrities were perceived as more authentic than those of SMIs when source authenticity was held constant ($b = -0.88$, $SE = 0.21$, $p < 0.001$), resulting in a strong mediation effect of mobilizing messages by celebrities on participation intentions directly via perceived authenticity of endorsements ($b = -0.19$, $SE = 0.08$, 95% CIs [−0.40, −0.06]). Among women, celebrities' mobilizing messages predicted higher participation intentions through source authenticity and endorsement authenticity ($b = -0.09$, $SE = 0.05$, 95% CIs [−0.26, −0.02]). Yet, we also found a direct positive link between source type and participation intentions ($b = 0.57$, $SE = 0.21$, $p = 0.005$), that is, young women were more intent to sign the petition following exposure to an SMI post than an appeal from a celebrity when both authenticity variables were held constant.

Regarding **H2b**, we found that endorsement authenticity significantly predicted political behavior ($b = 0.19$, $SE = 0.06$, $p = 0.002$). Yet, no serial mediation was found ($b = 0.00$, $SE = 0.01$, 95% CIs [−0.02, 0.03]). In the multi-group analysis, celebrities' mobilizing messages predicted higher participation behavior through source authenticity and endorsement authenticity among women ($b = -0.08$, $SE = 0.05$, 95% CIs [−0.19, −0.06]). Overall, H2b was also rejected.

---

[6]We additionally ran multilevel models (see OSF), in which random effects were controlled (controlling for different endorsers selected within each group). In these analyses, the directionality of relationships in relation to H1a and H1b was largely confirmed.

8.3 | Discussion

Analogous to Study 2, Study 3 did not confirm an overall mobilization effect of popular personalities presumably due to the same reasons discussed in Study 2. Yet, we again observed gender-specific effects: Among men, SMIs' mobilization resulted in the lowest participation intentions. When comparing the source types, we found that although men perceived the real-world SMIs as slightly more authentic than celebrities, they rated celebrities' *endorsements* as clearly more authentic than those of SMIs (see also Figure 3, Panel D), which led to an overall stronger effect on participation intentions.

Among women, we found a serial mediation effect of real-world celebrities' endorsements on participation intention and behavior via source and endorsement authenticity, which matches the effects among men in Study 2. Yet, as in Study 2, we also found a direct mobilizing effect of SMIs among women (albeit on participation intentions rather than behavior) that could not be attributed to source and endorsement authenticity.

9 | GENERAL DISCUSSION

This study examined the mobilizing power of political messages from popular personalities, namely SMIs and celebrities. We tested perceived source and endorsement authenticity as a serial mediating mechanism explaining variations in young people's participation (intentions) in response to personalities' mobilizing appeals. In line with the civic voluntarism model (Verba et al., 1995), Study 1 confirmed the general recruitment potential of popular personalities for political causes, corroborating research on political endorsements by celebrities (e.g., Austin et al., 2008) and SMIs (e.g., Naderer, 2023). Yet, these effects were only visible when the presence of mobilizing appeals was manipulated in the *same* accounts. When comparing SMIs and celebrities to each other and to a control group with lifestyle content (Study 2 and 3), we did not find general effects, highlighting that popular personalities' influence should also not be overstated and -estimated.

However, we did observe significant gender-specific results. Our findings indicate that young men may be more likely to be persuaded by celebrities than by SMIs to politically participate. Study 3 suggests that seeing mobilizing appeals from real SMIs even seems to backfire among men, as male SMIs' *endorsements* were perceived as considerably less authentic than the mobilizing messages by male celebrities, potentially explaining why their issue advocacy was overall comparably unsuccessful (relative to the control group). This point hints at a broader issue that (male) SMIs may face when posting about political issues: Even when they are seen as *personally* authentic, their non-profit endorsements can still be seen as comparably inauthentic. This finding simultaneously implies that factors other than source authenticity may determine whether young men believe that an endorser is expressing heartfelt support for a cause. One central factor in this context might be topic-endorser fit (Naderer, 2023), which was also assessed in Study 3 as a control
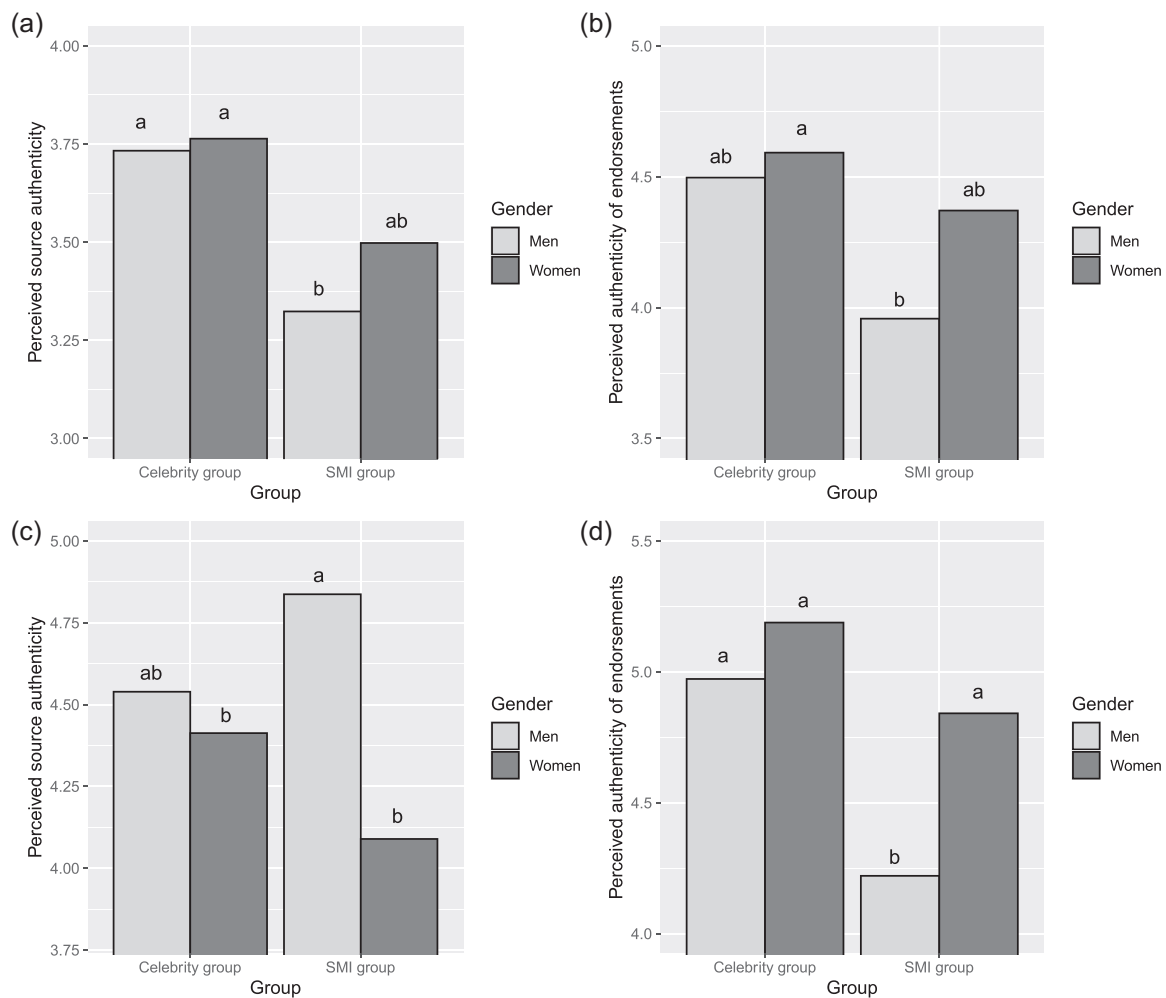
FIGURE 3 Mean differences between groups in authenticity variables (Study 2 and 3). Note. Panels a and b show results from Study 2, panels c and d show findings from Study 3. ANOVA-based results: Panel a, $F(3, 320) = 3.56$, $p = 0.015$; Panel b, $F(3, 320) = 3.25$, $p = 0.022$; Panel c, $F(3, 296) = 6.50$, $p < 0.001$; Panel d, $F(3, 296) = 6.83$, $p < 0.001$. Different letters indicate significant differences between groups.

variable. This variable was higher among celebrities than SMIs and correlated with perceived authenticity of endorsements (Table A5 in the Appendix), which aligns with research finding a positive relationship between endorser-organization fit and perceptions of endorsers' altruistic motivation (del Mar Garcia de los Salmones et al., 2013). Since political engagement by SMIs is still rare (Gonzalez et al., 2024) and has only become prominent in recent years (Newman et al., 2023), young men may not yet be used to seeing political posts from these figures. Additionally, due to SMIs' high commercial orientation, they may believe that their cause-oriented political engagement is not necessarily guided by intrinsic motives. Political celebrity activism, on the other hand, may be something that young men are quite familiar with—leading them to not only evaluate endorsements of those celebrities more favorably whom they do not know (Study 2), but to also follow suit with their appeals.

When looking at young women, we first and foremost also saw the meaning transfer model confirmed for endorsements of real-world celebrities. However, in addition, we found female SMIs (relative to female celebrities) to directly raise participation behavior

(Study 2) and participation intentions (Study 3) among young women *without* authenticity perceptions as intermediaries (see also Figure 4). Thus, other factors might render their messages effective: Enke and Borchers (2019, p. 264) note that SMIs signal "accessibility" and "establish affective connections" with their audiences—qualities that may also positively influence female followers' responsiveness to SMIs' calls for participation in the context of their support of a humanitarian cause (Centeno, 2010). Similarly, research has argued that young women look for "egalitarian relationships" with popular personalities (Gleason et al., 2017, p. 2): The notion that SMIs are attainable might then explain why their messages are more appealing to women than celebrities' posts when both authenticity variables are held constant (Enke & Borchers, 2019). Conversely, men place importance on role models' ability to act as authority figures (Gleason et al., 2017), which could clarify why celebrities, who may correspond more closely with an image of authority, are somewhat more effective endorsers among young men than SMIs.

Our findings also show that source authenticity cannot clearly be associated with one source type or the other. Although SMIs strive
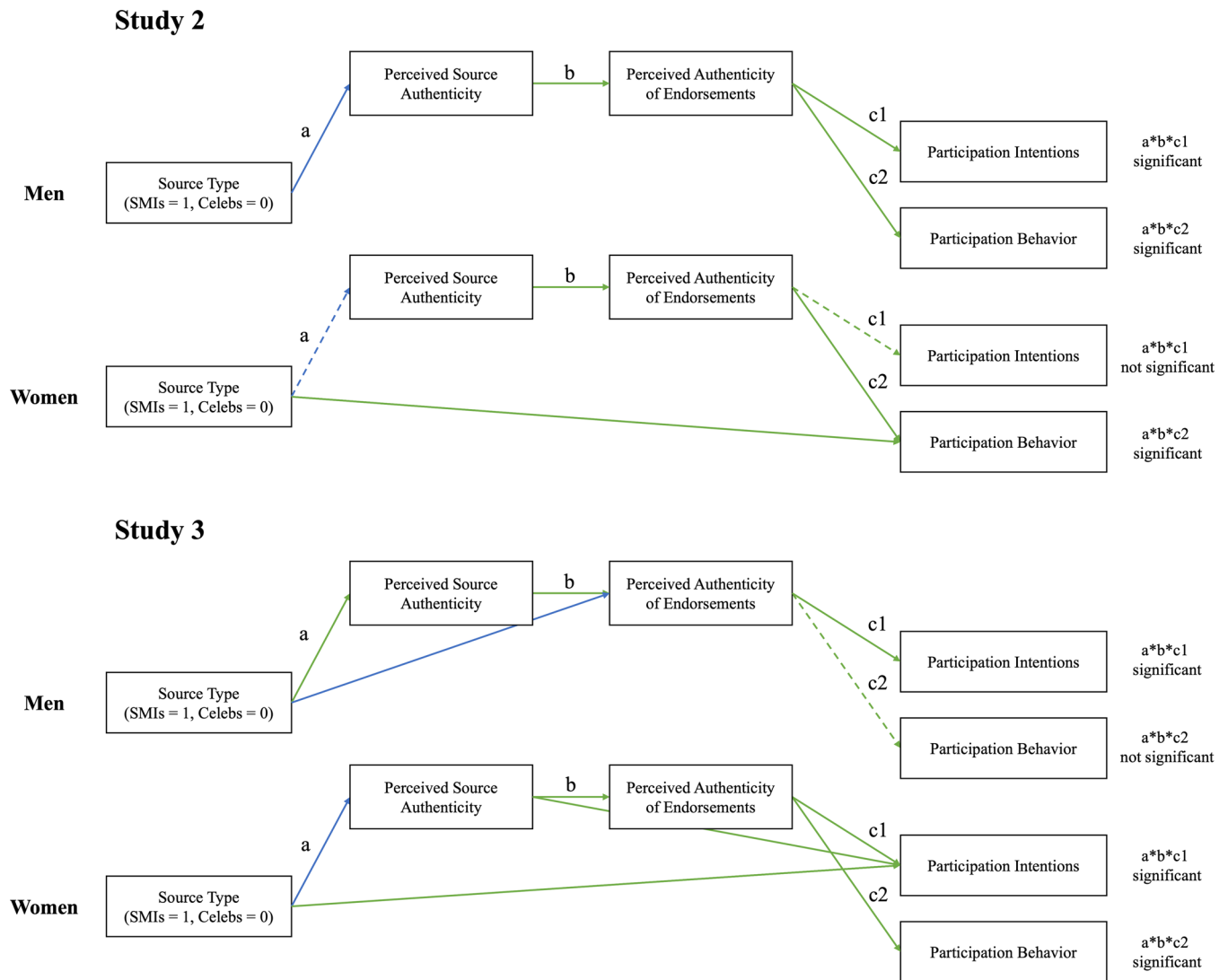
FIGURE 4 Schematic model of study results in relation to H2 (Study 2 and 3). Note. All full lines indicate significant relationships between variables. Dotted lines indicate that hypothesized relationships were not significant. Blue lines indicate negative associations, while green lines indicate positive associations between variables. Letters indicate the different paths of the serial mediation. On the right side, we list which of the mediations were significant.

for authenticity (e.g., Zhu et al., 2022), these studies insinuate that they may not always be more successful in achieving this goal (see also Xu et al., 2023). We suppose that young people may also often deem celebrities authentic, for example when they are able to convey a coherent image of professionality (Moulard et al., 2015) or adopt micro-celebrity techniques to appeal to fans. Moreover, exploiting the manifold affordances of social media, traditional celebrities can draw from "the [same] tactics of authenticity ostensibly embodied by the SMI" (Hearn & Schoenhoff, 2016, p. 205). Consequently, communication styles of these two source types might increasingly converge, potentially explaining why we do not find consistent and congruent differences in source authenticity between the source types. Last, perceptions of this trait may also again be gender-dependent: While female SMIs' self-presentation may seem brushed to recipients (Xu et al., 2023), well-known male SMIs are perceived as

highly authentic, possibly because audiences perceive that they still provide unfiltered insights to their lives and handle their social media independently of third parties.

9.1 | Limitations and future research

In Study 1 and 2, the use of fake SMIs and celebrities differed from real social media settings, where people may primarily see political posts from familiar individuals. Yet, this setup enabled us to hold all factors aside from the ones manipulated constant between groups, ensuring high internal validity. In contrast, in Study 3, participants were asked to select their favorite personalities (well-known SMIs and celebrities) from lists. Differences between personalities regarding manifest characteristics (e.g., follower

count) and perceived traits (e.g., likability) may have lowered the internal validity of this study. Yet, to investigate whether prior knowledge about popular personalities may be an important condition under which their mobilizing appeals are effective, it can be valuable to use designs with real personalities. Future research should also systematically explore how factors like follower count impact perceptions of source authenticity, which may, following our model, highlight the added value of micro- or nano-SMIs to humanitarian campaigns (Park et al., 2021).

Moreover, although we think that the hypothesized causal order is more theoretically sound, we acknowledge the possibility that the relationship between source and endorsement authenticity could be reversed, as both variables were assessed after stimulus exposure. The directionality of the relationships between the mediators, but also between the mediators and the dependent variable, should be further investigated in longitudinal studies (Coenen, 2022).

Last, in Study 2 and 3, participants in the control group may have perceived the petition (which was our proxy for participation behavior) as a mobilizing call from the researchers of the study, which may potentially explain why we did not find differences between the control groups and the treatment groups in the pooled analyses in Study 2 and 3.

9.2 | Implications

Notwithstanding these limitations, our study has noteworthy implications. As the first study to compare mobilizing political messages from these source types, we show that SMIs and celebrities can function as recruiters for political participation, although their influence might be somewhat limited—at least after single exposure to a mobilizing appeal. Yet, SMIs and celebrities serve as a viable alternative to less visible online sources of political mobilization (such as NGOs). This study further extends prior insights by explaining why popular personalities' mobilizing appeals can be efficient. Source authenticity may indeed influence participation intentions and behavior through perceived authenticity of endorsements, which may constitute grounds for a promising theoretical model to adopt in future research. Yet, the direct impact of female SMIs, uncovered in both Study 2 and Study 3, shows that other factors explaining personalities' influence still have to be revealed, while additional variables such as topic-endorser fit (del Mar Garcia de los Salmones et al., 2013) may influence participation through perceived authenticity of endorsements.

Our study also has methodological implications: By using two different experimental setups in this study—one with fake personalities and one with real ones—we point to the importance of making careful design choices, as effects may vary depending on the selection of real-world and fictitious figures. Yet, despite different experimental setups, the gender differences in relation to the effectiveness of the different source types as well as much of the

serial mediation process theorized in this article are corroborated in both Study 2 and Study 3, offering relevant implications for follow-up research.

Last, our research indicates that endorsers' familiarity is not essential for their effectiveness, while accounting for gender differences is important, which should be considered in strategic collaborations between political actors like NGOs or politicians with SMIs and celebrities.

ORCID

Darian Harff http://orcid.org/0000-0002-4354-2198
Desiree Schmuck http://orcid.org/0000-0002-9492-6052

REFERENCES

Abidin, C. (2017). # familygoals: Family influencers, calibrated amateurism, and justifying young digital labor. *Social Media+ Society*, *3*(2), 2056305117707191. https://doi.org/10.1177/2056305117707191

Atkinson, M. D., & DeWitt, D. (2016). Celebrity political endorsements matter. *Celebrity Studies*, *7*(1), 119–121. https://doi.org/10.1080/19392397.2016.1131014

Austin, E. W., Vord, R. V., Pinkleton, B. E., & Epstein, E. (2008). Celebrity endorsements and their potential to motivate young voters. *Mass Communication and Society*, *11*(4), 420–436. https://doi.org/10.1080/15205430701866600

Aw, E. C. X., & Chuah, S. H. W. (2021). Stop the unattainable ideal for an ordinary me!" fostering parasocial relationships with social media influencers: The role of self-discrepancy. *Journal of Business Research*, *132*, 146–157. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2021.04.025

Balaban, D. C., & Szambolics, J. (2022). A proposed model of self-perceived authenticity of social media influencers. *Media and Communication*, *10*(1), 235–246. https://doi.org/10.17645/mac.v10i1.4765

Batra, R., & Homer, P. M. (2004). The situational impact of brand image beliefs. *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, *14*(3), 318–330. https://doi.org/10.1207/s15327663jcp1403_12

Berryman, R., & Kavka, M. (2017). 'I guess a lot of people see me as a big sister or a friend': The role intimacy in the celebrification of beauty vloggers. *Journal of Gender Studies*, *26*(3), 307–320. https://doi.org/10.1080/09589236.2017.1288611

Brooks, G., Drenten, J., & Piskorski, M. J. (2021). Influencer celebrification: How social media influencers acquire celebrity capital. *Journal of

Advertising, 50(5), 528–547. https://doi.org/10.1080/00913367.2021.1977737

Brown, T. (2006). *Confirmatory factor analysis for applied research.* Guildford.

Bui, N. H. (2017). Exploring similarity characteristics, identification, and parasocial interactions in choice of celebrities. *Psychology of Popular Media Culture, 6*(1), 21–31. https://doi.org/10.1037/ppm0000082

Centeno, D. D. G. (2010). Celebrification in Philippine politics: Exploring the relationship between celebrity endorser's parasociability and the public's voting behavior. *Social Science Diliman, 6*(1), 66–85.

Coenen, L. (2022). The indirect effect is omitted variable bias. A cautionary note on the theoretical interpretation of products-of-coefficients in mediation analyses. *European Journal of Communication, 37*(6), 679–688. https://doi.org/10.1177/02673231221082244

Dekoninck, H., & Schmuck, D. (2022). The mobilizing power of influencers for pro-environmental behavior intentions and political participation. *Environmental Communication, 16*(4), 458–472. https://doi.org/10.1080/17524032.2022.2027801

Enke, N., & Borchers, N. S. (2019). Social media influencers in strategic communication: A conceptual framework for strategic social media influencer communication. *International Journal of Strategic Communication, 13*(4), 261–277. https://doi.org/10.1080/1553118X.2019.1620234

Eyal, K., Te'eni-Harari, T., & Katz, K. (2020). A content analysis of teen-favored celebrities' posts on social networking sites: Implications for parasocial relationships and fame-valuation. *Cyberpsychology: Journal of Psychosocial Research on Cyberspace, 14*(2), 7. https://doi.org/10.5817/CP2020-2-7

Ferchaud, A., Grzeslo, J., Orme, S., & LaGroue, J. (2018). Parasocial attributes and YouTube personalities: Exploring content trends across the most subscribed YouTube channels. *Computers in Human Behavior, 80*, 88–96. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2017.10.041

Forster, R. T., Vendemia, M. A., Journeay, J. M., & Downey, S. E. (2023). Mixing parasocial friendship with business: The effect of sponsorship disclosure timing in vlogs. *Journal of Media Psychology, 35*(4), 241–252. https://doi.org/10.1027/1864-1105/a000362

Friedrich, K., & Nitsch, C. (2019). Celebrity political endorsement and young voters in Europe: A five-country comparison on celebrity support effectiveness in the European elections. *International Journal of Communication, 13*, 4874–4894. https://ijoc.org/index.php/ijoc/article/view/11100

Frizzell, C. (2011). Public opinion and foreign policy: The effects of celebrity endorsements. *The Social Science Journal, 48*(2), 314–323. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.soscij.2010.12.002

Gayle, D. (2018). Social media influencer urges young people to protest over environment. *The Guardian.* https://bit.ly/3CwtBuu

Gleason, T. R., Theran, S. A., & Newberg, E. M. (2017). Parasocial interactions and relationships in early adolescence. *Frontiers in Psychology, 8*, 246529. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2017.00255

Gonzalez, A., Schmuck, D., & Vandenbosch, L. (2024). Posting and framing politics: a content analysis of celebrities', athletes', and influencers' Instagram political content. *Information, Communication & Society, 27*(8), 1605–1627. https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2023.2285495

Gräve, J. F., & Bartsch, F. (2022). # Instafame: Exploring the endorsement effectiveness of influencers compared to celebrities. *International Journal of Advertising, 41*(4), 591–622. https://doi.org/10.1080/02650487.2021.1987041

Grynbaum, M. M. (2024). Fox news to Taylor Swift: 'Don't get involved in politics!' *The New York Times.* https://bitly.cx/V8eu

Harff, D., & Schmuck, D. (2023). Influencers as empowering agents? Following political influencers, internal political efficacy and participation among youth. *Political Communication, 40*(2), 147–172. https://doi.org/10.1080/10584609.2023.2166631

Hearn, A., & Schoenhoff, S. (2016). From Celebrity to Influencer: Tracing the diffusion of celebrity value across the data stream. In P. D. Marshall, & S. Redmond (Eds.), *A companion to celebrity* (pp. 194–211). John Wiley & Sons.

Ilicic, J., & Webster, C. (2016). Being true to oneself: Investigating celebrity brand authenticity. *Psychology & Marketing, 33*(6), 410–420. https://doi.org/10.1002/mar.20887

Jackson, D. J. (2018). The effects of celebrity endorsements of ideas and presidential candidates. *Journal of Political Marketing, 17*(4), 301–321. https://doi.org/10.1080/15377857.2018.1501530

John, P., James, O., Moseley, A., Ryan, M., Richardson, L., & Stoker, G. (2019). The impact of peer, politician, and celebrity endorsements on volunteering: A field experiment with English students. *Journal of Nonprofit & Public Sector Marketing, 31*(3), 328–346. https://doi.org/10.1080/10495142.2018.1526743

Kahne, J., Middaugh, E., Lee, N.-J., & Feezell, J. T. (2012). Youth online activity and exposure to diverse perspectives. *New Media & Society, 14*(3), 492–512. https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444811420271

Khamis, S., Ang, L., & Welling, R. (2017). Self-branding, 'micro-celebrity' and the rise of social media influencers. *Celebrity Studies, 8*(2), 191–208. https://doi.org/10.1080/19392397.2016.1218292

Knoll, J., & Matthes, J. (2017). The effectiveness of celebrity endorsements: A meta-analysis. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science, 45*(1), 55–75. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11747-016-0503-8

Lee, J. A., & Eastin, M. S. (2021). Perceived authenticity of social media influencers: Scale development and validation. *Journal of Research in Interactive Marketing, 15*(4), 822–841. https://doi.org/10.1108/JRIM-12-2020-0253

Manning, N., Penfold-Mounce, R., Loader, B. D., Vromen, A., & Xenos, M. (2017). Politicians, celebrities and social media: A case of informalisation? *Journal of Youth Studies, 20*(2), 127–144. https://doi.org/10.1080/13676261.2016.1206867

del Mar Garcia de los Salmones, M., Dominguez, R., & Herrero, A. (2013). Communication using celebrities in the non-profit sector: Determinants of its effectiveness. *International Journal of Advertising, 32*(1), 101–119. https://doi.org/10.2501/IJA-32-1-101-119

McCracken, G. (1989). Who is the celebrity endorser? Cultural foundations of the endorsement process. *Journal of Consumer Research, 16*(3), 310–321. https://www.jstor.org/stable/2489512

McEntire, K. J., Leiby, M., & Krain, M. (2015). Human rights organizations as agents of change: An experimental examination of framing and micromobilization. *American Political Science Review, 109*(3), 407–426. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055415000295

Moulard, J. G., Garrity, C. P., & Rice, D. H. (2015). What makes a human brand authentic? Identifying the antecedents of celebrity authenticity. *Psychology & Marketing, 32*(2), 173–186. https://doi.org/10.1002/mar.20771

Moulard, J. G., Raggio, R. D., & Folse, J. A. G. (2016). Brand authenticity: Testing the antecedents and outcomes of brand management's passion for its products. *Psychology & Marketing, 33*(6), 421–436. https://doi.org/10.1002/mar.20888

Naderer, B. (2023). Influencers as political agents? The potential of an unlikely source to motivate political action. *Communications, 48*(1), 93–111. https://doi.org/10.1515/commun-2021-0006

Nah, H. S. (2022). The appeal of "real" in parasocial interaction: The effect of self-disclosure on message acceptance via perceived authenticity and liking. *Computers in Human Behavior, 134*, 107330. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2022.107330

Newman, N., Fletcher, R., Eddy, K., Robertson, C. T., & Nielsen, R. K. (2023). *Reuters institute digital news report 2023* (12th ed.). Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism. http://bitly.ws/Jfcf

Nownes, A. J. (2012). An experimental investigation of the effects of celebrity support for political parties in the United States. *American Politics Research, 40*(3), 476–500. https://doi.org/10.1177/1532673X11429371

van Nuenen, T. (2016). Here I am: Authenticity and self-branding on travel blogs. *Tourist Studies*, 16(2), 192–212. https://doi.org/10.1177/1468797615594748

Park, J., Lee, J. M., Xiong, V. Y., Septianto, F., & Seo, Y. (2021). David and Goliath: When and why micro-influencers are more persuasive than mega-influencers. *Journal of Advertising*, 50(5), 584–602. https://doi.org/10.1080/00913367.2021.1980470

Pease, A., & Brewer, P. R. (2008). The Oprah factor: The effects of a celebrity endorsement in a presidential primary campaign. *The International Journal of Press/Politics*, 13(4), 386–400. https://doi.org/10.1177/1940161208321948

Rounsefell, K., Gibson, S., McLean, S., Blair, M., Molenaar, A., Brennan, L., Truby, H., & McCaffrey, T. A. (2020). Social media, body image and food choices in healthy young adults: A mixed methods systematic review. *Nutrition & Dietetics: The Journal of the Dietitians Association of Australia*, 77(1), 19–40. https://doi.org/10.1111/1747-0080.12581D

Schartel Dunn, S., & Nisbett, G. S. (2023). When celebrity endorsements collide with social activism: Exploring athlete celebrity endorsements, social issues and brand perception. *International Journal of Sports Marketing and Sponsorship*, 24(3), 558–569. https://doi.org/10.1108/IJSMS-01-2023-0010

Schwaiger, L., Vogler, D., & Eisenegger, M. (2022). Change in news access, change in expectations? How young social media users in Switzerland evaluate the functions and quality of news. *The International Journal of Press/Politics*, 27(3), 609–628. https://doi.org/10.1177/19401612211072787

UNHCR. (2022). *Afghanistan emergency*. UNHCR. https://bitly.cx/nrzzV

Vannini, P., & Franzese, A. (2008). The authenticity of self: Conceptualization, personal experience, and practice. *Sociology Compass*, 2(5), 1621–1637. https://doi.org/10.1111/soco.2008.2.issue-5

De Veirman, M., D'Hooge, S., & Desimpelaere, L. (2024). February 8–9, What's in a name? Unveiling characteristics consumers associate with different popular personalities: Influencers, content creators and celebrities [Conference presentation]. ETMAAL 2024, Rotterdam, the Netherlands. https://www.eur.nl/en/eshcc/media/2024-02-etmaal-2024-program

Verba, S., Schlozman, K. L., & Brady, H. E. (1995). Voice and equality. In *Civic voluntarism in American politics*. Harvard UP.

Vissers, S., Hooghe, M., Stolle, D., & Mahéo, V.-A. (2012). The impact of mobilization media on off-line and online participation: Are mobilization effects medium-specific? *Social Science Computer Review*, 30(2), 152–169. https://doi.org/10.1177/0894439310396485

Vissers, S., & Stolle, D. (2014). The Internet and new modes of political participation: Online versus offline participation. *Information, Communication & Society*, 17(8), 937–955. https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2013.867356

Wang, X., & Picone, I. (2023). The art of attracting attention: A process model of Chinese toubu vloggers' strategies to create online identities and self-brands. *Celebrity Studies*, 14(3), 333–349. https://doi.org/10.1080/19392397.2021.1991408

Weiss, J. (2020). What is youth political participation? Literature review on youth political participation and political attitudes. *Frontiers in Political Science*, 2. Article 1. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpos.2020.00001

Whitmer, J. M. (2019). You are your brand: Self-branding and the marketization of self. *Sociology Compass*, 13(3), e12662. https://doi.org/10.1111/soc4.12662

Xu, Y., Vanden Abeele, M., Hou, M., & Antheunis, M. (2023). Do parasocial relationships with micro- and mainstream celebrities differ? An empirical study testing four attributes of the parasocial relationship. *Celebrity Studies*, 14(3), 366–386. https://doi.org/10.1080/19392397.2021.2006730

Zhu, H., Kim, M., & Choi, Y. K. (2022). Social media advertising endorsement: The role of endorser type, message appeal and brand familiarity. *International Journal of Advertising*, 41(5), 948–969. https://doi.org/10.1080/02650487.2021.1966963

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Additional supporting information can be found online in the Supporting Information section at the end of this article.

How to cite this article: Harff, D., & Schmuck, D. (2024). Is authenticity key? Mobilization by social media influencers versus celebrities and young people's political participation. *Psychology & Marketing*, 1–15. https://doi.org/10.1002/mar.22082