Doctoral Position in Political Communication at the University of Zurich (3+1 years)

The International and Comparative Media Research Group (Prof. Frank Esser) at the Department of Communication and Media Research (IKMZ) is seeking to fill the position of a **doctoral researcher** within the **SNSF-funded project** "**Political Social Media Influencers: An Empirical Investigation into Their Role and Influence on Youth Political Engagement**".

This project investigates the mechanisms through which political social media influencers (PSMIs) affect the political engagement of young people across different countries and media systems. Using cutting-edge computational methods (natural language processing, computer vision, machine learning), alongside panel experiments and data donations, our project aims to map the landscape of PSMIs on platforms like TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube. We seek to understand how these influencers shape political discourse and mobilize young voters across three diverse media environments (Germany, Poland, and the United States). This position offers an exceptional opportunity to contribute to a groundbreaking area of political communication and media research, with significant implications for both academic understanding and practical policy development in digital political communication and youth political engagement.

Your responsibilities

- Develop expertise in computational social science methods, including advanced text analysis with large language models, computer vision, and network analysis, to study political phenomena on social media.
- Acquire detailed knowledge of the literature on political communication, political engagement, social media communication, and information flows.
- Lead subprojects within the larger project framework, focusing on computational text analysis and multi-modal social media analysis to trace and content-analyze political conversations online.
- Assist PIs in coordinating data collection processes across multiple platforms and countries.
- Conduct data analysis and write scientific articles as part of the doctoral dissertation.
- Present findings at international scientific conferences and contribute to high-impact publications.
- Actively participate in the research environment of the Department of Communication and Media Research at the University of Zurich, including its structured PhD program.
- Submit a PhD dissertation within the period of appointment.

Your profile

- Excellent Master's degree in Communication Studies, Political Science, Computer Science, or a related discipline. The certificate is required at start of employment.
- Strong command of R and/or Python, with demonstrable experience in applying these to research projects.
- Keen interest in computational social science methods, including NLP, computer vision, machine learning, or network analysis.

- Strong interest in political communication, comparative media research, social media and politics, public opinion, and mixed method approaches.
- Excellent command of English. Knowledge of German or Polish is an additional asset.
- A scientific mindset, capacity for independent work, strong affinity for collaborative research, project management skills, and enthusiasm for interdisciplinary teamwork.
- Willingness to relocate to Zurich and travel internationally to engage with project-relevant scientific communities.
- Desirable: Previous work experience as a research assistant or in data science roles.

What we offer

- Participation in a cutting-edge research project funded by the Swiss National Science Foundation.
- Excellent resources and working conditions to pursue your doctoral degree within the framework of the project at the Department of Communication and Media Research under the supervision of Prof. Frank Esser.
- Access to state-of-the-art computational resources and datasets.
- Comprehensive training in advanced computational methods and their application to political communication research.
- Funding for conferences, additional specialized training, research stays, and research activities.
- 3 years of employment, plus possible extension of 1 year.
- An internationally competitive salary (salary range between 47,000 CHF in the first year and 50,000 CHF in the third and fourth year).
- A supportive, well-connected, research-oriented team with expertise in both political communication and computational methods.
- An attractive work environment: the University of Zurich is Switzerland's largest university. Zurich is a vibrant, cosmopolitan city that regularly ranks as one of the cities with the highest quality of life in the world.

Start date: The project is already under way and the start date can be flexible, with a preference for as soon as possible.

For informal inquiries and further information, please contact the current project team members Frank Esser (f.esser@uzh.ch) or Christian Pipal (c.pipal@ikmz.uzh.ch).

Please send your application in one pdf file to Dr. Christian Pipal (c.pipal@ikmz.uzh.ch). Applications should be submitted in English and must contain the following elements:

1. Letter of motivation outlining:
   o Your interest in the doctoral position and the research project
   o Your background, research interests, and technical skills
   o How you meet the selection criteria or how you will acquire the required skills
2. CV
3. Copies of degrees and relevant transcripts
4. Contact details of two academic referees who can speak to your academic and technical qualifications
5. One copy of relevant research work (e.g., research paper, data analysis project, or master thesis demonstrating computational skills)

The application deadline is **16 December 2024**.