

**RESEARCH REPORT ON THE INFLUENCE OF CREDIBILITY OF SOCIAL
MEDIA INFLUENCERS ON VOTERS IN UGANDA CHRISTIAN UNIVERSITY'S
GUILD ELECTION**

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M23B90/062

**A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE SCHOOL OF JOURNALISM, MEDIA AND
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**UGANDA CHRISTIAN
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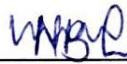
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DECLARATION

I, Bena Nekesa, hereby declare that this research report is my original work and has not been submitted to any institution for academic credit. All sources consulted and cited have been duly acknowledged.

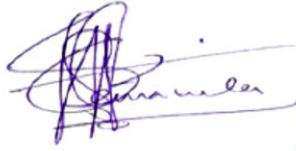
A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Bena Nekesa', is written above a horizontal line.

Bena Nekesa

APPROVAL

This research report entitled on The Influence Of Credibility Of Social Media Influencers On Voters In Uganda Christian University's Guild Election has been submitted for examination with the approval of my supervisor.

Signature: ...

A handwritten signature in purple ink, appearing to be 'Samuel', written over a horizontal line.

Date:5th June 2026.....

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my family, lecturers, and everyone who continues to support my academic journey.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I wish to express my sincere gratitude to my supervisor, Mr. Semakula John, for his invaluable guidance, support, and encouragement throughout this research process. I also extend my appreciation to the lecturers of the School of Journalism and Communication for their insightful advice and mentorship. Special thanks go to my friends and family for their encouragement and moral support during the preparation of this study.

ABSTRACT

This study examines the influence of the credibility of social media influencers on voters in Uganda Christian University guild elections. Specifically, it investigates how credibility, authenticity, and parasocial relationships shape students' voting decisions. A quantitative research design was employed, using structured surveys to collect data from students who actively use social media platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube. The data was analyzed using statistical techniques to identify patterns and relationships between influencer credibility and voter behavior. The findings are expected to provide valuable insights for academics, marketers, policymakers, and communication professionals, contributing to a better understanding of the role of social media influencers in shaping political engagement among university students in the African context.

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.0 Introduction

This chapter outlines the background to the study, presents the problem statement, defines the general and specific objectives, identifies the research questions and hypotheses, and highlights the significance, justification, scope, and operational definitions of key terms. The study aims to provide insight into how the credibility of social media influencers shapes students' voting decisions during Uganda Christian University guild elections and to suggest possible measures that can promote informed, ethical, and independent student participation in the electoral process (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Kothari, 2004).

1.1 Background to the Study

The growth of social media has significantly transformed political communication and participation, particularly among young people in higher education institutions. Social media platforms provide spaces where opinions are shared, debated, and shaped, making them influential tools during electoral processes (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). University students, who are active users of digital platforms, increasingly rely on social media as a primary source of political information and engagement (Loader, Vromen, & Xenos, 2014).

In recent years, the emergence of social media influencers has added a new dimension to political communication. Influencers are individuals who possess the ability to affect others' attitudes and behaviors due to their perceived authority, popularity, or trustworthiness within online communities (Freberg et al., 2011). Their influence is largely dependent on their credibility, which includes perceived honesty, expertise, and consistency in communication (Hovland, Janis, & Kelley, 1953).

At Uganda Christian University, social media has become an integral part of guild election campaigns. Student influencers actively use platforms such as WhatsApp, X (formerly Twitter), Instagram, and TikTok to endorse candidates, mobilize voters, and frame election-related discussions, a trend consistent with broader findings on the role of social media in electoral participation among young voters (Loader et al., 2014; Valenzuela et al., 2018). During the 2025 UCU guild elections, several student influencers openly supported particular candidates, contributing to the formation of opinions and voting intentions among students (Author's observation, 2025). This study is therefore grounded in examining whether the credibility of these influencers played a significant role in shaping students' decisions or whether some students disregarded influencer messages due to credibility concerns (Ohanian, 1990).

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Despite the increasing visibility of social media influencers in student electoral processes, there is limited empirical evidence explaining how their credibility affects voter decision-making in university guild elections, as most existing studies focus broadly on social media's influence on youth political engagement rather than on influencer credibility specifically (Ibrahim, 2024; Abdullah et al., 2025). While influencer endorsements were prominent during the 2025 Uganda Christian University guild elections, student responses varied, with some appearing persuaded and others remaining indifferent or skeptical, reflecting mixed patterns of political engagement observed among young social media users in other contexts (Ibrahim, 2024; Vukani & Obioha, 2024). This inconsistency raises questions about the actual influence of influencer credibility on voting behavior (Metzger & Flanagin, 2013).

The absence of a clear understanding of the role of social media influencer credibility presents several challenges within student electoral processes. First, it makes it difficult to determine whether social media campaigning enhances informed participation or instead undermines students' independent judgment during elections, a concern widely noted in studies on youth political engagement and digital persuasion (Loader et al., 2014; Valenzuela et al., 2018). Second, without sufficient empirical

evidence on the effectiveness and ethical implications of influencer-driven campaigns, guild candidates and electoral bodies may continue to rely on influencer strategies without critically assessing their actual impact on voter decision-making (Abdullah et al., 2025). This lack of clarity risks promoting popularity-based persuasion over issue-based evaluation, potentially compromising the integrity of student democratic processes (Ohanian, 1990). Consequently, this study seeks to examine how the credibility of social media influencers influenced students' voting decisions during the 2025 Uganda Christian University guild elections.

1.3 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to examine the influence of social media influencer credibility on students' decisions to support guild candidates during the 2025 Uganda Christian University guild elections. By focusing on credibility, the study aims to understand how trust, reliability, and perceived integrity of influencers affected student voting behavior (Hovland et al., 1953).

1.4 Objectives of the Study

General Objective

To examine the influence of social media influencer credibility on students' decisions to support guild candidates during the 2025 Uganda Christian University guild elections.

Specific Objective

To assess how the credibility of social media influencers affected students' decisions to support guild candidates during the 2025 Uganda Christian University guild elections.

1.5 Research Question

How did the credibility of social media influencers influence students' decisions to support guild candidates during the 2025 Uganda Christian University guild elections?

1.6 Scope of the Study

1.6.1 Geographical Scope

The study was conducted at Uganda Christian University, Mukono campus.

1.6.2 Time Scope

The study covered the period of the 2025 Uganda Christian University guild elections. The study targeted registered undergraduate students of Uganda Christian University who were eligible to vote in the 2025 guild elections. This population comprised students enrolled across the UCU campuses whose names appeared on the official 2025 guild voters' register. Given the focus of the study on social media influencer credibility, the target group also included students who were active users of social media platforms during the election period and were available to participate in the study at the time of data collection. riod of the 2025 Uganda Christian University guild elections.

1.7 Significance of the Study

1. The findings of this study may help students become more aware of how social media influence shapes their voting choices, thereby encouraging critical and independent decision-making.

2. Guild candidates may benefit from understanding the importance of credibility when engaging influencers for campaigns.

3. University electoral bodies may use the findings to design guidelines that promote ethical and informed participation in guild elections.

4. The study may also contribute to existing literature on social media influence and serve as reference material for future academic research (Loader et al., 2014).

1.8 Definition of Key Terms

Social Media Influencers: Students with substantial social media followings who are capable of shaping opinions and attitudes during guild elections through online platforms (Freberg et al., 2011).

Credibility: The extent to which students perceive a social media influencer as trustworthy, reliable, and knowledgeable in relation to election-related communication (Hovland et al., 1953).

Guild Elections: Electoral processes through which student leaders are chosen to represent the student body at Uganda Christian University.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Introduction

This chapter presents a comprehensive review of existing literature related to social media influencer credibility and its influence on student voting decisions. The review focuses on theoretical perspectives, key concepts, and empirical studies that explain how influencer credibility shapes attitudes and behaviors, particularly among young people and university students. The chapter further identifies gaps in the existing literature that necessitate the current study on Uganda Christian University (UCU) Main Campus guild elections. By examining both theory and previous research, this chapter establishes a scholarly foundation for understanding the relationship between social media influencer credibility and student voting behavior (Hovland, Janis & Kelley, 1953; Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017).

2.1 Theoretical Review

2.1.1 Source Credibility Theory

This study is anchored in the Source Credibility Theory, which was developed by Hovland, Janis, and Kelley (1953). The theory posits that the effectiveness of a persuasive message largely depends on the credibility of the source delivering that message. According to the theory, audiences are more likely to accept, internalize, and act upon information when it comes from a source perceived as credible. Credibility is mainly determined by three key attributes: trustworthiness, expertise, and honesty (Hovland et al., 1953).

Trustworthiness refers to the extent to which the audience believes the source is truthful and unbiased. Expertise relates to the perceived knowledge, competence, or experience of the source on the subject matter, while honesty reflects moral integrity and sincerity. When these attributes are present, the message is more persuasive, and the audience is more likely to change attitudes or behavior based on the message received (Hovland et al., 1953).

In the context of social media, influencers act as message sources who disseminate information to their followers. Among university students, influencers often include peers who are popular, active online, and vocal about campus issues. During guild elections, these influencers share campaign messages, opinions, and endorsements of candidates. According to Source Credibility Theory, students are more likely to believe and act on these messages if they perceive the influencer as trustworthy, knowledgeable about student leadership, and honest in their communication (Lou & Yuan, 2019).

The relevance of Source Credibility Theory to this study lies in its ability to explain variations in student voting behavior during guild elections. While some students may be strongly influenced by social media endorsements, others may ignore them. The theory provides a framework for understanding how differences in perceived influencer credibility affect whether students accept or reject campaign messages shared online. Therefore, Source Credibility Theory is appropriate for examining how social media influencer credibility shaped voting decisions during the 2025 Uganda Christian University guild elections (Hovland et al., 1953; Billah, Ahmed & Nsubuga, 2024).

2.2.1 Social Media

Social media influencers are individuals who have the ability to affect the opinions, attitudes, and behaviors of others through their online presence and content. They usually possess a sizeable following on social media platforms such as WhatsApp, X (formerly Twitter), Instagram, and TikTok. Their influence arises from frequent interaction with followers, perceived social status, and the ability to shape discussions on issues of interest (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017). Through posts, short videos, and discussions, they contribute to shaping opinions about candidates and the overall electoral process. Their role is particularly significant because students tend to trust peers who share similar experiences and concerns (Lou & Yuan, 2019).

Credibility refers to the extent to which an influencer is perceived as believable, reliable, and trustworthy by their audience. It is a critical factor in determining whether messages shared by influencers are accepted or ignored. Credibility is commonly

associated with attributes such as honesty, expertise, trustworthiness, and consistency in communication (Hovland et al., 1953). In social media environments, credibility is built through transparency, accurate information sharing, and genuine engagement with followers. Influencers who are perceived as credible are more likely to persuade students to accept their views, including political opinions and candidate endorsements. Conversely, influencers who are perceived as biased, dishonest, or poorly informed may fail to influence student voting decisions (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017). In university settings, voting behavior is often shaped by informal discussions and online interactions among students (Billah et al., 2024).

Social media has become a key platform where students access information about candidates. Influencers play an important role in shaping perceptions of candidate competence, integrity, and leadership ability. As a result, the credibility of influencers can significantly affect whether students decide to support or reject certain candidates during elections (Lou & Yuan, 2019).

2.2.4 Linking Concepts

The relationship between social media influencers, credibility, and student voting decisions is central to this study. Influencers use their social media platforms to communicate campaign messages and endorse candidates. When these influencers are perceived as credible, students are more likely to trust the information shared and allow it to influence their voting decisions. This study therefore examines how influencer credibility interacted with student perceptions to shape voting behavior during the 2025 UCU guild elections (Hovland et al., 1953; Billah et al., 2024).

2.3 Empirical Review

Several empirical studies have examined the influence of social media influencer credibility on young people's attitudes and decision-making. Djafarova and Rushworth (2017) found that young audiences are more likely to trust influencers who appear authentic, honest, and knowledgeable. Their study revealed that credibility significantly affects how followers respond to influencer messages, particularly in shaping opinions

and choices. Although their research focused on consumer behavior, the findings are relevant to political and electoral contexts involving youth.

Lou and Yuan (2019) investigated the role of influencer credibility in shaping followers' attitudes and engagement on social media. The study established that influencers perceived as trustworthy and expert were more persuasive and effective in influencing attitudes. This suggests that in student elections, credible influencers can shape perceptions of candidates by highlighting their strengths, achievements, and leadership qualities (Lou & Yuan, 2019).

In the Ugandan context, Billah, Ahmed, and Nsubuga (2024) examined the impact of influencer credibility on young people's decision-making. Their findings indicated that influencers with high levels of trustworthiness and credibility significantly affected followers' choices. This study is particularly relevant as it demonstrates that influencer credibility plays a role in decision-making among Ugandan youth, aligning with the context of university student elections.

Despite these findings, there is limited empirical research specifically focusing on social media influencer credibility in university guild elections in Uganda. Most existing studies concentrate on consumer behavior or general youth influence, leaving a gap in understanding how influencer credibility affects student political participation within higher education institutions. This gap justifies the current study, which focuses on Uganda Christian University Main Campus guild elections (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017; Lou & Yuan, 2019; Billah et al., 2024).

2.4 Summary of Literature Review

This chapter reviewed theoretical, conceptual, and empirical literature related to social media influencer credibility and student voting decisions. Source Credibility Theory provided a framework for understanding how trustworthiness, expertise, and honesty influence message effectiveness. Key concepts such as social media influencers, credibility, and student voting decisions were clearly defined and linked to the study context.

Empirical studies demonstrated that credible influencers significantly shape attitudes and decisions among young people. However, limited research exists on how influencer credibility affects student elections in Uganda, particularly at Uganda Christian University Main Campus. This identified gap provides a strong justification for the present study, which seeks to examine the influence of social media influencer credibility on student voting decisions during the 2025 UCU guild election

CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.0 Introduction

This chapter presents the research methodology used to investigate the influence of the credibility of social media influencers on voters in Uganda Christian University's guild elections. It outlines the research design, study population, sample size, sampling techniques and procedures, data collection methods and instruments of the research instruments, data collection procedures, data analysis techniques, measurement of variables, and ethical considerations.

The methodology is designed to generate reliable and valid data necessary for understanding how the credibility of social media influencers particularly in terms of trustworthiness, honesty, and expertise influences students' voting decisions during guild elections at Uganda Christian University.

3.1 Research Approach

This study employed a qualitative descriptive approach to explore and understand students' perceptions, opinions, and experiences regarding the credibility of social media influencers during the 2025 Uganda Christian University guild elections.

The approach was chosen because it allows for in-depth insights into students' views on influencers' trustworthiness, expertise, and honesty, and how these views influenced their voting decisions. Data was collected through interviews and open-ended questionnaires, enabling participants to express their experiences in their own words.

3.2 Population and Sample Size

The study population comprised Uganda Christian University students who were eligible to vote in the 2025 guild elections. These students were selected because they were directly exposed to social media influencers during the campaign period and could provide first-hand insights into how influencer credibility affected their voting decisions.

The population included students from different faculties, years of study, and social backgrounds, ensuring a diversity of perspectives and experiences relevant to the study.

3.3 Sampling Technique and Procedures

This study used purposive sampling to select six students for the interviews. Purposive sampling was chosen because it allows the researcher to select participants who are directly relevant to the study, in this case, students who were active on social media during the 2025 guild elections and had interacted with social media influencers.

This method ensures that the data collected is rich, detailed, and focused on the experiences of students who can provide meaningful insights into how influencer credibility affected their voting decisions.

3.4 Data Collection Methods

Data for this study was collected through semi-structured interviews with the six selected students. This method was chosen because it allows participants to express their experiences, opinions, and perceptions in their own words, providing in-depth insights into the credibility of social media influencers during the 2025 guild elections.

The interviews focused on understanding students' views regarding influencers' trustworthiness, expertise, and honesty, and how these perceptions influenced their voting decisions. Open-ended questions were used to encourage detailed responses, allowing the researcher to capture rich and meaningful data relevant to the study objectives.

3.5 Data Collection Instruments

The main instrument for this study was a semi-structured interview guide. It included carefully designed open-ended questions to capture students' views on the

credibility of social media influencers, focusing on trustworthiness, expertise, and honesty, and how these influenced their voting decisions.

The guide provided a consistent framework for all interviews, ensuring that the same topics were covered while allowing participants to share their experiences freely. Before the main study, the guide was pre-tested with two students to check for clarity and relevance of the questions.

3.6 Data Analysis

The data collected from the interviews was analyzed using thematic analysis. This involved reading through the interview transcripts, identifying common themes and patterns, and organizing the findings according to the study objectives.

Thematic analysis allowed the researcher to summarize students' experiences and perceptions regarding the credibility of social media influencers in a clear and organized way. Direct quotes from participants were used to support the findings and provide real examples of how influencer credibility affected their voting decisions.

3.7 Chapter Summary

This chapter has outlined the methodology used in the study, including the research design, study population, sampling technique, data collection methods, instruments, and data analysis. The qualitative descriptive approach and purposive sampling ensured that the study captured detailed and meaningful insights from students who were directly exposed to social media influencers during the 2025 guild elections. The next chapter presents the findings and analysis of the data collected from the interviews.

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA PRESENTATION AND FINDINGS

4.0 Introduction

This chapter presents, analyses, and interprets findings from the qualitative interviews conducted to examine the influence of social media influencers on voting decisions during the 2025 Uganda Christian University (UCU) guild elections. Data was collected from six respondents drawn from different faculties. The analysis is based on thematic interpretation guided by the study objectives and research questions.

4.1 Background Information of Respondents

A total of six respondents participated in the study. The respondents were students from different faculties at Uganda Christian University, ensuring diversity of views. For ethical reasons, respondents are identified using codes (R1–R6).

4.2 Influence of Social Media Influencers on Voting Decisions

Respondents were asked whether social media influencers influenced their voting decisions during the 2025 UCU guild elections and to explain how.

R1 stated that social media influencers played a significant role in shaping their voting decision, noting that influencers simplified candidates' manifestos and made them easier to understand.

R2 explained that endorsements by popular student influencers increased their confidence in certain candidates, especially when the influencers had a reputation for being informed and neutral.

R3 noted that frequent posts, videos, and live discussions by influencers helped them stay updated about candidates and election issues, which influenced their final choice.

R4 mentioned that social media influencers helped create visibility for candidates who were less known, allowing them to make an informed voting decision.

R5 stated that influencers influenced their voting decision by highlighting leadership qualities and past achievements of candidates, which were not always clear during physical campaigns.

R6 indicated that influencers positively influenced their decision by encouraging student participation and emphasizing the importance of voting, which motivated them to vote.

4.3 Trust and Credibility of Social Media Influencers

Respondents were further asked whether the qualities of social media influencers made them trust or distrust the influencers during the guild elections, and to explain which qualities influenced their perceptions.

R1 stated that they trusted influencers who were consistent, transparent, and avoided abusive or biased language when discussing candidates.

R2 noted that honesty and the ability to present balanced views made them trust certain influencers during the elections.

R3 explained that influencers who backed their opinions with facts, past records, and evidence were more credible and trustworthy.

R4 mentioned that influencers who openly declared their support for a candidate, rather than pretending to be neutral, were more trustworthy.

R5 stated that professionalism, respectful engagement with followers, and issue-based discussions increased their trust in influencers.

R6 indicated that influencers who engaged directly with students through comments, live sessions, and question-and-answer forums were more trustworthy.

Analysis: The responses show that credibility-related qualities such as honesty, transparency, consistency, professionalism, and engagement influenced trust in social media influencers. This supports the argument that influencer credibility plays a key role in shaping political decisions among young voters.

4.4 Discussion of Findings

The findings reveal that social media influencers positively influenced voting decisions during the 2025 UCU guild elections. Influencers helped students access information, understand candidates' agendas, and remain engaged in the electoral process. Trust in influencers was largely determined by perceived credibility, honesty, and professionalism.

These findings are consistent with credibility theory, which suggests that source trustworthiness and expertise increase message persuasiveness. Students were more likely to be influenced by influencers they perceived as credible and knowledgeable.

4.5 Summary of the Chapter

This chapter has presented and analysed qualitative data from six respondents on the influence of social media influencers on voting decisions during the 2025 UCU guild elections. The findings indicate a generally positive influence, with credibility-related qualities enhancing trust and persuasion. The next chapter will present conclusions and recommendations based on these findings.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.0 Introduction

This chapter presents a summary of the key findings of the study in line with the research objectives. It also draws conclusions based on these findings and provides recommendations for relevant stakeholders. In addition, the chapter suggests areas for further research.

5.1 Summary of Findings

The study examined the influence of social media influencers on voters' decisions during the 2025 Uganda Christian University (UCU) guild elections. Findings from the six interviewed respondents revealed that social media influencers played a generally positive role in shaping students' voting decisions.

The study found that influencers helped students access information about candidates, understand their manifestos, and remain updated on election-related issues. Influencers also enhanced candidate visibility, especially for candidates who were less known on campus. Additionally, influencers encouraged student participation and promoted issue-based discussions, which contributed to informed voting.

Regarding trust and credibility, the study established that students trusted social media influencers who demonstrated honesty, transparency, consistency, professionalism, and engagement with followers. Influencers who provided factual information, communicated respectfully, and openly declared their positions were perceived as more credible.

5.2 Conclusions

Based on the findings, the study concludes that social media influencers had a significant and positive influence on voting decisions during the 2025 UCU guild elections. Influencers served as important sources of political information and opinion, especially among young voters.

The study further concludes that the credibility of social media influencers played a key role in determining their influence. Influencers who were perceived as trustworthy, knowledgeable, and professional were more likely to shape voters' decisions. Therefore, influencer credibility is a critical factor in understanding political communication among university students.

5.3 Recommendations

Based on the study findings and conclusions, the following recommendations are made:

1. Guild candidates should engage credible and responsible social media influencers to communicate their messages effectively to students.
2. Social media influencers should maintain professionalism, honesty, and transparency when engaging in political discussions to enhance trust among followers.
3. University management and electoral bodies should recognize the role of social media in student elections and promote ethical online campaigning.
4. Students should critically evaluate information shared by influencers and verify facts before making voting decisions.

5.4 Suggestions for Further Research

Future studies may adopt a mixed-methods approach to examine both qualitative and quantitative aspects of social media influence on voting behavior. Further research could also explore the negative effects of social media influencers or compare influencer impact across different universities.

5.5 Chapter Summary

This chapter has presented the summary of findings, conclusions, and recommendations of the study. It has established that social media influencers positively influenced voting decisions during the 2025 UCU guild elections, with credibility playing a central role. This chapter marks the conclusion of the research report.

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AN INTERVIEW GUIDE

Dear Respondent,

I am BENA NEKESA, a final year student of Uganda Christian University, conducting a research study on the TOPIC “THE INFLUENCE OF CREDIBILITY OF SOCIAL MEDIA INFLUENCERS ON VOTERS IN UGANDA CHRISTIAN UNIVERSITY’S GUILD ELECTIONS” as part of the academic requirements for the award of the Bachelor of Journalism and Mass Communication.

The purpose of this study is to examine how the credibility of social media influencers affects students’ voting decisions during guild elections at Uganda Christian University. The study focuses on issues of trustworthiness, honesty, and reliability of influencers and how these factors shape students’ perceptions and choices in the electoral process.

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary, and the information you provide will be treated with strict confidentiality. Please do not write your name on this questionnaire. All responses will be used strictly for academic purposes only. There are no right or wrong answers. Please respond honestly by writing in the space provided.

Thank you for your cooperation

SECTION E: OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONS (INTERVIEW GUIDE)

Respondent Information

Name: _____

School/Faculty: _____

Interview Questions

17. In your own words, did social media influencers influence your voting decision during the 2025 UCU guild elections? Please explain your answer.

.....

.....

.....

18. Did the qualities of social media influencers make you trust or distrust them during the guild elections? If yes or no, which qualities influenced your trust or distrust, and why?

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.....

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Thank you for your participation!