

## THE ROLE OF POLITICAL INFLUENCERS IN THE CONTEMPORARY POLITICAL ARENA<sup>1</sup>

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### **Abstract**

Political candidates greatly benefit from their capacity to interact personally with communities. Because so many ideas, thoughts, and opinions are circulating on social media, these platforms are persuasive and frequently seek to shift or impact opinions on political views. Influencers, also known as content creators, who were previously mainly used to raise brand awareness, have been playing an increasing role in politically influencing other users in the digital environment (their followers) in recent years. They represent powerful individuals in politics who support candidates, propose policies, change public opinion, and bring about ideological change. Prominent political influencers have the ability to sway voters' opinion on prominent political figures, which is the primary reason why political parties are increasingly using them in their campaigns. However, despite their immense power, YouTube, Facebook, Instagram, X, TokTok, and other platforms do not have clear and strict guidelines requiring the disclosure of sponsored content that includes political figures or sentiments. By deceiving voters into thinking that party promotional material reflects sincere, ideologically compatible opinions, this opacity promotes a black market in political campaigns and impairs the electorate's ability to make educated decisions. As more public figures and politicians join the influencer economy, they are likely to encounter both financial opportunities and challenges that will impact the development of digital marketing and public life in the future.

**Keywords:** Political Influencers, Social Media, Voters.

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## INTRODUCTION

Almost 80 percent of internet users worldwide said that social media successfully increased awareness of social and political concerns, according to a 2022 survey (Statista Research Department, 2024). Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter (now X) were the most popular social media sites for news on national politics and government, according to survey of Gen Z and millennials in the United States. Only a small percentage of respondents utilized TikTok, Snapchat, or LinkedIn for this purpose. Facebook remained the most popular network for political news, while Reddit and Instagram were the most popular choice for over ten percent of respondents, respectively (Watson, 2024).

Advertisers have an interest in their message being recognizable, believable, and eventually embraced. However, traditional advertising methods are finding it harder to accomplish this, so marketers are using new forms of communication (Baltezarević & Baltezarević, 2019). With businesses offering influencer management tools that can display analytics data and perform algorithmic calculations to assist marketers in choosing suitable influencers for advertising campaigns through arbitrary assessments of influencers' risk and brand safety, the influencer industry is rapidly becoming more professional (Bishop, 2021). Members of online communities that possess the ability to shape and influence other members' opinions through their knowledge on a pertinent subject are known as influencers. On social media, influencers serve as digital opinion leaders (Cho et al., 2012). The past several years have seen the emergence of a new political activism trend. Political and social activist influencers that try to start social change and concentrate on issues that are important to society and politics have become more and more prevalent (Duckwitz, 2019).

Political influencers are those who, by virtue of their expertise, experience, commitment, and trustworthiness, can sway others via traditional or social media (Curiel, 2020). Influencers are frequently used by political candidates to further their agendas when they want to target particular demographics (Wong, 2020). Experts in political marketing are growing more conscious of the advantages that social media political influencers can offer them. A political influencer's content can include political analysis, commentary on current affairs, debates over political philosophies, and suggestions for getting involved in politics. Political influencers are renowned for producing real and captivating content that educates, awakens, or provokes discussion in their audience. They might also assist political campaigns and serve as ambassadors for political groups (Glowstaff, 2023).

A study of American influencers in 2020 found that 65 percent of participants thought it was a good idea for presidential contenders to engage influencers in their campaigns (Statista Research Department, 2023). The capacity of influencers to communicate authenticity is essential to their success. From a conceptual standpoint,

authenticity can be defined as being true to oneself, being unique, and being genuine (Syvertsen & Enli, 2020). Celebrities are now more frequently participating in political campaigns, giving politicians and political causes their audiences and credibility. Examples of this include the 2018 endorsements of Democratic candidates by Kathryn Grody, and Mandy Patinkin (Becker, 2021).

Having a clear, well-informed viewpoint on political problems and the ability to persuasively communicate it are essential for becoming a political influencer. The first step is to establish one's intellectual position and pinpoint a political specialty or areas of interest. This could entail examining recent political developments, talking about particular ideologies, or encouraging civic education. Creating relevant and regular content is crucial to developing a powerful online presence. This include producing political-themed blog entries, videos, and podcasts. Furthermore, working together with other political influencers is a great approach to broaden one's network and introduce fresh viewpoints (Glowstaff, 2023).

## LITERATURE REVIEW

The majority of teenagers rely on social media and the internet to obtain information about news and politics. Search engines, Instagram, and TikTok were the top sources cited by respondents when asked how they learn about everyday news subjects online. News apps and online newspapers were ranked as secondary sources (Ifk, 2022). Political marketing specialists are using social media influencers and electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) more and more in an effort to reach younger audiences (Baltezarević & Baltezarević, 2022). According to the Center for Information and Research on Civic Engagement and Learning (CIRCLE), 70% of young people said they learned about the 2020 election from social media, indicating that young voters are consuming and creating political news more than ever before (Stewart et al., 2024). Most of the discussions on X are about politics. Politicians and political groups are now using X to reach audiences that were previously hard to reach. Without being constrained by the hierarchical framework of political organizations, political candidates can use X to personally organize the public and run campaigns (Huszár et al., 2022).

Influencers are people who have perceived credibility on a given topic and can make it accessible to a large audience through digital channels because of their digital network, charisma, topic competence, and communication activity (Schach, 2018). They usually produce their own videos, sometimes with the help of a small production team, but most of the time they work alone (Hrnčárová, 2017). Because of their extensive engagement with political topics and the content they provide on social media, political influencers are regarded as genuine digital opinion leaders. Therefore, in order to promote greater political engagement, political influencers are crucial in influencing, persuading, and altering personal beliefs and behaviour (Harff & Schmuck, 2023). For political influencers, representation of political content is just as crucial as the topic itself.

In order to preserve their credibility in the eyes of their followers, political influencers must be mindful of their appearance and modest behaviour (Silaban et al., 2019). A personal brand has been developed by political influencers who are seen as trustworthy by their followers. Having a personal brand is a fantastic way to position yourself in the eyes of others (Milovanović et al., 2018). Influencers' ascent to prominence in the political sphere via self-branding techniques and the "natural" development of a social media following also offers an alternative to conventional celebrity endorsements (Harff & Schmuck, 2023). It's still unclear exactly who qualifies as a political influencer. When journalists share their thoughts on political issues on social media, some have referred to them as political influencers (Schwemmer & Ziewiecki, 2018). Some have referred to politicians who are very adept at social media as political influencers (de Gregorio & Goanta, 2022). According to The Republican National Committee (RNC) officials, some 70 content creators were invited to attend the 2024 Republican National Convention in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. About 200 social media influencers received credentials for the conference, which allowed them to meet and interview delegates as well as have exclusive access to parties and events that were invite-only. Additionally, they were granted entry to a private "creator's lounge" in the United Center arena that was distinct from the regular media areas. Rick Klein, the Political Director and Washington Bureau Director for ABC News, said for the "Nightline" that there are influencers that are far more significant if you're trying to reach real voters. They are also far more influential than the TV networks, the New York Times, and the Washington Post (Stewart et al., 2024). According to a survey examining the impact of social media on political activity, 46% of American social media users between the ages of 18 and 60 reported changing their political beliefs as a result of content from influencers during the 2024 election campaign (Izea, 2024).

Although social media has grown to be a vital platform for political communication, it is impossible to overlook the possibility that the freedom it provides could have unfavourable effects on political sentiments (Alsolami et al., 2021). People who use social media and internet technologies are increasingly asking themselves, "What are some reliable sources of information?" That is, how can one find digital sources that give users the assurance that they won't be emotionally or materially harmed by illicit cyber activity (Baltezarević & Baltezarević, 2021)? Critics claim that federal election laws have not kept up with the ways social media has changed campaigning and that political groups may exploit the lack of transparency in the newest and most popular area of political advertising to sway public opinion (Zakrzewski, 2024). Yet there is a serious risk associated with using influencers to spread political messages: misinformation. Lying turns into a potent tool for influencers without ethical training who want to gain as many followers as possible. Recent research indicates

that fake news spreads more widely on social media than genuine content, which is a significant problem for democracy (Gutierrez, 2023).

An excellent salary can be earned as a political influencer, particularly through partnerships with businesses and corporations. Numerous elements, such as the quantity of followers, follower interaction, and reach on social media sites like Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok, affect earning potential. Big political influencers can make a lot of money through affiliate marketing, sponsored postings, and advertising contracts. Additionally, there are chances to market their own goods or take part in partnerships and events. For each post or cooperation, micro-influencers often make up to €500. Influencers in the mid-tier can make up to €5,000 for each post or partnership. A post or partnership can bring in several thousand euros for top-tier influencers with a significant following (more than 500,000 followers) (Glowstaff, 2023).

New technologies that rate social media influencers' alleged brand safety have been proposed to advertisers by several marketing companies. Artificial intelligence (AI) is also used by some of the tools to forecast the possibility that a specific influencer may talk about politics in the future. Captiv8, a marketing company that assists Kraft Heinz and other advertisers in connecting with influencers, recently unveiled a tool that uses AI to analyse mentions of social media stars in online articles and determine whether or not they are likely to discuss elections or other hot political topics. Based on their posts, comments, and media coverage, the company also gives authors letter ratings; a "A" denotes extreme caution, while a "C" denotes fairly safe. Categories including sensitive social issues, hate speech, death and conflict, and sexual content are all included in the grades (Maheshwari, 2024).

## CONCLUSION

The manner that political leaders communicate, government institution's function, and campaigns are waged have all been profoundly changed by new media. Unquestionably, influencers have surpassed traditional media in importance, and their political power is irrefutable. Political influencers are starting to affect voting audiences as social media becomes more and more important in political elections.

Influencer marketing allows political candidates to attract more potential voters, improve their internet visibility, and effectively convey their policy concerns. In the end, political influencers will increase voter turnout for a successful campaign by making candidate more likeable and approachable to younger, more diverse voters. However, as campaigns and groups become more involved with influencers, disinformation researchers are afraid that they may spread misinformation by circumventing the already ambiguous constraints that social media platforms impose on political content.

Influencers, who focus their messaging to highly precise geographic and demographic groupings, are becoming more and more popular with campaigns and political organizations. This may make it more challenging to identify or disprove lies. Although influencers are generally seen by voters as more genuine than traditional campaign surrogates, the followers' faith in these influencers has come under scrutiny as supporters begin to wonder why they work with political campaigns. Campaigns' success in the years to come will be greatly influenced by their ability to collaborate with reputable and experienced companies that understand the opportunities and challenges of using content creators to reach voters.

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