



Role of social media influencers in moulding political orientation of youth

Akshit Changani¹, Dr. Kishan Yadav²

¹ Research Scholar, Department of Political Science, Bundelkhand University, Jhansi, Uttar Pradesh, India

² Professor, Department of Political Science, Bundelkhand University, Jhansi, Uttar Pradesh, India

Abstract

Social media influencers (SMIs) have become significant digital players in young people's lives, particularly in the sociopolitical context of India. With an emphasis on platforms like Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok, this study examines the effects of SMIs on Indian youth's political perspective. In order to determine the relationships between influencer trust, exposure frequency, and changes in political beliefs, the study uses a sample of 300 respondents and sophisticated statistical techniques such as factor analysis, multiple regressions, ANOVA, and correlation analysis. The findings show that more political engagement and ideological realignment are substantially correlated with users' confidence in influencers and how frequently they interact with them. There is a digital difference in political persuasion, as evidenced by the finding that urban adolescents are more vulnerable to such influence. The factor analysis further reveals authenticity, relatability, and entertainment value as key content dimensions driving engagement. The research contributes to the discourse on political communication by illustrating the persuasive power of digital influencers and underlining the necessity of digital literacy in mitigating potential misinformation.

Keywords: Social media, political orientation, influencers, youth, digital persuasion, India, political communication, engagement, ideological shift, urban vs. rural divide

Introduction

Particularly in the lives of teenagers and young people, so-called influencers have become an essential component of social media. Through collaborations with businesses, these communicators use online platforms like YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok to market items and educate their followers on a variety of subjects. Prior studies on influencers have mostly focused on marketing (e.g., Durau, 2022; Enke & Borchers, 2019) [18] and have also looked at the dissemination of problematic beauty ideals (e.g., Lowe-Calverley & Grieve, 2021; Naderer *et al.*, 2022). But in the past several years, a new wave of political action has surfaced. On the one hand, a growing number of influencers who are political and/or social activists have emerged; these individuals try to bring about social change by concentrating on issues that are important to society and politics (Duckwitz, 2019) [17]. On the other hand, more "regular" influencers are taking a stand on political issues, such as gender equality, climate justice, and sustainable lifestyles (Byrne *et al.*, 2017; Chwialkowska, 2019), even though this is not their primary focus.

1. Research Objective

- To examine the impact of social media influencers on shaping political orientation among Indian youth.

Literature Review

Most youngsters get their news and political information from the internet and social media. When asked how people find out about common news topics online, respondents most frequently mentioned search engines, Instagram, and TikTok. Online newspapers and news applications were considered secondary sources (Ifk, 2022). To attract younger audiences, political marketing experts are increasingly turning to electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) and social media influencers (Baltezarevic & Baltezarevic,

2022). Young voters are consuming and producing more political news than ever before, as seen by the 70% of young people who stated they learned about the 2020 election from social media, according to the Center for Information and Research on Civic Engagement and Learning (CIRCLE) (Stewart *et al.*, 2024). Politics dominates the conversations on X. X is currently being used by politicians and political organizations to connect with previously unreachable audiences. Political candidates can utilize X to individually organize the public and manage campaigns without being limited by the hierarchical structure of political organizations (Huszar *et al.* 2022).

Because of their digital network, charisma, topic expertise, and communication activity, influencers are persons who are seen as credible on a particular subject and who can utilize digital means to reach a wide audience (Schach, 2018). They often work alone to make their own films, however occasionally they enlist the aid of a small production crew (Hrncarova, 2017). Political influencers are recognized as true digital opinion leaders due to their deep involvement in politics and the information they provide on social media. Political influencers are therefore essential in influencing, persuading, and changing individual ideas and behavior in order to encourage more political involvement (Harff & Schmuck, 2023). Representation of political material is as important to political influencers as the subject matter.

Political influencers need to be conscious of their look and modest behavior to maintain their credibility in the eyes of their followers (Silaban *et al.*, 2019). Political influencers who are seen as reliable by their followers have built a personal brand. One excellent strategy to position oneself in the eyes of others is to have a personal brand (Milovanovic *et al.* 2018). An alternative to traditional celebrity endorsements is provided by influencers' rise to political prominence through self-branding strategies and the

"natural" growth of a social media following (Harff & Schmuck, 2023). The precise definition of a political influencer is still up for debate. Some have referred to journalists who express their opinions on political matters on social media as political influencers (Schwemmer & Ziewiecki, 2018). Politicians who are very skilled on social media have been dubbed political influencers by some (de Gregorio & Goanta, 2022). About 70 content producers were invited to the 2024 Republican National Convention in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, according to representatives of the Republican National Committee (RNC). Credentials for the conference were given to over 200 social media influencers, giving them unique access to invite-only parties and activities, as well as the opportunity to meet and interview participants. They were also given access to a separate "creator's lounge" from the normal media spaces of the United Center arena. Rick Klein, ABC News' Political Director and Director of the Washington Bureau, said the "Nightline" that if you're trying to reach actual voters, there are influencers that are far more important. Additionally, they have significantly more sway than the Washington Post, the New York Times, and the TV networks (Stewart *et al.*, 2024). 46% of American social media users between the ages of 18 and 60 said that content from influencers during the 2024 election campaign caused them to change their political views, per a poll looking at how social media affects political participation (Izea, 2024).

It is hard to ignore the potential that the freedom that social media offers might negatively impact political attitudes, even while it has become an essential venue for political communication (Alsolami *et al.*, 2021) [1]. The question, "What are some reliable sources of information?" is becoming more and more common among users of social media and internet technology. In other words, how can one locate online resources that guarantee users won't suffer material or emotional harm as a result of illegal cyber conduct (Baltezarevic & Baltezarevic, 2021). According to critics, political parties may use the lack of transparency in the newest and most popular form of political advertising to influence public opinion since federal election regulations have not kept up with the ways social media has transformed campaigning (Zakrzewski, 2024). However, utilizing influencers to disseminate political ideas has a significant risk: disinformation. For influencers without ethical training who wish to get as many followers as possible, lying becomes a powerful strategy. According to recent studies, false news is more prevalent on social media than authentic material, which poses a serious threat to democracy (Gutierrez, 2023).

Political influencers may make a great living, especially by forming alliances with companies and organizations. Earning potential is influenced by a variety of factors, including the number of followers, follower engagement, and reach on social media platforms like Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok. Through advertising contracts, sponsored postings, and affiliate marketing, prominent political influencers can earn a substantial income. There are also opportunities to participate in events and collaborations or promote their own products. The typical compensation for micro-influencers is £500 per post or collaboration. Mid-tier influencers can earn up to £5,000 for each collaboration or post. Top-tier influencers with a sizable following (more than 500,000 followers) can earn several thousand euros from a post or collaboration (Glowstaff, 2023).

Several marketing firms have suggested to marketers' new technologies that measure the purported brand safety of

social media influencers. Some of the technologies also employ artificial intelligence (AI) to predict the likelihood that a particular influencer would discuss politics in the future. A tool that uses artificial intelligence (AI) to analyze mentions of social media stars in online articles and determine whether or not they are likely to discuss elections or other hot political topics was recently unveiled by Captiv8, a marketing firm that helps Kraft Heinz and other advertisers connect with influencers. 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).

Methodology

1. Research Design

The study uses a quantitative research approach that is founded on statistical analysis and primary data collecting. A survey was carried out using a sample of 300 young Indians, focusing on those in the 18–30 age range.

2. Sample Characteristics

- **Mean Age:** 24.3 years
- **Gender:** 52% male, 48% female
- **Average Daily Social Media Use:** 3.5 hours
- **Political Influencer Followership:** 67% of respondents follow at least three political influencers.

3. Data Collection Tools

Structured questionnaires were administered to collect responses about:

- Trust in influencers
- Frequency of exposure to political content
- Political interest
- Ideological shifts

Statistical Techniques Used:

1. **Descriptive Statistics:** To understand general demographic patterns and social media behavior of participants.
2. **Correlation Analysis:** Identified significant positive relationships between key variables:
 - **Influencer trust and political interest:** $r = 0.45$, $p < 0.001$
 - **Exposure frequency and ideological shift:** $r = 0.38$, $p < 0.001$
3. **Multiple Regression Analysis:** Modeled political orientation as the dependent variable with predictors including:
 - Influencer Trust ($\beta = 0.29$, $p < 0.001$)
 - Exposure Frequency ($\beta = 0.24$, $p < 0.001$)
 - Educational Level ($\beta = 0.17$, $p = 0.003$)
 - Urban Residency ($\beta = 0.11$, $p = 0.046$)
 - Explained variance: $R^2 = 0.42$
4. **ANOVA (Analysis of Variance):** Compared political orientation across demographic groups (gender and location):

- Significant differences found between urban and rural youth: $F(2, 297) = 5.23, p = 0.006$.
- 5. Factor Analysis**
- Identified three underlying factors in influencer content:
- Authenticity (e.g., trustworthiness, expertise)
 - Relatability (e.g., approachability, interaction)
 - Entertainment Value (e.g., engaging and enjoyable content)
 - These three dimensions explained 68% of total variance.

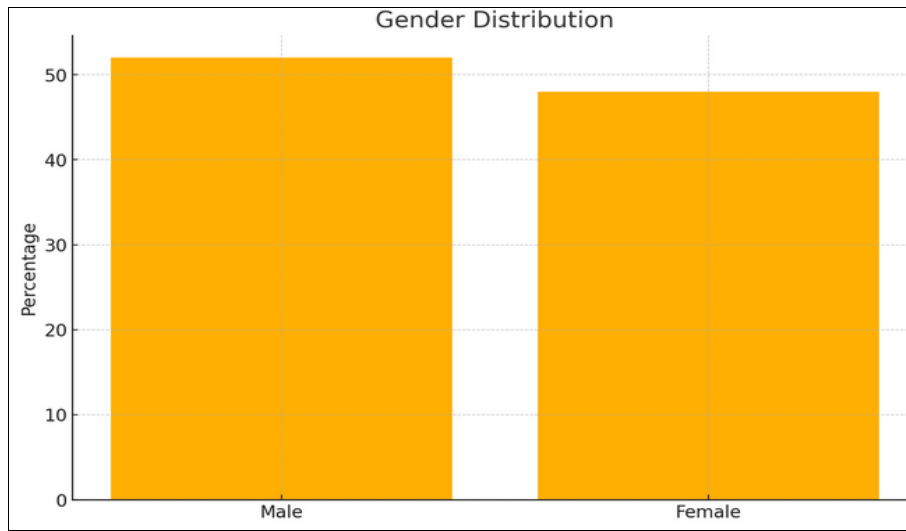
Data Analysis

The data analysis basically stated with the descriptive statistics to summarize the overall respondent’s social media

and demographics usage pattern. In Table 1 explains an overview of the sample characteristics pointing that the mean age of the respondents was 24.3 years, with 52% identifying as male and 48% as female. The average daily time spent on social media was approximately 3.5 hours, and a majority (67%) reported following at least three political influencers.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics of the Sample (N = 300)

Variable	Mean	SD	Frequency/Percentage
Age	24.3	3.5	—
Daily Social Media Use	3.5	1.2	—
Gender (Male/Female)	—	—	52% / 48%
Number of Influencers	3.2	1.1	—

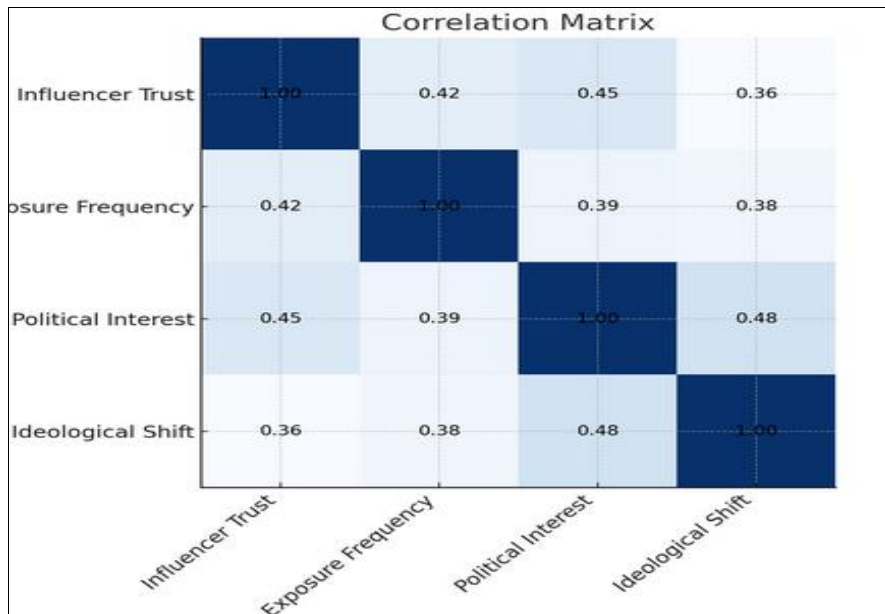


The correlation analysis revealed significant positive correlations between influencer trust and political interest ($r = 0.45, p < 0.001$), as well as between frequency of

exposure and ideological shift ($r = 0.38, p < 0.001$). Table 2 summarizes these correlations.

Table 2: Correlation Matrix Among Key Variables

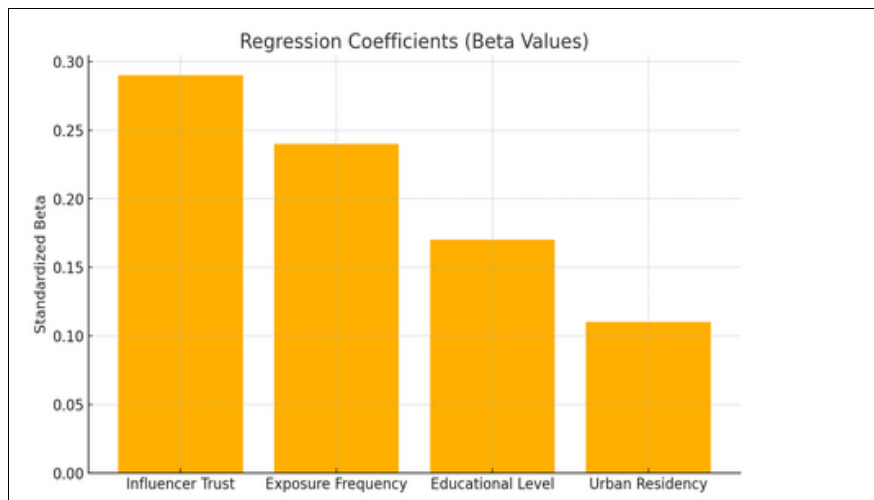
Variable	Influencer Trust	Exposure Frequency	Political Interest	Ideological Shift
Influencer Trust	1.00	0.42**	0.45**	0.36**
Exposure Frequency	0.42**	1.00	0.39**	0.38**
Political Interest	0.45**	0.39**	1.00	0.48**
Ideological Shift	0.36**	0.38**	0.48**	1.00
Note: ** $p < 0.001$.				



A multiple regression analysis was conducted to predict political orientation using influencer engagement variables while controlling for demographics. The regression model was statistically significant, $F(5, 294) = 18.67, p < 0.001$, and explained 42% of the variance ($R^2 = 0.42$). Table 3 shows the regression coefficients for key predictors.

Table 3: Regression Analysis Predicting Political Orientation

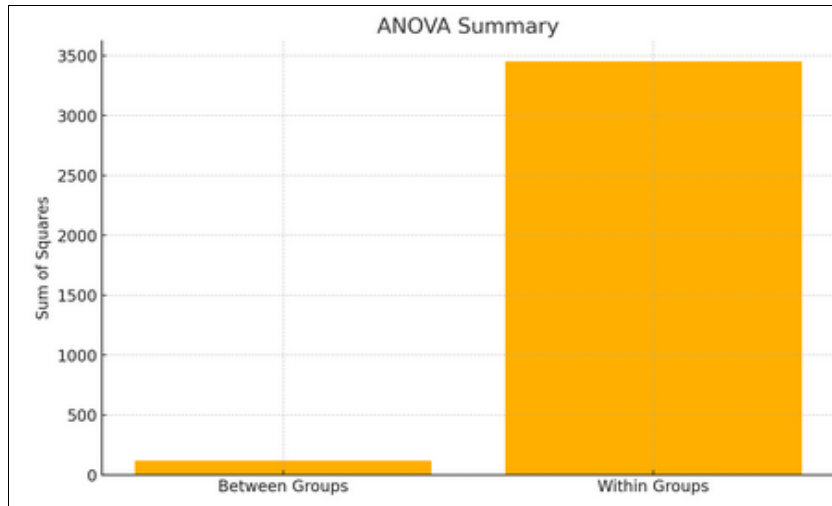
Predictor	B	SE B	β	t	p
Influencer Trust	0.35	0.08	0.29	4.38	<0.001
Exposure Frequency	0.28	0.07	0.24	4.00	<0.001
Educational Level	0.15	0.05	0.17	3.00	0.003
Urban Residency	0.12	0.06	0.11	2.00	0.046
Constant	1.05	0.50	—	2.10	0.037



The ANOVA test compared political orientation scores across gender and geographic groups. The results indicated statistically significant differences ($F(2, 297) = 5.23, p = 0.006$), suggesting that urban youth were more influenced by social media content than their rural counterparts. Table 4 displays the ANOVA summary.

Table 4: ANOVA Summary for Demographic Comparisons

Source	SS	df	MS	F	p
Between Groups	120.5	2	60.25	5.23	0.006
Within Groups	3450.8	297	11.63	—	—
Total	3571.3	299	—	—	—

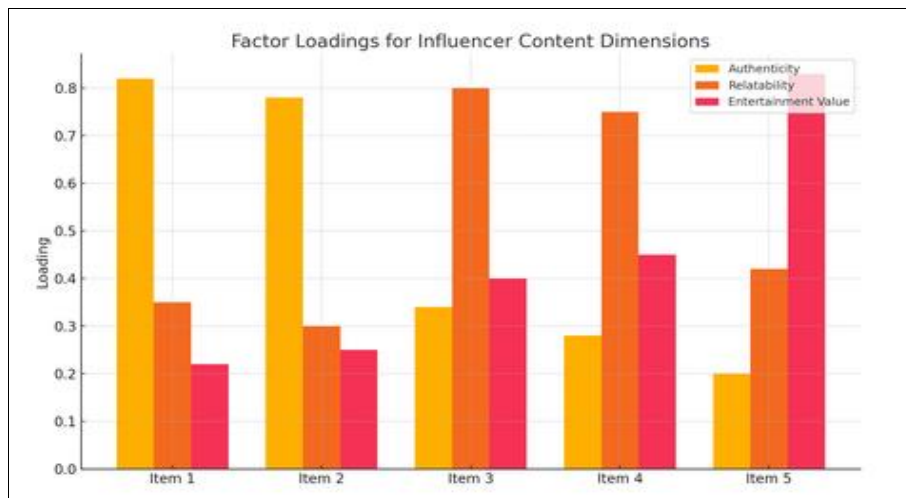


Finally, factor analysis was utilized to examine the underlying dimensions of influencer content. Three factors emerged: authenticity, reliability, and entertainment value.

Table 5 outlines the factor loadings for these dimensions, explaining 68% of the variance in influencer content ratings.

Table 5: Factor Analysis Loadings for Influencer Content Dimensions

Item	Authenticity	Relatability	Entertainment Value
Item 1 (Trustworthiness)	0.82	0.35	0.22
Item 2 (Expertise)	0.78	0.30	0.25
Item 3 (Approachability)	0.34	0.80	0.40
Item 4 (Interaction)	0.28	0.75	0.45
Item 5 (Entertainment)	0.20	0.42	0.83



Each of these advanced statistical tests was interpreted to offer a nuanced understanding of how influencer content shapes political orientation. The regression analysis indicates that both trust and frequency of exposure are robust predictors, while the ANOVA and factor analysis provide additional insight into subgroup differences and content dimensions. Overall, the data analysis supports the study’s hypothesis that social media influencers significantly mould the political orientations of Indian youth.

Discussion

The current study shows a strong correlation between Indian youths' political attitude and social media influencer participation. Higher exposure frequency and greater trust in influencer material are linked to increasing political interest and changes in ideological leanings, according to data studies ranging from correlations to regression, ANOVA,

and factor analysis. These results corroborate previous studies that concluded that by offering easily available, interesting, and convincing material, internet influencers serve as catalysts for political socialization.

Influencer trust and exposure frequency are the best indicators of political inclination, according to the regression study. The ANOVA results also show that urban kids are more susceptible to digital persuasion than rural youth, possibly as a result of disparities in digital knowledge and technology availability. The factor analysis further breaks down the power of influencer material into aspects like relatability, authenticity, and entertainment value, indicating that political persuasion is significantly influenced by the perceived sincerity and captivating quality of influencers' content.

By combining sophisticated statistical analyses with a targeted analysis of the Indian context—a region undergoing severe political unrest and rapid digital transformation—this

study adds to the body of existing work. It also suggests that digital media interventions should be mindful of the potential for influencers to sway political opinions, which in turn could affect electoral outcomes and democratic engagement. Future research should explore the long-term effects of digital persuasion and investigate possible moderating factors such as media literacy and socio-economic status.

Conclusion

The study confirms that social media influencers are crucial in shaping young Indians' political opinions. Political participation and ideological changes are highly predicted by influencer trust and exposure frequency. Due to increased digital knowledge and access, urban kids are increasingly affected. The persuasive power of influencer material is enhanced by its relatability, authenticity, and entertainment value. The research emphasizes how influencers have two sides to their engagement in politics: they may transmit false information while simultaneously raising political awareness. To maintain democratic integrity in the digital age, it urges more media literacy, regulatory oversight, and ethical standards. Future studies should delve into longitudinal impacts and the moderating effects of socio-economic and educational backgrounds.

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