

**ROLE OF SOCIAL MEDIA INFLUENCERS IN SHAPING
POLITICAL IDEOLOGIES AND VOTER PREFERENCES**

DISSERTATION

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SUBMITTED BY

KEVAL DAVE

ROLL NO.: 21BABBA055

UNDER THE GUIDANCE OF SUPERVISOR:

DR.PRADEEP MALLIK



SCHOOL OF LIBERAL STUDIES

PANDIT DEENDAYAL ENERGY UNIVERSITY

GANDHINAGAR – 382426.

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APPROVAL SHEET

This dissertation titled: ROLE OF SOCIAL MEDIA INFLUENCERS IN SHAPING POLITICAL IDEOLOGIES AND VOTER PREFERENCES by Keval Dave recommended for the degree of B.A. (Hons.)

Examiners:

Signature of examiner:

Name of examiner:

Signature of examiner:

Name of examiner:

Dissertation supervisor:

Signature of supervisor:

Name of supervisor:

Director-SLS:

Name:

Signature:

Date:

Place: Raisan, Gandhinagar

DECLARATION

I, **KEVAL DAVE**, hereby declare that this written submission represents my ideas in my own words and where others' idea or words have been included, I have adequately cited and referenced the sources. I also declare that I have adhered to all principles of academic honesty and integrity and have not misrepresented or fabricated, or falsified any idea/data/fact/source in my submission. I understand that any violation of the above will be cause for disciplinary action by the PANDIT DEENDAYAL ENERGY UNIVERSITY and can also evoke penal action from the sources which have thus not been properly cited or from whom proper permission has not been taken when needed.

Student's Roll No.: 21BABBA055

Student's Name: Keval Dave

Student's signature: _____

Date: _____

Place: Raisan, Gandhinagar

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines the effects of social media influencers on political preferences and behaviours among Indian citizens, emphasising digital-native users. In a political environment that is powerfully mediated, the objective is to scrutinize the role of influencers in shaping people's political opinion, voting intentions, ideological propositions, and susceptibility to misinformation. This mixed-method study combines content analysis of select influencer pieces of content and a quantitative survey ($N = 113$) using chi-square tests of relationships.

This research finds that individuals aged 18-24 are more likely to report a change in political opinion based on influencer content. Young people were also more ideologically reinforced and influenced by misinformation. Although those exposed to influencer content were more likely to switch their attitude, it was not well-linked to an individual's voting behaviour. The study also finds a perceived authenticity, which is an important variable in audience credibility, can outweigh even the accuracy of an influencer piece of content. Finally, while it was observed, that people who witnessed misinformation and subsequently changed their opinion were negatively statistically significant to the actual content they were exposed to, raises ethical questions about the unregulated power of influencers.

This research adds to the growing literature around digital political communication, specifically, by discussing the emotional, informal mechanisms through which influencers facilitate the mediation of political understanding for their audience. This research concludes with policy recommendations for the area of digital literacy and accountability of social media platforms.

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

The swift pace of digital technology development has dramatically changed how society engages with information and makes choices. Notably, perhaps the most impactful development has been the emergence of social media as a communication tool, especially in nations with heightened digital adoption. From being a site for entertainment and human interactions, social media platforms have become potent tools capable of shaping and mobilising thought processes. With the changing digital environment, the emergence of 'social media influencers' has captured considerable public interest and debate.

Social media influencers are individuals with large followings on one or more platforms, including but not limited to Instagram, YouTube, X (formerly Twitter), and Facebook. These influencers initially built their following by sharing content around topics like fashion, fitness, travel, beauty, and other lifestyle issues. But over the last few years, their influence has increasingly spread to issues of public interest, including health, finance, and politics.

India has a population of about 1.4 billion, and more than 35% of this population is under the age of 35 (S&P Global, 2023). Updated estimates show that India has more than 800 million internet users, and as of January 2025, almost 491 million of them use social media actively, which accounts for almost 33.7% of the population (DataReportal, 2025). YouTube and Instagram have become especially dominant among the youth of India, who use these to watch videos and shape their perceptions

accordingly. In such a situation, the role of social media influencers in shaping perceptions is significant and needs to be considered.

Political parties and candidates globally have been extensively utilising digital platforms to reach voters, mobilise their supporters and shape narratives. In India, the general elections of 2014 and 2019 saw wide use of social media campaigns by political parties. What has changed, however, is that influencers who may not have a formal political background are now playing a role in shaping political discussions. Their endorsements, which may be subtle or direct, reach millions of viewers and potentially influence how audiences perceive political parties, ideologies, or candidates.

Social media influencers' influence can be traced to their perceived authenticity. In contrast to conventional celebrities, who are perceived as aloof and far away, influencers are "one of us." They share behind-the-scenes glimpses of daily life, raw thoughts, and direct interactions with their audience through comments, stories, and live streaming. This cultivates trust and familiarity, which conventional media or advertising campaigns may find difficult to replicate. When these people speak about politics or urge civic action, their words are likely to be more effective in engaging audiences, particularly politically undecided or disengaged ones.

The importance of this dynamic is amplified in India's multi-party democratic culture, where political awareness and loyalty vary hugely by region, by caste, religion, and generation. In this multicultural context, understanding how political opinion is formed and the contribution that online voices can make to its formation

has wide implications. Although political scientists have long viewed the influence of mass media and campaign strategies on voter behaviour, the rise of digital influencers adds a new dimension that has yet to be fully examined, particularly in India.

This study is at the intersection of political behaviour and media. It tries to analyse how influencer exposure affects political opinions among different age groups. This involves a study of whether influencer endorsement or political views have any measurable impacts on vote choices, party identification, or political engagement. Further, the study seeks to determine whether the influence is one-dimensional across age groups or whether some demographic segments are more susceptible to influencer manipulation.

With the novelty of this trend and the lack of academic research, especially within the context of Indian social and political life, this dissertation hopes to bridge a major knowledge gap. Previous research has been more focused on online political campaigns of established political parties or on analysing social media trends based on sentiment analysis and keyword tracking. Little research has ventured into the more complex arena of influencer-based political content and its influence on public opinion. This research, therefore, adds to the expanding corpus of scholarship that understands political participation and persuasion through the lens of digital culture.

Furthermore, this study also addresses broader debates over the use of digital technology in modern democracies. With the voting process increasingly a battlefield characterised by narrative battles fought in online realms, the role of

unusual political agents like influencers complicates the model of educated citizenship. Are the people voting ideologically and based on policy questions, or are they subject to digital charisma and asymmetrical personal relations? What are the implications for democratic processes, especially in emerging countries like India, where mastery of the use of the internet is not always synonymous with understanding political affairs?

The emergence of social media influencers is a fundamental change in the manner in which political opinions are formulated and articulated in India. As the influence becomes more established, grasping its various dimensions becomes more pertinent and necessary. This research attempts to chart that landscape and offer an academic basis for further research in this new area of study.

1.2 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

In today's digital era, social media has emerged as a strong arena for political discourse, especially in democracies like India, where multiple political ideologies vie for power and influence. Among the many digital stakeholders, social media influencers, or persons commanding a sizable online audience, are important intermediaries between political communications and the public. Their content, often interspersed with personal experiences, humour, and entertainment, integrates political commentary and thereby influences the way their followers view, interact with, and react to political affairs. These influencers, whose output is always perceived as relatable and authentic, can frame public opinion, organise civic

participation, or reinforce existing prejudices, especially among youth and first-time voters who mostly consume digital media for information gathering.

With more Indian political parties and campaign tacticians turning to influencers to relay their ideology and agenda, the implications of these partnerships are still to be properly researched. As opposed to the mainstream media, subject to the oversight of regulation and journalistic practice, political communication through influencers takes place primarily within an unregulated environment. This gives rise to considerable transparency, authenticity, and ethical practice concerns. More precisely, concerns relating to nondisclosure of pecuniary interests, slanted presentation of facts, and distribution of disinformation may have the capacity to deceive the public, create ideological echo chambers, and incite political polarisation.

Second, there is limited academic literature examining specifically how Indian influencers across different ideological groups shape political attitudes and voting behaviour. Existing research has focused mainly on political discourse sentiment analysis or the impact of media viewing on voting behaviour, but there is less research on how the multifaceted strategies of influencers in producing ideological narratives are comprehended or how such narratives are consumed and interpreted by the audience. Last, there is a poor comprehension of whether the followers perceive the influencer-generated content as politically motivated or as part of the influencer's authentic personal output.

With the large internet user base in India and the popularity of social networking websites like Instagram, Twitter, and YouTube, it is increasingly necessary to be aware of the role played by influencers in determining political views. This study

attempts to offer a response to the question of what role influencers have in shaping political views by comparing six Indian influencers three being pro-government and three being critical of the government (Based on conclusion drawn from content analysis from chapter Data Analysis) attempting to gauge their impact on public opinion, political engagement, and democratic discussion. It also attempts to learn about the ethical outcomes of political communications spread by influencers and establish if the employment of such tactics results in democratic participation or obstructs the electors' capacity for making well-educated choices.

1.3 OBJECTIVES

- To compare the Effects of Left-Leaning and Conservative Influencers

This study will analyse the engagement patterns, content framing, and persuasive techniques used by both pro-government (conservative) and anti-government (left-leaning) influencers. By comparing their impact on audience sentiment and political discourse, the research aims to understand how each ideological group contributes to public opinion formation and political polarisation.

- To assess the Role of Credibility and Authenticity

The study will examine how audiences perceive the credibility and authenticity of political influencers and how these factors affect their ability to shape political narratives. It will explore whether influencers' personal brand, consistency, and transparency influence trust and engagement levels among their followers.

- To Explore the Strategies and Narratives Employed by Political Influencers in Engaging and Persuading Their Followers

By analysing the language, tone, emotional appeals, and content formats used by influencers, this research aims to identify key strategies that drive audience engagement and persuasion. It will also assess whether influencers rely on factual discourse, ideological reinforcement, or sensationalism to shape political opinions.

- To Examine the Influence of Social Media Influencers on Political Preferences

This study seeks to determine whether exposure to political content from influencers leads to shifts in audience political preferences or reinforces pre-existing beliefs. It will explore how influencer-driven political discourse affects voting intentions, political activism, and alignment with specific ideologies.

- To Identify Challenges Related to Non-Disclosure of Affiliations, Astroturfing, and the Ethical Implications of Influencer-Driven Political Campaigns in the Indian Context

The research will critically analyse the ethical concerns surrounding political influencers, including undisclosed sponsorships, covert affiliations with political parties, and the practice of astroturfing (orchestrated grassroots movements). It will assess how these practices affect audience trust and democratic discourse.

- To Provide Insights into the Role of Social Media Influencers in Shaping Democratic Participation and Political Engagement in a Digitally Connected World

By studying audience interactions, discussions, and participation in political activities, this research will evaluate how influencers contribute to democratic engagement. It will explore whether influencer-driven political communication leads to increased civic involvement, activism, or passive consumption of political content.

- To understand Audience Demographics and Behavioural Patterns:

The study will analyse the demographic composition of influencer audiences, including age, gender, education, and geographic distribution. It will also assess behavioural patterns, such as content consumption habits, engagement levels, and the likelihood of sharing or acting upon politically charged content.

1.4 HYPOTHESIS

In this research, a null hypothesis framework is used to determine whether some variables, age group, social media usage patterns, influencer content exposure, and perceived misinformation, have a statistically significant association with political opinion shift and voter turnout. In every instance, the null hypothesis (H_0) is that there is no statistically significant association between the variables being tested. This is the general practice in empirical research, especially when using inferential statistics like the chi-square test, as it offers a clear point of reference to determine whether differences in observed data are the result of random variation or reflect a significant association.

This study endeavours to maintain objectivity and be grounded in empirical realities by testing null hypotheses, hence letting the data dictate the conclusions. This is to offset the assumption of a causal or significant relationship before statistical confirmation, ensuring the reliability and purity of the results. All hypotheses have been deliberately selected based on the theoretical underpinnings of political communication, media effects, and behavioural psychology to account for the intricate and precise mechanisms through which social media influencers tend to impact political attitudes and civic participation.

Null Hypothesis:

H01: There is no statistically significant relationship between the rate of individuals consuming influencer content and any shift in their political attitudes.

This hypothesis tests the relationship between increased exposure to influencer content and actual political opinion change, or otherwise, whether people consume such content passively with no effect on their opinion.

H02: There is no significant relationship between the identification of misinformation by influencers and the belief that influencers must disclose their political affiliation.

This study looks at whether there is a greater sense of need for transparency from individuals who can identify misinformation, or if belief regarding misinformation is distinct from requests for disclosure.

H03: There is no significant relationship between the age group of the population and the perception that influencers propagate existing political ideologies or ideas.

This hypothesis analyses to what degree different age groups perceive influencers as echo chambers that reinforce existing opinions, or conversely, if this is not age-dependent.

H04: There is no significant correlation between age group and whether or not individuals voted based on content posted by influencers.

This examines whether the behavior of voters influenced by influencers differs between generations, especially between native-born young people and conventional generations.

H05: There is no strong correlation between a change in someone's political stance and content-based vote-switching by influencers.

This attempts to identify whether individuals who say that influencers cause a political opinion change are also more likely to permit such influence to dictate their voting behaviours.

H06: There exists no statistically significant correlation between political opinion changes and age groups due to content posted by influencers. Here, attention is given to finding out if certain age groups of young users, in particular, are more prone to altering their political opinions according to influencer messages.

H07: There is no significant correlation between witnessing misinformation from influencers and political opinion change. This hypothesis tests the relationship between the perception of misinformation and political opinion change, or whether it has no or very little effect on opinion change.

1.5 SIGNIFICANCE OF STUDY

The increasing convergence of digital media and political discourse has transformed the way individuals participate in public debates, and it is important to investigate new modalities of political communication, with emphasis on influencer-led ones. This research has important scholarly, practical, and social relevance in understanding new political participation dynamics and ideological impact in India's digital democratic sphere.

Intellectually, this study contributes to the relatively less-explored field of political communication within the context of influencer culture in India. While the global body of literature has opened up debates around the political influence of influencers on public opinion, the unique socio-political context of India, combined with its burgeoning growth of its digital population, requires region-specific insights. This study fills in the research gap identified above through comparative analysis of influencers across ideological lines, contributing to the interdisciplinary discourse at the interface of media studies, political science, and digital sociology. The study will provide empirical insights into how influencers influence public opinion, contribute to political polarisation, and construct ideological identities through content sharing.

In practical terms, the research presents useful lessons to political strategists, social media marketers, campaign managers, and policymakers who are interested in grasping the intricacies of online political involvement. As influencers become de facto spokespeople for political discourse, comprehending how they operate, e.g.,

emotional appeals, framing content, authenticity, and targeting audiences, can assist in creating more ethical, effective, and transparent communication practices. Furthermore, the study elucidates the influencer credibility and trust-building techniques and practices, assisting brands and political organisations in navigating the grey areas between advocacy and manipulation.

At the social level, the study is of particular value in alerting social media users, young voters in particular, to the potential effect of online personas on political attitudes and behaviour. In a world where online engagement often surpasses that of conventional media, the ability to critically evaluate the messages and intentions of influencers is crucial to effective engagement in a democratic process. Through the raising of awareness regarding issues such as astroturfing, nondisclosure of affiliation, and the surreptitious insertion of political ideologies into entertainment or lifestyle programming, this study fosters media literacy and public discourse regarding the ethical concerns of influencer politics.

Further, this study also seeks to contribute to the current debates on digital governance and content moderation. As policymakers are faced with the challenges of misinformation, political manipulation, and transparency gaps in influencer-created content, the results of this study can, in turn, be utilised to inform future guidelines or frameworks for improving accountability in the digital sphere.

This research is a significant contribution to political influence scholarship from an academic point of view in the context of social media, while at the same time providing media practitioners, political leaders, and the general public with helpful recommendations. This research is a timely analysis of how online personas influence the political life of a country and the democratic engagement of many people.

1.6 AIM AND SCOPE OF STUDY

The general objective of this research is to offer a critical examination of the impact of social media influencers on political ideology construction and voter decision-making under Indian democracy. The research aims to investigate the degree to which pro-govt and anti-govt influencers use online platforms to disseminate political messages, influence opinions, and possibly affect voting outcomes. In addition, the research aims to evaluate the strategies of these influencers towards constructing ideological coherence and loyalty with audiences, and examining the ethical concerns and implications of influencer-based political communication.

By analysing content, patterns of interaction, and reactions from audiences specific to particular influencers, this paper aims to put forth empirical findings regarding the

impact of online figures on political identity formation and crystallisation, diffusion of ideological narrative, and the politicisation of online political discussions. With regards to this aim, the present research paper plans to contribute towards the body of knowledge concerning political communication on digital platforms and the implications for democracy.

Parameters of the Research

This research is concerned with the Indian social media space, with particular interest in those influencers who actively participate in political discussions. The research will examine six of the most popular Indian influencers, three who actively participate in pro-government ideologies and three who actively voice criticism or dissent against government policies. These have been chosen because they remain active with political content and have a significant following.

The research has two primary elements:

1. Content and Engagement Analysis: Qualitative examination of YouTube posts and approaches adopted by the selected influencers will be conducted. Content will be analysed for ideological framing, emotional tone, persuasion tactics, and the frequency and nature of political commentary. Engagement indicators such as likes, comments, shares, and views will also be examined to determine the reach and acceptance of the political message.
2. Perception and Effect on the Audience: This research will examine how political affiliations, levels of trust, ideological positions, political discourse or political activity participation are influenced by content shared by influencers, using systematically designed surveys to reach demographically diverse cohorts of followers. Demographic controls will be examined to measure trends and correlations in audience reactions.

The focus of this research is deliberately confined to online influencers who mainly work on YouTube, as these are extensively used for the spread of political content in India.

In addition, although the research recognises the worldwide applicability of influencer politics, it draws on the Indian socio-political environment, which is defined by this country's diverse electorate, nuanced ideological spaces, and rising internet penetration. Temporally, the focus is on the post-2019 era, considering the advent of political influencer activity around and during the general elections.

Briefly, the current research tries to offer a focused but comprehensive analysis of the digital influencer phenomenon in the Indian political debate, offering findings of scholarly value, sociological significance, and pragmatic application in political communication

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

2.1 REVIEW OF PREVIOUS STUDIES

The media's role in influencing political behaviour has long been the subject of academic study, with early foundation studies emphasising the influence of social contexts on voting choices. Pioneering studies, including those by Lazarsfeld, Berelson, and Gaudet (1944) and Berelson et al. (1954), demonstrated the pivotal role of interpersonal communication within social networks in the voter decision process. However, the subsequent decades saw a paradigm shift toward models prioritising individual agency. Campbell et al. (1960) proposed a psychological approach to voting behaviour, while rational choice theorists like Fiorina (1981) focused on the concept of individual utility maximisation in political choice. This development trajectory largely marginalised the study of social intermediaries until a revival, spearheaded by scholars like Huckfeldt and Sprague (1995), reasserted the importance of interpersonal networks and contextual factors in electoral behaviour (Beck et al., 2002).

With the emergence of digital technologies, researchers were concerned with the political implications of the internet, social media sites, and mobile communication. Early studies of online campaigning, like Gibson (2002) and Chen (2008), viewed these technologies as new but marginal tools and not as core components of electoral campaigns. However, over time, there was a general agreement that welcomed new media as core to political communication (Chen, 2013). The Australian federal election of 2013, examined by Chen (2013), was a case study that demonstrated this shift, with political parties using integrated multi-channel approaches, using email, social media, targeted digital advertising, and data-driven campaigning to shape voters more effectively. This demonstrated how traditional political actors quickly adjusted to technological developments, in support of the "normalisation hypothesis," which argues that new communication technologies are more likely to reinforce than challenge existing power relations (Gibson and McAllister, 2011).

Parallel occurrences in both American and European spheres further highlighted the transformative yet intricate influence of social media. The research conducted by Rita, António, and Afonso (2023) contested previous optimistic views regarding the predictive capacity of social media sentiment. Their examination of Twitter conversations during the 2019 United Kingdom general elections indicated that, although social media encapsulated fervent political discourse, sentiment analysis proved to be an unreliable gauge for electoral outcomes. The prevalence of neutral content and the lack of correlation between positive sentiment and electoral achievements illustrated the shortcomings of equating online expressions with voter actions. In a similar vein, Belcastro et al. (2022) enhanced computational models by integrating topic discovery, neural-based opinion mining, and emotional analysis to more accurately delineate polarisation during the 2020 United States presidential election. Their results demonstrated that, while social media platforms function as valuable indicators of public opinion and sentiment, their outputs necessitate advanced interpretation to effectively predict political behaviour.

Within the Indian context, Verma and Sardesai (2014) provided important explanations of the ways media exposure and voting inclinations were shifting. Using data from six rounds of the National Study Election, they demonstrated that higher exposure to traditional and new media was highly correlated with increased support for the BJP, particularly in terms of economic liberalisation policies. Their study, however, confirmed that media effects worked mainly by exciting existing inclinations and not by radically altering social attitudes, again in keeping with the "minimal effects" hypothesis. This nuanced perspective is especially relevant in gauging the influence of political influencers on social media, whose primary function may also be in consolidating existing beliefs and not in persuading floating voters.

A new strand of research has focused exclusively on the micro-level impact of individuals, as opposed to mass media or institutional agents. Lajnef (2023) studied the impact of social media influencers on teenagers' behavioural and cognitive biases using a cognitive mapping approach. Her findings

underscored the credibility, uniqueness, and emotional appeal of influencers as having a significant impact on teenagers' self-esteem, identity, and imitative behaviour. While ultimately interested in consumer behaviour, the processes at work—the emotional bonding, trust establishment, and parasocial relationships—are directly transferable to political influence, especially in those areas where political communication is becoming ever more informal and personality-centred.

This was developed by Summers and McGregor (2023), who advanced Political Relational Influencers (PRIs), i.e., those who form political views from relationship-focused, non-ideological material on sites like TikTok and YouTube. Their study showed that emotional trust and parasocial relationships, and not direct political communication, were the strongest predictors of political influence among youth audiences. This new scholarship avoids the focus on party-based approaches to a recognition of decentralised influencer communication that is emotionally engaging as a core driver of political opinion formation.

In addition, Ralph Schroeder (2018) carried out a cross-national comparative examination of the way digital media empowered right-wing populism by producing counterpublic spaces that favoured the flourishing of oppositional or excluded discourses. His study showed that social media platforms enabled individuals such as Donald Trump, Narendra Modi, and the Sweden Democrats to bypass established media gatekeepers and build emotional loyalties within followers. This same tendency towards emotionally and identity-based political mobilisation is also observable in the Indian case, where influencers tend to mix nationalist discourse with entertainment to engage audiences.

Finally, the more pernicious forms of social media influence, namely public opinion manipulation through disinformation and hybrid information operations, have been the subject of considerable research by Bradshaw (2020). Her research highlights how features embedded in social media platforms, such as algorithmic filtering, anonymity, and automation, facilitate large-scale influence operations that subvert democratic processes. Although

Bradshaw focused her research on state-sponsored activities, her results are equally applicable to explaining how non-state domestic political actors can use similar strategies to influence public discourse and election results. Collectively, these studies illustrate that although the digital era has broadened the avenues of political discourse, it has not necessarily democratised them. Social media platforms have become arenas for political power and serve to amplify dominant ideological narratives. Influencers, as recognised as emerging political actors, are the intersection of personal identity, emotional connection, and strategic messaging, thereby redefining the parameters of political persuasion in ways that traditional models are only just beginning to appreciate.

2.2 REVIEW OF RELATED THEORIES

Theoretical models of political communication have undergone very significant development with technological advancement. One of the critical aspects of comprehending the power of media, or in this case, of social media influencers, is identifying theories that show how social identity, emotional identification, and mediated political action interact. All of these models combined explain how some media personalities, particularly influencers, have immense political power over audiences in contemporary democratic environments.

One theory model central to this debate is the two-step flow of communication model developed by Lazarsfeld, Berelson, and Gaudet (1944). This model is a critique of the assumption of direct media impact on mass audiences, instead postulating that opinion leaders act as intermediaries to mediate media effects

by interpreting and relaying information within social networks. Beck et al. (2002) extend this observation through social calculus of voting, highlighting interpersonal communication and partisan information intermediaries—friends, organisations, and media—as determinants of political decision-making. These observations remain highly pertinent to

influencer studies today, whose influencers are essentially digital-age opinion leaders, sharing political narratives among niche audiences.

The significance of group identity in shaping political influence is explained via Social Identity Theory (Tajfel, 1972) and its extension in Self-Categorisation Theory (Turner et al., 1987). According to these theories, individuals construct their sense of self primarily based on membership in social groups and internalise group norms, including political beliefs, into their self-concept. Suhay (2015) combined these theories and emotion, and so developed the social-emotional influence theory concept. As explained by Suhay, reflexive emotions such as pride and shame serve as conformity mediators to in-group political norms and help in political polarisation. When individuals see political messages as aligning with their in-group identity, they tend to feel pride and reinforce their political beliefs. Messages being seen as inconsistent, however, trigger shame or embarrassment and result in opinion change or further entrenchment of dominant beliefs.

Similarly, Bandura and Adams' (1977) theory of observational learning highlights the profound impact of behaviour modelling in shaping attitudes and behaviours. Lajnef (2023) applies this theoretical framework to illustrate the dynamics of the relationship between influencers and followers, demonstrating how adolescents copy the behaviour, attitude, and taste exhibited by influencers whom they consider to be real and authentic. This finding highlights the psychological processes through which political influencers can shape ideological perceptions without direct influence, but by modelling behaviour and emotions. In the age of the internet, Toffler's (1980) concept of "prosumers" and its extension by Park (2019) and Stieglitz and Dang-Xuan (2012) becomes especially relevant. Prosumers are both producers and consumers of content simultaneously, thus cooperatively engaging in the creation of political discourse. Influencers represent the paradigmatic example of this role, combining personal anecdotes and political commentary to subtly shape their political inclinations. Rita et al. (2023) extend this by showing that social media consumers, as prosumers, polarise opinions through selective exposure and algorithmically supported echo chambers.

Platform-specific theories, such as van Dijck's (2013) Platform Society theory, provide a more satisfactory explanation of the role of social media in political processes. This theory posits that platforms are not just neutral infrastructures but instead influential actors that contribute to shaping information dissemination, actor visibility, and engagement patterns. Bradshaw (2020) builds on this perspective in the context of computational propaganda by demonstrating how the characteristics of a platform, such as algorithmic curation, anonymity, and automation, contribute to amplifying politically influential content and disinformation, thereby enabling both domestic and foreign influence campaigns.

Within populist movements, Schroeder (2018) combines populist media theory and Fraser's (1990) theory of counterpublics. To him, new media have assisted right-wing populists in bypassing gatekeepers in mainstream media and creating alternative political discourse spaces. These counterpublics are characterised by emotional narratives, moral dualisms, and anti-elitist discourses, which flourish particularly in social media environments. Such epistemological frameworks are crucial in the analysis of the political role of influencers who, while not necessarily belonging to formal political movements, often use identical discursive approaches to create loyalty and shape public opinion.

In addition, the Political Relational Influencers (PRI) framework developed by Summers and McGregor (2023) explains political influence through the framework of relational communication. Contrary to customary political agents, PRIS create emotional intimacy and trust by using personal stories and shared cultural markers, thus attaining political influence without obvious ideological framing. Their study is empirical evidence supporting the argument that relational trust and emotional intimacy are more powerful motivators of political opinion construction than rational thought or explicit persuasion. Together, these theoretical models provide an overall foundation for understanding how social media influencers exert political influence within contemporary societies. They highlight the complex interplay between identity, emotion, trust, platform architecture, and face-to-face communication

in shaping political behaviour. Drawing on these conceptual models allows for a nuanced examination of the complex processes through which social media influencers in India and the global community influence political opinions, voting, and public discourse.

2.3 SOCIAL MEDIA AND POLITICAL INFLUENCE

The intersection of political power and social media has been a major area of academic research, particularly in the context of electoral politics and civic engagement. The ubiquity of digital media has radically changed the way political messages are disseminated, received, and digested by the masses. Unlike mainstream media, social media supports a two-way model of communication where users not only receive information passively but also actively engage in the creation and transmission of political messages, often fusing the boundaries between private gossip and public political action (Stieglitz and Dang-Xuan, 2012).

Empirical studies have consistently shown that social media plays a twofold role as both a barometer of public opinion and a mobilisation instrument. Belcastro et al. (2022) show that, in the 2020 United States presidential election, real-time Twitter sentiment analysis of public mood was able to detect shifts in public mood and predict candidate performance more accurately than traditional polling methods. Yet, the relationship between online sentiment and electoral outcome is nonlinear and not always uniform. Rita, António, and Afonso (2023), in their analysis of the 2019 United Kingdom general elections, found that although social media platforms facilitated wide-ranging political debate, the overall sentiment expressed was overwhelmingly neutral. Additionally, positive or negative sentiments regarding political parties did not always translate into electoral victory, thus highlighting the complexities involved in converting digital participation into actual political action.

In India, social media usage during political campaigning has been particularly effective. Verma and Sardesai (2014) demonstrate how increased exposure to

all types of media, including television, print media, and internet news, was highly correlated with increased support for the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in the 2014 general election. Their work points out that the effect of media has the tendency to reaffirm political allegiances and not change voter sentiments, which aligns with the "minimal effects" theory. This is particularly applicable when thinking about the role of social media influencers, who tend to reaffirm ideological allegiances among their audiences rather than produce significant opinion shifts.

Social media has profoundly changed the political influence dynamics by offering a new generation of political influencers. Influencers, unlike politicians or journalists, operate in relational and affective spaces rather than using official power or ideological consistency. Summers and McGregor (2023) introduce the idea of Political Relational Influencers (PRIS), who exercise political influence by creating para-social intimacy with their publics through non-political content, such as humour, lifestyle, or personal narrative. Their study indicates that relational trust, emotional connection, and perceived authenticity are more powerful drivers of political influence than explicit political communication. This relational influence approach is particularly effective with younger generations, to whom conventional political rhetoric comes across as distant or irrelevant. The affective aspect of social media influence is also accounted for by psychological theory. Suhay (2015) outlines how group-based feelings of pride and shame act as mediators between polarisation and political conformity. Online, influencers tend to position themselves as spokespeople for the in-group, generating emotional loyalty and affirming ideological borders among their audience. The amplification of emotional reactions by likes, shares, and comments serves to reinforce these effects, leading to the creation of digital echo chambers where opposing perspectives are pushed to the margins, and in-group norms are continually reinforced.

At the systemic level, platform structures contribute substantially to the construction of political power. Bradshaw (2020) describes how aspects like algorithmic curation, anonymity, and automation facilitate quickly flowing

politically charged information and disinformation. Algorithms are biased in favour of content optimised for engagement, usually favouring sensational or emotionally charged content over objective reporting. This provides a conducive environment for influencers skilled at creating emotionally charged content to disseminate political messages that achieve broad reach and considerable influence, usually without the inhibition of editorial control or journalistic integrity.

Social media's impact on political processes not only encompasses democratic engagement but also populist mobilisation. Schroeder (2018) demonstrates how populist politicians such as Donald Trump, Narendra Modi, and the Sweden Democrats used digital media to their advantage to circumvent mainstream media and thus spread their messages through emotionally resonant stories presenting politics as a moral battle between morally upright citizens and an immoral elite. Social media influencers who are often without official political status in many cases also resort to the same rhetorical strategies, combining entertainment with populist or nationalist agendas to strike a chord inside the hearts of audiences.

In addition, Chen's (2013) research indicates that political leaders have become more professional in their utilisation of digital media, leveraging data-driven targeting, coordinated messaging across platforms, and audience segmentation strategies. Likewise, influencers leverage platform analytics and audience data to optimise their content strategies, thereby maximising engagement and relevance with their audiences. This intersection of political strategies and influencer marketing strategies highlights the blurring of the lines between formal political communication and informal influence by influencers.

Though the seeming power of social media in framing political narratives cannot be ignored, its influence is filtered through a series of socio-demographic factors. Internet access, literacy levels, linguistic diversity, and geographic diversity all significantly influence the extent to which social media influences political conduct, particularly in a plural society like India. In addition, though social media enables the rapid dissemination of political information, it cannot be said to necessarily enable democratic practice or

civic engagement. Studies have shown that it can also enable the dissemination of disinformation, enhanced polarisation, and disengagement among specific segments of society. Finally, the dynamic and multifaceted relationship between political influence and social media has redefined the ways political messages are communicated and received. Influencers have become even more pivotal as key political actors in this respect. Emotional resonance, relational trust, the usefulness provided by platforms, and audience segmentation all coalesce to make social media politically effective. Understanding these dynamics is required to appreciate the role of influencers in the formation of political opinion and behaviour in contemporary election contexts, particularly in plural and complex democracies such as India.

2.4 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical framework for the study is based on an interdisciplinary synthesis of political communication, social psychology, and digital media theories. It aims to theorise how social media influencers shape political behaviour by acting as contemporary intermediaries within an electronically mediated public sphere. The framework synthesises insights from prominent opinion leadership theories of opinion leadership, social identity and affective influence, and platform affordance models to provide a multi-level framework for studying the influence of influencers in modern political processes.

Underlying the structure is the development of the two-step flow of communication model, first developed by Lazarsfeld, Berelson, and Gaudet (1944). In the past, this model held that the power of mass media is exercised indirectly through opinion leaders, who interpret and pass along information to their interpersonal networks. Beck et al. (2002) developed this model by introducing the social calculus of voting, which suggested that political decisions by citizens arise from an interplay between social interaction in politically charged environments and personal predispositions. With social media, influencers become the opinion leaders of the present day, editing

political information and constructing narratives in ways that appeal to the pre-dispositions and emotional investments of their audiences.

Social Identity Theory (Tajfel, 1972) and Self-Categorisation Theory (Turner et al., 1987) are significant theoretical underpinnings that explain the psychological mechanisms of political alignment by influencers. These theories propose that people categorise themselves into different social groups and adopt the norms, attitudes, and behaviours typical of these groups. Suhay's (2015) social-emotional influence theory builds on these theories by emphasising the self-conscious emotions, such as pride and shame, in shaping political conformity and polarisation. In the model used in this dissertation, influencers are considered members of an in-group who trigger emotional reactions that lead to political attitude changes among their followers.

Besides identity and emotion-based mechanisms, the model also includes the observational learning principles as outlined by Bandura and Adams (1977). In this theoretical framework, people learn and emulate the act of observing credible and likeable models. Influencers, through their perceived credibility, authenticity, and emotional proximity, become influential role models to their followers. Cognitive mapping of adolescent responses to influencer actions by Lajnef (2023) supports this mechanism, outlining how credibility and novelty perceptions lead to mimetic behaviours that extend beyond consumer choice and permeate broader cognitive and behavioural domains.

Summers and McGregor's (2023) relational communication model is the foundation for the theoretical framework of the dissertation. Their model of Political Relational Influencers (PRIS) highlights how political influence tends to occur increasingly in the form of affective relations with parasocial intimacy and trust instead of overt political communication. Per this model, the relational intensity between influencer and follower is more significant than the ideological content of the conveyed messages, such that political influence is through emotional identification and a perceived sense of interpersonal closeness. At the systemic level, the framework proposed combines ideas on

platform affordances and amplification effects of algorithms. Van Dijck's (2013) Platform Society theory posits that social media platforms are not neutral intermediaries but active agents that shape communication practices through their very design and governance. Bradshaw's (2020) computational propaganda study also shows how algorithms preferentially favour emotionally charged content, thus building information ecosystems that reward influencers who are adept at generating engagement. Schroeder's (2018) use of counterpublic theory demonstrates how digital spaces can empower alternative political narratives by circumventing traditional media gatekeepers, a mechanism especially relevant to the work of influencers in spreading nationalist or populist narratives.

Finally, Gibson and McAllister's (2011) theory of normalisation is employed to explain how social media technologies, which were originally considered tools of democratisation, have been primarily utilised by powerful actors within political systems. Influencers, while operating outside officially sanctioned political institutions, could be party to the reinforcement of existing ideologically based hierarchies rather than their destruction. Chen's (2013) research into the professionalisation of political communication tactics in digital media landscapes supports this view, illustrating how digital technologies are strategically integrated into broader contexts of persuasion and mobilisation of voters.

In using this framework, the dissertation takes the position that the effect of political influence emanating from social media influencers will vary with four related factors: (1) the individual dispositions of the audience, which include political ideology, identity commitments, and affective sensitivity; (2) influencer dispositions, which include credibility, authenticity, affective expressiveness, and relational warmth; (3) platform affordances that enhance the scale of affective and relationally framed communication; and (4) the broader systemic political currents that influence reception and effect of influencer communication. This theory integration allows for a nuanced exploration of the intricate and multidimensional ways in which influencers organise political opinions and behaviours. It transcends simplistic models of

direct media influence or information transfer, acknowledging the salience of identity, affect, relational processes, and technological mediation in constructing political outcomes in modern digital environments.

2.5 RESEARCH GAP

Despite the large body of existing work on media, social media, and political behaviour, much remains to be filled by this dissertation. Even though existing work has emphasised the central role played by social media in political discourse and mobilisation, most existing literature is drawn to macro-level phenomena like sentiment shift, trends in polarisation, and official campaign strategies. On the contrary, relatively less effort has been placed on the micro-level processes of political influence by individual actors beyond formal political arenas, particularly social media influencers who mix entertainment, lifestyle, and political communication in informal communicative spaces.

One basic weakness is the lack of understanding of the political dynamics of influencers. Belcastro et al.'s (2022) and Rita, António, and Afonso's (2023) studies provide robust computational models for measuring sentiment and opinion trends on social media, but largely view online political engagement as a uniform aggregate behaviour and do not differentiate the diverse impacts of different influencers. Similarly, studies like that of Verma and Sardesai (2014) highlight the impact of average media exposure, treating both conventional and social media as uniform aggregates, without examining how personalised communications from influencers can affect political attitudes on different audiences differently.

Besides, whereas there has been a wide theoretical examination of the emotional and identity-based components of political influence, most prominently in Suhay (2015) and Summers and McGregor (2023), there is a genuine deficiency of empirical studies taking this into the context of digital influencers. The majority of experimental studies of group conformity and political emotion have, to a large extent, been carried out in offline settings or within very controlled contexts, and this questions their transferability to the

more fluid, decentralised, and affective environments that materialise on social media. As such, there is an urgent need for academic studies that close this theoretical framework to empirical investigations of actual influencer-follower interactions, most prominently in politically active and culturally diverse societies.

The Indian context adds further layers of complexity that remain to be explored in depth. While Schroeder (2018) and Bradshaw (2020) have charted the influence of digital media on populist mobilisation and disinformation campaigns, their analyses themselves are founded mainly on broad trends at the macro level or on operations driven from outside. Comparatively little research has been done to examine the domestic, vernacular influencer space in India, where political content is generally embedded within entertainment content, and linguistic, cultural, and regional diversities intensify digital communication patterns. This research gap is especially pertinent because India is one of the world's largest social media markets, with sites such as YouTube, Instagram, and regional networks serving as influential spaces for politics.

In addition, current literature is not sufficiently dealing with the transparency as well as the ethical concerns of influencer-mediated political communication. Bradshaw (2020) critically questions algorithmic amplification concerns along with the platforms' role in enabling disinformation, but little scholarly research is undertaken on the covert sponsorship techniques, undeclared political allegiances, as well as astroturfing tactics utilised by influencers within domestic political environments. With no regulatory frameworks, influencers yield significant political clout without accountability and thus shape electoral perceptions in ways that are likely to be outside of traditional oversight mechanisms.

Finally, methodological limitations remain in extant research. Much of the existing literature relies on either computational sentiment analysis that only captures surface-level measures of public opinion or ethnographic case studies that are rich at the expense of generalizability. Relatively little work has employed mixed-method designs that combine computational analyses with

survey-based measures of audience perceptions, emotional reactions, and behavioural impacts. These kinds of methodologies are required to adequately quantify both the breadth and the depth of political influence generated by influencers. This dissertation will bridge the aforementioned gaps through the application of a mixed-methods research approach focused on the role of social media influencers in shaping political opinions in India. Not only will it examine the content strategies adopted by the influencers, but also the emotional, relational, and identity processes by which they can influence their followers. By placing influencer communication within a broader socio-political and technological environment, and focusing on the ethical dimensions, this research will seek to offer a more nuanced account of how non-traditional digital players are shaping the political landscape in contemporary democracies

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 RESEARCH DESIGN

This dissertation employs a mixed-methods exploratory research framework to study the impact of social media influencers on political ideologies and voter choices in the Indian context. A mixed-methods strategy combines qualitative and quantitative methods, which allows for more insight into the research questions. This strategy is best for social research that involves perceptions, attitudes, and behaviours, which require both richness in description and measurable trends. This type of approach is exploratory due to the relative newness of this topic in India, as the impact of social media personalities on democratic behaviours has not yet been extensively studied despite their growing presence in the online landscape.

The qualitative element of the study involves thematic and content analysis of political tweets and posts posted by six selected influencers—three government supporters and three government opponents—on social media platforms such as YouTube. This element of the design focuses on framing, tone, and rhetorical moves used in their posts. It offers a chance to study how political narratives are constructed, what emotions they evoke, and how they write ideology into apparently neutral or apolitical messages.

The quantitative component involves gathering a systematically planned online survey mailed to a stratified panel of social media participants. The survey measures a range of variables, such as political orientation, attitudes toward influencer credibility, frequency of exposure, and self-reported political activity, such as shifts in opinion or impact on voting behaviour. Quantitative analysis permits the establishment of statistically significant relationships and the generation of generalizable conclusions about the patterns of influence across demographic groups, such as age, education, and geographic location. Together, these interrelated factors create a solid foundation for meeting the research goals. The mixed-methods exploratory design permits the collection of empirical data as well as the accommodation of complexity and dynamism in digital political communication. This methodology provides a rich analysis that connects individual views with wider ideological trends, thus making the study more relevant to current discussions on media influence and democratic engagement in the Indian setting.

3.2 DATA SOURCES

To facilitate methodological rigour and inclusive insight, the present study makes use of both primary and secondary data sources. The synergy between the two types of data allows findings to be triangulated and boosts the validity of conclusions drawn regarding the impact of social media influencers on political opinion and voter conduct in India.

Primary data are collected using an online questionnaire from a stratified sample of social media users of content from chosen influencers. This contact

with respondents yields firsthand information on how exposure to influencer content relates to political attitudes, trust, and choice. The survey aims to measure demographic information, content exposure frequency and type, perceived credibility and impartiality of the influencer, and the degree to which political leaning and vote choice are influenced or legitimised by digital engagement. 113 valid responses were gathered and analysed. These data provide qualitative richness into the way audiences engage with influencer-driven political messages, enabling statistical analysis of associations and trends within groups.

Secondary data are taken from public posts on YouTube by six leading Indian influencers—three holding pro-government views and three known for their strong criticisms of the incumbent administration. YouTube was used for content sourcing. The selected content comprises videos that express political ideologies explicitly or implicitly. Metrics of engagement, like likes, shares, comments, and view counts, are also incorporated to give a quantifiable measure of audience response and reach. This content was analysed systematically to find ideological framings, emotional or persuasive appeal patterns, and narrative construction techniques.

Combining these data sources facilitates both macro-level analysis of influencer language and micro-level evaluation of individual behavioural consequences. While primary data enables the researcher to analyse psychological and behavioural responses to influencer content, secondary data sheds light by describing the communicative strategies potentially causing those responses. This two-source method is pivotal in tackling research aims and informs a multi-dimensional analysis of political influence in digital environments.

3.3 RESEARCH INSTRUMENT

The two principal research instruments employed in this study are a structured online questionnaire to collect primary data from social media users, and a content analysis based on themes to carry out systematic content analysis of

secondary data drawn from social media content—i.e., YouTube videos—created by chosen influencers. Both instruments are compatible with the mixed-methods research design of the study and are to be used to achieve the research objectives concerning political persuasion, ideological framing, and influence on the audience.

Principal Instrument – Structured Questionnaire

The questionnaire was designed to measure qualitatively how different audiences view and are affected by political content created by social media influencers. It was taken online and administered to a stratified sample of respondents based on different political affiliations and demographic makeup. It consists of six sections:

1. Demographic Data – Education, gender, age, region, occupation, and political leanings;
2. Social Media Usage – Most favoured platforms, frequency of exposure to political content, and where they discover influencers;
3. Perception and Trust – Credibility ratings of influencers, accuracy, and ideological bias based on Likert-scale ratings;
4. Political Influence – Influencer posts, as perceived by respondents, in terms of changing their mind, political debate, and political voting behaviour
5. Ethical Considerations – Political openness, disinformation, and influencer responsibility attitudes
6. Open-ended Questions – Space for the respondents to elaborate on their views regarding political debates by influencers.

Fixed-response items and Likert scales were employed to allow for statistical analysis and to standardise.

Secondary Instrument – Content Analysis and Thematic Coding Framework

The secondary data employed for the analysis were publicly available political content produced by six popular Indian influencers—three who had government-friendly views and three who were notorious for their government criticism. The content, primarily from YouTube videos, was gathered and examined systematically by employing a systematic content analysis approach.

This content was then analysed through thematic analysis, in which recurring themes, types of narrative, ideological constructions, and emotional tone were determined. The process adhered to Braun and Clarke's (2006) popular approach, which includes data familiarisation, initial code generation, search and review, and final theme definition. YouTube videos in particular were most important, as they allowed for observation of verbal and non-verbal cues, such as tone of voice, body language, and visual symbolism, that are all components of the overall persuasive strategy of all influencers. The combination of systematic thematic video analysis and organised survey data allows for triangulated analysis of political influence exerted, perceived, and possibly internalised by viewers. The two-instrument design ensures that both content from the media and user opinion are treated systematically under a single uniform methodological umbrella.

3.4 DATA COLLECTION TECHNIQUE

The data collection process in this study was conducted in a bifurcated manner: the collection of primary data through an online survey, alongside the collation of secondary data through a systematic extraction and documentation of social media posts, with particular emphasis on YouTube videos. This two-pronged approach is consistent with the mixed-methods research design of the study, thereby ensuring a comprehensive and multidimensional understanding of the subject matter under study.

Collection of Primary Data – Online Questionnaire

Primary data were collected using a well-designed online survey aimed at obtaining information regarding the interaction between users of social media

and political influencers, and the possible influence of such interaction on their political attitudes or actions. The survey was administered online via Google Forms and shared across various social media sites to facilitate a heterogeneous and diverse group of respondents. A stratified random sampling design was utilised to achieve representation across wide demographic segments such as age, educational level, gender, and location. The design facilitated the inclusion of a diverse sample and allowed findings to be interpreted meaningfully across various segments of the population.

The participants were informed of the voluntary nature of their participation and were assured of the confidentiality of their answers. The questionnaire was administered in English and was available for a stipulated period to allow sufficient time for the responses. In the end, 113 valid responses were collected and included in the analysis.

Secondary Data Collection – Extraction of Social Media Content

The secondary data comprised content shared by six political influencers in India via YouTube. The influencers were chosen based on their publicly known ideological leanings—three being pro-government (Sudhir Chaudhry, Palki Sharma, Rajat Sharma) and three being anti-government or being critical (Dhruv Rathee, Akash Banerjee, Ravish Kumar). The content identified was videos released within a specific time frame that reflected current political developments and election cycles.

A purposive sampling strategy was used to select content that exhibited overt or covert political messaging. We chose videos based on high engagement measures (views, likes, and comments) and thematic salience to political discourse, including policy issues, governance, corruption, elections, and nationalism.

Thematic analysis was applied in studying these videos and posts to facilitate the identification of enduring patterns, ideological structures, and rhetorical strategies. Data collection also involved the capturing of audience response through the comment sections of YouTube videos, thus providing additional context for public input and opinion. The union of survey data gathered

systematically with methodically obtained digital material provides a robust basis for analysing the generation and reception of political messaging disseminated by influencers. The well-considered approach to data collection guarantees that subjective user experience as well as objective media content is properly documented and analysed within research parameters.

3.5 DATA ANALYSIS TECHNIQUE

The methodology employed during the analysis within this research is mixed methods involving both quantitative and qualitative methodological approaches towards investigating the impact of social media influencers on the political ideologies and voters' voting choice. Every research method was executed based on the type of information collected and specific study objectives.

Quantitative Analysis – Survey Data

The responses collected from the structured questionnaire were initially analysed using descriptive statistical methods facilitated by tools in Google Forms and Microsoft Excel. Descriptive statistics like frequencies, percentages, and mean values were applied in summarising participant demographics and to determine general trends on the consumption of political content, credibility ratings of influencers, and the self-reported political opinion changes.

After the descriptive stage, inferential statistical analysis was used to test the hypotheses of the study. Specifically, Chi-square tests of independence were used to determine statistically significant relationships.

The analyses carried out allowed the establishment of influence patterns among various demographic groups and allowed the quantification of the strength of the relationship between exposure to influencers and political perception or behaviour change. Where appropriate, statistical significance was quantified by using a standard p-value threshold of 0.05.

Qualitative Analysis – Thematic Analysis of Influencer Content

The second evidence, i.e., videos of selected influencers, was analysed using thematic analysis in the six-stage process as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). The process involved:

Familiarisation – Repeated viewing of the same YouTube videos and viewing related posts to get accustomed to the material;

Developing Early Codes – Identifying repeated ideas, words, tones, and methods that indicate political framing or ideological belonging;

Identifying Themes – Grouping associated codes to unearth more general themes, e.g., nationalism, economic development, anti-corruption rhetoric, political satire, or appeal to feelings;

Assessing Themes – Ensuring that themes represented were internally coherent and were differentiated from one another well.

Defining and Naming Themes – Sorting the meaning of every theme in terms of the goals of the research and naming them as pro-government or anti-government, depending on the influencers' ideological leanings;

Preparing the Report – Consolidating themes in the findings section with supporting examples and appropriate engagement measures.

A content coding grid was employed to systematically document each post's metadata and qualitative features, such as influencer name, platform, date, theme, sentiment, engagement measures (likes, shares, views), and major analytical findings. A systematic approach enabled consistency and traceability across the analysis.

Triangulation of Data

Through the combination of survey responses and thematic findings obtained through social media remarks, the study employs methodological triangulation

in enhancing the dependability and quality of its outcomes. Through such a combination, an all-encompassing understanding of not only what is being conveyed by influencers but also how their audiences perceive, interpret, and can be influenced by such details in making their political choices can be achieved. Together, these analytical lenses provide an in-depth examination of the convergence of digital influence and political conduct in the constantly changing media scene of India.

4. DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

4.1 QUALITATIVE CONTENT AND THEMATIC ANALYSIS OF YOUTUBE POSTS

This section is a qualitative thematic and content analysis of political content posted by six prominent Indian social media influencers on YouTube: Sudhir Chaudhry, Palki Sharma, Rajat Sharma, Dhruv Rathee, Akash Banerjee, and Ravish Kumar. They have been chosen based on their high political content engagement and their role in shaping public discourse. For this research, they have been divided into two groups of three, based on perceived ideological positions within the digital political spectrum, to explore whether differences in thematic and stylistic forms exist in the construction and presentation of political stories.

The goal of such an analysis is not to assign influencers rigid ideological categorisations, but to study, by content analysis, the way their political communication, in both implicit and explicit modes, develops across different axes such as tone, emotional resonance, issue framing, and audience engagement. Drawing on data points such as spoken content, and audience reaction (likes, comments, views and shares), this section tries to identify the

strategies and themes that could influence political opinion formation and voting behaviour in a digitally mediated public sphere.

Firstly, the analysis will focus on three of these influential individuals: Sudhir Chaudhry, Palki Sharma, and Rajat Sharma.

4.1.1 ANALYSIS OF CONTENT BY SUDHIR CHAUDHARY

Table 1 summarises a qualitative assessment of 10 randomly selected YouTube posts by Sudhir Chaudhary between 26th May 2022 and 17th March 2025. The posts were randomly sampled based on their political or ideological significance and engagement. The table documents data on posting date, content topic, prevalent inference or message being communicated, and simple engagement metrics like likes, comments, and views.

Sudhir Chaudhary is a prominent Indian television newsreader and journalist, known for his long association with Hindi news channels such as Zee News and Aaj Tak. He has gained huge popularity in his career by hosting politically powerful news segments and analysis programs, most notably the very popular show DNA (Daily News and Analysis). He is very popular on YouTube, where he regularly engages with the viewers by sharing his views on political, social, religious, and international issues. His programs are likely to create huge public debate, and therefore, he is a relevant topic for research on the influence of digital political communication.

Table 1 . Content Study of Sudhir Chaudhary's YouTube Videos

<u>Date of post</u>	<u>Platform</u>	<u>Theme</u>	<u>Inference drawn</u>	<u>Likes</u>	<u>Comments</u>	<u>Views</u>	<u>Link</u>
26/5/22	Youtube	Religious	Propagates the claim that the Qutub Minar was built	19k	1.4k	6,78,167	https://youtu.be/Py-TcXeh9YA?feature=share

			by destroying Hindu and Jain temples.				
24/5/22	Youtube	Foreign Policy	Highly praises PM's role and contributions at various world events.	5.3k	163	1,53,920	https://youtu.be/JR9Mo0lGQw4?si=Grf48lRYxgJhGXcJ
8/7/20	Youtube	Politics	Highlights how PM Modi's approval ratings have been consistently higher than his other contemporary world leaders	1.8k	230	41,969	https://youtu.be/N0zsP5W6gz0?si=hzmRzooPzeK5Mma8
19/5/22	Youtube	Economy	Talks about high inflation around the world and shows how India is better at managing	18k	1.6k	10,37,705	https://youtu.be/gaTVvX78yE8?si=yn_CgdN1fshTvRs

			g inflation as compared to other nations around the world				
24/2/25	Youtube	Religion/politics	Refutes a scientific report's claim of Ganga Jal being contaminated during Mahaku mbh.	4.7k	547	2,72,544	https://youtu.be/H3nH-CUoWHA?si=twNB8Hde-x8CnRo
8/3/25	Youtube shorts	Religion	Questions why the Urdu word 'mubarak' is used for Holi greetings.	1.1 lakh	5,936	54,38,162	https://youtube.com/shorts/OAGGdJBO5GQ?si=fpVdAXIY0iF8C7D2
11/2/25	Tech		Covers PM's visit to AI summit in Paris and highlights his achievements in the field.	12k	837	7,92,415	https://youtu.be/OCqzz_RTOdw?si=y_e8fZwlAdsmKsKE

10/12/24	Youtube shorts	Religion	Lists how many temples were destroyed around the country by Mughal invaders centuries ago.	4.9k	49	1,58,447	https://youtube.com/shorts/ziftOnpHiE4?si=ym8ipMlreudmAMJp
20/3/25	Youtube shorts	Religion	Compares Aurangzeb with Osama bin Laden and justifies why his grave must not exist.	83k	2,092	17,05,292	https://youtube.com/shorts/hjJw5n9dezs?si=g3EOzLqCtv32GFBn
17/3/25	Youtube shorts	Politics	Talks about how PM Modi's recent podcast interview is getting praises from around the world.	60k	3,379	7,34,619	https://youtube.com/shorts/1awq5KbniM4?si=mKhHDw98FppwsFky

The videos posted on 26/5/22, 8/3/25, 10/12/24, and 20/3/25 are all marked by religious identity and grievance history themes. These posts appear to show an attempt to reassert a Hindu cultural narrative through assertions of temple destruction, the mixing of historical figures such as Aurangzeb with contemporary terrorists, and the analysis of Urdu words used in Hindu festivals. This type of content manipulates emotional signals and collective memory in an attempt to establish a sense of cultural victimhood and unity among the dominant group.

In addition, the viral short (8/3/25) that denounces the application of the word "Mubarak" in the context of Holi is a sign of the trend towards the politicisation of language as a form of cultural resistance. Applying shorts to transmit such controversial messages makes it easier for wider dissemination and quicker emotional response among youth audiences.

Some videos—like those on 24/5/22, 8/7/20, 11/2/25, and 17/3/25—emphasise PM Narendra Modi's contribution to international diplomacy, technology, and governance. These videos have a tendency to individualise national achievement by crediting global acclaim and national success to the vision and leadership of the Prime Minister. For example, the AI Summit video (11/2/25) puts technological diplomacy in Modi's presence, while the video on 8/7/20 emphasises his high global approval ratings.

This is typical of a leader-narrative trajectory, where national success and identity are inextricably bound up with a political leader. This not only consolidates allegiance in current fans but also potentially has a subtle effect on undecided viewers as it conveys stability and international prestige.

Counterargument to Criticism or Alternative Stories Videos like 24/2/25, where it refutes allegations of contamination of Ganga water, and 19/5/22, where Indian economic performance is presented in good light in terms of world inflation, are symptomatic of a pattern of repetition of discrediting adverse reports or presenting India in a positive light compared to the rest of the world. These videos aim to maintain national confidence while covertly

implying that criticism from outside or opposition is exaggerated or ideologically driven.

These forms of content form a defensive, but compelling role, affirming belief in state narratives and limiting room for critical critique, particularly when combined with evocative or cultural allusions.

Sudhir Chaudhary's narratives exhibit a repeated pattern of narration that is saturated with ideological preoccupations, entwining religious identity, nationalism, and the cult of leadership. These issues are presented deliberately to elicit emotional responses, reconcile the public with political leaders, and address external and internal criticism. Though more analysis is required to comprehend audience interpretation in its entirety, the style of messaging employed is characterised by its assertiveness, persuasiveness, and intense entwinement with socio-political symbolism.

4.1.2 ANALYSIS OF CONTENT BY PALKI SHARMA

Palki Sharma is a well-known Indian journalist admired for her reporting on global affairs and anchoring. A former managing editor of WION (World Is One News), she is best recognised for her straightforward and assertive delivery of news, typically reporting foreign policy, international diplomacy, and national achievements. Her recent online work has extended to YouTube and short-form platforms, gaining attention for its routine emphasis on India's geopolitical position and leadership under the present government.

This section analyses 10 selected YouTube posts between 4th July 2023 and 17th March 2025, shown in Table 2. The choice of content is high engagement and political salience, particularly for India's international reputation and narratives of governance at home. The aim is to identify patterns of framing political and international affairs and the extent to which leadership and national identity are emphasised.

Table 2. Content study of Palki Sharma's YouTube videos

<u>Date of post</u>	<u>Platform</u>	<u>Theme</u>	<u>Inference Drawn</u>	<u>Likes</u>	<u>Comments</u>	<u>Views</u>	<u>Link</u>
17/3/25	Youtube	Foreign affairs	Focuses on the praises PM Modi has been receiving from the world media after his recent podcast interview.	12k	1.4k	6,35,917	https://youtu.be/EhBO_6Kaszl?si=ul1gfOv2mS1alA_9
14/2/25	Youtube shorts	Foreign policy	Reviews the recent meeting between PM Modi and President Trump and showcases India's achievements.	4.8k	76	97,792	https://youtube.com/shorts/tbqAyYdqJx4?si=Rri3yO3cCARL60F
30/8/23	youtube	politics	Covers how India's influence under PM Modi has been rising.	9.3k	2.1k	3,30,565	https://youtu.be/rNtiXJ2Q60A?si=h12cUMa0uxjWO_KsJ

22/10/24	youtube	Foreign affairs	Focuses on how PM Modi is helping reach a peace deal in the Russia-Ukraine war.	3.1k	232	1,86,414	https://www.youtube.com/live/abzApr4UnWw?si=PwiIavoYhzlvTs4E
10/1/25	Youtube	Politics	Highlights how this year's Mahakumbh was better managed than under previous governments	8.1k	98	1,60,437	https://youtube.com/shorts/dRjuSP2c3Nk?si=UvlubNy1gF1a_Tbl
25/4/24	Youtube shorts	politics	Delivers a speech at Oxford University where she compares India pre bjp and says how strong it has become now.	33k	1,388	7,31,368	https://youtube.com/shorts/HaXIcNEljs8?si=BzGPl7tDeNL63n-N

25/10/24	Youtube	Foreign Affairs	Promotes India's position as 'vishwa mitra' of the world and the sweet spot India is in the world under the current government.	4.3k	628	1,94,741	https://youtu.be/FKFK_ydYuw?si=ztG_iwEyMvA0y5iFO
14/2/25	Youtube	Foreign policy	Briefs about the special gifts PM Modi received from President Trump and Elon Musk on his visit to the US	2.5k	329	1,91,864	https://youtu.be/p6dOYIxk4Ek?si=iuB0Rvill9BYCJE
10/1/25	Youtube	Politics	Highlights the achievements of the recently held Mahakumbh	20k	1.3k	11,10,018	https://youtu.be/rvojT-QxBFY?si=GzSjRGEHRPNDN3RJ

4/7/23	Youtube shorts	Foreign affairs	Decodes PM Modi's brand of diplomacy.	88k	1,799	18,10,550	https://youtube.com/shorts/5WHEhbvzn6w?si=SQFz2LNztFBiA6JE
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A qualitative content analysis of the foregoing posts reveals that Palki Sharma's posts consistently emphasise India's emergence on the global scene, robust leadership, and cultural resurgence. Three broad themes emerge across her videos: India's diplomacy on the global scene and exercise of soft power, comparative governance stories, and leader personalisation-based nation-branding.

Clips on 4/7/23, 17/3/25, 22/10/24, and 25/10/24 consistently reveal India's position as a strong global player. These clips display India not only as an ascendant geopolitical actor but also as a moral leader or mediator, as one can see through the Russia-Ukraine peace agenda and the "Vishwamitra of the world" narrative. This way, they highlight PM Modi's diplomatic persona, frequently making it seem that his presence puts India on an international pedestal.

The brief on 4/7/23, interpreting Modi's diplomatic mode, was particularly high-engagement, implying that the idea of personal brand diplomacy, a common thread throughout her story, had resonance.

Two videos uploaded on 10/1/25 and 25/4/24 contrast earlier and current political situations. The administration of the Mahakumbh is taken as a case study to imply bureaucratic excellence in the present government, and the Oxford speech contrasts pre- and post-BJP India to drive home the message of change. These stories are presented as low-key but sharp political commentary, implying that the present government has raised India's standing and effectiveness.

This form of writing avoids overt contradiction with other people; rather, it uses performance contrasts and international legitimacy to construct a positive image of the current administration.

Clips like 14/2/25 (Trump and Musk present to Modi) and 30/8/23 (India's rising influence) use symbolic recognitions and gestures to build a hero-narrative on Prime Minister Modi around his leadership being acknowledged by world leaders-used here as a proxy for India's overall excellence. This specific framing is used to build a sense of national pride by individual recognition, a technique often used in soft propaganda and image management.

Significantly, these messages eschew explicit ideology, employing instead aesthetic presentation, subdued flattery, and universal symbols to underpin leader-based nationalism. Summary of Subsection Palki Sharma's content generation style emphasises external approval, diplomatic alignment, and implicit comparisons of government, portraying India as a strong globalising nation with visionary and effective leadership. Her video reports frequently set up events within the framework of national rebirth, largely basing political narratives on foreign encomiums and symbolic successes. Although generally neutral in tone, the frequent eulogising in the direction of Prime Minister Modi, as compared to appraisals of previous governments, suggests an integrated positive style of political communication that might subtly affect opinions of the audience.

4.1.3 ANALYSIS OF CONTENT BY RAJAT SHARMA

Rajat Sharma is one of India's most distinguished news anchors, presenting the popular political talk show Aap Ki Adalat. Renowned for his authoritative style of presentation and his acute sense of political events, Sharma's coverage usually involves incisive analysis of governance, electoral processes, and national identity issues. In recent times, his YouTube presence has consolidated his reach to a larger online audience, frequently mirroring major

political controversies and exchanges of arguments between the ruling party and the opposition.

This part analyses 10 chosen YouTube posts between 1st April 2022 and 27th February 2025. The videos were chosen based on their thematic importance and audience reaction. The analysis is based on political narrative framing, communal use of language, foreign policy coverage, and ideological reinforcement efforts with various rhetorical devices.

Table 3. Content Study Of Rajat Sharma's YouTube videos.

Date of post	Platform	Theme	<u>Inference Drawn</u>	Likes	Comments	Views	
27/2/25	youtube	Politics	Lists all the achievements of the BJP government. In successfully organising the Mahakumbh.	2.1k	91	152,517	https://youtu.be/_9wdt6CKVjc?si=QYiEZA39LWoGQ
4/2/25	Youtube	Politics	Covers a Parliament speech by PM Modi and lists down all the attacks on the opposition that he made,	2.1k	103	7,144	https://youtu.be/lxtnxWSy_9k?feature=shared

			along with their justifications.				
6/11/24	Youtube	Foreign affairs	Stresses on PM Modi and President Trump's friendship as a driver for US-India ties.	1.2k	24	122,097	https://www.youtube.com/live/H2TZ8vlaX-s?feature=shared
8/11/24	Youtube	Politics	It covers part of PM Modi's election campaign speech with a communal tone.	1.3k	97	1,09,012	https://youtu.be/LMazljHYFh0?si=vanwGdL0GmCIUVlp
1/4/22	Youtube	Foreign affairs	Hails the Indian government's stance on the Russia-Ukraine war.	13k	606	15,28,533	https://youtu.be/h01YpiXNWLU?si=itFhs3mUWssctgAE
18/3/25	youtube	politics	Elaborates on how another targeted a certain community in a recent commun	1.8k	174	1,31,185	https://youtu.be/AdkpqalggWc?si=F15PPnQ-G1bcz25D

			al violence incident in Nagpur.				
6/3/25	Youtube	Politics	Talks about the foreign sinister state's statement on taking back POK	2.7k	122	2,43,729	https://youtu.be/mNFtYBnOqho?si=YImDW60NaDEiKfHg
9/12/24	Youtube	Politics	Brings unverified facts to prove the conspiracy theory of George Soros meddling with Indian politics.	1.9k	188	1,13,447	https://youtu.be/JbYDBq_JDNU?si=7pHjwBAO0gWhICVF
16/12/24	Youtube	Politics	Repeats communal statements of BJP leaders and tries to persuade watchers by using them.	3k	148	3,32,595	https://youtu.be/ePZTnijgXWo?si=qS8THHxhWaZzOObM

			Argues why it is justified to spend crores of public funds on Deepotsav in Ayodhya, and it should not be questioned.				https://youtu.be/nK7zHoFp7BY?si=oZrXGhEc5NTGY5dr
30/8/24	youtube	Politics	1.6k	95	1,26,784		

Rajat Sharma's chosen writings exhibit a tone of communication with a reason, ideological justification, and symbolic nationalism. Three broad themes among the ten posts are: institutional legitimacy through cultural events, defensive communal framing, and endorsement of leadership narratives.

Two segments (27/2/25 and 30/8/24) are dedicated to grand religious or cultural festivals—Mahakumbh and Deepotsav. These festivals are shown as emblems of national pride and governmental efficiency, particularly in the context of the BJP government. The account shows the magnitude and cost involved in these festivals as not only warranted but also indicative of an Indian cultural renaissance. This legitimization tries to associate governmental efficiency with cultural approval, suggesting that such spending is important both religiously and nationally.

Videos dated 8/11/24, 16/12/24, and 18/3/25 show a pattern of amplifying communal undertones in political speeches or incidents. On one occasion (16/12/24), Sharma parrots inflammatory comments by political leaders without critical distance, simply convincingly echoing them. Another video (18/3/25) shows a communal violence incident by attributing bias against a particular group. These videos give emotive accounts and can lead to

perceived polarisation by providing a unidimensional or confirming interpretation of dominant-group opinions.

Rajat Sharma also places significant emphasis on PM Modi's leadership role, particularly on foreign policy and domestic orations. For instance, his 6/11/24 post emphasises Modi and Trump's friendship as a basis for bilateral relations—a form of personality diplomacy repeated in other influencer posts. The 1/4/22 video applauds the government's approach to the Russia-Ukraine conflict, justifying India's assertiveness under Modi's leadership.

The 4/2/25 video exemplifies this technique further by listing Modi's criticisms levelled against the opposition in Parliament and giving justifications for each incident. This demonstrates a political rhetoric of dominance and superiority, where oppositional criticisms are typically discredited and rendered irrelevant by the endorsement of Modi's argumentative stance.

The 9/12/24 video propagates a highly discredited conspiracy theory that George Soros is intervening in Indian politics. Offered without fact-checking, the video cynically manipulates popular distrust of foreign meddling and global elites to orchestrate an "us vs. them" scenario. This is a nationalist fear campaign, implying foreign threats to Indian sovereignty, democracy, or values.

Rajat Sharma's YouTube content employs an affirmatory and defence-oriented tone, characterising the present political leadership as firmly embedded in cultural contexts and effective in geopolitical matters. His style of communication seems to render polarising rhetoric the standard and even the norm, particularly about communal matters or conspiracy-laden narratives. Through repeated affirmations of official stances and counter-refutations of criticism through assertive narration, Sharma's content is an extension of hegemonic political discourse in narrative form, with the potential to shape audience perceptions of national events and cultural-political disputes.

After the discussion of the thematic trends and content strategy of the first set of influencers—Sudhir Chaudhary, Palki Sharma, and Rajat Sharma—the attention of the analysis shifts to the second set of selected influencers: Dhruv Rathee, Akash Banerjee, and Ravish Kumar. These are covered in the research because of their high degree of online presence and active engagement with politically relevant content that tends to present critical perspectives of the current government and policies.

The purpose of studying this second cohort is to determine whether those with a more questioning, confrontational, or interrogative tone engage in different political communication styles. This analysis involves evaluation of their narrative choices, use of data or satire, emotional framing, and how they engage with their audience relative to the first cohort.

The subsequent subsections will provide individual qualitative analyses of each influencer, beginning with Dhruv Rathee.

4.1.4 ANALYSIS OF CONTENT BY DHRUV RATHEE

Dhruv Rathee is a popular Indian YouTuber and political commentator whose videos are well-known for their criticality against the Indian government, especially the current ruling BJP. With an engineering and political science background, Rathee has established a strong base among urban, educated, and youth audiences with his fact-checking, research-based videos. His videos regularly question government claims, public policies, and divisive socio-political trends with fact-checking, visual data, and comparative analysis.

This section examines 10 YouTube videos uploaded between 13th June 2024 and 26th February 2025. The chosen videos were well-viewed and engaged with, reflecting high audience engagement. The aim is to identify how Rathee builds counter-narratives, reverses power dynamics, and uses evidence-based arguments to place political issues.

Table 4. Content Study Of Dhruv Rathee's YouTube videos.

<u>Date of post</u>	<u>Platform</u>	<u>Theme</u>	<u>Analytic al sentence</u>	<u>Likes</u>	<u>Comments</u>	<u>Views</u>	<u>Link</u>
26/2/25	Youtube	Politics	Cites various scientific studies to attack the government on the impure water of the Ganga during the Mahakumbh	7.3 lakhs	58k	1,44,12,549	https://youtu.be/j0juJch9f5g?si=emwQ6y-N6ynDzKvC
25/1/25	Youtube	Economy	Criticises the government on its economic policy and states that the middle class is under extreme stress.	6.9 lakh	51k	1,21,11,703	https://youtu.be/zRnrq24crDI?si=x18e15H5LX29pUup

31/5/24	youtube	Foreign affairs	Attacks on foreign policy under PM Modi are made by comparing it with previous governments.	12 lakh	1.4lakh	1,59,42,979	https://youtu.be/pH9ZCFy8ZUs?si=FU_GFdXZ4zS8iPSi
12/5/24	youtube	politics	Questions various claims related to PM Modi's personal life and upbringing.	28 lakh	3.2 lakh	4,04,45,478	https://youtu.be/bzbJGMVHxQ?si=O_T_8q9OfqasrKP
6/5/24	youtube	politics	Questions historians' claims regarding atrocities against Hindus in the Mughal era.	12 lakh	1.5 lakh	1,58,04,020	https://youtu.be/gdKTsvFuR_I?si=o_wXfPufyrQVn7Csm
8/9/23	youtube	Foreign policy	Attacked the G20 summit that was held in India.	3.8lakhs	14k	80,20,701	https://youtu.be/9c9roBWbqMY?si=-Qvpt04WjeRwUTlF

6/8/23	youtube	security/politics	Questions about the government's inefficiency in handling Manipur's crisis.	3.8 lakh	22k	74,02,981	https://youtu.be/a9OswjzEbWQ?si=SqjFAXrfVC-6ldhH
8/1/25	youtube	politics	Raises serious questions of voter fraud in India by the BJP.	4.7 lakh	33k	80,78,737	https://youtu.be/jIzxxEYDHFM?si=DjHc-kDHYs8WgDNd
14/11/24	youtube	politics	Challenging the politicians of Maharashtra and asking them to focus on development.	10 lakh	70k	1,32,85,079	https://youtu.be/Du16-GsdBZg?si=y_9oRiwH4bEiI4a8
13/6/24	youtube	politics/education	Attacks the government on NEET and other exam paper leaks.	12 lakh	84k	1,50,81,109	https://youtu.be/BFU9eSKQt4?si=FZpUb05B3G-GNhNr

Dhruv Rathee's work displays a critical and questioning communicative style, grounded in evidence-based argumentation, institutional critique, and

counter-narratives. Three general thematic strategies are employed: Fact-based Accountability, Challenging Dominant Cultural/Political Narratives, and Public-Centric Framing.

Such clips as 26/2/25, on Ganga water quality, 13/6/24, on exam leaks, and 25/1/25, on economic stress, are good examples of Rathee's tactic of using outside reports, academic papers, and media statistics to call governments to account. He often uses empirical research, global rankings, and comparative history to question official claims. This makes him a fact-checker, being most appealing to viewers looking for logical, evidence-based counter-narratives to political spin.

The use of infographics, timelines, and quoted documents gives the text an educational tone, but at the same time ignites public distrust for state institutions.

In his 6/5/24 and 12/5/24 videos, Rathee discusses extremely sensitive and symbolic stories, like the historic Hindu persecution under the Mughals and the childhood stories of PM Modi. He frequently takes on widely accepted assertions, calling for historical investigation or openness. These videos would be of use to those who are uneasy about ideological oversimplification or politics of hero-worship.

This thematic approach serves two functions: it deconstructs political mythology and encourages critical thinking, in the process subtly supporting counterpositions.

A consistent framing mode in all the videos places public concern ahead of political narrative. For example, in his analysis of the Manipur crisis (6/8/23) or the financial hardships of the middle class (25/1/25), the narrative is around the problems of the citizen and not the politics of the elite. Adopting the lens of "the common man," Rathee increases relatability and credibility, both of which are essential in effective influencer communication.

Besides, his video on supposed voter fraud (8/1/25) addresses issues of electoral integrity, to stimulate fears of democratic backsliding—a matter of political concern.

Dhruv Rathee's content strategy is based on counter-narratives, evidence-based critical analysis, and rational critique of common political messages. His video content is a blend of investigative journalism and visual pedagogy to engage a politically aware, critical, and youth audience. Though offered normally as informative, his constant emphasis on specific political personalities and topics demonstrates a high level of ideological critique of the ruling party. The effectiveness of his persuasive communication lies in the integration of believability (data-based) and emotional value (civic issues-based), thereby making his content effective in generating alternative political discourse on the internet.

4.1.5 ANALYSIS OF CONTENT BY AKASH BANERJEE (@thedeshbhakt)

Akash Banerjee is a satirical news commentator and internet analyst, widely recognised for his YouTube channel, The DeshBhakt. As a hybrid of journalism and satire, Banerjee has made himself a voice for political dissent and criticism of the media in India. Banerjee's video postings frequently use humour, sarcasm, and sharp political commentary to remark on everything from the government, the trajectory of elections, propaganda, and the bias of the media. Through a mix of infotainment and analysis, he appeals strongest to urban, digitally educated viewers seeking politically edgy content presented in critical and frequently comedic terms.

This section examines 10 YouTube videos released from 15th May 2024 to 8th March 2025. These videos capture Akash Banerjee's central content theme—government responsibility, institutional criticism, and satirical commentary. The examination seeks to identify the overarching themes, emotional connections, and engagement tactics employed to criticise governance and shape public opinion.

Table 5. Content Study Of Akash Banerjee's YouTube videos

Date of post	Platform	Theme	Inference Drawn	Likes	Comments	Views	Link
8/3/25	youtube	Religion	Questions the propaganda of the movie Chhava, which is based on Aurangzeb and Chatrapati Sambhaji Maharaj.	81k	16k	19,77,964	https://youtu.be/yiwd8FVF0zM?si=JpwgDoX-9Mkz5Xkm
16/2/25	youtube	politics	Alleges that the government tried to hide the recent Delhi stampede .	74k	7.4k	17,31,774	https://youtu.be/XkL5kaXfrJI?si=Fa4Uz0CU6yQRZIU6
10/2/25	youtube	politics	Brings to notice the crisis in Manipur and blames the government for its current state.	25k	2.2k	8,54,664	https://youtu.be/IBpN_2yQebo?si=3nR_cTikkCnIdnmG

13/1/25	youtube	Foreign policy	Shows how India's passport rank has been sliding in the global passport index, which is contradictory to the government's Vishwaguru efforts.	44k	4.8k	9,95,168	https://youtu.be/zSj1gk-Y5Zg?si=K-ilb_Cz2YE0Ymdp
2/1/25	youtube	Politics	Shows how widespread voter name deletions have been and alleges electoral fraud due to this.	29k	5.4k	6,71,064	https://youtu.be/xWhcCciviQA?si=k1y7_uzwiDn0dlbE
26/10/24	youtube	Economy	Attacks India's economic state on various indicators and blames the FM for it.	64k	6.8k	17,88,784	https://youtu.be/O3iRaC4nhR4?si=vfWvckqNU_9U8RsD

18/9/24	youtube	politics	Questions whether Modi's image is facing a dent and lists various statements to prove that.	47k	5.8k	10,94,354	https://youtu.be/brYaaSC89W8?si=pwdTXn0ZP6xBegws
27/7/24	youtube	politics	Takes an overview of the first 50 days of the new government and lists various negatives of it.	83k	5.3k	17,87,707	https://youtu.be/nOuLVmAOTwg?s_i=0XeuDTKAT1YBv9p
5/6./24	youtube	politics	Lists reasons for the BJP's reduced numbers in the Lok Sabha and says that the invincibility of Modi is now over.	1.6 lakh	13k	38,00,754	https://youtu.be/s1B5CjEQpmU?si=8kH8zAfA1Pwdq6nj

15/5/24	youtube	politics	Lists various contradictory statements made by PM Modi on various matters.	68k	7.4k	11,08,096	https://youtu.be/-En9U3hnW_s?si=cgehffy30YL67JzD
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Akash Banerjee's work is a blend of satire, criticism, and political education, and is marked by frequent use of sarcasm, media critique, and symbolic references. His work can be grouped into three broad themes: Subverting Political Image-Building, Revealing Institutional Failures, and Satirical Deconstruction of Nationalist Messaging.

Banerjee often critiques the government's self-aggrandisement and fabricated narratives of achievement. Productions such as "First 50 Days Review" (27/7/24) and "Modi's Invincibility Myth" (5/6/24) seek to undermine the portrayal of political idealism, drawing attention to electoral challenges, inconsistencies, and signs of leadership exhaustion.

In the 18/9/24 video, the presenter takes numerous quotes and opinion polls to show a fall in Modi's popularity, using a tone that is provocative but firmly based in reference and comparison. These strategies are effective in turning strength into weakness, an oppositional political rhetoric strategy that must be utilised.

In several videos—such as the one on voter list removals (2/1/25), the Manipur crisis (10/2/25), and the Delhi stampede (16/2/25)—Banerjee blames the government for cover-ups, lapses, or active suppression. The message in these videos addresses viewers who feel let down by institutional performance or media collusion.

By highlighting the gaps between official rhetoric and reality, these videos strengthen the case that public accountability is being eroded. His report on economic performance on 26/10/24 also suggests a gap between media image and real concerns, in this case, financial and economic management.

Banerjee's movie on Chhava (8/3/25) and the passport ranking (13/1/25) both try to challenge the symbolic elements of nationalism—e.g., cinema, titles like 'Vishwaguru', and idealised comparisons with history. Using sarcasm and film criticism, he reveals the propaganda strategies within popular culture and political rhetoric.

His is a tongue-in-cheek, and sometimes sarcastic, tone, which also uses memes and manipulated video clips to induce mental dissonance in viewers, to subvert the accumulated pretension of nationalist assertions.

Akash Banerjee's videos are a mix of satire, fact-based counterargument, and political performance critique. His genre—half infotainment, half watchdog journalism—is something new, which appeals to digitally native viewers who are sceptical of legacy media. By deconstructing official discourse and employing humour as a political tactic, Banerjee does two things at once: educates and mobilises. While his videos may be said to be critically over-the-top, their worth lies in the ways they test the limits of political questioning in India's online public sphere.

4.1.6 ANALYSIS OF CONTENT BY RAVISH KUMAR

Ravish Kumar is a renowned Indian journalist and former anchor and a member of the NDTV family, known for his in-depth reporting, critical coverage of the dominant media line, and his dedication to democratic values and free press. A Ramon Magsaysay Award winner, he is highly regarded for his investigative reporting and calm, analytical tone. His YouTube channel has now become a platform of significance for those looking for fact-based analysis of government decisions, socio-economic realities, and political

developments, especially in the wake of the media consolidation that has stifled critical journalism in mainstream media.

This section examines 10 of his YouTube videos uploaded between 24th April 2024 and 8th March 2025. These were chosen based on their content relevance, political complexity, and viewer engagement. The study examines how Ravish Kumar constructs counter-narratives, prioritises transparency, and critiques the performance of the government and media complicity.

Table 6. Content Study Of Ravish Kumar's YouTube videos

<u>Date of post</u>	<u>Platform</u>	<u>Theme</u>	<u>Inference Drawn</u>	<u>Likes</u>	<u>Comments</u>	<u>Views</u>	<u>Link</u>
8/3/25	youtube	Foreign policy	Alleges that the government has surrendered to Trump's demands and has reduced tariffs under pressure.	1 lakh	10k	19,90,430	https://youtu.be/ZSbcrya3-mk?si=M5pH3AUayn7PvNSJ

			Why has there been ongoing controversy or speculation regarding PM Modi's educational qualifications, and why hasn't he chosen to publicly present his degree to address these concerns?				
5/3/25	youtube	politics	80k	8.1k	17,74,872	https://youtu.be/gdLX9mJeIy4?si=UsEohHlsruv3FqXd	
22/2/25	youtube	politics/environment	Cites various studies to refute the government's claims that Ganga water is clean.	56k	4.3k	16,13,226	https://youtu.be/PfWKaa2QlGE?si=3GHXmq852s6Bwsfh
21/2/25	youtube	politics	It talks about government censorship	61k	2.8k	10,26,773	https://youtu.be/pEABo5WheuQ?si=FhUYj1t

			p to remove stampede videos.				spEkU7bUi
12/2/25	youtube	economy	Attacks the government on the stock market crash and talks about the underlying economic stress.	83k	5.5k	23,97,986	https://youtu.be/OKYzAwmkrAY?si=r2rL26ATMOqzzKh1g
10/2/25	youtube	politics	Covers the inefficiency of the government in handling the Manipur crisis.	53k	2.2k	11,94,826	https://youtu.be/EzcwbZlhSY?si=VjxFIZpFzfAt4Qz
5/11/24	youtube	economy	Lists various socio-economic stresses that the middle class of the country is under.	73k	5k	16,06,199	https://youtu.be/tMwboLR2cyw?si=ioWI9Y2n0baLOF9q

19/7/24	Youtube	politics	Takes stock of the first 100 days of the BJP government and lists its unfulfilled promises.	60k	3k	9,54,372	https://youtu.be/5pYjZUzUEyM?si=BAi424irD3yFF9ue
12/5/24	youtube	politics	Lists all promises of the Congress manifesto	1.3 lakh	7.8k	27,69,722	https://youtu.be/GM8q0x1wsEw?si=t8HAEEm2qnMlE-Pj
24/4/24	youtube	politics	Compares Rahul Gandhi's recent rallies and speeches and states how well he is doing.	2.9 lakh	22k	1,06,72,379	https://youtu.be/FGrLWt2bal?si=mfvjIx62TkRYlab8

Ravish Kumar's work is marked by institutional criticism, fact-based analysis, and a focus on developing civic consciousness. His writing is analytical and contemplative, shying away from over-dramatisation. The most repeated thematic patterns are: Inquiry into Leadership Transparency, Accountability in Economic and Social Governance, and Media as Custodians of Democracy.

Several videos (5/3/25 and 8/3/25) record Kumar's focus on leadership and institutional transparency. Through questioning PM Modi's educational background and tariff policies in the context of US relations, Kumar challenges the absence of

disclosure and unilateral decision-making. His systematic framing eschews sensationalism and instead uses rational loopholes and public interest questions to trigger scrutiny.

This strategy resonates with viewers who appreciate institutional accountability and frames Kumar as a public interest journalist, not a political adversary.

Economic slump videos (12/2/25, 5/11/24) and environmental issues videos (22/2/25) show Ravish Kumar's consistent emphasis on structural failures rather than symbolic politics. He condemns the middle-class burden, market instability, and inadequate responses to public crises, such as the Manipur crisis and the stock market meltdown.

By using external data, economic indicators, and expert opinion in his messaging, he prioritises citizen well-being over partisan performance, creating a counter-narrative to growth-focused government narratives.

In the diary entries of 21/2/25 and 19/7/24, Kumar is concerned with censorship, government manipulation, and the erosion of freedom in the media. He examines the repression of imagery, particularly the Delhi stampede, and emphasises the failed promises of campaign rhetoric, thereby pointing to a gap between campaign rhetoric and the norms of public accountability.

The last two videos—on Congress's manifesto (12/5/24) and Rahul Gandhi's rallies (24/4/24)—are especially positive in their representation of opposition action, a departure from his usual line to examine other political mobilisations. While remaining critical in tone, more evenly balanced in their approach, which can lead to more voter awareness of political choices.

Ravish Kumar's output is evidence-based, institution-critical, and democratic in its responsibility. Kumar's presentation is slow and restrained, meant to incite thinking rather than a response. Kumar steers clear of sensational or jocular tropes, unlike most influencers, and adopts measured, reportage-driven narration. Kumar's output carves out a significant niche in the Indian digital media space by providing non-sensational, reflective commentary that enables people to think about governance, economy, and ethics in the media.

4.1.7 COMPARISON AND CONCLUSIONS DRAWN

The examination of the narratives of the six selected influencers—Sudhir Chaudhary, Palki Sharma, Rajat Sharma, Dhruv Rathee, Akash Banerjee, and Ravish Kumar—elicits stark differences among their narrative styles, thematic agendas, and political positions. For reasons of analysis only, the influencers were separated into two disparate groups. The first group included Sudhir Chaudhary, Palki Sharma,

Rajat Sharma, Dhruv Rathee, Akash Banerjee, and Ravish Kumar were separated into the second group. The comparison of the two groups generates significant insight into how the influencers influence the wider political narrative through multiple content frames and stylistic strategies.

In the first category, there is a discernible pattern where the content has a strongly positive and obsequious tone towards the governing political establishment. The Prime Minister, Narendra Modi, is always described through the prism of admiration, outlining his leadership abilities, international standing, and symbolic association with national pride. This is well evident in the manner in which government schemes are outlined not so much as administrative successes but as moral or civilizational victories. Emotional appeal and cultural symbolism are used extensively, particularly in the writings of Sudhir Chaudhary and Rajat Sharma, who incessantly resort to religious identity, historical grievances, and nationalism discourses. Additionally, the usage of data or third-party sources in this category is non-existent, with claims outlined mostly through rhetorical support and not empirical data.

By contrast, the second group takes a far more questioning and critical stance. Dhruv Rathee and Ravish Kumar's work is characterised by its consistent use of external evidence, including academic studies, news articles, and expert opinions, to question and evaluate government policies. Akash Banerjee, taking a satirical tone, also appeals to contradictions in political statements and institutional failures to refer to failures in governance and the decline of democracy. Together, their stories are not about individual leadership, but about systemic accountability, transparency, and the role of civic vigilance. This group also appears to reject mainstream majoritarian narratives, often deconstructing communal rhetoric and questioning the exclusionary impulses in state discourse and popular media.

Analysis also shows that whereas the first cohort tends to legitimise and confirm the current political order, the second cohort tries to subvert it. The way issues—be they economic, cultural, or geopolitical—are framed betrays a vivid ideological fault line: Group 1 glosses government narratives with few criticisms, while Group 2 engages in a careful deconstruction of the same narratives. While no influencer openly declares a political leaning, the kind of content they produce, the views they express, and the issues they cover cumulatively suggest an unstated ideological leaning. Based on the above analysis, we can presume the first set of influencers—Sudhir Chaudhary, Palki Sharma, and Rajat Sharma—are government narrative proponents, whose content tends to support and validate the political agenda of the ruling dispensation. In contrast, the second set—Dhruv Rathee, Akash Banerjee, and Ravish Kumar—are critical or anti-government in leanings, who always critique government action, puncture the dominant narrative, and offer alternative narratives, which provide space for democratic deliberation. The dichotomy indicates that political discourse in the Indian digital space is fragmented, and influencers are not

passive commentators but active agents in the framing and challenging of public opinion.

4.2 DESCRIPTIVE ANALYSIS

4.2.1 FREQUENCY OF WATCHING POLITICAL CONTENT ON SOCIAL MEDIA

How frequently do you watch political content on social media?

113 responses

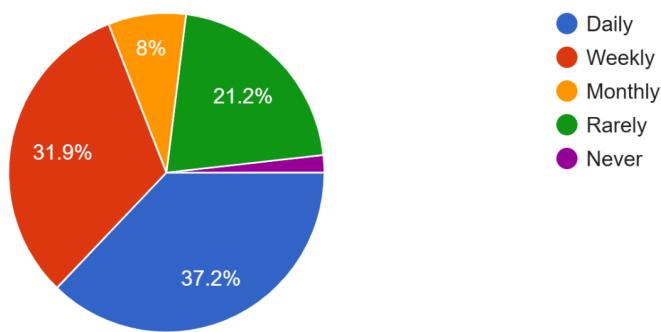


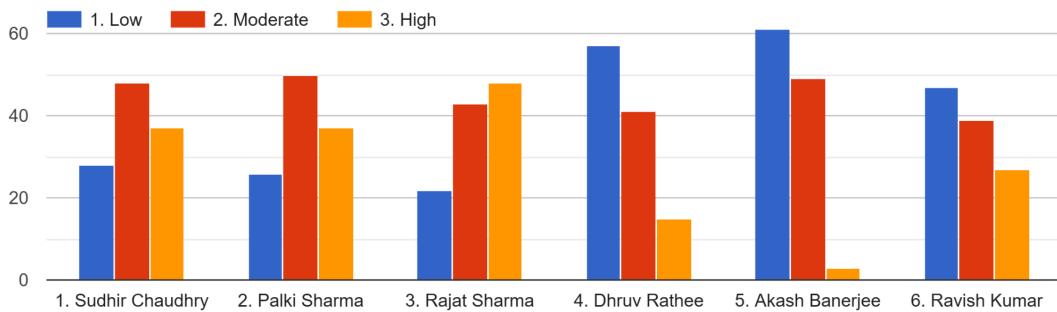
Fig. 1. Pie chart representing the percentage of Frequency of watching of respondents

These findings are the direct answer to the first research objective: to examine how often individuals consume political content produced by social media influencers. The very high rates of daily (37.2%) and weekly (31.9%) consumption signal that such content becomes part of the daily media routine of significant numbers of consumers. This confirms that political influencers are not unintentional sources of information but are deeply embedded into the daily media routine of their audience. Such frequency and regularity of exposure can enhance the influencers' role in shaping political attitudes in the long term. Additionally, the low percentage of participants who never watch such content (1.8%) does nothing but prove the virtually universal extent of political influencer discourse. This finding, therefore, provides the baseline context for further research on the correlation of frequency of exposure and change of political opinion, and hence the relevance and impact of influencers in contemporary political communication.

4.2.2 CREDIBILITY PERCEIVED BY THE RESPONDENTS FOR EACH FIGURE

Fig. 2. Bar graph representing the percentage of respondents and the credibility

How credible do you find their content?



of each influencer, respectively.

The credibility of influencers as rated by participants varies wildly across the two ideological blocs. In the first, along with Sudhir Chaudhary, Palki Sharma, and Rajat Sharma, participant opinions were more divided. Palki Sharma was rated highest for credibility, with 50% of participants awarding her content a "moderate credibility" rating and nearly 25% a rating of "high credibility," while only a quarter rated her content as being of low credibility. Rajat Sharma and Sudhir Chaudhary, however, were more cynical, with 34% and 40% respectively awarding their content a rating of "low credibility." Both, however, also received high "moderate" credibility ratings—47.3% for Rajat Sharma and 42.7% for Sudhir Chaudhary—indicating that while trust is divided, these figures are still seen as being somewhat credible sources by a high proportion of participants.

Conversely, the second set—Dhruv Rathee, Akash Banerjee, and Ravish Kumar—evoked more polarised reactions, especially on the lower credibility side. Dhruv Rathee and Akash Banerjee were both rated "low credibility" by 58.2% and 54% of respondents, respectively, with relatively low proportions—17% and 10%—regarding their content as very credible. Such figures imply high degrees of distrust in influencers who are often very critical of the government, possibly out of political disagreement or perceived bias in the viewership. Ravish Kumar's record is more balanced: 39.8% regarded him as moderately credible, while more than 22% regarded him as highly credible, implying a relatively higher level of trust among his

viewership. Overall, these imply that perceived credibility not only differs from person to person but also seems to be determined by the ideological alignment and narrative style of each influencer—a critical factor to remember while measuring their overall political influence.

4.2.3 FACTORS INFLUENCING TRUST IN AN INFLUENCER

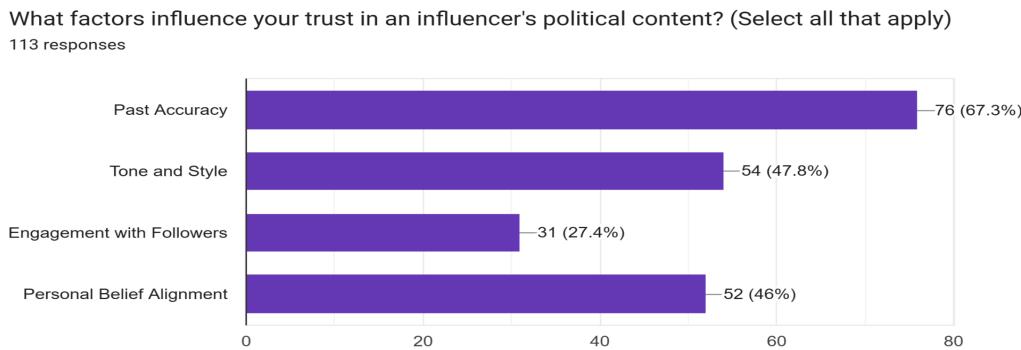


Fig. 3. Percentage of respondents and their perceived reason to trust

Respondents were asked to select the factors behind their trust in an influencer's political content, and the results show a multifaceted foundation for perceived credibility. The two most common factors mentioned were previous accuracy and tone and style, both cited by 67.3% of respondents (76 out of 113). This suggests that audiences are not merely interested in influencers who have a good track record for delivering factual and accurate content, but also carefully listen to how that content is presented. Tone and style—whether the content is balanced, sensational, respectful, or provocative—have a significant effect on perceptions of trustworthiness. Also, 47.8% of respondents (54 individuals) said that interaction with followers, such as replying to comments or providing an interactive profile, contributes to their trust in an influencer. This attests to the significance of perceived accessibility and relational credibility in the digital communication context. Finally, 46% of respondents (52 individuals) said that agreement with their personal opinion has an effect on their trust, which means that for close to half of the sample,

ideological or value-based resonance is a significant determinant for how credible they regard a source to be. Together, these results indicate that political influencer trust is shaped by objective and subjective factors: audiences balance prior factual performance with the influencer's communicative style, perceived openness, and agreement with their worldview. This attests to the argument that political trust in the influencer context is complex and highly personalised.

4.3 HYPOTHESIS TESTING USING THE RESULT OF THE CHI-SQUARE TEST

4.3.1 ASSOCIATION BETWEEN FREQUENCY OF VIEWING AND POLITICAL OPINION CHANGE

Table 7. PSPP output showing association between viewing frequency and opinion change

	Value	df	Asymptotic Sig. (2-tailed)
Pearson Chi-Square	28.00	12	.006
Likelihood Ratio	15.25	12	.228
Linear-by-Linear Association	.04	1	.843
N of Valid Cases	113		

This section offers findings and implications of the first hypothesis set to test the contribution of social media content consumption towards political attitude change among respondents.

Null Hypothesis (H_0): There is no statistically significant relationship between the viewing of influencer content and any shift in their political view.

To determine if this hypothesis was true, a Chi-square test of independence was used. The test measures were the frequency of social media influencer watching (dichotomised into five levels) and whether or not respondents said they had a change in political opinion (with four groups for no change, some change, complete change, and unsure). The number of valid responses used in the test was 113.

Pearson's Chi-square test provided the following result: $\chi^2(12, N = 113) = 28.00$ with $p = 0.006$. Since the p-value is less than the conventional level of significance of 0.05, the null hypothesis is rejected

Interpretation of Results The statistically significant finding reveals that, indeed, there is a connection between how frequently people view influencer content and whether their political views have shifted. That is, those who reported higher frequencies of viewing influencer content (most prominently in groups 2 and 3) were more likely to report some degree of political opinion shift, as seen through observed and expected count differences. Although some categories (most prominently "completely changed" and "unsure") had very low frequencies, most responses were found in the "no change" and "some change" categories across frequency levels and still contributed to overall significance.

This result suggests that the rate of exposure to influencer content is a causative factor in political attitudes. Those who expose themselves more to influencer-influenced narratives can be more readily swayed by a shift in political affiliation, which is most probable due to repeated exposure to effective or value-based messages in influencer content. This is consistent with the broader media influence literature, where it is predicted that exposure to certain perspectives regularly can influence audience attitudes in the long term.

Conclusion Finally, the analysis gives empirical proof of the alternative hypothesis: there exists a strong correlation between political opinion change and the consumption rate of influencer content. This is in support of the key research assertion that political opinion can be shaped by social media influencers, particularly among active regular viewers.

4.3.2 PERCEPTION OF MISINFORMATION AND BELIEF IN POLITICAL DISCLOSURE BY INFLUENCERS

Table 8. PSPP output on misinformation and influencer disclosure

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymptotic Sig. (2-tailed)	Exact Sig.
	(2-tailed)	Exact Sig. (1-tailed)		
Pearson Chi-Square	.01	1	.930	
Likelihood Ratio	.01	1	.930	
Fisher's Exact Test				1.000
.568				
Continuity Correction	.00	1	1.000	
Linear-by-Linear Association	.01	1	.930	
N of Valid Cases	113			

Null Hypothesis (H_0): There exists no relationship between influencers' ability to recognise misinformation and the view that such influencers should declare their political affiliations.

To check this, a Chi-square test of independence was used. The two classification variables in question were:

Whether respondents had ever seen misinformation coming from influencers (Yes = 1, No = 0)

Whether they thought that influencers should announce their political party affiliation (Yes = 1, No = 0)

The questionnaire included 113 valid answers and had one missing value in the data.

Chi-Square Test Results

Pearson's Chi-square test provided the result $\chi^2(1, N = 113) = 0.01$, with the corresponding p-value of 0.930, much larger than the standard significance value of 0.05.

Analysis of Findings Because the p-value is substantially larger than 0.05, the null hypothesis cannot be rejected. That is, there is no statistically significant association between awareness of the misinformation disseminated by influencers and the belief that such influencers ought to declare their political affiliation.

The response pattern, as the analysis reveals, is almost identical across the two groups (those that accepted misinformation and those that didn't). Within both groups, nearly 81% of the respondents held the opinion that influencers must disclose political affiliations, and 18–19% didn't. These almost equal percentages, plus the small Chi-square statistic, prove that any difference in opinion is extremely likely to be a consequence of random variation rather than a significant relationship.

That is, even among individuals who are aware of misinformation spread by influencers, such awareness appears to have little influence on their attitudes towards political disclosure. That is to say that the public opinion on the transparency of influencers is, to a great extent, shaped by ethical norms in general and not on specific cases of misinformation.

Conclusion, Misinformation detection has no strong connection with demanding political transparency of influencers. The findings indicate that the perception of influencer integrity may be operating independently of certain misinformation detection, and it can be a signal of more ingrained beliefs about transparency and regulation of digital influence culture.

4.3.3 RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN AGE GROUP AND PERCEPTION OF INFLUENCERS REINFORCING POLITICAL IDEAS

Table 9. PSPP output on age and influencer political impact

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymptotic Sig. (2-tailed)
Pearson Chi-Square	11.46	4	.022
Likelihood Ratio	12.07	4	.017
Linear-by-Linear Association	5.15	1	.023
N of Valid Cases	113		

H_{03} : There is no statistically significant relationship between the age category of the population and the belief that the influencers spread the prevailing political ideology or concepts.

To verify the interaction between the age group of the respondent and whether they perceive social media influencers to disseminate common political ideologies, a Chi-square test for independence was run. The test reported a Pearson Chi-square of 11.46 with 4 degrees of freedom and a p-value of 0.022. Since the p-value is less than the standard significance level of 0.05, the result is statistically significant. Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected, and it can be concluded that there is a significant interaction between the age group of the respondent and whether they perceive social media influencers to disseminate political views.

Cross-tabulation gives a clearer indication of this relationship. In the 18–24 age group (Group 1), 57.8% of the majority held the view that influencers do support political ideologies, with 26 out of 45 respondents answering "yes."

This view was comparatively lower among the older groups. In the 25–34 age group (Group 2), only 18.2% (2 out of 11) held this view. Likewise, 29.4% in the 35–45 age group (Group 3) and 42.9% in the 45–54 age group (Group 4) held the view that influencers supported political opinions. The lowest level of agreement was in the 55 and above group (Group 5), with only 16.7% (2 out of 12) answering in the affirmative.

These findings suggest a clear generational divide in attitude. Younger respondents are more likely to share the view that influencers verify or strengthen some political ideas, and older respondents are either less vulnerable to or less attuned to influencer-created material. This discovery is pertinent to the dissertation's core goal of paying attention to demographic variation in perspectives of political influence on social media. It suggests the significance of age as a determining factor in interpreting and receiving political messaging from influencers.

4.3.4 RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN AGE GROUP AND VOTING BASED ON INFLUENCER CONTENT

Table 10. PSPP output on age and voting influenced by content

Chi-Square Tests

Chi-Square Tests			
Value df Asymptotic Sig. (2-tailed)			
Pearson Chi-Square	25.34	16	.064
Likelihood Ratio	20.93	16.181	
Linear-by-Linear Association	.15	1	.698
N of Valid Cases	113		

H_04 : Age group does not significantly differ from whether or not an individual voted based on content posted by influencers.

To confirm whether age is strongly associated with influencer-influenced voting decisions on social media, a Chi-square test of independence was performed. The test produced a Pearson Chi-square value of 25.34 on 16 degrees of freedom with a p-value of 0.064. Since the p-value is greater than the conventional 0.05 significance value, the result is not statistically significant. Therefore, the null hypothesis cannot be rejected, and there is no evidence of a strong correlation between age group and voting decision from influencer posts. The result is, however, just above the level of significance, and therefore, a borderline or potential association is indicated that needs to be further explored.

Although trends in results of cross-tabulation were not statistically significant, they were interesting nonetheless. Among the 18–24 age group (Group 1), the biggest majority (55.6%) were neutral in whether or not they voted on influencer posts, with smaller groups disagreeing (20%) or strongly disagreeing (17.8%). A negligible 6.7% agreed, showing that although young adults might have extensive exposure to influencers, this does not translate to voting behaviour. The 25–34 age group (Group 2) showed the strongest resistance, with 54.5% strongly disagreeing and the rest being largely neutral; no one in this group agreed. This trend shows greater political assertiveness or scepticism of influencer-driven narratives in this group.

The 35–44 age group (Group 3) also had a roughly equal division, with 47.1% neutral and 29.4% strongly disagreeing, again reflecting doubt or uncertainty. The 45–54 age group (Group 4) also had a majority (57.1%) choosing neutral, with 21.4% strongly disagreeing, but an extremely small minority (7.1%) agreeing. This reflects a slightly more open attitude than the middle-aged groups, though indecision remains paramount.

The most extreme variation existed within the 55 and above segment (Group 5), where opinions were highly polarised. 33.3% strongly disagreed, but an interesting 25% agreed, and 8.3% strongly agreed that they had voted on influencer content. This variation suggests that older people are more susceptible to influencer signals or perhaps disoriented by the online

information landscape, and thus generate a greater range of responses compared to the younger segments.

While the statistical testing did not find a significant correlation, the attitudinal differences between generations are important qualitative results. Young and middle-aged voters are in the direction of neutrality or rejection of influencer influence, while the oldest age group shows strong resistance and support. These findings suggest that even though influencers won't necessarily have the same effect across different ages on voting intentions, the perception of influence changes dramatically with age. This supports the value of the study of demographic nuances in examining the political impact of social media activity.

4.3.5 RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CHANGED POLITICAL OPINION DUE TO INFLUENCER CONTENT AND VOTING BASED ON INFLUENCER CONTENT

Table 11.PSPP output on political opinion change and voting pattern

	Value	df	Asymptotic Sig. (2-tailed)
Pearson Chi-Square	10.92	16.814	
Likelihood Ratio	12.27	16.725	
Linear-by-Linear Association	1.02	1	.312
N of Valid Cases	113		

The chi-square test between "Changed Political Opinion due to Influencer Content" and "Voting Based on Influencer Content" reveals no statistically significant relationship ($\chi^2(12) = 12.74$, $p = .388$). While those who reported a political opinion change reported a slightly higher voting influence through content than those who

did not, this was not statistically significant. The null hypothesis is therefore retained. Nevertheless, the descriptive data reveal a mild behavioural trend worthy of further exploration in future studies.

4.3.6 RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN AGE GROUP AND POLITICAL OPINION CHANGED BASED ON INFLUENCER CONTENT

Table 12. PSPP output on age and political opinion change

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymptotic Sig. (2-tailed)
Pearson Chi-Square	23.27	12	.025
Likelihood Ratio	25.59	12	.012
Linear-by-Linear Association	8.35	1	.004
N of Valid Cases	113		

H_{70} : No statistical association exists between seeing misinformation from influencers and opinion change on politics (age group vs opinion change).

To test this hypothesis, a Pearson Chi-Square test was employed to identify whether there exists any relationship between respondents' age group and whether or not their political opinion was influenced by misinformation caused by influencers. The results are presented below.

Implications of Findings

The Pearson Chi-Square statistic ($\chi^2(12) = 23.27$, $p = .025$) indicates that there is a statistically significant relationship between age group and political opinion change as a result of misinformation disseminated by influencers.

Because the p-value is less than the given significance level ($\alpha = 0.05$), the null hypothesis is therefore rejected.

In-depth Analysis by Age Group

Age Group 1 (18–24 years)

62.2% of the respondents in this category indicated a political opinion change as a result of influencer disinformation.

This cluster alone accounted for 60.9% of the overall "changed opinion" answers.

Only 33.3% said their opinion remained unchanged.

Interpretation: This is the most susceptible age group to disinformation being spread through influencers, possibly because of greater online activity and greater use of online influencers.

Age Group 2 (25–34 years)

Only 27.3% shifted their views; 72.7% remained unchanged.

Indicates a significant reduction in susceptibility from the younger cohort.

This group can exhibit early indicators of important digital literacy.

Age Group 3 (35–45 years)

Just 17.6% were made to alter their stance.

An impressive 82.4% reported no change.

Interpretation: Political opinions within this segment appear more entrenched or resistant to external digital influence.

Age Group 4 (45–54 years)

Interestingly, 39.3% indicated a change, more than both the 25–34 and 35–45 groups.

This suggests a possible re-emergence in digital impressionability, perhaps due to lagging digital integration or lack of exposure to critical media literacy training.

Age Group 5 (55+ years)

A small 8.3% reported change; 91.7% were unaffected.

This age group is least influenced by online misinformation, which aligns with existing research that suggests that older age groups make use of traditional media and hold strong political views. Implications and Theoretical Context The results validate theoretical models of media effects and internet vulnerability, especially among young users who demonstrate higher engagement on platforms such as Instagram, YouTube, and Twitter. The results align with the Elaboration Likelihood Model (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986), and it is suggested that young users may accept persuasive messages via the peripheral route, placing more emphasis on the credibility of the influencers than strict factual evaluation. The modest increase observed in the 45–54 age bracket raises questions for future research, possibly indicating a hitherto underresearched subgroup of users starting to use online services without proper media literacy safeguards. In summary, A statistically significant relationship has been established between demographic age and political opinion changes brought about by misinformation spread by influencers. The trend is age-dependent, with young adults (18–24 years) being most vulnerable to being influenced, followed by the lowest for older adults (55 years and older). The results are essential for policymakers, educators, and media outlets keen on minimising the political impact of online misinformation. They underscore the need for age-dependent digital literacy programs and influencer accountability measures in political discourse.

5. CONCLUSIONS

5.1 RECAPITULATION OF STUDY OBJECTIVES

This research was conducted to examine the transforming role of social media influencers in influencing political choice in India, particularly among digitally engaged audiences. With the widespread spread of influencer culture and its intersection with public life, this research sought to critically assess how influencer-driven content could be influencing political opinion change, ideological reinforcement, and even voting patterns. This research was informed by the fact that influencers are no longer merely brand endorsements or lifestyle niches but are now significant socio-political agents, many of whom interact with political narratives openly or covertly.

To find out the scope of this effect, the study aimed to accomplish seven main objectives. The first was a comparative evaluation of the extent of influence by left-wing and right-wing influencers through their tonal aspects, stylistic presentation, and perceived credibility. Through the analysis, the study sought to examine whether the political alignment of an influencer dictates the extent of influence exerted on their audience. The second was regarding the measurement of perceived credibility and authenticity of the influencers, especially in the event of political controversy. This was based on the argument that people will be influenced more by influencers they see as credible or relatable, regardless of the credibility of the political information being communicated.

The third research goal was to investigate the most common persuasive methods employed by political influencers, including emotional storytelling, satire, cultural allusions, and framing. The fourth research goal was to investigate whether or not these strategies have measurable effects, such as changes in political leanings or changes in real-world voting behaviour. Toward this end, the study aimed to examine to what extent influencers not

only serve as opinion leaders but also as real agents of behavioural influence in the democratic process.

The fifth aim was centred on the ethical issues about the use of influencers in political contexts, specifically emphasising issues such as the spread of disinformation, lack of transparency of content, and non-disclosure of political affiliations or sponsorships. These are becoming increasingly relevant in the Indian context, as the influence of the internet on electoral processes is growing, but regulatory frameworks fall behind. The sixth aim was centred on the broader implications of influencers for democratic engagement, specifically analysing whether they reinforce civic activity, lead to polarisation, or encourage passive consumption of politicised content.

The final purpose was to study how demographic categories, especially age, affect susceptibility to political influence by social media influencers. It was a topical issue, in light of India's youth population and high rate of digital use among the public. By using the categorization of respondents as broad age bands and examining responses to influencer communication, the research aimed to identify which age group are most vulnerable or least susceptible to internet political influence.

Together, these objectives were designed to give a holistic understanding of the processes through which influencers can influence or affect the political scene of India. The research employed a mix of qualitative and quantitative methods, with content analysis of influencer-created content on one end, and a formal survey to gather quantifiable data on user responses on the other. The mix of these methods gave triangulation of findings, leading to a more specific insight into how political influence is enabled in the online space. Each objective was addressed through separate hypotheses, which were tested using chi-square statistical analysis to determine the strength and significance of the relationships found. This research finally aimed to fill a gap in the Indian political communication literature by shifting the emphasis from the effect of traditional media to the more active, decentralised, and culture-infused effect of social media influencers. In re-stating these goals and how they correspond to the findings that will be introduced in the following sections, this chapter

provides the foundation for a comprehensive synthesis of findings and the broader implications for policymaking and potential future academic study.

5.2 MAJOR FINDINGS AND INTERPRETATION

It implies that social media influencers are increasingly influential in shaping political opinions, especially among young people. The results derived from hypothesis testing offer rich insights into the impact of exposure to influencer-generated content on variation in political opinions, disclosure expectations, judgments of the credibility of information, and, in certain situations, tangible voting behaviour. Each hypothesis contributes to a larger narrative: that online influence, where it is derived from trust, familiarity, and emotional investment, can reconstruct political cognition in significant ways.

The first significant finding is from Hypothesis H₀₁, which tested the association of high exposure to influencer content and political opinion changes. The test yielded statistically significant results ($p = .006$), and thus, the null hypothesis was rejected. The finding clearly shows that high exposure to engaging with influencers is significantly associated with increased chances of people reporting political opinion changes. Of note is the frequency of opinion changes among the 18–24 age group, which supports the assumption that younger audiences are most susceptible to politically oriented influencer content. The finding is in congruence with media effects theories such as cultivation theory and the elaboration likelihood model, which assume that repeated exposure to content that is high in specific values can increasingly influence systems of belief.

On the other hand, Hypothesis H₀₂ tested the possible effect of the identification of misinformation spread by influencers on the perceived demand for such actors to disclose their political affiliations. The data failed to support this hypothesis, as seen from a non-significant p-value of .930. This result suggests that while misinformation is still a problem, its identification does not necessarily translate to a heightened demand for transparency in the form of political affiliations. This result may suggest a level of normalisation

of misinformation, suspicion of the motives of influencers, or even user unawareness of the necessity for disclosure procedures in political communication.

Hypothesis H₀₃ examined the relationship between age groups and the perception that influencers are ideological echo chambers that reinforce current political ideologies. The test yielded a statistically significant result ($p = .022$), which suggests that influencers' opinions as ideological echo chambers differ considerably across age groups. Respondents in the youngest age group (18–24) had the highest chance of believing that influencers reinforce their current beliefs, meaning that for this age group, influencers function more as validators rather than persuaders. This finding is especially applicable when the influence of algorithms is considered in shaping content that reflects users' current opinions, thereby reinforcing ideological bubbles. Null hypothesis H₀₄, which tested for the correlation between voting attitude and age under the influence of influencer content, was not statistically significant ($p = .064$). The finding is close enough, however, to merit further investigation, suggesting a trend for younger respondents to be neutral or ambivalent towards voting following exposure to influencer influence, as compared to older age groups that expressed more solid positions, either flatly rejecting or affirming the same. In addition, the findings suggest that influencers may be able to influence public opinion, but that such influence is not necessarily carried over to voting, suggesting a disconnect between opinion formation and consequent behavioural responses.

Hypothesis H₀₅ tested the hypothesis that those who experienced changes in their political views were more likely to vote based on content from social media influencers. The results ($p = .388$) were not statistically significant, further validating the idea that, while influencers can powerfully shape individual beliefs, their power over tangible political actions like voting seems to be comparatively limited. This inconsistency can be due to a range of factors influencing voting behaviour, which include family background, traditional media, and pressures from local communities, which can dilute the effect of digital influencers in the electoral process.

Conversely, Hypothesis H₀₆ returned a statistically significant result ($p = .025$), which confirms that age plays a determining role in whether or not a particular individual experiences a change of political opinion through a change in influencer content. The 18–24-year-olds were again overrepresented, with over 60% of the group reporting a change in political viewpoint. This yet again supports the findings of earlier research to the extent that young, technologically adept individuals not only view influencer content on a wider basis but are also susceptible to their ideological frameworks.

The final hypothesis, labelled H₀₇, tested the relationship between exposure to misinformation disseminated by social influencers and subsequent opinion shift. The null hypothesis was rejected at a p-value of .025, indicating a statistically significant relationship. The finding raises extreme ethical questions regarding the power of influencers to spread politically charged or factually erroneous information. The findings suggest that misinformation from a trusted influencer can act as a catalyst for political realignment—an event of lasting consequence to the integrity of elections and public discourse. Collectively, these results illuminate the multi-dimensional and frequently nuanced ways in which influencers influence political engagement. Although their overt political impact seems minimal, the influence on attitudes, identity reinforcement, and the formation of ideological cleavages is certainly a domain in which influencer impacts are robust. Additionally, these findings underscore the importance of age as a primary variable in nearly all hypothesis testing, which implies that any policy initiative or educational campaign designed to counteract political misinformation or promote responsible influencer conduct must be directed predominantly at those tactics aimed at the young adult population.

5.3 THEMATIC SYNTHESIS AND BROADER IMPLICATIONS

The findings contained in this dissertation, while structured around individual hypotheses, together shed light on a complex set of interconnected themes that inform the cumulative knowledge regarding how social media influencers are transforming India's political communicative space. The overarching theme found within the findings is the heightened susceptibility of young audiences,

namely those aged 18–24, to the influence of online personalities. Whether examining opinion change, reinforcement of ideologies, or reception of disinformation, younger respondents consistently emerged as the most heavily affected by all variables measured. This is in line with the view that digitally native generations participate in political discourse not through formal institutions or mainstream news media, but through such informal, personality-based sources as resonate with their worldviews and identities.

Another salient theme is the blurring of lines between opinion and political endorsement in influencer material. Most of the participants indicated changes of attitude or endorsement of ideas, but without technically accepting influencers as political actors. This suggests that influencers, as opposed to classic political communicators, tend to frame discourse indirectly—through story, cultural references, humour, and anecdotal information as opposed to policy writing or explicit endorsement. This indirection is an understated mode of political engagement, raising complex issues about influence with impunity, since influencers are not bound by the same ethical or legal norms as journalists, politicians, or public media.

The third theme concerns the ideas of trust and authenticity as being central to influence. Participants habitually evaluated credibility less in terms of expertise or factuality but in terms of considerations such as relatability, consistency, and emotional honesty. Influencers who were "authentic" were more successful irrespective of their ideological leanings or analytical focus. The finding has profound implications for the building of political legitimacy in digital spaces. Instead of being based on credentials or an aura of objectivity, political credibility is increasingly achieved through emotional connection—a shift that is both empowering and manipulative.

Further, the research revealed that misinformation is still a powerful force, capable of inducing political opinion shifts, particularly when disseminated by sources that are perceived to be credible. Although subjects were shown to possess a rudimentary understanding of misinformation, the revelation that statistically significant opinion changes were found to be linked with exposure to such information indicates that emotional connection is typically more

influential than rationality. This is what researchers have referred to as a post-truth media landscape, where feelings trump evidence, and ideological compatibility can act as a heuristic for truth identification.

A further impact concerns the creation of echo chambers and loops of reinforcement, especially among youth audiences who consume algorithmically driven content. Influencers tend to be viewed less as adversaries to entrenched beliefs, but rather as endorsers of existing political beliefs. The impact can contribute to greater polarisation, lower predisposition to deliberate, and the restriction of democratic debate. Users may increasingly instead interact with opposing opinions, preferring instead content that reaffirms what they already hold, enabled by influencers whom they admire.

Lastly, the research points to civic and digital education in terms of influencer-based content. Influencers can stimulate political activism and political awareness, while their unregulated power also poses the dangers of manipulation, disinformation, and ideological zealotry. Thus, a priority is to establish media literacy interventions, especially among young citizens, to teach them the skills to critically evaluate the content they consume and identify personal opinion, propaganda, and political debate founded on fact. In summary, the research establishes that social media influencers are not political fringe players, but intermediaries of utmost significance in the production of political meaning, particularly among the youth. They are pivotal figures in the production of political reality through informal, emotional, and highly personalised channels. Although the trend can foster democratic engagement, it presents the imperative of the need for instant intervention by educators, policymakers, and researchers who intend to maintain democratic integrity in the rapidly digitalised world.

5.4 MAJOR FINDINGS AND INTERPRETATION

The significance of this dissertation lies in the direction of growing relevance of social media influencers in the politics of today, with particular reference to India. What was a peripheral phenomenon until now has emerged as a

determining element in the creation of political ideologies, identities, and engagement among digitally enabled citizens. While traditional media still influence the popular imagination, this book testifies to the fact that influencers, who create customised, parasocial relations with their publics, have a unique ability to shape how politics is imagined, deliberated, and even enacted in the digital age.

One of the most striking findings from this study is the extent to which online influencers have a profound influence on the 18- to 24-year-old age group. This group was found to be more vulnerable to opinion changes, belief reinforcement, and exposure to misinformation than older groups. This would be expected, given their natural comfort with digital spaces and their high levels of engagement with social media. However, this development raises serious questions about the long-term implications for democratic values and the quality of informed citizenship. If political ideology and voting habits are increasingly shaped by material that prioritises emotional resonance, relatability, or alignment with personal identity over factual accuracy and accountability, then it would result in a democratic process that is more performative than participatory.

A second important consideration is the ambiguous ethical boundaries on which the influencer is acting. Unlike journalists and public broadcasters, who often face strict editorial oversight, influencers enjoy a much more open environment for communication, often mixing commercial promotion with political communication, and sometimes without adequate disclosure. Institutionalisation of the same could lead to a distrust of authentic information among the public, along with a corresponding surge in what scholars refer to as 'soft propaganda'—ideologically charged communication masquerading in the guise of entertainment or personal testimony.

On this basis, a number of recommendations are made. Above all, civic and digital literacy need to be enhanced, especially among the younger generation of users. Educational institutions and media regulators need to work together to incorporate critical thinking and media literacy into secondary and university courses. This would empower students with the ability to separate

fact and opinion, distinguish misinformation, and know the manipulative techniques typically employed by digital creators.

Second, platform responsibility needs to be tackled. Social media platforms need to be urged, or perhaps required, to introduce stricter labelling and transparency measures on political content being promoted by influencers. This can be disclosure badges, audience warnings on sensitive issues, or fact-check integration on politically sensitive material. Influencers themselves have ethical responsibility, but platforms broadcasting their words also have a responsibility in halting misinformation and encouraging well-informed debate.

Third, influencer policy-making around rules, particularly in political spheres, needs to be prioritised. As has been illustrated through this research, influencers are capable of exercising real influence on the public mind, even if that does not automatically translate into voter behaviour. Electoral commissions, advertising regulators, and ministries of technology need to come together to produce guidelines on political disclosures, sponsorship, and internet campaigning, complete with clear sanctions for failure to comply. India, with its vast and politically diverse online audience, is most in need of such guidelines.

In summary, additional academic research needs to be conducted. While this research provides critical insight, several areas need more study, including longitudinal influencer-generated content impact, geographical and language influencer salience, and caste, religion, and influencer influence effect in the Indian context. Qualitative follow-up interviews and research, for instance, can further clarify user motivation and emotional response to political influencer-generated content. In brief, this dissertation has sought to understand the intricate, multi-faceted interrelationship between influencer content and political thinking in India. It identifies influencers as danger and promise alike for democratic life: as having the potential to mislead, manipulate, and splinter public debate, yet also to mobilise, inform, and galvanise hitherto inert citizens. It is this duality that subsequent research, regulation, and education will need to continue.

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7. PLAGIARISM REPORT

Role of Social Media Influencers in Shaping Political Ideologies and Voter Preferences

ORIGINALITY REPORT

7%	6%	4%	4%
SIMILARITY INDEX	INTERNET SOURCES	PUBLICATIONS	STUDENT PAPERS

PRIMARY SOURCES

1	Submitted to Pandit Deendayal Petroleum University Student Paper	1%
2	Hafinaz, R Hariharan, R. Senthil Kumar. "Recent Research in Management, Accounting and Economics (RRMAE) - A case study on Recent Research in Management, Accounting and Economics", Routledge, 2025 Publication	<1%
3	Submitted to Michigan Technological University Student Paper	<1%
4	www.coursehero.com Internet Source	<1%
5	Submitted to Institute of Research & Postgraduate Studies, Universiti Kuala Lumpur Student Paper	<1%
6	vdoc.pub Internet Source	<1%
7	Submitted to American University Student Paper	<1%
8	Submitted to Universidad TecMilenio Student Paper	<1%

8. APPENDIX

A. Survey Questionnaire

Section 1: Demographic Information

1. Age: _____
2. Gender: [] Male [] Female [] Other [] Prefer not to say
3. Educational Qualification: [] High School [] Undergraduate [] Postgraduate [] Doctorate [] Other
4. Occupation: _____ [] Prefer not to say
5. Region: _____
6. Political Affiliation (if any): [] Left-leaning [] Right-leaning [] Centrist [] Undecided [] Prefer not to say

Section 2: Social Media Usage

1. Which social media platforms do you use regularly? (Select all that apply) [] YouTube [] Instagram [] Twitter [] Facebook [] Others: _____
2. How did you first discover political influencers on social media? [] Suggested Videos [] Shared by Friends/Family [] News Articles [] Other: _____
3. How frequently do you watch political content on social media? [] Daily [] Weekly [] Monthly [] Rarely [] Never
4. How often do you watch videos by the following influencers? (1 - Never, 5 - Always)
 - Sudhir Chaudhry [1 2 3 4 5]
 - Palki Sharma [1 2 3 4 5]
 - Rajat Sharma [1 2 3 4 5]
 - Dhruv Rathee [1 2 3 4 5]
 - Akash Banerjee [1 2 3 4 5]
 - Ravish Kumar [1 2 3 4 5]

Section 3: Perception and Trust

1. How credible do you find the following influencers? (1 - Not Credible, 5 - Highly Credible)
 - Sudhir Chaudhry [1 2 3 4 5]
 - Palki Sharma [1 2 3 4 5]
 - Rajat Sharma [1 2 3 4 5]
 - Dhruv Rathee [1 2 3 4 5]
 - Akash Banerjee [1 2 3 4 5]

- Ravish Kumar [1 2 3 4 5]
2. Do you think these influencers provide factual information? [] Yes [] No [] Sometimes
 3. How neutral or biased do you perceive each of these influencers to be? (1 - Highly Biased, 5 - Completely Neutral)
 - Sudhir Chaudhry [1 2 3 4 5]
 - Palki Sharma [1 2 3 4 5]
 - Rajat Sharma [1 2 3 4 5]
 - Dhruv Rathee [1 2 3 4 5]
 - Akash Banerjee [1 2 3 4 5]
 - Ravish Kumar [1 2 3 4 5]
 4. What factors influence your trust in an influencer's political content? (Select all that apply) [] Past Accuracy [] Tone and Style [] Engagement with Followers [] Personal Belief Alignment

Section 4: Influence on Political Opinions and Choices

1. Have you ever changed your opinion on a political issue after watching content from an influencer? [] Yes [] No [] Unsure If yes, please elaborate:

2. Do influencers reinforce your existing political beliefs? [] Yes [] No [] Sometimes
3. Have you shared political content from these influencers on your social media? [] Yes [] No
4. Do you discuss political topics with others after consuming influencer content? [] Yes [] No
5. How likely are you to vote based on opinions shaped by influencers? (1 - Not Likely, 5 - Highly Likely) [1 2 3 4 5]

Section 5: Ethical and Transparency Considerations

1. Do you think influencers should disclose any political affiliations or sponsorships that they have? [] Yes [] No [] Not Sure
2. Are you aware of any instances where influencers may have presented biased or misleading information? [] Yes [] No
3. How important is it for influencers to provide fact-checked information? (1 - Not Important, 5 - Extremely Important) [1 2 3 4 5]
4. Do you think social media platforms should regulate political influencer content for transparency? [] Yes [] No [] Not Sure

Section 6: Additional Comments. Please share any thoughts on how social media influencers affect political discourse in India: