

THE EFFECT OF POLITICAL INFLUENCER ON ONLINE POLITICAL PARTICIPATION IN TWITTER/X

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Abstract

Twitter/X serves as a platform for communication and connection, which allows for non-reciprocal relationships. It provides opportunities for individuals to contribute and disseminate information. It provokes the emergence of political influencer as an authentic digital opinion leader. Their involvement in political issues stimulates young people's interest in published content. However, research on how political influencer affects online political participation remain limited. To address this, a survey was conducted among followers of political influencer (N=344) to investigate their impact on online political participation. Source credibility theory was used to explain how political influencer affects followers' political behavior. The finding suggests that political influencer positively affects online political participation. This is explained by the role of political influencer as a source of political information that adapt to the needs of their followers. Overall, the results of this research provide theoretical implications in the form of an understanding of political influencers from middle class countries.

Keywords: Political Influencer, online political participation, social media, X

INTRODUCTION

Social media supports the development of digital democracy, as it offers cost-effective and accessible opportunities for each individual to participate in political discussions (Borge Bravo & Esteve Del Valle, 2017). One such social media platform that promotes democratic processes in a virtual space is X (formerly known as Twitter). It allows users to create and share political information, opinions, and political influence with individuals interested in politics (Alsolami et al., 2021).

Borge Bravo & Esteve Del Valle (2017) notes that Twitter plays dual role in politics, as it empowers party leadership and creates opportunities for individuals to become political influencer. Political influencer is an authentic digital opinion leader (Riedl et al., 2021). Their involvement in political issues stimulates young people's interest in published content. Political influencer possesses a significant influence in shaping, persuading, and changing individual attitudes and behavior, ultimately fostering political participation (Alsolami et al., 2021; Harff & Schmuck, 2023).

It is worth noting that on recent studies have primarily focused on developed countries, with no investigation on the impact of political influencer on online political participation on X yet. Research on political influencers mostly studied on social media YouTube, Facebook or Instagram, with an emphasize on political influencers classification. In Indonesia, there are influential political influencers on Twitter, either media institution or an individual. This study, however, focuses on individual political influencers to find out how political influencer affects online political participation. It is essential to illustrates how the Quo Vadis of digital democracy.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Political Influencer on X

Political influencers are individuals who have the power to influence others through conventional or social media based on their knowledge, experience, credibility and commitment (Curiel, 2020). Political influencers can be categorized based on the media used, such as YouTube (Acharoui et al., 2020; Fischer et al., 2022), X (Alsolami et al., 2021; Casero-Ripollés, 2021; Curiel, 2020; Dubois & Gaffney, 2014; Harff & Schmuck, 2023; Peres-Neto, 2022) each platform has unique characteristics and features that shape the style or approach of each influencer.

X is considered as the most effective medium for engaging in political activities. Ausserhofer & Maireder (2013) describes that X serves as a platform for promoting transparency within political sphere. It facilitates networking conversation opportunities without physical, time, space constraints and social boundaries. Considering its popularity and characteristics offered, X foster a closer and more direct relationship between voters and politicians, and bridging the gap between ordinary people with powerful and influential elite (Alsolami et al., 2021).

Research on political influencers on various social media platforms and their impact has been conducted by several scholars. Pérez-Curiel & Naharro (2019) conducted a study in the United States to examine the influence of Donald Trump's tweets as a political influencer in X on the media and its users. The results indicate that Trump's active engagement in X is perceived as a significant news source and political influencer for both media and citizens. The study of Acharoui et al. (2020) in Morocco supports previous research findings, demonstrating that information shared by political influencer in YouTube's channel affects the recipient's perception. Although the content delivered by influencers has not had a substantial real impact on voter behaviour in the form of political participation, it remains a noteworthy influence.

Political participation, as defined by Gil de Zúñiga et al. (2014) refers to the ability to express political opinions and mobilize political influence online and offline. Meanwhile Kwon (2020) describes online political participation as consuming political information, expressing political opinions, and political mobilization. Other studies have also identified additional forms of online political participation, including forwarding political emails, posting political comments on blogs, social media or websites, following political candidates on social media, signing online petition, seeking political knowledge and information on social media, sharing political information, messaging political candidates or government officials, and donating (Dauda Abdu et al., 2017; Halim et al., 2021; Hoffmann et al., 2014; Yang & DeHart, 2016).

There is considerable evidence to support that social media has significantly contributed to the rise in online political participation. Similar finding has been reported by Dekoninck & Schmuck (2022) that influencers enhance both online and offline political participation among youth through political information shared.

Source Credibility Theory

In the 1950s, Hovland and Janis developed source credibility through research with the aim of identifying the characteristics of communicators and its factors that contribute to the perception of credibility. According to Hovland, Janis and Kelly, credible sources are easier and more effective at persuading their audiences. This concept formed the basis for further research into source credibility theory (Flanagin & Metzger, 2014).

Following Hovland, Janis and Kelly (1963), Greenburg & Miller in 1966 conducted experiment to test source credibility and found that individuals with low credibility were unable to change the attitudes of the audience. On the contrary, individuals with high credibility tended to produce positive attitudes. This result aligned with Johnson & Izzett' research in 1969 which confirmed that highly credible sources are more influential and more likely to encourage attitude change. It because audiences tend to respect for those with high credibility, making their words easier accepted (Serman & Sims, 2022). Source credibility is a positive attribute of a communicator. The personal characteristics of the communicator play a significant role for credibility and audience acceptance. Dou et al. (2012) identified at least two dimensions of source credibility: character and competence. However, source credibility is not inherent in the individual but is instead a perception of the audience.

Source credibility is often attributed to political influencers because they share certain qualities. Source credibility refers to positive characteristics that communicators possess in terms of their character and competence, while political influencers are individuals who have the ability to affect other people's opinion through conventional media or social media due to their knowledge, experience, credibility and commitment (Curiel, 2020). The concept of political influencer encompasses the positive traits of communicators, such as their character and competence in the form of knowledge, experience, credibility and commitment. Thus, political influencers are able to motivate online political participation among their followers, according to the principles of source credibility theory.

Knowledge and Online Political Participation

Knowledge encompasses general political knowledge and views on current political issues, as well as the capacity to make accurate predictions (Herne et al., 2019). Political influencers with knowledge disseminated through X facilitate individuals' acquisition of the necessary political knowledge. The availability of political information accessible through social media provides knowledge that contributes to online political participation (Hussain et al., 2023). Ondercin & Jones-White (2011) highlight that the higher the political knowledge, the higher the possibility of political participation. Political knowledge influence the political participation of men and women differently. Thus, the hypothesis.

H1: Political influencer knowledge positively affects online political participation.

Experience and Online Political Participation

Experience refers to the duration of experience in politics, the extent of experience in formal and informal positions, and the quality of those positions (Baturo & Elkink, 2022a). Experience enables individuals to learn from events and positions held (Baturo & Elkink, 2022b). Experienced individuals are regarded as more reliable and trustworthy that provides and relevant views (Baturo & Elkink, 2022b; Duffy & Pierce, 2007). The higher the followers' trust in political influencers, the higher their influence (Qiang et al., 2021). However, there is no direct research that directly stated the influence of political influencer experience on online political participation. Thus, the hypothesis.

H2: Political influencer experience positively affects online political participation.

Credibility and Online Political Participation

Credibility is an individual's assessment of trustworthiness which must reflect competence, trustworthiness, care and track record. Competency includes expertise and skills. Caring includes an interest in listening, understanding other ideas, and empathy. Track record includes a track record in decision making and leadership style (Van Zuydam & Hendriks, 2018). It is essential for political influencer to possess high credibility as it enables them to be respected and their words are more easily accepted. Several studies have found that credible individuals have a more significant influence on attitudes and behavioral intentions to engage in political participation compared to non-credible sources (Serman & Sims, 2023).

Credible sources serve as role models and their opinions are highly valued, making it easier for others to adopt the suggested ideas and behavior quickly (Weissman et al., 2020). Boesch (2009) confirms that source credibility plays an important role in stimulating online political participation. Thus, the hypothesis.

H3: Political influencer credibility positively affects online political participation.

Commitment and Online Political Participation

Commitment is a strong desire and belief to establish an institution and carry out strategic actions on a continuous basis. It can be determined through both stated and demonstrated commitment, which includes simplifying complex issues and concentrating on specific goals (Baker et al., 2018; Fox et al., 2011). Political influencers are expected to exhibit commitment (Dubois et al., 2020), because changing attitudes and behavior is not an easy task and requires continuous and long-term persuasion process. It requires both convincing information and messages (Werner et al., 1995).

Political influencers who are devoted to sharing information, points of view and advice on political issues can broaden their followers' involvement and create a supportive environment for mutual learning. Mawarti et al. (2021) states that the opportunity to continue learning about politics foster the development of good citizens. By gaining knowledge and understanding of political issues, it encourages followers to engage in online political participation.

H4: Political influencer commitment positively affects online political participation.

METHODS

Data was collected using Zoho online surveys. The questionnaire was distributed via a link on the X platform to enable respondents share the survey link to their social circles and fellow X followers of political influencer. The online survey was conducted due to its beneficial of research. The aim of this research is to examine the effect of political influencers on online political participation in X. To be included in the study, respondents must follow account X of political influencer, without any restriction on age.

In terms of sample size, according to G*Power, a sample of 266 was required. However, the sample size in this study exceeded to 344 respondents. Consequently, this study boasts a sample size that is deemed sufficiently large to produce convincing results. Following the data collection, a path analysis test was undertaken using SPSS version 27. Path analysis is a method of multivariate analysis that extends multiple regression to empirically examining sets of relationships represented in the form of linear causal models (Ayata & Ayata, 2007; Cinaroglu, 2019). It was employed to determine the extent of political influencers, both directly or indirectly or together, on online political participation variables.

Table 1. Measurement Items		
Variables	References	Cronbach's Alpha
Political Influencer	(Curiel, 2020)	
Knowledge	(Herne et al., 2019)	0.860
Experience	(Baturo & Elkink, 2022)	0.755
Credibility	(Van Zuydam & Hendriks, 2018)	0.884
Commitment□	(Baker et al., 2018; A. M. Fox et al., 2011)	0.732
Online Political Participation	(Gil de Zúñiga et al., 2014; Jensen, 2013; Vissers & Stolle, 2014)	0.884

The research instrument was developed to align with research topic and objectives. Modifications were made to ensure relevance to the context. For political influencers, the four-dimensional scale was adapted from Curiel (2020), with each dimension utilizing scale measures adopted from previous research (Baker et al., 2018; Baturo & Elkink, 2022a; Fox et al., 2011; Herne et al., 2019; Van Zuydam & Hendriks, 2018). The online political participation scale was adapted and modified, respectively, from previous studies (Gil de Zúñiga et al., 2014; Jensen, 2013; Vissers & Stolle, 2014). All items measured were measured on a 5-point Likert scale, where 1 indicated strongly disagree and 5 indicated strongly agree, to assess the level of agreement.

RESULTSDrawing from the finding of questionnaires distributed to respondents through online survey, the data pertaining to the characteristics of respondents was obtained as follows.

Table 2. Demographics				
Demographic	Frequency	Percentage		
Gender				
Male	271	78.78%		
Female	73	21.22%		
Age				
13 - 27	169	49.13%		
28 - 43	139	40.41%		
44 - 59	36	10.47%		
Latest Education				
Associate/Bachelor degree	160	46.51%		
High school	138	40.12%		
Master degree	25	7.27%		
Junior high school	13	3.78%		
Ph.D degree	8	2.33%		
Frequency of accessing X in a day				

3-5 times	134	38.95%
1-2 times	107	31.10%
6-7 times	62	18.02%
>7 times	41	11.92%
Frequency of viewing political influencer		
timeline or tweets in a week		
3-5 times	168	48.84%
1-2 times	144	41.86%
6-7 times	22	6.40%
>7 times	10	2.91%

As can be seen in table 2, the sample from this study was (78.8%) male and female (21.2%) respondents. The majority of respondents were between the ages of 13-27 (49.1%). Educational Status, a considerable number of respondents were bachelor degree (49.1%), followed by high school (40.1%). Data results confirm that 38.9% of respondents access X 3-5 times a day. There were also respondents prefer to access X more than 7 times in a day. Additionally, reasonable number of respondents viewed political influencer timeline or tweets 3-5 times (48.8%) in a week, following 1-2 times (41.8%), 6-7 times (6.4%), and more than 7 times (2.9%) %).

A structural path analysis was performed to test the proposed hypothesis. Table 2 describes the results of hypothesis testing.

Table 3. Measurement results					
Hypothesi s	Regression Weights	□□Coefficient s	P- value	Supported / Not Supported	
H1	Knowledge Online participation	ine political	.214	.001	Supported
H2	Experience \(\subseteq \subseteq \) Online participation	ne political	.197	.001	Supported
Н3	Credibility □ □ Online participation	ne political	.167	.049	Supported
H4	Commitment□□ Onl participation	ine political	.176	.030	Supported

The result shows that knowledge positively affect online political participation (\Box coefficient = 0.214, p = 0.001 < 0.05), hence H1 is supported. Hypotheses 2, which proposed experience positively affects online political participation (\Box coefficient = 0.197, p = 0.001 < 0.05), confirmed. Moreover, Hypothesis 3 states that credibility positively affects online political participation. Path analysis provide evidence that credibility positively affects online political participation (\Box coefficient = 0.167, p = 0.049 < 0.05), hence H3 is accepted. Hypothesis 4 states that commitment significantly affects online political participation (\Box

coefficient = 0.176, p = 0.030 < 0.05), thus confirming H4. Furthermore, based on Table 3, it can be seen that there are simultaneous effects (Sig. 0.000 < 0.05), which means knowledge, experience, credibility, and commitment has a significant effect on online political participation.

Table 4. Multiple Regression Analysis

ANOVA^a

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	55.229	4	13.807	64.518	.000 ^b
	Residual	72.547	339	.214		
	Total	127.776	343			

- a. Dependent Variable: Online Political Participation
- b. Predictors: (Constant), Knowledge, Experience, Credibility, Commitment

Table 5. Model Summary

Model Summary^b

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted l Square	R Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.657ª	.432	.426	.46260

- a. Predictors: (Constant), Knowledge, Experience, Credibility, Commitment
- b. Dependent Variable: Online Political Participation

The R Square value in Table 4 and 5 is 0.432 which indicated that the political influencer with four dimensions knowledge, experience, credibility, and commitment accounted for 43.2 percent of the variance in predicting the online political participation (R Square= 0.432, F= 64.518, p<0.000).

DISCUSSION

This study aims to understand how political influencers affect online political participation in X. To date, where there has been little discussion on this topic. By examining the four dimensions of political influencers proposed by Curiel (2020) knowledge, experience, credibility, and commitment, this study seeks to address the gap in the existing literature.

The findings suggest that political influencers have a significant influence on online political participation. These results align with previous research conducted by Harff & Schmuck (2023), which discovered that political influencers directly influence political participation due to their ability to influence the behaviour of their followers. This influence can be attributed to the valuable political content, insights and perspectives provided by political influencers based on their depth of knowledge and experience. As such, political influencers are considered to knowledgeable and experienced in providing insight that can be accepted by their followers.

The research findings show that the majority of respondents, Gen Z, believe that political influencers simplify political issues. This supports the notion that generation Z prefers political influencers because they regularly provide political information in a moderate, understandable, interesting and related to their daily lives (Harff & Schmuck, 2024; Rinaudo, 2023).

Sharing views, opinions and advice on political issues regularly demonstrates a political influencer's commitment to fulfilling the needs and desires of their followers. In particular, this section plays a crucial role in shaping a particular point of view. Duffy & Pierce (2007) mentioned that political influencers typically provide advice on current political issues in order to make followers has sufficient information. In fact, it makes them a credible source of information.

Credibility is one of the dimensions of political influencers that affect political participation, alongside dimensions such as knowledge, experience and commitment. The interpretation of these results is consistent with the basic assumption of source credibility theory which posits that individuals who have credibility are better able to persuade and convince their audience. Another possible explanation for this may be rooted in people preference to be influenced by individual rather than the media. Personal influence is often perceived as more independent than the government or media sources whose owners have political interests (Casero-Ripollés, 2020; Soares et al., 2018). The social capital possessed by political influencers allow them to have a significant impact on changing opinions, views, and individual decision-making behaviours, including in online political participation.

LIMITATION AND FUTURE RESEARCH

The limitations of this research are 1) there is no definite information on the duration time that followers remain engaged with political influencer accounts. It is essential to understand the length of followers' exposure that leads to certain political behavior, such as online political participation 2) this study only examine source credibility theory. Future studies might examine two step flow theory as political influencer is considered as digital opinion leader, 3) the social media platforms used are limited to X. Further research might compare the impact of political influencers on different social media platform, or compare two political influencers on the same platform.

DISCLOSURE STATEMENT

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