

# Influencers and Politics: Their Role as Political Communications in the Digital Age

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#### Abstract

#### Article Information:

Received November 13, 2024 Revised December 19, 2024 Accepted January 27, 2025

**Keywords:** Influencer, public opinion, social media, politics, regional head elections The role of influencers Regional Head Elections in Indonesia has become a topic of interest in political and social discussions. In the digital and social media era, influencers play an important role in shaping public opinion and informing voters, especially the younger generation, about various political, social and economic issues that are key points in the election. This research aims to analyze the extent of the role of influencers in shaping public opinion in the digital era during the 2024 Regional Head Elections campaign. The research method used is a descriptive approach qualitative method with data collection through observation and content analysis on the Instagram social media platform. The results showed that the presence of influencers on social media has a significant influence in shaping public opinion, especially among the younger generation such as millennials and Gen Z. Influencers act as a communication bridge between politicians and the public, disseminating political information in an innovative and interesting way so as to increase political participation. The emotional connection built between influencers and their followers makes political messages better received.

# INTRODUCTION

Almost everyone has a communication device that makes it possible to communicate with everyone around the world through social media (Pratiwi & Husen, 2021). The purpose is to know more about the explanation of communication and social media. Communication is one of the most fundamental activities in human life (Ayuningtyas et al., 2020). Social media as a collection of software that allows individuals and communities to gather, share, communicate, and in certain cases collaborate or play with each other.

The presence of social media is a platform that allows humans to interact online without having to be limited by space and time, this has had a significant influence on social change in society, especially for the millennial generation (Maulana et al., 2020). Apart from the millennial generation, including generation Z, which plays an important role in the current era. Millennials and zoomers are two different generations, both of which together do a lot of activities and depend

How to cite:	Dafrizal, D., Mastanora, R., Andriani, Y., Armadila, A., Alfriani, R. D. (2025). Influencers and Politics: Their Role as Political Communications in the Digital Age. <i>International Journal</i> of Multidisciplinary of Higher Education (IJMURHICA), 8(1), 107-115.
E-ISSN:	2622-741x
Published by:	Islamic Studies and Development Center Universitas Negeri Padang

on the presence of internet technology (Meifitri, 2020).

The development of social media as a platform for social, informational, and political exchange has become a powerful tool that can be used effectively to target various segments of Indonesian society (Saputro, 2022). Social media has a social power so influential on public opinion that develops in the community. Raising support or mass movements can be formed due to the power of online media, because what is in social media has proven to be able to shape public opinion, attitudes as well as public or community behavior (Tama et al., 2022).

In today's digital era, our lives cannot be separated from social media. This fact proves that social media has a huge impact on individual lives. Moreover, a recent phenomenon on social media is the emergence of individuals known as influencers (Yasar et al., 2024). The emergence of these influencers opens up new ways to convince, influence and engage people on social media. There are three main actors in the world of social media, namely buzzers, influencers and followers, all of which are key elements in shaping political issues and preferences (Amanatus Sholihah, 2023).

In this context, influencers are social media account holders with many followers and play an important role in spreading issues to the wider community through social media. The role of influencers on social media has extended to politics, including local elections. Social media is now one of the main tools for political actors to influence public perception, with influencers playing a strategic public role. With Instagram, TikTok and YouTube platforms, they can deliver political messages in an innovative and relatable way. Millennials and Gen-Z, who are mostly active on social media, are highly sensitive to their favorite influencers. Therefore, politicians and political campaign teams have started using digital strategies involving influencers to reach young voters (Sikumbang et al., 2024).

In shaping public opinion, influencers not only convey information related to candidates and campaigns, but also serve as a bridge between politicians and voters, helping to build a positive image and mobilize support. In the implementation of government policies, the role of influencers is crucial in shaping public opinion, particularly in local elections. Public opinion can be expressed verbally or non-verbally, for example, behavior, body language, facial expressions and symbols worn. Public opinion is synonymous with internal freedom and openness to express ideas, opinions and constructive criticism. Public opinion is the effect of the freedom to express ideas and opinions in public. However, behind the scenes the convenience provided by social media as a means of public communication also has dangers.

This role is increasingly important in the political context, where influencers are used by various parties, including businesses and political actors, to influence public opinion and encourage certain actions. In the 2024 elections, these influencers played an active role in the candidates' campaigns. Seeing the great appeal of influencers in shaping public opinion, various candidate pairs took advantage of this (Budianto & Ghanistyana, 2024). As such, this research provides insight into how influencers on social media can influence public opinion, especially among younger generations such as millennials and Gen Z. This is important for understanding the dynamics of political communication. This is important to understand the dynamics of political communication in the digital era. In contrast to previous studies that more generally discuss the role of social media in shaping public opinion. This research aims to analyze the extent of the role of influencers in shaping public opinion in the digital era during the 2024 Regional Head Elections campaign.

# **METHODS**

Researchers used a qualitative method with a descriptive approach using one of the methods, namely by collecting data in the form of observation, content analysis related to the role of influencers in shaping public opinion on social media during political campaigns on the Instagram platform (Boestam et al., 2023; Engkizar et al., 2021; Ibrahim et al., 2023; Kaputra et al., 2021; Lubis et al., 2022; Munzir, 2019; Saragih et al., 2024; Waldi et al., 2018). Involving social media users who actively follow influencers to gain deeper insights into their influence. The sources of data were primary sources with direct observation of the content posted by influencers during the campaign period and secondary sources, which came from written sources such as books, books, journals, newspapers, other online platforms related to the role of influencers in political campaigns in the 2024 regional elections. The data analysis technique used in this research is using reduction, display and conclusion where all data obtained is then collected, then selected and classified according to the main issues to be discussed so that the data is relevant to the writing.

# **RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

The development of technology and information, especially the internet, has flooded society with various types of information. A report from We Are Social noted that the number of active social media users in Indonesia in January 2024 was 139 million people, or 49.9% of Indonesia's total population. Meanwhile, according to RRI, the number of active social media users in Indonesia in 2024 is 167 million people, or 64.3% of the total population. Social media has a major influence on the way people receive information, including political information. The existence of influencers on social media has a significant impact on Indonesian politics today. This is due to the provocative-reactive and discursive messages delivered by influencers to netizens. In the 2024 regional elections, prospective candidates went to great lengths to engage influencers in their campaigns. This strategy proved to be very effective in increasing the votes and electability of the candidate pairs competing in the 2024 Regional Head Elections. Candidates who get a lot of support from influencers, always excel in the contestation of regional election contestation. The wide influence of influencers makes it easier for people to receive information (Kurniawan et al., 2021).

According to Hariyanti & Wirapraja in Anitasari (2020), it is explained that an influencer is an individual or public figure on social media who has a diverse and significant following, and is able to influence the behavior of his followers through the content they share. In today's digital era, the existence of influencers has received a lot of attention from the public, especially social media users. They are often regarded as trend-setters, especially among millennials and Gen-Z. With a large number of followers, they have the ability to influence people's views and actions on various topics (Maheswari et al., 2023).

Influencers have two main roles in the flow of political information. First, they serve as a communication bridge between the government and the public, disseminating and translating government programs to be more easily understood by the public. Today, the role of influencers in politics is particularly important as many people are active on social media, so the government can work with influencers to deliver information. Secondly, influencers act as a counterweight to the opposition in strengthening the check and balance function. Influencers can monitor the government's performance and represent the voice of the people or their followers in influencing political policies. Influencers also play a role in the feedback process, helping to monitor, evaluate and review government policies in accordance with the authority of each stakeholder. Thus, policy implementation can run well in the next period. Influencers embody people's expression of their satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the political decisions taken (Afriani et al., 2023).

Public opinion is an opinion of a group or society obtained from the results of social discussions from various parties with interests. Unlike individual opinions which are subjective, public opinion is objective and measurable. Public opinion is the result of the integration of a number of opinions formed by discussions between members of all communities in a democratic country. Public opinion is formed from imaging by the content of the speaker's message one type of communicator influence, namely the content of the issue that often occurs between a communicant. Therefore, in the formation of public opinion, communicators are required to have or from the point of view of the concept of message-forming operators to be in line with events and easily understood by communicants. Between social media and public opinion this can go hand in hand because in reality with social media communicators can facilitate the messages they want to convey to communicants more easily (Zempi et al., 2023).

Influencers, especially on social media in shaping public opinion, have a huge influence on people's views. They usually have a large following and gain strong support from their follower base. Influencers have an important role in shaping public opinion as they often disseminate information, express personal opinions, or promote candidates to their followers (Saputro, 2022). Influencers are sometimes considered to have more power than conventional media to influence people's decisions. Many variables contribute to this. Despite the literacy gap, influencers can play a role in improving political education and democracy.

This can encourage a constructive exchange of ideas and increase understanding of different political views, which is important for supporting a healthy and vibrant democracy. Individuals and celebrities have large, diverse and significant followings on social media, and the content they share can influence the behavior of their followers. Through direct messages, live broadcasts and comments, influencers often establish intimate and dynamic relationships with their followers. As a result of this relationship, followers are more likely to accept and trust the opinions or recommendations given because they feel more familiar and trusted. Influencers also typically have strong reputations, unique personalities and deep industry expertise (Adani & Setianingrum, 2024).

They build an audience that shares similar interests, and followers often see them as authorities or experts in a particular field. Therefore, when influencers deliver political messages, followers tend to pay attention and take those views into consideration. Their followers tend to be more influenced because they are perceived as trustworthy and competent sources. In addition, influencers have the ability to popularize issues and attract the attention of the public at large. The viral potential of influencers is heavily influenced by the algorithms and features of social media platforms. Social media algorithms generally prioritize content that gets a lot of interactions, such as likes, comments and shares. When influencers post content on issues that catch the attention of their followers, the content tends to appear in other users' feeds, thus increasing the exposure of the issue (Prihanum & Fadillah, 2024).

In the context of simultaneous Regional Head Elections in Indonesia, the role of influencers cannot be separated. The release of the website rajakomen.com, (n.d.) also contains the same thing, that the momentum that further emphasizes the role of influencers in the digital era political system is the regional election as a form of democratic party of the Indonesian people held simultaneously. This was also conveyed by the Commissioner of the General Election Commission of the Republic of Indonesia, there is a trend of candidate pairs cooperating with influencers such as; celebgrams and youtubers in the implementation of campaign activities in the 2024 Regional Head Elections, through social media they also socialize the vision, mission, as well as certain candidate pair programs. The utilization of influencers in Regional Head Elections is actually done for the purpose of shaping public opinion. By cooperating with the right figure or figures, it is believed that it will be able to improve the image of certain candidates or candidate pairs in the community (Faulina et al., 2020).

The 2024 simultaneous regional elections present a more vibrant nuance than five years ago. The role of social media, influencers, and even buzzers has become an interesting phenomenon in the dynamics of political campaigns this time (Muhammad Habibi Putra Pratama & Erwan Efendi, 2024). The presence of influencers on various social media platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, and Twitter provides a new color in the way candidate pairs promote their visions and missions to the public. this was conveyed by the informant as follows:

This year's elections are more lively than five years ago because of the widespread use of social media and the emergence of influencers and celebgrams, which has become an attraction in itself (informant 1)

Most influencers are famous for entertainment content, but many of them are now using their platforms to talk about important issues, such as politics. Influencers who recognize their social responsibility have shown that they can participate in an educative role, not just an entertaining one. They have the ability to convey simple yet meaningful information about candidates' vision-mission, facilitate political conversations, and encourage their followers to engage in the larger political process, such as registering as voters and actively participating in elections. An example would be an influencer providing information on voter rights, how to vote correctly, or even providing brief instructions on how to carefully follow candidate debates. This method not only increases public awareness of politics, but also helps young voters learn about the formal political process (Alamsyah, 2023; Nur Suci Romadhona et al., 2023).

Influencers not only influence young voters, but also become an effective campaign tool to reach all age groups. However, this phenomenon also raises pros and cons in society. Some see it as a positive step, while others question the authenticity of the influence exerted by these digital personalities. In the excitement elections, it is important for people not to rely solely on references from social media. Rationality and an in-depth understanding of a candidate's track record and vision and mission are very important in making choices. Thus, this democratic party can produce leaders who are truly capable of bringing positive changes to society (Ligua et al., 2022; Madhani et al., 2021).

While the role of influencers elections is crucial, the use of social media and influencers in political campaigns also comes with risks. Uncontrolled political messaging and aggressive tactics on social media can damage a candidate's reputation and influence public opinion with invalid information. It is important to raise awareness of social media as platform algorithms often expose users to similar views, which can reinforce the polarization of society. Without clear ethics and responsibilities, influencers can sway public opinion in a negative direction. Misinformation and disinformation are increasingly prevalent on social media.

Influencers should be responsible for ensuring the information shared is accurate and trustworthy (Suparna, 2024). To address this risk, some countries have required influencers to include a "paid" or "endorsed" label during their campaigns for certain candidates. Similar measures in Indonesia may be an important consideration for the 2024 elections, as public trust in the electoral process must be maintained. The 2024 presidential election in Indonesia is one clear example that illustrates the influence of influencers in politics. Presidential candidates Prabowo Subianto and Gibran Rakabuming Raka used an aggressive digital strategy to recruit young support. They collaborated with popular celebrities and influencers such as Raffi Ahmad, Varrel Bramasta, Baim Wong, Ria Ricis, Nagita Slavina, Deddy Corbuzier, and Atta Halilintar. This indicates how important the role of influencers is in shaping public opinion and encouraging young voters to participate in the democratic process. By using social media platforms, the Prabowo-Gibran pair managed to reach a wide audience and promote their vision and mission in a dynamic and interactive manner, and made them win the 2024 presidential election (Hafid et al., 2024).

The strategic role of media and influencers in the success of local elections can be seen from their ability to provide accurate and verified information, which can increase public understanding of the electoral process. The development of social media technology increasingly opens up space for influencers to be involved in the election process, both in attracting public sympathy or support for certain candidate pairs, including influencers helping election organizers (General Election Commission) in increasing voter participation. Furthermore, local elections can strengthen the foundation of a healthy democracy by encouraging political participation and political awareness among younger generations who may be less interested or involved (Bantara et al., 2024).

## CONCLUSION

The findings show that the presence of influencers not only influences the political views of the younger generation, but also serves as a communication bridge between politicians and the public. By utilizing social media platforms, influencers can deliver political messages in an innovative and engaging manner, thereby increasing political participation among young voters. Influencers not only serve as information disseminators, but also as agents of social change that can increase political awareness among the younger generation. In addition, findings show that the relationship built between influencers and their followers allows political messages to be better received, thanks to the trust that has been built. The influence of influencers on one's political opinion is influenced by credibility, emotional connection and the individual's level of political interest. It is important to have a critical attitude towards the political content received and use it wisely.

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