

Social Media and Political Participation: A Systematic Literature Review and Bibliometric Analysis

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Social media has become a central arena for political communication, participation, and the formation of digital public opinion, while social media influencers increasingly operate as political intermediaries. This study maps the development, intellectual structure, and thematic direction of research on social media and political participation. A bibliometric analysis and systematic literature review were conducted using 107 unique Scopus records published between 2020 and July 2026. All records were used for performance and science-mapping analysis, while 80 English-language journal articles and reviews formed the qualitative synthesis corpus. The dataset comprised 95 publication sources, 239 authors, 44 countries, and 1,001 citations. Publication output increased from five documents in 2020 to 35 in 2025, indicating rapid consolidation of the field. Keyword co-occurrence analysis produced 27 interconnected terms, 70 links, and three major clusters: social media, elections, and informational risks; political influencers, platforms, and democracy; and youth political participation, efficacy, and digital activism. The literature consistently identifies influencers as accessible opinion leaders who can stimulate political interest and online engagement, but evidence on sustained offline participation remains conditional. Recent research increasingly focuses on TikTok, Generation Z, artificial intelligence, misinformation correction, and regulatory accountability. The study concludes that future research should prioritize longitudinal and experimental designs, comparative Global South settings, platform algorithms, political disclosure rules, and the distinction between passive exposure, expressive engagement, and durable civic participation.

Keywords: social media; political participation; political influencers; digital democracy; Generation Z; bibliometric analysis; systematic literature review

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1. Introduction

Social media has moved political communication from a predominantly institutional and journalistic system toward a hybrid environment in which politicians, citizens, activists, celebrities, and content creators compete for attention. Within this environment, social media influencers have become recognizable political intermediaries because they combine large or highly engaged audiences with personalized communication, perceived authenticity, and frequent interaction. Their political role is no longer limited to campaign endorsements; influencers discuss elections, climate policy, human rights, public services, identity, and democratic values while translating complex issues into everyday narratives [1]-[4]. Research increasingly treats them as digital opinion leaders whose relational visibility can connect entertainment-oriented audiences with political information and civic discussion [2], [3], [15], [17]. This development is especially important for younger citizens, who often encounter political messages incidentally through algorithmic feeds rather than through traditional news routines [4], [8], [11], [13].

Empirical evidence nevertheless presents a conditional rather than uniformly positive account of mobilization. Following political influencers has been associated with online participation, political interest, issue advocacy, perceived similarity, and internal political efficacy, while online engagement can

sometimes become a gateway to offline action [1], [4]-[6], [11]-[13]. The effect depends on message-source fit, authenticity, issue relevance, perceived simplification, platform affordances, and whether followers move beyond passive exposure toward expressive or organizational activity [5]-[9]. Cross-national evidence also indicates that the same influencer strategy may produce different outcomes across political systems, youth cultures, and media environments [10]-[14]. Consequently, the crucial question is not simply whether social media increases political participation, but under what communicative, institutional, and technological conditions influencer-led engagement becomes informed, inclusive, and durable.

The democratic significance of this field also lies in its risks. The commercialization of political speech can obscure sponsorship and accountability, while the authority granted to visible creators can facilitate misinformation, populist simplification, selective exposure, and emotional polarization [18]-[21]. Platform governance further shapes which voices receive visibility and which forms of participation are rewarded, producing tensions between accessibility and manipulation, personalization and fragmentation, or mobilization and democratic fatigue [22]-[27]. Studies from Indonesia, Hong Kong, Nigeria, India, Spain, and other non-Western settings demonstrate that social media may widen civic expression while simultaneously reinforcing surveillance, ideological enclaves, political consumerism, and unequal public visibility [28]-[33]. These competing dynamics have produced a rapidly growing but fragmented body of research distributed across political communication, marketing, law, psychology, media studies, and public-sphere scholarship.

Despite the expansion of individual studies, a consolidated map of the field is still needed to identify its growth pattern, influential contributors, conceptual clusters, emerging technologies, and unresolved research problems. This study therefore combines bibliometric analysis with a systematic literature review to answer four questions: how has research output developed between 2020 and 2026; which publications, authors, countries, and institutions structure the field; which keywords and thematic clusters organize the literature; and what theoretical, methodological, geographical, and policy gaps should guide future research? The contribution is threefold. First, it provides a data-based performance profile of a recent research domain. Second, it connects science-mapping results with critical thematic synthesis rather than treating bibliometric visualization as an end in itself. Third, it offers a future agenda relevant to political science and government studies, particularly for research on youth participation, democratic governance, election communication, platform regulation, and political accountability.

2. Literature Review And Problem Statement

The literature is principally informed by the two-step flow of communication, opinion leadership, the gateway hypothesis, uses and gratifications, source credibility, and perceived similarity. These perspectives explain why influencers may operate as accessible interpreters between political institutions and audiences who do not actively seek formal political information [1], [4], [5], [8], [17]. Unlike conventional elites, influencers establish authority through continuous self-presentation, intimacy, familiarity, and topic-based community membership, which can lower the psychological distance of politics [2], [3], [6], [7]. However, relational closeness does not automatically create political competence or sustained participation; the mobilizing mechanism may depend on the credibility of the source, the fit between the influencer's established identity and the political issue, the clarity of the participatory appeal, and the availability of pathways from online expression to collective action [4]-[6], [9], [12].

Previous studies show substantial variation across platforms and contexts. Livestreaming, Instagram advocacy, hashtag-based election discussion, and influencer appeals can stimulate attention, political expression, and participation, particularly among younger users [7]-[10]. Comparative and recent studies extend this pattern to Austria, Hong Kong, Indonesia, Serbia, the Philippines, and other settings,

but also reveal that efficacy, advertising exposure, and participation do not relate identically across countries [11]-[14]. The conceptual literature therefore increasingly distinguishes political influencers from celebrities, party actors, activists, and professional journalists while emphasizing overlapping practices of promotion, opinion leadership, and democratic representation [15]-[17]. At the same time, law and media-governance studies warn that monetized political communication and hidden persuasion complicate disclosure, electoral fairness, and responsibility for harmful information [18]-[20].

The central problem is that the field remains fragmented along disciplinary, methodological, and geographical lines. Mobilization studies often emphasize individual attitudes and intentions, whereas public-sphere and governance studies emphasize platform power, commercialization, and democratic quality [15]-[21]. Research is also shifting rapidly from Twitter and Facebook toward TikTok, artificial intelligence, large-scale computational analysis, and misinformation correction, creating conceptual gaps between older participation models and newer algorithmic environments [22]-[27]. Regional bibliometric and case studies further show that the Global South is becoming more visible, yet comparative designs and locally grounded theory remain limited [28]-[33]. The problem statement guiding this review is therefore: how can the expanding literature on social media and political participation be organized into a coherent intellectual structure, and which gaps must be addressed to explain when digital influence strengthens or weakens democratic participation?

3. Method

This study used a combined bibliometric analysis and systematic literature review design. Two Scopus CSV exports uploaded for the study contained the same set of 107 EID identifiers; the 45-column version was selected because it additionally contained cited-reference data. The records covered publications from 2020 to July 2026. The search architecture represented three concept blocks: social media and digital platforms, political participation and democratic engagement, and influencers or digital opinion leaders. The operational search logic was expressed as TITLE-ABS-KEY(("social media" OR TikTok OR Instagram OR Facebook OR Twitter OR YouTube) AND ("political participation" OR "political engagement" OR "civic engagement" OR "voting behavior" OR democracy) AND (influencer* OR "political influencer*" OR "digital opinion leader*")). The exported corpus was treated as the authoritative dataset; no records were added from external databases.

Table 1. Selection criteria and analytical corpus

Stage	Criterion	Outcome
Identification	Scopus CSV exports dated 24 July 2026	107 records
Duplicate control	Duplicate title and EID checking	0 duplicates; 107 unique records
Bibliometric inclusion	All unique document types and languages in the exported topical corpus	107 records
SLR document type	Journal articles and reviews	84 records
SLR language	English-language articles and reviews	80 records
Exclusion from SLR	16 book chapters, 4 books, 2 conference papers, 1 editorial, and 4 non-English journal records	27 records excluded from qualitative synthesis

The bibliometric stage examined annual publication output, citation counts, productive sources, authors, countries, and institutions. Author names were standardized by removing Scopus identifiers and harmonizing diacritics. Countries were extracted from affiliation metadata, and institutional names were normalized when equivalent forms occurred. Keyword analysis combined author and index keywords, removed generic indexing terms, and merged obvious synonyms such as influencer/influencers/social

media influencer, Twitter/X, fake news/misinformation, and Gen Z/Generation Z. Terms occurring at least three times were retained, and core topical terms were preserved when substantively necessary. Co-occurrence links were calculated at the document level; community detection identified thematic clusters, while the mean publication year of each term was used for overlay analysis.

PRISMA-based study selection flow

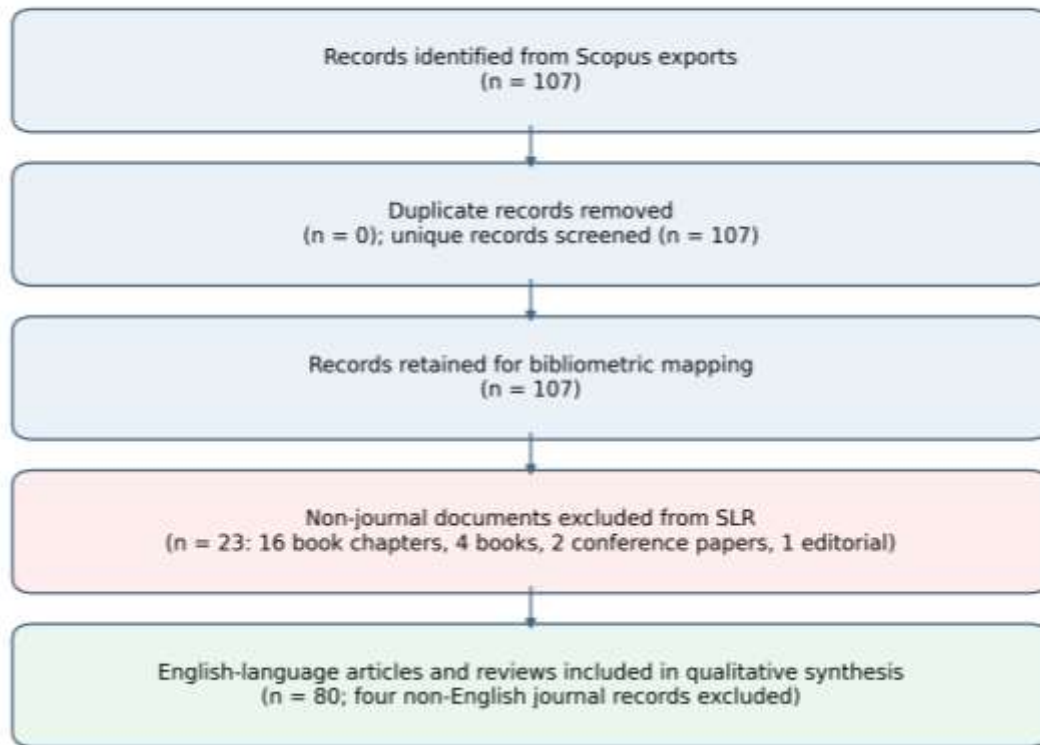


Fig. 1. PRISMA-based study selection and analytical corpus.

The resulting keyword network contained 27 terms and 70 weighted co-occurrence links. To ensure reproducibility, a VOSviewer-compatible map file and network file were generated with item identifiers, labels, coordinates, cluster membership, occurrence weights, link strengths, and average publication-year scores. The same files underpinned network, overlay, and density visualizations. The systematic review used critical synthesis: studies were compared by theoretical mechanism, platform, population, political context, method, and reported outcome. Rather than summarizing papers sequentially, the synthesis identified convergence, contradiction, boundary conditions, and future research opportunities. Descriptive findings were calculated directly from the Scopus metadata, whereas interpretive claims were checked against the titles, abstracts, keywords, and reference information contained in the export.

4. Results And Discussion

Dataset Profile and Publication Growth

Table 2. Main characteristics of the Scopus dataset

Indicator	Value
Period	2020-July 2026
Unique documents	107
Publication sources	95
Unique authors	239

Indicator	Value
Countries represented	44
Total citations	1,001
Mean citations per document	9.36
Median citations per document	2
English journal articles/reviews for SLR	80

The annual profile shows a young field entering a phase of rapid consolidation. Output remained at five documents in both 2020 and 2021, increased to 14 in 2022, temporarily declined to 12 in 2023, and then rose to 17 in 2024 and 35 in 2025. The 2025 total represented 32.7% of the complete corpus, while publications from 2024 to July 2026 accounted for 66.4%. The 19 records already indexed in 2026 indicate continuing momentum even though the year was incomplete at the time of export. Citation totals are highest for the 2021-2023 cohorts because these publications have had more time to accumulate citations, so the declining citation line for 2025-2026 should not be interpreted as declining impact.

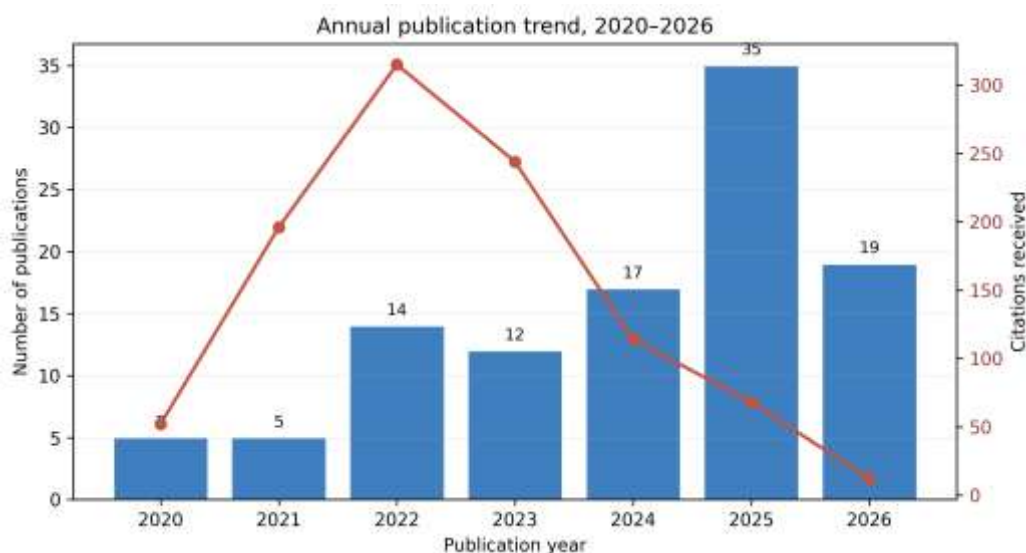


Fig. 2. Annual publication output and citations received, 2020-2026.

The growth pattern corresponds to the emergence of political influencers as a distinct object of study rather than merely an extension of influencer marketing. Early work established the conceptual transition from lifestyle influence toward meaningful political content, while later research moved toward causal mechanisms, comparative analysis, and democratic implications [1]-[4], [15]-[17]. The most recent publications increasingly use TikTok data, field experiments, machine learning, cross-cultural samples, and AI-generated communicators, indicating that the field is moving from exploratory identification toward platform-specific explanation and governance-oriented evaluation [22]-[27].

Productive Sources, Authors, Countries, and Institutions

Table 3. Most productive publication entities

Category	Entity	Documents
Source	Social Media and Society	4
Source	Javnost	2
Source	American Behavioral Scientist	2
Source	Youth Civic Engagement and Political Participation in Digital Spaces	2

Category	Entity	Documents
Source	Distinktion	2
Author	Schmuck, Desiree	4
Author	Harff, Darian	3
Author	Reinikainen, Hanna	3
Author	von Sikorski, Christian	2
Author	Merz, Pascal	2
Country/territory	United States	20
Country/territory	Germany	9
Country/territory	Nigeria	7
Country/territory	India	7
Country/territory	Spain	7
Country/territory	Hong Kong	7
Country/territory	Indonesia	6
Institution	KU Leuven	4
Institution	University of Vienna	4
Institution	Lovely Professional University	3
Institution	Free University of Berlin	2
Institution	California State University	2

The publication structure is highly dispersed. Social Media and Society was the only source with four documents, while most of the 95 sources contributed a single publication. This dispersion demonstrates the interdisciplinary character of the topic: political communication journals coexist with outlets in psychology, law, marketing, sociology, information technology, and regional studies. Desiree Schmuck was the most productive author with four records, followed by Darian Harff and Hanna Reinikainen with three each. Their visibility reflects the strong empirical strand examining youth, authenticity, efficacy, and influencer-led mobilization [1], [3], [4], [6], [12].

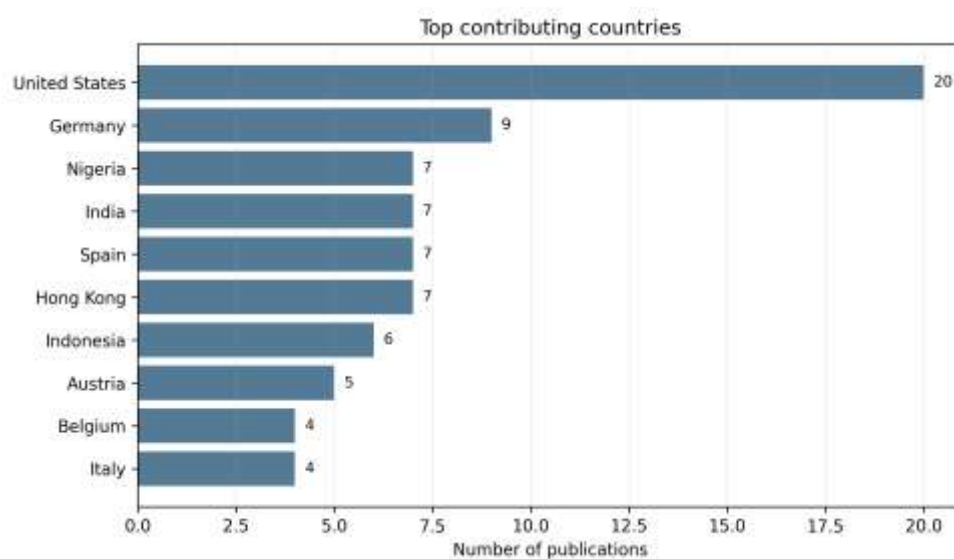


Fig. 3. Ten leading countries or territories by publication count.

The United States led country participation with 20 documents, followed by Germany with nine. Nigeria, India, Spain, and Hong Kong each contributed seven, while Indonesia produced six. This distribution is

notable because it does not reflect a purely North American or Western European field; African and Asian cases are already prominent. Studies from Nigeria, Indonesia, the Philippines, Hong Kong, India, and Taiwan demonstrate that social media participation is embedded in distinct electoral institutions, media freedoms, youth cultures, and histories of civic mobilization [8], [10], [13], [14], [28]-[33]. Nevertheless, the concentration of repeated authorship and institutional productivity in a relatively small set of European institutions shows that agenda-setting capacity remains uneven.

Citation Structure and Intellectual Influence

Table 4. Eight most cited documents in the corpus

Year	Document title	Citations
2022	The Mobilizing Power of Influencers for Pro-Environmental Behavior Intentions and Political Participation	125
2021	The rise of political influencers-perspectives on a trend towards meaningful content	103
2022	When Social Media Influencers Go Political: An Exploratory Analysis on the Emergence of Political Topics Among Finnish Influencers	85
2023	Influencers as Empowering Agents? Following Political Influencers, Internal Political Efficacy and Participation among Youth	71
2021	Legitimizing falsehood in social media: A discourse analysis of political fake news	68
2023	Influencers as political agents? the potential of an unlikely source to motivate political action	53
2022	The Influencer Republic: Monetizing Political Speech on Social Media	43
2022	Connective action or collective inertia? Emotion, cognition, and the limits of digitally networked resistance	33

The citation structure is dominated by foundational papers that defined political influencers, established mobilization mechanisms, or articulated democratic risks. The leading article, on the mobilizing power of influencers, received 125 citations; the perspective article on the rise of political influencers received 103; and the exploratory study of Finnish influencers received 85. High citation counts for studies of youth efficacy, fake news, source similarity, and political-speech monetization show that the field's intellectual core is not limited to a celebratory participation narrative [1]-[5], [18], [19]. Instead, influential work combines behavioral outcomes with questions of legitimacy, persuasion, and accountability.

The older highly cited papers supply the conceptual vocabulary used by newer studies, but citation age must be considered. Publications from 2025 and 2026 have low current citation counts despite addressing frontier topics such as AI-generated influencers, TikTok experiments, cross-cultural youth engagement, and large-scale content modeling [11]-[17], [22]-[27]. Their position in the overlay visualization is therefore more informative for identifying research direction than their present citation totals. This distinction prevents the review from equating accumulated citation advantage with current thematic relevance.

Keyword Co-occurrence and Thematic Clusters

Table 5. Keyword clusters identified in the co-occurrence network

Cluster	Interpretive label	Items	Occurrences	Leading keywords
1	Electoral communication and informational risks	14	106	social media, elections, x/twitter, facebook, misinformation, digital media, activism, polarization
2	Political influencers, platforms, and democracy	7	92	social media influencers, political influencers, political communication, democracy, instagram, tiktok, voting behaviour
3	Youth participation, efficacy, and digital activism	6	64	political participation, youth, digital activism, generation z, political interest, political efficacy

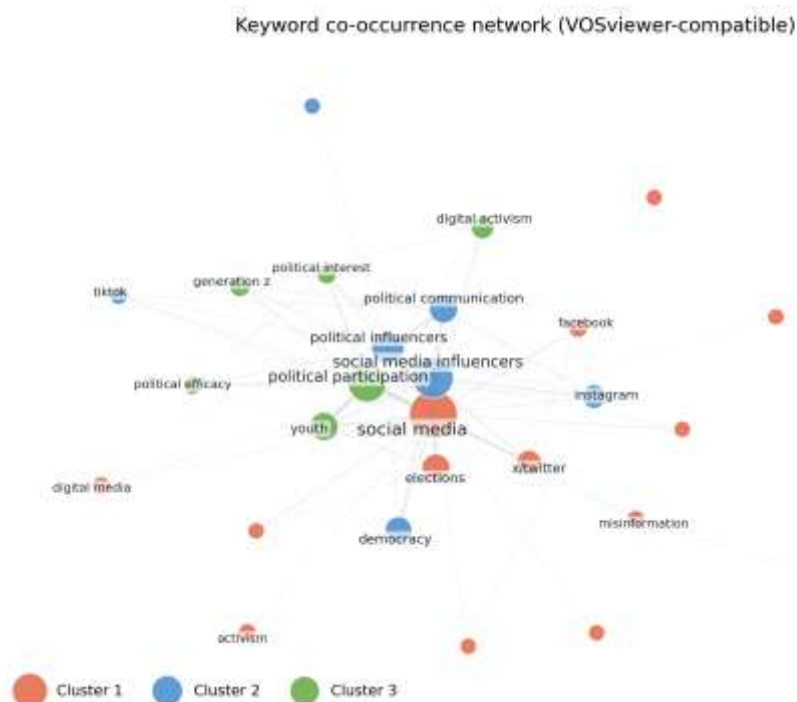


Fig. 4. Keyword co-occurrence network generated from the VOSviewer-compatible map and network files.

The network places social media at the center with 45 occurrences and the highest link strength. It connects strongly to social media influencers, political participation, elections, youth, political communication, and platform names. Cluster 1 joins social media with elections, X/Twitter, Facebook, misinformation, digital media, activism, polarization, political parties, and the public sphere. This cluster captures the infrastructure and risk environment of electoral communication, where visibility can support agenda formation but can also legitimize falsehood, intensify ideological division, or alter information quality [18]-[21], [27], [30], [33].

Cluster 2 is organized around social media influencers, political influencers, political communication, democracy, Instagram, TikTok, and voting behavior. It represents the institutionalization of influencers as a political-communication category and the shift from generic social media studies toward creator-centered research. The cluster combines questions about message strategies, authenticity, public representation, political promotion, and platform-specific engagement [2], [3], [7], [15]-[17], [22]-[24]. Its close position to the central social media node indicates that influencer research is now integrated into the main political communication conversation rather than remaining a peripheral extension of commercial marketing.

Cluster 3 links political participation, youth, digital activism, Generation Z, political interest, and political efficacy. This grouping reflects the behavioral and civic-engagement tradition of the field. It focuses on whether exposure to influencers increases knowledge, confidence, expression, advocacy, voting-related action, or broader offline participation [1], [4]-[6], [10]-[14], [25]. The network also reveals that efficacy and interest are smaller than the participation node, suggesting that mediating mechanisms remain less frequently studied than participation outcomes themselves. This imbalance supports further research that separates attention, psychological empowerment, expressive engagement, and sustained political action.

Overlay and Density Visualization

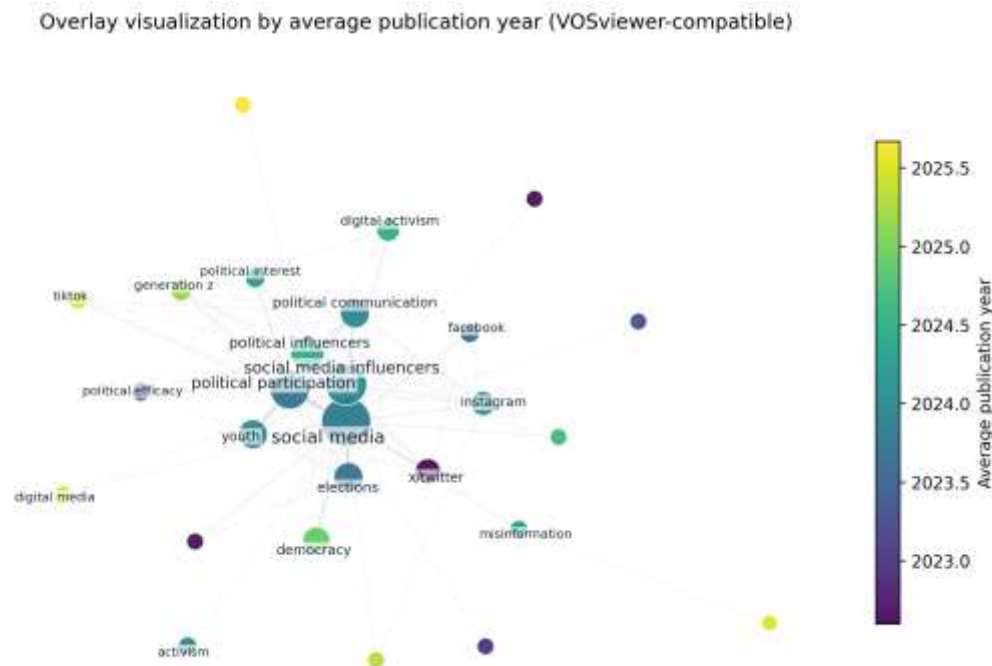


Fig. 5. Overlay visualization based on the average publication year of keywords.

The overlay map shows the temporal movement of the field. Earlier terms include X/Twitter, influencer marketing, political efficacy, political parties, and public-sphere concepts, reflecting the first phase of conceptualization and election-oriented social media research. Newer terms include TikTok, Generation Z, voting behavior, content analysis, digital media, polarization, and democracy. This transition indicates a move from explaining whether influencers can mobilize followers toward examining how platform design, short-form video, audience generation, and democratic consequences condition that influence [22]-[27], [28], [32], [33].

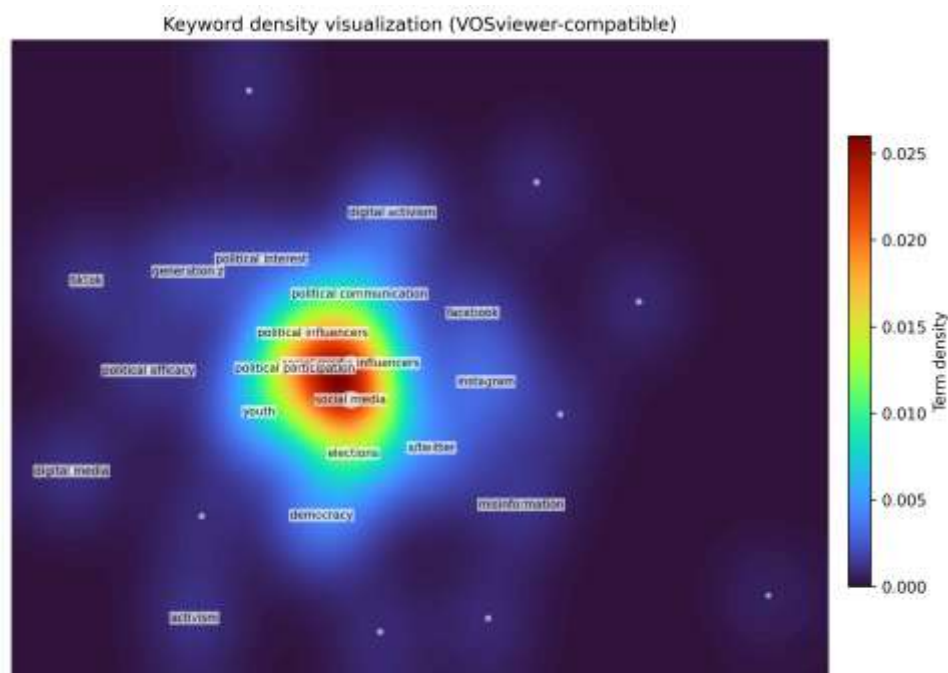


Fig. 6. Density visualization of the normalized keyword network.

The density visualization confirms that the intellectual core is concentrated around social media, social media influencers, political participation, political influencers, youth, and political communication. Lower-density peripheral terms such as artificial intelligence, misinformation, polarization, digital media, and voting behavior should not be treated as unimportant; they represent specialized or emerging fronts whose publication volume has not yet reached the density of the established core. The proximity of TikTok and Generation Z to influencer and participation nodes suggests that they are likely to become central rather than remain isolated subtopics, particularly as experimental and large-scale computational research expands [13], [14], [22]-[26].

Critical Thematic Synthesis

Mobilization, efficacy, and the online-offline pathway

A consistent finding is that influencers can lower the entry barriers to politics by translating issues into familiar language, embedding appeals in routine media use, and offering visible models of participation. Panel, experimental, and comparative studies associate influencer following with online participation, advocacy intentions, political interest, perceived similarity, and internal efficacy [1], [4]-[6], [8]-[13]. The evidence is strongest for immediate or online forms of engagement because liking, sharing, commenting, and participating in platform discourse require fewer resources than joining organizations, attending events, or maintaining long-term civic commitments. Influencers therefore function effectively as participatory triggers, but not necessarily as substitutes for political organizations.

The online-offline relationship is conditional. Some studies identify a gateway in which online engagement predicts later offline participation, while others show that influencer exposure or passive news consumption does not directly produce real-life action [1], [4], [11], [24], [25]. Active communication and activism appear more consequential than mere exposure, suggesting that participation should be modeled as a sequence rather than a single dependent variable. Future studies should distinguish exposure, attention, interaction, expression, coordination, voting, protest, and institutional participation, while testing the temporal transitions among them.

Authenticity, intimacy, and political opinion leadership

Influencers derive political influence from communicative qualities that differ from conventional political elites. Authenticity, perceived similarity, intimacy, topic fit, and informal explanation can increase message acceptance and make political content feel personally relevant [2], [3], [5]-[7], [15]-[17]. This relational authority also explains why non-political creators may mobilize audiences when an issue overlaps with their established identity, such as sustainability, lifestyle, religion, or community concerns. However, political content can threaten an influencer's commercial positioning or expose the creator to harassment, leading some influencers to avoid controversial topics [2], [3], [17].

Opinion leadership in this environment is hybrid. Political influencers may be activists, entertainers, journalists, politicians, entrepreneurs, or ordinary creators whose visibility becomes politically consequential. Their legitimacy is therefore not based on electoral mandate or professional accreditation but on audience recognition and platform performance [7], [9], [15]-[18]. This creates analytical difficulty: follower numbers alone do not establish influence, and engagement metrics do not reveal whether communication improves knowledge or democratic judgment. Research should combine network position, content quality, audience interpretation, and behavioral outcomes rather than relying on visibility as a proxy for political influence.

Misinformation, commercialization, and democratic accountability

The same relational qualities that support mobilization can amplify democratic risks. Influencers may blend commercial and political speech, obscure sponsorship, circulate unverified claims, or frame politics through emotional and personalized narratives that are difficult to evaluate using conventional campaign rules

[18]-[21]. Platform incentives reward attention and engagement, which can favor outrage, conflict, and simplification over deliberative quality [20], [21], [27], [30]-[32]. These problems are especially significant when audiences interpret authenticity as evidence of competence or trustworthiness.

Regulation must therefore address disclosure, platform responsibility, and information quality without treating all influencer politics as covert advertising. Clear labeling of paid political content, archives of sponsored creator campaigns, transparent recommendation systems, and accessible correction mechanisms are promising directions [18]-[20], [26], [27]. The finding that both human and AI-generated influencers may correct misinformation suggests that communicator identity interacts with issue polarization and message design, creating new governance questions about synthetic personas and automated persuasion [23], [26], [27].

Platform transition, Global South contexts, and emerging technologies

The platform center of gravity is changing. Earlier work concentrated on Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube, whereas the newest studies emphasize TikTok's short-form video logic, large-scale content features, field experimentation, and algorithmic engagement [22]-[24]. TikTok research shows that emotional affect, civility, partisan critique, source type, and mobilization appeals can influence engagement, but engagement should not be equated with attitude change or democratic learning [22]-[24]. Research on field experimentation, AI-generated influencers, and misinformation correction further expands the field from human creator behavior to synthetic political communication [24], [26], [27].

Geographical diversification is equally important. Studies from Nigeria, Indonesia, the Philippines, Hong Kong, India, Taiwan, and Lebanon show that youth participation, political consumerism, election narratives, surveillance, and influencer credibility vary across political and cultural environments [8], [10], [13], [14], [25], [28]-[33]. These studies challenge universal assumptions derived from Western democracies, but many remain single-country cases. Comparative Global South research should therefore develop context-sensitive concepts while retaining common measures that permit cross-national explanation.

Research Gaps and Future Research Agenda

Table 6. Research gaps and priority agenda

Dimension	Observed gap	Recommended direction
Theory	Frequent use of opinion leadership, but weak integration with platform governance and democratic institutions	Combine two-step flow, political efficacy, affordance theory, and institutional trust in multilevel models
Causality	Many cross-sectional surveys and content studies	Use panels, field experiments, natural experiments, and pre-registered replication
Participation	Online engagement often treated as equivalent to participation	Model sequential outcomes from exposure to durable offline and institutional participation
Platforms	Twitter/Facebook legacy remains strong	Expand comparative work on TikTok, Telegram, YouTube Shorts, messaging apps, and cross-platform migration
Algorithms	Limited access to recommendation mechanisms	Audit exposure pathways and link recommender systems to political diversity and participation quality
Influencer type	Political, celebrity, activist, journalist, and party influencers often merged	Build validated typologies based on role, revenue model, expertise, and political affiliation
Disclosure	Hidden sponsorship and monetized political speech remain undermeasured	Test disclosure formats and design public repositories for paid influencer campaigning
Misinformation	Correction effectiveness is studied separately from participation	Examine whether corrections preserve efficacy, trust, and willingness to participate
Artificial intelligence	Synthetic influencers are an emerging topic	Compare human, AI-generated, and hybrid communicators across polarized and non-polarized issues
Geography	Comparative Global South evidence remains limited	Conduct coordinated studies across Southeast Asia, Africa, Latin America, and fragile democracies
Youth diversity	Generation Z is often treated as homogeneous	Disaggregate by education, gender, socioeconomic status, geography, and political interest

Dimension	Observed gap	Recommended direction
Democratic quality	Engagement metrics dominate normative outcomes	Measure knowledge, tolerance, deliberation, pluralism, and accountability alongside participation volume

For government and political institutions, the results imply that influencer engagement should be designed as civic infrastructure rather than merely as promotional outreach. Election commissions, local governments, parties, and civil-society organizations can collaborate with credible creators to translate procedures, public policies, and participation opportunities into accessible formats, but collaborations should be accompanied by disclosure, factual verification, and clear boundaries between public information and partisan persuasion. Programs should also provide pathways from online appeals to concrete participation, such as registration, consultation, community forums, monitoring, volunteering, and feedback mechanisms.

The theoretical implication is that contemporary political participation should be understood as a platformed process involving relational intermediaries, algorithmic visibility, and multiple stages of action. The practical implication is that communication effectiveness cannot be evaluated only by reach or engagement; institutions must assess whether influencer communication improves understanding, inclusion, trust, and sustained civic behavior. The policy implication is that electoral and platform regulation must recognize creators as consequential political actors while protecting legitimate citizen expression. These conclusions are consistent with research emphasizing both the mobilizing potential and democratic vulnerability of influencer politics [1]-[6], [15]-[21], [22]-[27].

5. Conclusion

This study mapped 107 Scopus records on social media and political participation published from 2020 to July 2026 and synthesized 80 English-language journal articles and reviews. The evidence shows a rapidly expanding and highly interdisciplinary field, with publication growth accelerating after 2023. The intellectual structure is organized around three connected domains: electoral communication and informational risks; political influencers, platforms, and democracy; and youth participation, efficacy, and digital activism. Social media influencers can make politics more accessible, stimulate online engagement, and sometimes support transitions toward offline participation. Nevertheless, these effects are conditional on authenticity, issue relevance, active audience involvement, political context, and the availability of organizational pathways. The same ecosystem also creates risks related to hidden sponsorship, misinformation, emotional polarization, algorithmic visibility, and weak accountability. Recent studies signal a transition toward TikTok, Generation Z, artificial intelligence, computational analysis, and cross-cultural comparison. For political science and government studies, the central challenge is therefore to move beyond simple exposure-effect models and evaluate the quality, durability, and democratic consequences of influencer-led participation. The study is limited by its reliance on one Scopus corpus and by the rapid citation disadvantage of recent publications. Future reviews should integrate additional databases, update the dataset periodically, and connect bibliometric mapping with longitudinal, experimental, and comparative evidence.

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