



The Rise of Political Influencers in Digital Pakistan

Sahab Ayaz¹, Dr. Muhammad Shahid²

1. Riphah institute of Media Studies, Riphah International University, Political Communication
2. Assistant Professor and Postgraduate Program In-Charge at RIMS, Riphah International University, Islamabad

Abstract

This academic review paper reviews the topic of the growth of political influencers in the changing contours of Pakistan's digital landscape. The paper shows how more people now have access to the internet and the spread of platforms like Twitter (X), YouTube, TikTok etc to create political discourse and to share public narratives through a medium that are not rooted in conventional political infrastructures and media structures. The paper draws on Agenda-Setting Theory, Uses and Gratifications Theory and the Spiral of Silence to analyze methods, content strategies and interactions of audiences that define the influence of influencer political communication. In the paper, I trace these digital voices by both their democratizing potential the risks they pose—such as misinformation and unregulated content—through recent case events such as 2025 India Pakistan conflict. The paper concludes that political influencers have changed the paradigm of political messaging in Pakistan but that there is an immediate need for ethical guidelines, digital literacy and regulatory controls to establish a political communication space that is balanced and credible in its messaging.

Keywords: Digital Pakistan, Political Influencers, Social Media, Communication Theories

Introduction

Over the past decade, there has been fast digital change in Pakistan that has greatly changed how people participate in politics. Because smartphones are widely available and mobile data is becoming more affordable, a growing number of people now take part in political discussions online (Fatima, 2020). Because of this shift, a thriving group of political influencers has begun to arise. Since they are not members of main political parties or popular media groups, these people rely on platforms like Twitter (now X), Facebook, YouTube, TikTok and Instagram to post opinions, discuss policies, promote their political ideas and influence people's views (Zeib & Shahzad, 2025). It shows that political communication is shifting toward being more open and democratic instead of being led by politicians, journalists and well-known media companies (Chadwick, 2017). Because Pakistani mainstream media is often censored, gatekeeping and influenced by politics, digital influencers have created their own spaces to talk about politics (Jamil, 2021). Some of them are independent reporters, others are vloggers, activists across social media or those involved in humorous content creation. Some of the most popular among them can affect public opinion, decide what the government's priorities should be and influence elections (Yusuf et. al., 2013). The way they mix political views with entertainment helps to connect with

young internet users. Therefore, these individuals have made political discussion more accessible and brought new forms of speaking and writing into Pakistan's political field (Zeib & Shahzad, 2025). However, more political influencers on digital platforms in Pakistan raises important questions about honesty, responsibility and misinformation. While social media informs youth about politics, political groups, ideological prejudice and party support can also influence it (Khan et al., 2023). Since there are no strong regulations for digital political content, there are concerns about the role these influencers play in helping people take part in democracy (Abbas et al., 2023). The purpose of this review paper is to study the impact of political influencers in Pakistan's online setting. The study investigates the social and political setting responsible for this growth, analyzes their methods and communications and explores their effects on public involvement and political discussion in an age of digital development.

Theoretical framework

This study uses three significant communication theories Agenda-Setting Theory, Uses and Gratifications Theory and the Spiral of Silence Theory to look at the growth of political influencers in digital Pakistan. All three give readers a clear way to see how influencers work, how they attract followers and how they influences politics during current events.

Agenda-Setting Theory (McCombs & Shaw, 1972)

According to this theory, media helps decide which matters gain priority by picking out matters for attention while leaving some aside. Nowadays, political influencers determine what people should focus on and talk about. When influencers pick which political subjects to discuss, popular hashtags to highlight and politicians to emphasize, they influence the direction of political conversations and often direct both social media debates and the news. There is a strong effect from influencers on public attention and concern during major political events such as general elections.

Uses and Gratifications Theory (Blumler & Katz, 1974)

This theory helps us understand the reasons people are tuning in to political influencers more often than to traditional news. As the media evolves in Pakistan, people are actively searching for programs that give them political news, fun entertainment or a feeling of being part of a community. Those with political influence often present their opinions in interesting ways such as through videos, memes, online events and answering questions from viewers. These styles appeal to young people who grow up with technology and meet both their educational and emotional needs.

Spiral of Silence Theory (Noelle-Neumann, 1974)

According to this theory, it can help us understand why some people take part in digital debates less often than others do. As political comments online are usually quite extreme, most users are afraid to post opinions that differ from those around them for fear of being criticized or excluded. Those with strong and large groups of supporters in politics, if they want to stick with major ideas, may accidentally lessen the value of other ideas by boosting what the majority supports and reducing what they do not support. All three theories support one another by giving a broad insight into how political figures function, reach out and affect political conversations in Digital Pakistan.

Literature Review

Political influencers gaining prominence online is changing the way politics is discussed in digital Pakistan in the run-up to the 2024 general elections. Leading influencers are using their large social

media accounts on Instagram, Twitter (X) and YouTube to take part in political storytelling and boost public action. They double their activities by using strategic communication to sway public opinion, rather than limiting themselves to conventional media outlets. Using different platforms, political influencers send timed political promotions and help gather support for specific causes and campaigns (Riedl et al., 2021). Sharing political messages in a way that images their products as a lifestyle helps them be more accessible and spread their influence (Dharta et al., 2024). Using this content strategy leads to increased activity among young groups, who tend to join political discussions online by signing petitions, using hashtags and joining interactive forums (Prawira et al., 2024). However, as more people use political influencers, their appearance also leads to new problems. Unchecked misinformation and public disagreements are some of its biggest issues, as they threaten to weaken the way democracy is talked about among the public (Younus et al., 2024). In addition, their reliability is often questioned, particularly when they plainly support political figures or political groups. Consequently, people question both the real intentions of these groups and the accuracy of what they say (Dharta et al., 2024). Political influencers still have a pivotal role in Pakistan's digital politics. The techniques they apply for gaining support can either help or harm participation in democracy. That is why it is important to look at digital political participation with an open mind, dealing with its benefits and its associated dangers. Achieving transparency, promoting knowing how to read media and supporting ethical practices in content creation are important for healthier and more welcoming political talk online.

Case Analysis

According to council on foreign relations and CSIS, In April 2025, relations between Indian and Pakistani authorities took a sharp turn for the worse after terrorists killed 25 Indian tourists and one Nepali national in Pahalgam in Indian Administered Kashmir. The attack was blamed on Pakistan based militant groups by India and there was a series of military retaliations, including missile strikes and drone warfare, a fierce fight back between the two nuclear armed neighbours in the recent years. In such a volatile environment, political influencers in Pakistan took to a powerful role of opinion and discourse shaping. These influencers used platforms like Twitter (now X), YouTube and Facebook to keep people updated about and informed about the changing events taking place. Their content went from patriotic messaging endorsing the actions of the Pakistani military, to critical analysis of government strategies and calls for de-escalation.

Reporting about the conflict as it happened became widely known. There were videos and pictures sent of what happened after supposed Indian missile strikes, along with images showing Pakistan's defense was strong and that local communities managed to withstand the issues. These stories being shared publicly and in the media greatly improved patriotism and a sense of unity in America. Still such rapid sharing caused everything it touched to burn up promptly. At times, a lot of the messages spread were false and misleading which caused people to misunderstand and increased the risk of disputes. An additional example of uncertainty was seen when news of war casualties differed widely and caused confusion about the extent of harm. No immediate official updates left people relying on rumors which brought about a double problem with the rapid spread of news by influencers. Along with sharing updates, political influencers would also organize people to support certain aims connected to the conflict. The work of influencers backs campaigns assisting suffering communities, raises support for displaced people and aims toward preventing more war. They explored the ways digital tools might boost population involvement and united action in emergencies.

Influencers were also involved in starting the dispute in wider geopolitical discussions. There was a discussion about what India's decision to suspend the Indus Waters Treaty implies and

suggestions on how to handle future diplomatic steps. Influencers played a part in helping people understand what was happening by putting the events in the context of broader global trends. But creating these digital actors was also met with controversy. A number were accused of encouraging national pride which on some occasions felt like warmongering and others of critiquing how things are explained by official institutions. How people reacted to influencer messages in a tense atmosphere showed the difficulties involved with digital politics. All in all, the 2025 India Pakistan conflict revealed that politicians lead public discussions, spread important facts and win the support of their citizens in times of crisis. However, what they did also highlighted the difficulties of accurate information and division which affect politics today as a result of such types of platforms. In spite of digital influence still being part of our lives, this conflict once again reveals that media producers and audiences both need a critical eye.

Discussion/Reflection

Political influencers in Pakistan's digital landscape, however, represent a disruptive change in the ways in which political narratives are built, dispensed and ingested. The key point of this paper is that nowadays influencers take a central place in public discourse and such influencers have comparable reach and influence to mainstream media, politicians and other similar figures. So, their position in political communication is improving as they can deal with current events promptly, motivate their supporters and direct political views.

2025's India-Pakistan conflict highlights the advantages as well as difficulties brought by the evolution in media. At the same time, influencers have opened up areas for people who might not usually be heard, so everyone has a chance to speak. Even so, concerns have increased over misinformation, bubble communities and how difficult it is to tell the difference between activism, journalism and propaganda now.

Since influencers are having an evolving role in society, thinking critically about what they do and their effects on political engagement is very important. People can use the media to lead the conversation or guide emotions or they may act honestly by taking part in the discussion or creating division and leading the public astray. There is no proper regulation for digital news, online news and social media content in Pakistan which means these products are unaccountable. Also, as this shift happens, people ought to be able to consider influencer content objectively. It points out that adaptation would be important for those who control policy, those in education and those who communicate news.

Basically, digital political influencers are highly concerned with politics and can affect many discourses which is why their statements need careful attention and fitting into standards, regulations and ideal governance models. In the coming years, digital power will increase even more and everyone must be aware and responsible to handle it wisely.

Conclusion

The spread of political influencers in Pakistan is a clear indicator that there is big change in political communication. These actors are now influencers because they help set narratives, gather audiences and challenge established media and political structures, as social media is where most people talk and think publicly. They feature young people online on YouTube, Twitter and TikTok, pay attention to regional problems and spare no time in addressing hot national and international topics. When they become larger, so do their issues: misinformation, polarization and lack of supervision. When we use Agenda-Setting, Uses and Gratifications and Spiral of Silence theories,

we can come to understand better the complex connection among influences, audiences and power. Pakistan should help its people be responsible online, promote ethical creation of digital content and design suitable policies to better allow influencers to support democratic discussion.

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