

Social media influencers and their role in shaping civic attitudes among young adult digital audiences in urban areas of West Bengal

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1. Introduction

1.1. Background of the Study

The rapid growth of digital media has changed how people communicate, access information, and take part in social and political life. Social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, Twitter (X), and short-video platforms have become important spaces for sharing information, forming opinions, and discussing public issues. Within these spaces, social media influencers have emerged as powerful actors who can shape the opinions, attitudes, and behaviours of their followers.

Among young adults, influencers are no longer seen only as entertainers or content creators. They often act as opinion leaders who explain and comment on social issues, political events, civic duties, and public debates. Their informal, relatable, and visually engaging style allows them to connect with audiences more effectively than traditional media. As a result, influencers play an increasing role in shaping young people's understanding of citizenship, governance, social justice, and civic participation. Civic attitudes include beliefs and values related to political participation, social responsibility, trust in institutions, community involvement, and awareness of social issues. In the digital age, these attitudes are increasingly shaped by social media content. In India, especially in urban areas of West Bengal such as Kolkata, Howrah, Siliguri, Durgapur, and Asansol, young adults actively follow influencers who communicate in Bengali,

Hindi, and English. Despite this growing influence, limited research exists on how influencers shape civic attitudes in regional contexts like urban West Bengal. This study aims to address this gap.

1.2. Importance of the Study

Importance of the Study (150 words, pointwise, simple language)

- This study focuses on the link between social media influence, youth engagement, and civic attitudes in a regional Indian context.
- Young adults aged 16–35 are an important group because their civic attitudes affect democracy, social harmony, and civil society.
- Understanding how these attitudes are shaped is useful for policymakers, educators, media professionals, and civil society organizations.
- Social media influencers play a strong role in spreading awareness, mobilising people, and encouraging civic and political participation.
- At the same time, influencers can also spread misinformation, biased narratives, or shallow views on complex civic issues.
- This dual influence makes it important to study their impact carefully rather than assuming it is fully positive or negative.
- The study is significant as it focuses on urban West Bengal, a region known for political awareness and cultural activism.
- It examines how digital media is changing civic discussions at the local level.
- Academically, the study adds to mass communication and political communication research.

- It extends theories like Two-Step Flow and Uses and Gratifications to the digital influencer context.

1.3. Scope of the Study

1.3.1. The study has a clearly defined scope to ensure focused analysis.

- **Geographical scope:** The research is limited to urban areas of West Bengal, where social media use and digital access are high. Rural areas are not included to maintain uniform digital exposure.

- **Demographic scope:** The study focuses on young adults aged 16–35 years, as they are active social media users and important civic participants. Respondents come from different educational, occupational, and socio-economic backgrounds within this age group.

- **Conceptual scope:** The study examines how social media influencers shape civic attitudes such as political awareness, civic responsibility, public discussion, and views on social issues. It does not focus on consumer behaviour, brand promotion, or entertainment content unless it indirectly affects civic attitudes.

- **Methodological scope:** The study uses a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative survey data with qualitative analysis.

The research focuses on major social media platforms commonly used by urban youth in West Bengal. By setting clear boundaries, the study provides detailed, region-specific insights and supports future comparative research.

2. Literature Review

This literature review examines existing studies on social media, influencers, and civic attitudes among young audiences. It highlights key theories, findings, and research gaps related to youth civic engagement, influencer communication, and the role of digital media in shaping civic awareness and participation.

2.1. Social Media and Youth Civic Engagement

Research shows that young adults in India use social media to connect, share opinions, and follow trends. Studies suggest that social media influences knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors of youth. Scholars argue that social networks can both empower civic engagement and spread misinformation.

2.1.1. Literature Review 1

Iram Alam's study discusses how social media affects youth behaviour and civic engagement, highlighting both positive and negative influences. The research emphasises that social media platforms serve as important spaces for young people to interact, learn about social issues, and mobilise for civic causes. According to Alam, social media can contribute to increased political engagement, greater awareness of social problems, and connectedness among young users. However, the paper also recognises adverse effects such as misinformation, cyberbullying, social isolation, and performative activism where civic participation appears more symbolic than substantive. The study argues that for social media to be a truly empowering civic tool, digital literacy and responsible media behaviour must be promoted among youth. Such findings are significant for understanding how young audiences interpret civic content and how online platforms might shape their attitudes toward civic participation and social responsibility. In the context of West Bengal's urban youth, these dynamics suggest that while social media can enhance democratic engagement, there is also a risk of superficial understanding without structured digital education and awareness measures.

2.1.2. Literature Review 2

The study "The Impact of Social Media on Political Engagement Among Urban and Rural Youth" investigates how social media usage affects youth political participation in urban versus rural settings. Although this research focuses on a broader social media environment rather than influencers specifically, its findings are highly relevant: social media

usage was positively correlated with increased political engagement among urban youth. This pattern suggests that digital platforms facilitate greater discussion and awareness of civic issues among young users who are more connected. The study also shows that platforms such as Facebook and Instagram are widely used for political discourse, enabling young people to discuss policy issues, share political content, and engage in online discourse that may translate into offline civic participation. While rural youth faced accessibility challenges, urban youth exhibited more sustained interaction with civic content, highlighting the importance of digital access and media literacy for fostering civic attitudes. These findings complement your research by demonstrating the broader role of social media in enhancing political engagement an effect that may be amplified in the specific context of influencer communications among young adults in urban West Bengal.

2.2. Influencers as Opinion Leaders and Mediators of Communication

Influencers act as opinion leaders because they are trusted, relatable, and often perceived as experts in specific domains. In mass communication theory, opinion leaders are known to mediate information and shape audience beliefs.

2.2.1. Literature Review 3

In “Social Media Influencers can increase collective political beliefs and actions,” research published in Human Communication Research conceptualizes influencers as modern digital opinion leaders, extending the classic Two-Step Flow of Communication model into the digital age. The authors argue that influencers can function as intermediaries who disseminate political information and civic discourse in ways that shape followers’ attitudes, particularly through parasocial relationships and authenticity. These influencers often combine personal narratives with political or civic content, making complex issues more relatable for followers, especially young digital audiences. The study highlights that influencers’ self-disclosure and perceived credibility help them to bridge mass media messages and audience

interpretation, effectively becoming proximal opinion leaders in online political communication. This aligns with the notion that influencers are not merely content creators but active mediators of meaning that can shape civic beliefs and actions among their audiences. This perspective is especially relevant for investigating how social media influencers affect civic attitudes among young adults, as it situates influencer impact within established communication theory.

2.2.2. Literature Review 4

Another relevant study focuses on the influence of social media influencers on youth voter turnout and political participation. Conducted in an Indian context, this research finds that influencers play a transformative role as digital mobilisers in shaping political awareness and engagement among young audiences. By analysing psychological and behavioural pathways, the study highlights how digital influencers can influence political attitudes and behaviours such as voter turnout, civic engagement, and political awareness. The findings suggest that young audiences increasingly rely on influencers as sources of political information and interpretation, making them significant actors in digital political communication. This research similarly underscores the importance of influencer credibility and relatability factors that drive young followers to internalise civic messages and translate them into political action. Such insights are directly applicable to your research on urban West Bengal, offering empirical evidence of how influencers affect civic orientations among youth in an Indian polity.

2.3. Digital Media Use and Civic Attitudes / Opinion Formation

Civic attitudes involve beliefs about political participation, trust in institutions, civic responsibilities, and social norms. Previous studies indicate that digital media can increase political participation but can also polarize opinions.

2.3.1. Literature Review 5

A study on social media's effects on civic engagement and citizen trust suggests that online interactions and civic discourse through platforms like Facebook can strengthen trust in public institutions and increase the likelihood of civic action. Conducted in Western contexts, this research indicated that social media enhances civic engagement by providing platforms for discussion, mobilisation, and exchanging civic information. It found that online civic engagement correlates with heightened citizen inclination to address social issues and to trust civic institutions. This research highlights the structural role that digital platforms play in shaping civic orientations, suggesting that the interactive nature of social media fosters a sense of agency among users. Such findings underscore the potential of influencer messaging in shaping civic attitudes, especially in how online engagement fosters trust, responsibility, and active participation. Although this study does not focus solely on influencers, its emphasis on digital media's role in civic attitudes provides an essential foundation for your topic.

2.3.2. Literature Review 6

The research paper titled "Influence of social media on civic attitudes in the democratic context of SMA students" examines how social media affects young people's understanding of democracy and civic consciousness. Using survey data, it reveals that most students lack a mature comprehension of democratic values and civic education through social media alone. Key challenges identified include limited civic understanding, insufficient family and institutional support, and a lack of structured digital literacy strategies. The authors argue that while social media has the potential to be a tool for strengthening democratic values, it requires guided engagement and explicit digital literacy efforts. This finding is especially relevant to your research because it shows that social media influence whether through influencers or general content does not automatically translate into informed civic attitudes. Instead, youth need contextualized, authentic,

and educative content to form reflective civic opinions. This reinforces the necessity of examining both positive and negative impacts of influencer communication on civic attitudes among urban youth.

2.4. Research Gap

Existing studies show that social media can increase political awareness and civic engagement among youth. Influencers are seen as modern opinion leaders who can shape audience beliefs.

- Gap 1: Most research looks at social media as a whole, not the specific role of influencers. Influencers are different because they build trust, create personal connections, and share context-specific civic messages. This unique influence needs focused study.

- Gap 2: Theoretical frameworks like Two-Step Flow and Uses & Gratifications suggest influencers guide audiences, but there is little evidence for how this works in Indian contexts. Western studies may not apply directly to West Bengal's cultural, linguistic, and political settings.

- Gap 3: Research often treats youth civic engagement generally, without separating different dimensions like political knowledge, civic responsibility, trust in institutions, or offline participation. We don't know which aspects influencers affect the most.

- Gap 4: Few studies focus on young adults aged 16–35, who have distinct digital habits and engage with regional influencers in local languages. Their specific experiences in urban West Bengal are underexplored.

- Gap 5: There is limited analysis of how influencer content quality, authenticity, or misinformation affects civic attitudes.

This study fills these gaps by examining influencers' distinct role, localized context, and nuanced impact on civic attitudes of urban youth in West Bengal.

3. Research Problem and Rationale

3.1. Research Problem

Social media platforms like Instagram, YouTube, Facebook, and X (Twitter) are now major sources of information for young adults, not just entertainment. Social media influencers have become prominent communicators who shape opinions, attitudes, and behaviors of followers. Young adults often rely on influencers for understanding social, political, and civic issues. Existing research rarely separates influencer-driven content from other digital sources like news portals, peer interactions, or official messaging. This makes it unclear whether influencers have a unique role. In urban West Bengal, influencers use local languages and cultural references, blending entertainment, storytelling, and civic commentary, making their messages relatable and emotionally engaging. There is limited empirical research on how this communication affects civic attitudes such as political awareness, civic responsibility, trust in institutions, and participation in public discourse. Civic attitudes are multi-dimensional, including political interest, social responsibility, willingness to participate, and critical evaluation of information, but existing studies often treat them as a single outcome. The 16–35 age group is diverse (students, first-time voters, working professionals) and is at a key stage of civic identity formation, yet it is under-researched in this context. Central problem: There is a lack of clear, localized, and systematic understanding of how influencers shape civic attitudes among young adult digital audiences in urban West Bengal.

3.2. Rationale of the Study

This study is necessary and timely for several reasons.

3.2.1. Academic significance: It focuses specifically on social media influencers, not general social media use, filling a gap in existing literature. There is limited empirical research on influencers' role in shaping civic attitudes in regional India. Studying urban West Bengal provides localized insights for global discussions on digital civic engagement.

3.2.2. Theoretical significance: The study extends communication theories like the Two-Step Flow of Communication and Uses and Gratifications Theory to the influencer context. Influencers act as intermediaries between information sources and audiences, and this research validates their role in civic communication.

3.2.3. Social and democratic significance: Young adults are key participants in democracy. Their civic attitudes affect governance, elections, social justice, and public discourse. Influencers can either strengthen democracy by promoting informed discussion or weaken it through misinformation and superficial engagement.

3.2.4. Practical relevance: Policymakers, educators, civil society organizations, and digital platforms can use the findings to design media literacy programs, civic engagement initiatives, and responsible digital communication strategies.

3.2.5. Regional relevance: Urban West Bengal has a politically aware youth population. Understanding how local influencers shape civic conversations in Bengali, Hindi, and English is essential for capturing cultural and social specificities often missed in broader studies.

- In summary, this study is justified by the need to:
- Examine influencer-specific civic impact
- Address regional and demographic research gaps
- Understand nuanced civic attitude formation
- Support informed digital civic engagement.

By addressing these concerns, the research offers meaningful academic, social, and practical contributions to the field of mass communication and civic studies.

4. Objectives and Research Questions

4.1. Objectives of the Study

The objectives of this study are as follows:

- To understand how social media influencers affect the civic attitudes of young adults (16–35 years) in urban areas of West Bengal.
- To identify the types of civic-related content shared by social media influencers that influence young adults.
- To examine whether social media influencers encourage positive or negative civic attitudes among young adults.

4.2. Research Questions

Based on the above objectives, the study seeks to answer the following research questions:

- How do social media influencers influence civic attitudes among young adults (16–35 years) in urban West Bengal?
- What kind of civic-related content from social media influencers impacts young adults the most?
- Do social media influencers contribute to positive or negative civic attitudes among young adult digital audiences?

5. Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of this study provides a clear explanation of how social media influencers influence civic attitudes among young adult digital audiences aged 16–35 years in urban areas of West Bengal. It explains the relationship between social media influencers, the content they share, audience engagement, and the resulting civic attitudes. This framework is developed by integrating three key communication theories: Uses and Gratifications Theory, Two-Step Flow of Communication, and the Digital Influence Model. Together, these theories help to understand the process through which influencer-led communication affects civic thinking and attitudes.

5.1. Uses and Gratifications Theory

People actively choose media to satisfy personal needs; they are not passive. Young adults follow influencers for information, entertainment, social connection, identity, and opinions. Influencers provide simple, relatable explanations

of social and civic issues and updates on current events. Media motivation drives attention and engagement, making influencers powerful in shaping civic attitudes.

5.2. Two-Step Flow of Communication

Information first reaches opinion leaders, who then share it with others; influencers are modern opinion leaders. Influencers reinterpret news, political events, and social issues for their followers using personal experiences and emotions. This personalized approach makes content relatable, trustworthy, and credible. Influencers filter and frame civic narratives, affecting how young adults understand civic issues in local languages and cultural contexts.

5.3. Digital Influence Model

Online influence works through interaction, visibility, and engagement. Influence is mediated by three factors:

- Attention – whether followers notice content
- Engagement – likes, comments, shares, discussions
- Perceived Credibility – trustworthiness of the influencer

Higher engagement and credibility increase the impact of influencer content on civic attitudes, political awareness, and social participation.

5.4. Integrated Conceptual Framework

By combining these three theoretical perspectives, the conceptual framework explains the complete influence process:

- Young adults actively choose to follow influencers (Uses and Gratifications).
- Influencers act as opinion leaders, interpreting and framing civic content (Two-Step Flow).
- Digital interaction and credibility strengthen influence, leading to attitude formation (Digital Influence Model).

This integrated process results in the formation of civic attitudes, which may be positive (increased awareness, engagement, responsibility) or negative (misinformation, polarization, passive engagement).

5.5. Relevance of the Framework to the Study

This conceptual framework directly aligns with the objectives, research questions, and hypotheses of the study. It provides a structured explanation of how and why social media influencers shape civic attitudes among young adults in urban West Bengal. The framework also supports empirical testing by identifying clear variables such as influencer content, audience engagement, credibility, and civic attitudes. Overall, the framework serves as a strong theoretical foundation for analysing influencer-driven civic communication in a regional, digital context.

6. Research Methodology

This chapter explains the research methods and procedures that will be used to investigate the role of social media influencers in shaping civic attitudes among young adult digital audiences (16–35 years) in urban areas of West Bengal. Given the exploratory nature of the research and the focus on understanding this phenomenon in real context, a Case Study approach has been adopted. This methodology allows for an in-depth study of interactions, content influence, and perceived impact

in actual digital environments, helping to link theory (Uses & Gratifications, Two-Step Flow, Digital Influence Model) with real behavior, content, and results.

6.1. Research Design

The research uses qualitative case studies supported by content analysis, interviews, and focus groups to deeply explore how influencer content influences civic attitudes such as political awareness, civic responsibility, public participation, and trust in institutions.

A case study approach is appropriate because:

- It allows contextual, real-world exploration of how influencer content affects audiences.
- It enables analysis of complex interactions between influencer messages, audience perception, and attitude formation.

- It supports connections between theory and actual examples in West Bengal.
- It provides a basis for generating detailed insights and thematic patterns.

The conceptual framework guides this methodology: influencers act as opinion leaders (Two-Step Flow), providing content that users select based on their motivations (Uses & Gratifications), which is then processed through attention, engagement, and perceived credibility (Digital Influence Model).

6.2. Case Selection Criteria and Rationale

Six case studies have been selected based on the following criteria:

- Relevance to civic or social content the influencer or context involves civic topics like politics, social responsibility, public discourse, controversy, or public mobilisation.
- Presence of measurable engagement or reaction cases with notable public response, controversy, or engagement are more useful for studying influence.
- West Bengal context prioritising influencers and events connected to Bengal, local politics, or youth audiences.
- Demonstrative variety including positive, negative, and mixed examples to understand nuanced influence.

Below are the six selected cases.

6.3. Case Studies

6.3.1. Case Study 1: Saif Sarkar Youth-Focused Analytical Influencer

- Description: Saif Sarkar is a Bengali YouTuber from Murshidabad who creates analytical videos in Bengali on topics including social issues, politics, and awareness content aimed at explaining complex subjects in simple language, attracting young audiences.

- **Relevance:** His content provides an example of how regional influencers use language, relatability, and explanation to shape young people's civic understanding (e.g., political events, scientific or social trends). This aligns with the Uses & Gratifications Theory in that young people actively choose his videos for educational and civic information.

- **Data Collection:** Video content analysis (topic categories), follower comments for engagement patterns, interviews with young regular viewers.

6.3.2. Case Study 2: Roddur Roy Political Satire, Controversy, and Public Response

- **Description:** Roddur Roy is a well-known social media personality and satirical commentator from West Bengal who's politically charged and often controversial content has sparked public debate, legal issues, and reactions from followers and critics alike.

- **Relevance:** This case highlights the impact of influencer content on public political discourse and polarization. His content often invokes emotional reactions, illustrating how influencer rhetoric can shape civic attitudes sometimes in ways that polarise or provoke debate. This relates to the Digital Influence Model's emphasis on engagement and perceived credibility.

- **Data Collection:** Analysis of select political satire videos/posts, comment sentiment analysis, interviews with followers across the political spectrum.

6.3.3. Case Study 3: Sharmistha Panoli Controversy Communal Commentary and Public Debate

- **Description:** Influencer and law student Sharmistha Panoli was arrested by West Bengal police due to a controversial video and later sparked public debate over civic freedoms, religious sensitivities, and digital expression. Public figures including actors publicly commented on her treatment.

- **Relevance:** This case provides insight into how influencer content that touches civic and communal issues can elicit strong public and institutional responses, shaping young audiences' civic attitudes regarding free speech, communal identity, and legal accountability.

- **Data Collection:** Content and thematic analysis of the original posts and follower reactions; interviews with followers on how the controversy affected their civic attitudes.

6.3.4. Case Study 4: Viral Activist Video Barrackpore Police Backlash and Civic Accountability

- **Description:** A viral video of a social activist confronting police over alleged extortion triggered widespread backlash online and influenced public opinion.

- **Relevance:** Though not tied to a single influencer, this illustrates how social media actors (activists) can become de facto influencers when their content shapes civic discourse. This shows user-generated civic content influencing public attitudes toward law enforcement and civic accountability a form of bottom-up influence.

- **Data Collection:** Analysis of video diffusion, engagement metrics, and young people's reactions to police accountability messaging.

6.3.5. Case Study 5: Murshidabad Fake News Account Removal - Impact of Misinformation on Civic Attitudes

- **Description:** The West Bengal police blocked over 1,093 social media accounts for spreading fake news about communal violence, highlighting the effect of digital misinformation on societal attitudes.

- **Relevance:** This case exemplifies the negative side of social media influence specifically how misinformation, often amplified by influential accounts, can affect civic attitudes related to trust, inter-community relations, and governance. It aligns with the conceptual module of attention and engagement leading to attitude shifts. **Data Collection:** Analysis of misinformation narratives, engagement tracking, interviews about how youth interpreted these messages.

6.3.6. Case Study 6: Local Social Media Community Mobilisation -Youth Participation for Local Social Issues

- **Description and Relevance:** While specific detailed academic case studies in West Bengal on influencers' civic mobilisation are limited, research illustrates how social media usage influences youth leadership and civic expression, making it a valid contextual case. Platforms like Twitter and Instagram allow youth to discuss governance and civic issues frequently, demonstrating digital mobilisation patterns.

- **Data Collection:** Secondary content analysis of youth-led civic hashtags and campaigns on regional platforms; interviews with participants.

6.4. Research Questions and Case Study Mapping

This study explores how social media influencers shape civic attitudes among young adults (16–35 years) in urban West Bengal using a qualitative case study approach. Mapping research questions to case studies ensures focus and theoretical grounding, guided by key communication theories and a structured conceptual framework.

6.4.1. Research Question 1

How do social media influencers communicate civic-related content to young adult digital audiences in urban West Bengal?

Case Studies Mapped

- Saif Sarkar (Case Study 1)
- Roddur Roy (Case Study 2)
- Viral Activist Video – Barrackpore Police Incident (Case Study 4)
- Justification

This question focuses on the nature, tone, format, and framing of civic content produced by influencers. Influencers do not merely share information; they interpret, simplify, and contextualize civic issues such as governance, freedom of

expression, social justice, and accountability.

- Saif Sarkar's content demonstrates how analytical and explanatory videos help young audiences understand complex civic and political issues in regional language, increasing accessibility.

- Roddur Roy's satirical political commentary illustrates how humor, provocation, and critique are used to communicate civic dissent and political opinion.

- The Barrackpore activist video shows how non-celebrity individuals can temporarily become influencers through viral civic content.

These cases help analyze message framing, language use, emotional tone, symbolism, and narrative style, which aligns with the Two-Step Flow of Communication, where influencers act as intermediaries between information and audiences.

6.4.2. Research Question 2

How does engagement with influencer-generated civic content affect young adults' civic attitudes, such as awareness, opinion formation, and sense of civic responsibility?

6.4.2.1. Case Studies Mapped

- Sharmistha Panoli Controversy (Case Study 3)
- Murshidabad Fake News Account Blocking (Case Study 5)
- Roddur Roy (Case Study 2) Justification

This research question examines the impact of exposure and engagement with influencer content on young people's civic attitudes. Civic attitudes include political awareness, perceptions of justice, trust in institutions, freedom of speech, and social responsibility.

The Sharmistha Panoli case highlights how influencer content can trigger strong reactions and shape youth opinions on civic rights, law enforcement, and communal sensitivity.

- The fake news crackdown in Murshidabad shows how misinformation amplified by influential accounts can negatively affect civic trust and social harmony.

- Roddur Roy's case again helps examine polarization and emotional engagement, showing how repeated exposure can reinforce or challenge existing civic beliefs.

This mapping aligns with the Digital Influence Model, where attention and engagement serve as pathways through which attitudes are formed or modified.

6.4.3. Research Question 3

How do credibility, relatability, and engagement mediate the relationship between influencer content and civic attitude formation among young adults?

6.4.3.1. Case Studies Mapped

- Saif Sarkar (Case Study 1)
- Local Youth Civic Mobilisation Case (Case Study 6)
- Viral Activist Video (Case Study 4)

6.5 Justification

This question explores why young audiences trust and responds to certain influencers more than others. Credibility and relatability are crucial mediators in the influencer-audience relationship.

- Saif Sarkar's perceived authenticity and educational tone enhance trust and long-term engagement.

- Youth-led digital mobilisation campaigns reflect peer-to-peer credibility, where audiences trust content created by people similar to themselves.

- The viral activist video demonstrates how perceived moral authority and courage can temporarily establish credibility and influence civic perceptions.

This directly connects to Uses and Gratifications Theory, which explains how young users actively choose content that satisfies their informational, social, and identity needs.

6.5.1. Summary of Mapping

Each research question is strategically mapped to multiple case studies to:

- Capture different forms of influencer communication
- Examine both positive and negative civic influence
- Understand mediating factors like engagement and credibility
- Ensure theoretical and methodological consistency

This mapping strengthens the validity and depth of the study.

6.6. Data Collection Methods: Content Analysis

This study uses content analysis as the main method for collecting data. Content analysis means closely studying social media content to understand what messages are being shared and how people react to them. Since this research focuses on social media influencers and civic attitudes, content analysis is the most suitable method.

6.6.1. Why Content Analysis Was Chosen Content analysis was chosen because:

- The research is about online content
- Influencers mainly communicate through posts and videos
- Civic attitudes are reflected in comments, reactions, and discussions
- The method allows detailed understanding without interacting directly with users
- This method helps the researcher observe real and natural behaviour on social media platforms.

6.6.2. Sources of Data

The data for this study was collected from publicly available social media content. The platforms used include:

- YouTube
- Instagram
- Facebook
- Twitter (X)

Only public posts were studied. No private accounts or messages were accessed.

- How the Content Was Collected

The content was collected by:

- Saving video links and post URLs
- Taking screenshots where needed
- Writing notes about the main message of each post
- Recording basic engagement details like number of likes and comments All collected content was organised case-wise for easy analysis.

6.6.3. What Was Observed in the Content

While collecting the content, the researcher focused on:

- The main civic issue being discussed
- The tone of the message (informative, emotional, critical)
- The language used (especially Bengali or local expressions)
- The way influencers explained or framed the issue
- The type of reactions from young audiences
- These observations helped connect the content with civic attitudes.

6.6.4. Ethical Considerations

Ethical care was taken during data collection:

- Only public content was analysed
- No usernames or personal details of commenters were used

- Content was studied respectfully and for academic purposes only
- The study did not harm or misrepresent any individual

6.7. Data Analysis Techniques

This study uses content analysis to understand how social media influencers affect the civic attitudes of young adults (16–35 years) in urban areas of West Bengal. Content analysis means carefully studying social media posts, videos, captions, and comments to identify common ideas and patterns.

Since this research follows a case study approach, the analysis focuses on what influencers say, how they say it, and how young audiences react to it online.

Step 1: Collecting and Reading the Content

First, social media content from the selected six case studies was collected. This included:

- Videos
- Written posts and captions
- Public comments
- Visual elements like images, text on screen, and thumbnails

Each post or video was watched and read multiple times to understand the message clearly and to see how it related to civic issues such as politics, freedom of expression, social justice, law and order, and misinformation.

Step 2: Identifying Important Ideas

Next, important ideas were noted from the content. These ideas included:

- Talking about political or social problems
- Expressing anger or support
- Explaining civic issues in simple language
- Criticising government or institutions

- Spreading awareness or, in some cases, misinformation
- These ideas were marked and grouped based on similarity.

Step 3: Grouping Similar Ideas

The identified ideas were grouped into simple categories such as:

- Type of civic issue (politics, law, rights, social issues)
- Style of communication (informative, emotional, satirical)
- Audience reaction (support, disagreement, debate)
- Trust and credibility (whether people believed the influencer or not) This helped in understanding common patterns across different case studies.

Step 4: Finding Common Patterns

After grouping the content, common patterns were identified. For example:

- Certain styles of content received more attention
- Emotional posts attracted more comments
- Content in local language created stronger reactions
- These patterns helped explain how influencers shape civic attitudes.

Step 5: Interpreting the Meaning

Finally, these patterns were interpreted to understand:

- How influencers influence young people's thinking
- What type of content affects civic awareness the most
- Why some influencers are trusted more than others
- This step connects the content to the research questions and objectives.

7. Findings

This section presents the main findings of the study in a clear and easy way. The findings are based on the content analysis of six case studies related to social media influencers and civic issues in West Bengal.

7.1. Influencers Help Young People Understand Civic Issues

One important finding is that social media influencers help young people understand civic and political issues.

7.1.1. Influencers explain complex topics in simple language.

7.1.2. They break down news, events, and controversies so that young audiences can understand them easily.

This shows that influencers act like informal teachers or explainers for civic matters.

- Local Language and Culture Matter a Lot
- Content shared in Bengali and connected to local culture received more attention and engagement.
- Young people felt more connected to influencers who spoke their language.
- Local examples made civic issues feel more real and relatable.
- This shows that cultural familiarity increases interest and understanding.
- Emotional Content Gets More Attention
- Posts and videos that showed strong emotions like anger, sadness, or injustice attracted more likes, shares, and comments.
- People reacted strongly to content related to police action, freedom of speech, or social injustice.
- Emotional content made young people think more deeply about civic issues.

- However, emotional content sometimes also created arguments and conflict.

7.2. Trust in Influencers Is Very Important Young audiences trusted influencers who:

- Spoke honestly
- Explained things clearly
- Were consistent in their opinions

When people felt an influencer was spreading false or misleading information, trust reduced quickly. This shows that credibility plays a major role in shaping civic attitudes.

7.3. High Engagement Is Not Always Positive

- Many posts received high engagement, but this did not always mean positive impact.
- Some posts created confusion or fear.
- Some discussions became aggressive or divided.
- Misinformation sometimes increased distrust in institutions.
- So, influencer impact can be both positive and negative.

7.4. Influencers Change Thinking More Than Action

The study found that influencers mostly affect:

- Awareness
- Opinions
- Attitudes
- They influence how young people think, but they do not always push them to take real-world civic action like voting or protests.

Young People Are Not Passive Young audiences actively:

- Question influencers
- Argue in comments

- Share their own opinions

This shows that young people do not blindly follow influencers but think and react on their own.

7.5. Overall Summary of Findings

- Influencers play a strong role in shaping civic thinking.
- Language, emotions, and trust matter more than popularity.
- Civic influence is complex and not always positive.
- Social media is a powerful space for civic discussion among youth.

The findings show that social media influencers have a clear influence on civic attitudes among young adults in urban West Bengal. This influence works mainly through simple explanations, emotional connection, and trust, rather than direct instruction or pressure.

8. Discussion

This chapter discusses the key findings of the study in relation to the research objectives, research questions, and conceptual framework. It explains how social media influencers shape civic attitudes among young adults in urban areas of West Bengal. Rather than repeating the findings, this section interprets their meaning and significance. The discussion highlights the role of influencers as civic interpreters and examines how young audiences actively engage with, question, and respond to influencer content. It also connects the findings to established communication theories, showing how digital engagement, credibility, and emotional framing influence civic thinking.

8.1. Influencers as Civic Interpreters and Opinion Leaders

One of the most important interpretations from the findings is that social media influencers function as civic interpreters rather than simple information sharers. Influencers do not merely repeat news or civic information; instead, they frame, explain, and personalise civic issues for their audiences.

This supports the Two-Step Flow of Communication, which suggests that information often flows from media to opinion leaders and then to the wider public. In this study, influencers acted as opinion leaders who:

- Simplified complex civic issues
- Added personal opinions or emotional framing
- Helped young audiences make sense of events

This interpretation aligns with the first research objective, which aimed to understand how influencers communicate civic content. The findings show that influencers play a mediating role, shaping not just awareness but also interpretation.

8.2. Youth as Active Consumers of Civic Content

A central finding of this study and a key focus of this discussion is that young people are active consumers, not passive recipients, of influencer content.

The content analysis clearly showed that:

- Young users questioned influencers in comments
- They debated with each other
- They expressed agreement, disagreement, and alternative viewpoints

This directly supports Uses and Gratifications Theory, which argues that audiences actively select and use media based on their needs. Young audiences engaged with influencer content to:

- Gain information
- Express opinions
- Form identity
- Participate in civic discussions

Rather than blindly following influencers, youth used influencer content as a starting point for discussion and

reflection. This interpretation answers the second research question, which examined how engagement with influencer content affects civic attitudes.

8.3. Role of Language and Regional Identity

Another key interpretation is the strong influence of local language and cultural context. Content in Bengali and content that referenced local events, issues, or cultural symbols generated higher engagement and stronger emotional responses.

This suggests that civic influence is context-dependent. Youth are more likely to engage with and trust content that:

- Reflects their lived realities
- Uses familiar language
- Acknowledges regional identity

This finding supports the Digital Influence Model, particularly the role of relatability as a mediator between content and attitude formation. It also explains why local influencers often have greater civic impact than national or global figures among regional youth.

8.4. Emotional Framing and Civic Attitude Formation

The findings showed that emotional content especially content expressing anger, injustice, or urgency received higher engagement. The discussion here highlights that emotions play a powerful role in shaping civic attitudes.

Emotional framing helped:

- Draw attention to civic issues
- Trigger discussions and debates
- Strengthen opinions

However, the discussion also shows that emotional influence is double-edged. While it increases awareness, it can also:

- Create polarisation
- Spread misinformation
- Reinforce existing biases

This interpretation is important because it highlights that influencer impact is not always positive. It supports the third research objective, which explored mediating factors such as engagement and credibility.

8.5. Credibility as the Core of Influence

Across all case studies, credibility emerged as a key factor determining influence. Youth trusted influencers who were:

- Consistent
- Transparent
- Clear in their communication
- Perceived as authentic

This aligns strongly with the Digital Influence Model, which places credibility at the centre of attitude change. Even highly popular influencers lost influence when their credibility was questioned.

This discussion highlights that trust is more important than popularity, especially in civic communication.

8.6. Engagement Does Not Always Mean Positive Civic Impact

Another critical interpretation is that high engagement does not always result in healthy civic attitudes. Some content generated large numbers of comments and shares but also:

- Increased confusion
- Spread fear
- Reduced trust in institutions

This finding complicates the common assumption that engagement equals positive impact. The discussion shows that quality of engagement matters more than quantity.

8.7. Cognitive Influence Over Behavioural Change The study found that influencers mainly influenced:

- Awareness
- Opinions

- Attitudes

They had less impact on:

- Actual civic behaviour
- Offline participation

This suggests that influencer influence is strongest at the cognitive and emotional level. This interpretation is significant because it clarifies the scope of influencer impact and avoids exaggerated claims. Theoretical Implications The discussion confirms that:

- Uses and Gratifications Theory explains why youth engage
- Two-Step Flow explains how influence is mediated
- Digital Influence Model explains how attitudes are shaped
- Together, these theories provide a comprehensive understanding of influencer-led civic communication.

8.8. Overall Interpretation

Overall, the discussion shows that social media influencers play a significant but complex role in shaping civic attitudes. Youth are active participants who interpret, challenge, and negotiate influencer messages rather than accepting them passively.

9. Conclusion

This study examined the role of social media influencers in shaping civic attitudes among young adult digital audiences (16–35 years) in urban areas of West Bengal using a qualitative case study approach and content analysis.

Summary of Key Findings

- Social media influencers act as interpreters of civic issues, not just information sharers.
- Young people are active consumers who question, debate, and reinterpret influencer content.

- Local language and cultural context significantly enhance civic engagement.
- Emotional content attracts attention but can also lead to polarization.
- Credibility is more important than popularity in shaping civic attitudes.
- High engagement does not always result in positive civic outcomes.
- Influencers influence thinking and awareness more than direct civic action.

9.1. Achievement of Research Objectives The study successfully:

- Examined how influencers communicate civic content
- Analysed how engagement shapes civic attitudes

9.1.1. Identified credibility and relatability as key mediating factors Thus, all research objectives and questions were addressed.

9.2. Implications of the Study Academic Implications

- Contributes regional insight to influencer and civic communication research

9.2.1. Strengthens understanding of youth as active audiences
Social Implications

9.2.2. Highlights the need for responsible influencer communication

9.2.3. Emphasises digital literacy among youth
Policy Implications

- Suggests the need for ethical guidelines for civic influencers
- Supports media literacy initiatives
- Compare different regions

10. Recommendations

This study shows that social media influencers strongly affect how young people in urban West Bengal think about civic and social issues. Based on these findings, the following simple and practical recommendations are suggested.

- Platforms should be transparent about content algorithms.
- Civic and political content should be clearly labelled.
- Fake news and hate speech must be controlled.
- Influencers should verify facts and clarify personal opinions.
- Influencers should promote respectful discussions.
- Young users should verify information and think before sharing.
- Digital literacy should be taught in education.
- Ethical rules for online civic content are needed.
- Platforms, influencers, educators, and policymakers must work together.
- Future studies should include rural areas and more platforms.

11. Limitations

Every research study has some limitations, and this study is no exception.

- The study covers only urban areas of West Bengal; rural and semi-urban areas are excluded.
- Only content analysis was used; no surveys or interviews were conducted.
- Audience views were inferred from comments and reactions, which may not fully reflect real opinions.
- The study focuses only on YouTube, Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter (X). Other platforms and private messaging spaces were not included.

- The analysis is limited to a specific time period; trends may change over time.
- Interpretation-based analysis may involve some researcher bias.
- Despite these limitations, the study offers useful insights into influencer impact on civic attitudes.

12. Future Research

Based on the findings and limitations of this study, the following areas are suggested for future research:

- Future studies can include rural and semi-urban areas of West Bengal.
- Different research methods like surveys and interviews can be used.
- Other age groups below 16 and above 35 can be studied.
- Platform-specific studies can focus on Instagram, YouTube, Facebook, or X.
- Long-term impact on real-life civic actions can be examined.
- Different types of influencers can be compared.
- Ethical issues like misinformation and algorithm bias can be studied.
- Comparisons with other Indian states can be made.

These future research directions can help develop a deeper understanding of the role of social media influencers in shaping civic attitudes in India.

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