

From Likes to Ballots: Social Media Personalities and Their Influence on Voters' Preferences in the Philippine Elections

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ABSTRACT: In the contemporary Philippine political landscape, election campaigns have transitioned toward digital platforms, positioning social media personalities as modern opinion leaders in public discourse. This quantitative study investigated the extent to which online personalities influence the voting choices and behaviors of the electorate. Grounded in Craig's socio-psychological tradition of communication, data were gathered via purposive sampling from 360 digitally engaged registered voters aged 18–35 in District VI, Manila. Descriptive statistics, Pearson's productmoment correlation, and regression analyses were applied to evaluate relationships between platform exposure, perceived credibility, and candidate preferences. Descriptive findings revealed that while respondents maintain a moderate level of exposure to influencers (Mean = 3.3), they express neutral trust regarding content credibility (Mean = 2.8) and disagree that online endorsements dictate final ballot choices (Mean = 2.52). Inferential data indicated that exposure does not significantly correlate with credibility ($r = 0.083$, $p = 0.116$), and regression models established that exposure fails to explain candidate support ($p = 0.1155$). However, a strong, statistically significant relationship was confirmed between high perceived credibility and voter preferences ($r = 0.73$, $p < 0.001$). The study concludes that Filipino youth act as autonomous "active observers" who utilize social media for information but maintain individual electoral skepticism. While digital personalities are powerful vectors for awareness, their direct persuasive impact remains bounded by independent public critical assessment

KEYWORDS: Social Media Personalities, Voter Preferences, Philippine Elections, Political Influence, Voter Behavior, Digital Campaigning, Perceived Credibility

1. INTRODUCTION

In the contemporary Philippine political landscape, election campaigns serve as a foundational mechanism for candidates to broadcast political platforms and for citizens to evaluate prospective leaders. However, democratic discourse has rapidly transitioned from traditional campaign avenues—such as rallies, print posters, and broadcast media—toward highly digitalized strategies optimized for social media ecosystems. Within this paradigm, social media personalities (including influencers, content creators, and vloggers) have evolved into modern opinion leaders who play central roles in dictating public discourse. Moving beyond commercialized endorsements, these online actors are heavily leveraged for covert and overt political campaigning due to their personal, constant, and relatable interaction loops with audiences.

This systemic shift is highly critical given the demographic profile of the Philippine electorate, which features an intensely active, digitally native voter baseline. During the 2022 and 2025 national elections, tens of thousands of digital influencers deployed content across platforms such as YouTube, TikTok, Facebook, and X to amplify candidate branding and construct political narratives. While digital popularity can generate immense online engagement (measured via metrics such as likes, shares, and comments), it remains ambiguous whether this visibility effectively alters actual voter preference on physical ballots.

This study addresses this knowledge gap by assessing the specific persuasive influence of social media personalities during election campaign periods. Formally, it addresses the overarching problem:

To what extent do social media personalities influence voters' preferences in the Philippine elections? Driven by empirical sub-problems, the inquiry isolates four key relational dimensions:

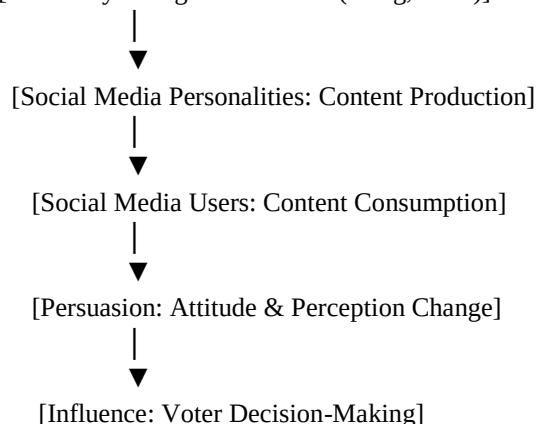
1. The relationship between audience exposure to influencers and the perceived credibility of their political content.
2. The relationship between perceived credibility and actual voter preferences and behavior.
3. The explanatory capacity of content exposure on the likelihood of supporting endorsed candidates.
4. The explanatory power of perceived credibility on voting choices.

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Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

This inquiry is explicitly anchored in **Robert T. Craig's (1999) Socio-Psychological Tradition of Communication**, which examines communication as an empirical process of expression, interaction, and cause-and-effect influence over attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors. Within this tradition, public exposure to targeted messages functions as a primary psychological stimulus.

[Socio-Psychological Tradition (Craig, 1999)]



As illustrated by the research paradigm above, the conceptual model maps content production by digital personalities as an environmental trigger. This content is consumed by social media users, inducing internal psychological mechanisms (such as parasocial framing and credibility judgments) that drive persuasion (attitude shifts) and ultimately generate observable electoral behavioral influence.

2. METHODOLOGY

This study utilized a **quantitative, descriptive-correlational research design** to mathematically analyze and summarize the relationships between digital exposure, perceived credibility, and voter preference. The target landscape was set within the **District of Pandacan, Manila** (encompassing Zones 91 to 95), a densely populated residential and active voter hub within the 6th Legislative District of Manila.

A sample of **N = 360 registered, digitally engaged voters** aged 18–35 was selected using a non-probability **purposive sampling technique**. This technique was required to enforce strict inclusion eligibility criteria: participants had to be legal residents of the localized barangays, belong to the youth/young adult age group, and actively consume social media political media, thereby filtering out irrelevant non-users. Data collection was executed across five designated areas: Barangay 836 (n=75, 20.8%), Barangay 837 (n=75, 20.8%), Barangay 842 (n=71, 19.7%), Barangay 843 (n=70, 19.4%), and Barangay 844 (n=69, 19.2%).

The primary research tool consisted of an expert-validated survey questionnaire measured on a **5-point Likert Scale** (ranging from 5 = Strongly Agree to 1 = Strongly Disagree). The metric range for verbal interpretations was configured as:

- 4.21 - 5.00 Strongly Agree (Very High)
- 3.41 - 4.20 Agree (High)
- 2.61 - 3.40 Neutral (Moderate)
- 1.81 - 2.60 Disagree (Low)
- 1.00 - 1.80 Strongly Disagree (Very Low)

Data processing was completed via Microsoft Excel's Data Analysis Toolpack. **Descriptive statistics** (weighted mean, standard deviation) summarized voter sentiments, while **inferential statistics**—specifically **Pearson's productmoment correlation (r)** and **ordinary least squares (OLS) linear regression analysis**—were applied to test directional hypotheses at a strict significance threshold of $\alpha = 0.05$.

3. RESULTS

Demographic Baseline

Demographic mapping shows that the sample is concentrated in the youngest sub-bracket, with 70% of respondents aged 18–23, followed by 21% aged 24–29, and 9% aged 30–35. Gender is balanced (53% female, 47% male). Educationally, 56% are currently at the college level and 18% are college graduates, reflecting a structurally literate and digitally capable baseline.

Descriptive Aggregates

The comprehensive descriptive assessment of the primary research variables is displayed in Table 1:

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Table 1: Descriptive Analytics of Exposure, Credibility, and Voting Influence

Variable Dimension	Grand Mean ($\bar{x}$)	Weighted	Verbal Interpretation	Sample Consistency (σ)
Platform Exposure	3.30		Neutral (Moderate)	Concentrated around center
Perceived Content Credibility	2.80		Neutral (Moderate)	Cautious variance
Direct Voting Decision Influence	2.52		Disagree (Low)	High localized agreement

Item-level analysis under exposure indicated that while respondents frequently observe or follow these personalities ($\bar{x} = 3.34$), they remain heavily skeptical of their baseline objectivity ($\bar{x} = 2.56$, Disagree), signaling that consistent viewing does not equal automatic cognitive acceptance.

Inferential Relationships and Hypotheses Testing

To map the behavioral paths, inferential metrics were extracted to answer the core sub-problems:

Table 2: Inferential Statistical Model Matrices

Statistical Test Path	Metric Value	Significance Value (p)	Decision on H0
Correlation (r): Exposure $\times$ Perceived Credibility	$r = 0.083$	$p = 0.116$	Accept Null (Not Significant)
Correlation (r): Perceived Credibility $\times$ Voter Preference	$r = 0.730$	$p < 0.001$	Reject Null (Highly Significant)
Regression (R^2): Exposure predicting Candidate Support	$F_{\text{-test model}}$	$p = 0.1155$	Accept Null (No Predictive Power)
Regression (R^2): Credibility predicting Vote Choice	$F_{\text{-test model}}$	$p = 0.7808$	Accept Null (Independent Interaction)

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- **Path 1 (Exposure vs. Credibility):** The correlation between exposure frequency and content trust was positive but structurally weak and completely non-significant ($r = 0.083$, $p = 0.116$). High visibility fails to trigger an increase in perceived credibility.
- **Path 2 (Credibility vs. Preference):** Conversely, a very strong, highly significant linear correlation was observed between perceived influencer credibility and voter alignment ($r = 0.73$, $p < 0.001$), demonstrating that persuasion is highly dependent on cognitive trust rather than volume.
- **Path 3 & 4 (Predictive Modeling):** Linear regression models confirmed that exposure frequency cannot predict candidate selection ($p = 0.1155$). Strikingly, when tracking the total voter baseline, perceived credibility alone also produced an F-significance of $p = 0.7808$, confirming that a high credibility rating given to an influencer does not directly dictate final ballot actions.

4. DISCUSSION

The empirical behavior observed in this study challenges simplistic conceptual frameworks that assume digital exposure directly drives political compliance. Grounded in Craig's Socio-Psychological tradition, the data reveals that the audience is not a passive recipient of media messages. The complete lack of statistical significance between exposure volume and perceived credibility ($r = 0.083$) invalidates simple repetition models within digital spaces. Filipino youth actively process information rather than adopting beliefs through simple repetition.

Furthermore, the low grand mean for direct voting influence ($x = 2.52$) demonstrates clear psychological resistance against influencer endorsements. This resistance occurs even on highly visual applications like TikTok and YouTube. While a high trust level correlates with candidate preference ($r = 0.73$), the overall regression models show that voters remain highly independent.

This profile matches the concept of "**active observers**". The youth electorate uses social media platforms primarily for entertainment, narrative discovery, and informational awareness. However, they maintain critical skepticism during elections. They draw a sharp boundary between digital consumption and casting their physical vote. This boundary limits the capacity of digital personalities to directly alter election outcomes.

5. CONCLUSION

This research concludes that **social media personalities do not directly or significantly dictate the final voting preferences of young voters in the Philippine elections**. Although digital content creators have changed political campaigning, their influence is limited to generating awareness rather than determining ballot behavior.

Voters maintain clear autonomy and do not automatically view high online visibility as a sign of credibility or trustworthiness. Increased exposure does not lead to higher trust or automatic support for endorsed political candidates. Filipino youth function as active observers who use social media platforms for information but rely on independent assessment when making political choices.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on these empirical findings, the following actions are recommended:

- **For the Commission on Elections (COMELEC):** Incorporate targeted digital media literacy into standard voter education programs. These frameworks should teach the electorate how to evaluate online endorsements critically, distinguish between paid partnerships and objective commentary, and identify manufactured credibility trends.
- **For Social Media Platform Providers:** Implement explicit credibility indicators for political content. Platforms should mandate transparent labelling (e.g., "Paid Political Advertisement") for any public endorsement issued by influencers, helping users separate general engagement from organized campaigns.
- **For Politicians and Campaign Strategies:** Shift campaign budgets away from simple influencer exposure strategies, such as superficial video shout-outs. Because exposure has zero predictive power over voting choices, campaigns should build substantive partnerships with creators who can explain complex policies deeply to build authentic trust.
- **For Academic Institutions:** Integrate digital civic literacy modules directly into the General Education curriculum, particularly within courses like *The Contemporary World* or *Ethics*. These modules should prepare students to analyze social media trends critically and maintain independent judgment.
- **For Future Researchers:** Use these findings as an empirical baseline to explore more detailed variables, such as the distinct effects of localized micro-influencers versus macro-celebrities, or how specific platform recommendation algorithms affect voter perspectives.

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