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Tiktok's Influence On Young Voters: A Review Of Social Media's Role In Political Decisions

Wan Rosmaria Wan Ismail¹, Mumtaz Aini Alivi^{2*}, Nasrullah Dharejo³

¹Department of Media and Communication Studies, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, University of Malaya, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia E-mail: s2193065@siswa.um.edu.my

²Department of Media and Communication Studies, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, University of Malaya, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, E-mail: mumtazaini_alivi@um.edu.my.

³Department of Media and Communication Studies, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, University of Malaya, Malaysia & Lecturer Department of Media and Communication Sukkur IBA University Pakistan Email: nasrullah.dharejo@iba-suk.edu.pk

Corresponding Author: Mumtaz Aini Alivi Email: mumtazaini_alivi@um.edu.my

Abstract

TikTok influences the behaviour of young voters significantly and shapes political decision-making. This entertainment cum information platform simply erases all the traditional barriers that may prevent anyone, especially those in the less traditionally engaged demographic group, from participating in politics. Influencers and political organizations mainly provide the means of educating young voters on how to vote and register to get involved. 4049 articles were retrieved from Scopus and the Web of Science databases. After screening, only 10 articles were included in the study, following the PRISMA guidelines for systematic review. The study focused on TikTok as a tool for educating young adults on voting matters, inspired by influences like the parties through awareness. Some of the most effective campaigns thus far have been those using trending TikTok challenges to inspire first-time and general population participation in elections. Overall, political messaging that rides with other relevant content is more effective among the youth. This review integrates the existing literature and empirical evidence, highlighting the emerging importance of TikTok as a channel for civic engagement. It contributes to understanding youth political engagement during the digital era, underscoring possible positive changes in enhancing voter turnout and involvement through these platforms.

Keywords:

TikTok, Voting Behavior, Social Media Influence, Young Voters, Youth Voting Trends, TikTok and Elections.

I. INTRODUCTION

Social media has become essential to daily life and affects various societal sectors, such as communication, entertainment, and political decisions. Platforms like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat, and TikTok dominate the digital landscape, each catering to different demographics and offering unique features influencing public engagement and opinion. Among those is TikTok, which, with a rapidly increasing user base, has become the new puissance that most powerfully shapes public opinion among the youth [1]. With interactive short-form videos, TikTok offers an interactive space where users can put forward their views, engage in political discourse, and be influenced by the content they consume [2]. Researchers, as well as political analysts, have been interested in how social media has become a great tool by which the needs of voters are leveraged to the political parties; it is within this context that examines the impact of TikTok on young voters' voting behaviour [3], [4].

This growing influence of TikTok reflects a broader transformation in media consumption over the last century. Political campaigns have evolved from relying on print and television media to embracing digital platforms like TikTok, now dominating younger audiences' attention. With the younger generation spending significantly more time on the internet than previous generations, platforms like TikTok have emerged as critical arenas for political messaging, activism, and voter mobilization. Its algorithms, designed to personalize

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content based on user behaviour, profoundly influence its users' political leanings and decisions, especially young voters more susceptible to digital trends and social influences[5].

The young voters are people aged between 18 and 29 years. They represent a very critical voting population in modern elections. Young voters make up a vital fraction of the electorate, but their behaviours at the polls were not predictable in previous elections. Many factors contribute to how young people decide at the polls. There is the influence of peers, exposure to political content, and, more importantly, personal engagement with issues. Such factors intersect, merge, and influence each other through social networking such as that on TikTok [6], [7]. As a platform, TikTok's features allow for fast information diffusion, often packaged in entertaining and emotionally charged ways. Political content creators' influencers and even politicians used the service to send messages, influence opinions, and communicate with the masses[8] [9].

While TikTok's influence on young voters offers new avenues for political engagement, it also raises critical concerns regarding the integrity of the information shared and the potential for reinforcing existing biases. Such dynamics highlight the dual-edged nature of TikTok's influence, where its potential to foster political engagement among young voters intersects with challenges of information accuracy and ideological diversity. The political engagement on TikTok is not controversy-free. The application has come under criticism for allowing misinformation to spread, which can change a young voter's perception of candidates and their stances on issues. Through algorithmic recommendation, supposed to maximize the user's engagement, TikTok also houses users in echo chambers and denies them the availability of diverse opinions that could differ from those they hold. However, this raises an eyebrow about the platform's polarizing power and the deepening of political division among the youth.

Despite all these challenges, the influence of TikTok on the youth cannot be overstated. The platform can inspire political participation, increase voter turnout, or even change the outcome of elections. Viral trends, challenges, and hashtags can suddenly propel political movements on TikTok, catapulting what was once a niche political opinion into one with which people of all walks were debating. It would be a highly vibrant environment where young voters would constantly be exposed to political discourse, which would often occur in an informal and more accessible manner than traditional political communication methods. It is of paramount importance to investigate TikTok's role as digital platforms hold a crucial stand in political campaigns, particularly regarding the prevention of echo chambers and misinformation that will polarize young voters[10], [11].

This paper discusses and explores TikTok's role in shaping young voters' voting behaviour. It examines the platform's features in Table 1, its impact on political discourse, and how it affects the youth's political engagement, which would account for its role in the bigger scheme of things. This understanding matters for policymakers and strategists in political circles and those interested in the nexus between social media and electoral politics. Hence, it aims to answer the following research questions:

RQ1: To what extent does the algorithm for content recommendations on TikTok influence political opinion among young voters?

RQ2: What features in TikTok's design and user experience facilitate political participation?

RQ3: How do TikTok users for spreading political news and information differ from those of other social networks? Does this have an impact on their voting behaviour?

RQ4: To what degree and through what mechanisms do influencers or creators of content affect political preferences on TikTok?

RQ5: How might TikTok contribute to the spread of misinformation and political polarization?

RQ6: How far and by which mechanisms does the TikTok environment support or hinder young voters?

Table 1. Statistical Data on Using TikTok and Political Participation

Statistics	Value	Source
Number of global TikTok users in 2023	1.1 billion	Statista (2023)

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Percentage of TikTok users aged 18-29	41%	Pew Research (2023)	
Percentage of TikTok users who follow political content	25%	DataReportal (2022)	
Increase in political content on TikTok (2020-2023)	78%	TikTok Transparency Report	
		(2023)	
Percentage of young voters who use TikTok as a source for	33%	Pew Research (2022)	
political news			
Percentage of TikTok users influenced to vote by content	17%	Civic Science (2022)	
seen on the platform			
Average daily time spent by TikTok users in the US	95	Business of Apps (2023)	
	minutes		

II. METHODS AND MATERIALS:

The following are the steps taken to perform this review:

1. Articles Collection

This systematic review was conducted following PRISMA criteria. As a result, the PRISMA structure was followed throughout the entire process, from creating a search strategy to finally including research [12], [13]. "TikTok," "TikTok app," "voting behaviour," "voting behaviour," "voting rights," "voting," "young voters," "youth," and "adult voters" are the search terms that were entered. These phrases were used consistently in Web of Science (WOS) and Scopus databases on September 22, 2024. In the primary search, 3,803 articles were obtained from WOS, and 246 studies were obtained from Scopus, resulting in 4,049 studies. These studies were then filtered rigorously.

2. Eligibility criteria

The inclusion and exclusion criteria were determined to ensure that only high-quality studies that correctly answer the scope of the review are included in this review. Such criteria are necessary to narrow down specific studies on the impact of TikTok on young and first-time voters' political engagement. The inclusion criteria are the following:

- Only peer-reviewed articles were included.
- The literature search was based on articles written in English, open access, and published from 2014 to 2024.
- Studies that discussed TikTok's impacts on voting behaviours and political participation.
- Studies that analyzed the quantitative measurements in the form of surveys, experiments, or data-driven research into how TikTok influences the voting behaviour of the youth

The excluded studies were those whose outcomes were irrelevant to the current review, e.g., studies analyzing the mental implications of TikTok usage. Non-peer-reviewed literature, opinion articles, and editorials were also excluded. Articles published in a non-English language were also excluded. Conference abstracts and grey literature for which full texts were unavailable were also excluded.

Articles Screening

There were 4049 articles in total from the two databases. After removing the duplicates, only 910 unique articles remained for further screening. Two reviewers independently screened the titles and abstracts of 910 unique articles. At this stage, studies that did not meet the inclusion criteria were excluded. Disagreements were resolved by discussion, referring to a third reviewer when required. 50 articles were selected for full-text review out of 110. Full-text articles were retrieved and assessed in detail for eligibility according to the inclusion and exclusion criteria. After the screening step, 10 articles were included for review.

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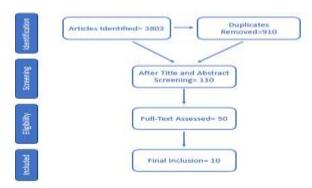


Figure 1. The PRISMA steps for conducting this study

III. Results

The research findings from the ten articles included are as follows:

- 1. TikTok Platform Features
- i. Content Creation and Engagement

TikTok is an application where users share short pieces of videos with catchy music, filters, and effects. The popular application has created a following among young voters who want to express themselves on political matters and other debates. Users can co-create duets on split screen while interacting via likes, comments, and shares, thus contributing to participatory culture. Therefore, by encouraging political beliefs and societal issues for discussions, TikTok amplifies the youth voice in the political discourse, giving them a voice in the table [14], [15].

ii. Algorithmic Recommendations

There is application-ported content based on user history and interactions within the application. Algorithmic curation can amplify political messages to young voters, thereby affecting their beliefs[16]. The algorithm will showcase engaging content at the fore of creating influence, either reinforcing existing political views or sharing new ideas, which makes it a decisive factor in shaping the perceptions of users toward political decisions and increasing awareness among young voters during elections [17], [18].

iii. Viral Trends and Challenges

TikTok is known for viral trends fueled by hashtags, such as "VoteForChange" challenges, mobilizing young voters. Political issues spark content creation on the platform, making politics accessible and fun. This sort of viral nature can amplify messages to mainstream media and thus shape the political sphere. TikTok's algorithm and participatory nature contribute to spreading trends like wildfire [19]. The visual representation of TikTok platform features is shown in Figure 2.

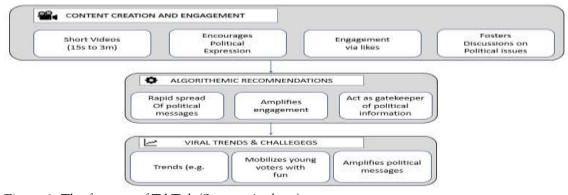


Figure 2. The features of TikTok (Source: Authors)

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2. Voting Behavior of Young Voters

i. Political Awareness

Social media, particularly TikTok, is significant in building political awareness among young voters. It makes the content of complex issues available in a fun and exciting way through several videos created by various politicians' influencers. This may cause a type of passive awareness, but it alters the voting choices in the future. At the same time, information spread through social media and its relevance and accuracy in the political discourse is problematic [20], [21].

ii. Engagement Patterns

Young consumers on TikTok are active and tend to share opinions, like, and make content, providing a bottom-up, community-led space for politics. Influencers help shape the opinion of politics and mobilize young voters through digital campaigns and rallies.

iii. Decision-Making Processes

TikTok influences the opinions of young voters regarding their candidates, policies, and elections through diverse content[22], [23]; therefore, it impacts choice-making and decision-making [24], [25]. The algorithm tends to "echo chamber," that is, hold views like yours more, so even voters may become polarized and vote dangerously. The depiction of the voting behaviour of young voters is shown in Figure 3.

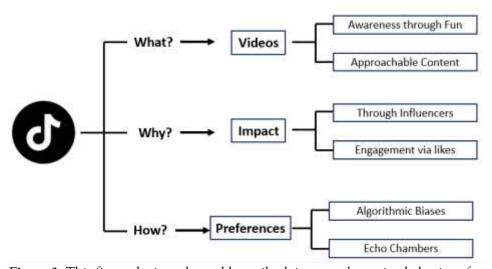


Figure 3. This figure depicts why and how tiktok impacts the voting behavior of voters (Source:Authors)

- Social Media Algorithms and Political Influence
- i. Influence on Opinion Formation

The algorithms of social media sites such as TikTok tend toward engaging content to keep the user on that platform for as long as possible. Divisive political posts are often highlighted, thus providing young voters with a taste of varying ideologies. With social media becoming increasingly a news source for youths, influencers on sites like TikTok use such information to further social and political agendas and inform public opinion [26]. Such algorithmic exposure can shape opinion without adequate review for some users[27], [28].

ii. Echo Chambers and Filter Bubbles

Social media algorithms create echo chambers and filter bubbles that tend to support certain beliefs and limit exposure to contrary opinions or those of opposing parties. They significantly influence political behaviour [29], [30]. The TikTok algorithm will likely isolate users into individualistic filter bubbles, limiting the dynamic nature of young voters' political ideologies while critically diminishing discourse[31].

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iii. Reinforcement of Biases

Social media algorithms like TikTok have entrenchments that create echo chambers, facilitating biases and confirmation biases. This might introduce false beliefs, increase partisan loyalty, and hinder informed political decision-making.

- 4. Misinformation and Political Polarization
- i. Spread of False Information

TikTok's engagement-focused design allows false information to spread quickly. Popular posts reach a broad audience on the "For You" page, potentially going viral. False news spreads faster than actual news, distorting perceptions and influencing younger voters. Bite-sized political videos simplify complex issues, spreading misinformation and impacting political landscapes worldwide[32].

ii. Role of Political Influencers

TikTok's Political influencers significantly influence young voters by expressing their opinions on politics, specific issues, and candidates. While some spread misinformation or divisive content, others do so with malicious intent. In doing so, they can quickly sway the views of their followers, leading to polarization and potential entrenchment in false beliefs. Additionally, they may exploit TikTok's algorithms to amplify sensational or provocative content, spreading misinformation to a wider audience [33].

- 5. Political Engagement and Mobilization
- Role of Influencers and Creators

Influencers and content creators are essential in deepening the involvement of politicians and TikTok. Those influencers who can reach many people can influence public opinion and make young people vote. They inject entertainment with the political message to make complex information accessible to young viewers. Most social media celebrities are now endorsing candidates and discussing policies; as such, youngsters find political information more relatable. They also amplify voices and issues not usually represented and help youths engage in politics relevant to them[34], [35].

ii. Hashtags and Political Movements

TikTok organizes political movements through hashtags, and, for this reason, it is quite easy for users to be involved in, for example, #BlackLivesMatter, #ClimateChange, and #Vote2024. These happen on TikTok, mobilizing the young toward collective action. This 'decentralized activism' empowers young voters to engage digitally in political activity - just like a snowball effect - by creating content under one hashtag that spreads the message exponentially [36].

iii. Impact on Voter Turnout

TikTok has contributed positively to voter turnout, specifically amongst those unlikely to do otherwise. It makes voting more fun and informative on the platform. Because with the spread of vote-related campaigns, people tend to remember much easier. Influencers, celebrities, and political groups educate young voters through TikTok about voting. In the case of the 2020 U. S. presidential election, political campaigns successfully used TikTok to inform young voters about the critical dates and reasons for voting. Political messaging can be even more relatable and engaging to a young first-time voter by integrating voting-related content into some prevalent challenges and trends [37], [38].

Table 2. A clear and concise overview of the key points regarding political engagement and mobilization on TikTok.

Aspect	Details
Role of Influencers	• Influencers blend entertainment with political messaging.
	 Authentic endorsements mobilize political participation.
	• Amplify grassroots movements and educate alienated young
	voters.

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Impact on Voter	• Reduces barriers to political involvement through					
Turnout	entertainment.					
	 Educates young voters on registration and voting. 					
	Successful campaigns during the 2020 U.S. election using					
	viral trends.					
Hashtags and Political	Essential for organizing political movements.					
Movements	• Examples: #BlackLivesMatter, #ClimateChange,					
	#Vote2024.					
	• Facilitate user engagement and decentralized political					
	activism.					

Table 3. Summary of literature review

Citati	Target	Input	Architect	Pre- Processing	Dataset	Outcome	Output Result
on	Variable	P 440	ure				2 3.30 40 400 410
[39]	Social Media Usage and Political Engageme nt	TikTok, Instagram, Facebook, Twitter	N/A	Gender, Political Affiliation Analysis	Teens of Color, Republican, Democratic Teens	Social media use linked to political interest and engagement	Stronger engagement on TikTok and Instagram
[40]	Political Participati on via social media	Multimoda 1 Connected ness, News Use	O-S-R-O- R Model	Interpersonal Discussion and Political News	2,379 Citizens in China	Political interest is mediated by news and trust	Real-time interference hinders participation
[41]	Political Commun ication on TikTok	Political Party Profiles and Activities	Survey	Content Analysis of TikTok Political Content	21 Studies (Web of Science, Scopus)	Institutional and Political Communication Research	Rise in TikTok political studies post- COVID
[42]	Readiness of Young Voters	Demograp hics, Knowledge of Electoral Process	Survey (462 Young Voters)	Age, Ethnicity, Responsibility, Peers' Influence	53.9% Malay, 65.2% Female	Personal responsibility and peer influence impact readiness	Majority aged 19-20, aware of electoral processes
[43]	Microcele brity Influence on Political Identity	TikTok Immigrant Creators' Profiles	Co- creation, Hash baiting Techniqu es	Cultural Experiences and Political Involvement	Immigrant TikTok Creators	Personal online identities mobilized for political influence	Use of unique immigrant identities and experiences
[44]	Commun ity Building	#Wasian Check and Shared	Prospectiv e Analysis	Emotional and Cultural Visual Sharing	Mixed-Race Asians	TikTok fosters belonging and	Virtual space supports diverse identity expression

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	on	Experience				recognition for	
	TikTok	S				mixed-race users	
[45]	Political	Party Posts	Cross-	Use of TikTok	TikTok	Political messaging	Limited citizen
	Party	and	sectional	Features	Political Party	often	engagement, mostly
	Engageme	Interaction	study	(Challenges,	Activities	unidirectional and	by Podemos
	nt on	Frequency		Duets)		focused on	
	TikTok					promotion	
[46]	Political	TikTok	Explorato	Party-Based	ZANU-PF,	TikTok helps build	Young voters
	Commun	Political	ry study	Content Sharing	CCC,	political visibility	targeted through
	ication in	Videos and			Zimbabwean	and community in	entertaining
	Zimbabwe	Hashtags			Voters	Zimbabwe	political content
[47]	Political	Short	Explorato	Video	Small-town	Short videos	Stronger political
	Identity of	Video Use	ry study	Consumption	Chinese Youth	increase political	trust in males and
	China's	Frequency,		and Trust		trust and identity	stable jobholders
	Youth	Political		Analysis			
		Trust					
[48]	Celebrity	TikTok	Survey	Respondent	100 Young	Celebrity	Preference for
	Politician	Videos and	(Celebrity	Opinions and	Voters	politicians	receiving info
	s and	Voter	Influence)	Voting	(Sample)	influence voting	outside TikTok
	Voter	Preferences		Preferences		and political	
	Behavior					discussions	

IV. ISCUSSION AND RESEARCH GAPS

Findings from the review show how TikTok uniquely stands out as a political behaviour influencer for young voters, showing the potential and complexities involved in its use as a campaign platform. Entertainment-politics amalgamation on TikTok has broken the barriers to traditional involvement in political discourse, which has existed for some time, opening the same to younger audiences who might not watch traditional media. It enables social media influencers and content producers to educate, mobilize, and even sway political opinions and increase voter turnout in a few instances[49], [50]. Being entertainment-driven, viral, and enjoyable, the platform makes consumption of political messages livelier and entertaining with active sharing and debating, hence creating a participatory political culture that is very attractive to young voters.

However, more important than making voters more cognizant and active in politics is how TikTok structures the choice of young voters. Its algorithm feeds users' preferences: it shows contents similar to the user's choices, leading to an echo chamber[51], [52]. Without the user's knowledge, the aspect can create more polarized younger voters, unlike past generations, and increase the reinforcement of biases because of the restriction in exposure to a diversified array of opinions. Accordingly, though such people are involved due to their engagement and influence over political debates, one fails to understand whether the information or notions used by influencers are valid and reliable[53]. Additionally, short-form content often creates issues since such content blurs complex questions of politics; therefore, young voters fail to grasp policies and candidates in much detail[54].

It further concerns that such a platform carries misinformation easily. One of the criticisms TikTok has received is not doing enough to curb the spread of misinformation, which leads to misleading young voters and affects their political choices. Further, the rapidity at which information spreads and becomes viral on TikTok highlights the necessity of a more robust mechanism of content moderation and fact-checking[55],

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[56]. This requires immediate rectification of specific issues so that TikTok may become an asset to democratic processes and provide young voters with reliable and balanced information.

There are still several gaps that exist and need to be filled if there is to be a better understanding of the influence of TikTok on the political behaviour of young voters after the insights produced by the review. First, despite its affirmation of the roles played by influencers and content creators in the configuration of political opinions, further research is still required to discover the long-term effects their influence may have on the political engagement of young voters[57], [58]. The impact does not necessarily mean continually being political beyond digital activities. For example, they may vote in the subsequent elections or even become active in online activism.

The second is that although it is known that TikTok's algorithm fosters an echo chamber, relatively little empirical research has surfaced to demonstrate how exactly this effect influences youth voters' political perceptions and decision-making. Future studies can be conducted on how exactly TikTok's algorithm restricts the exposure of diversity in political perspectives, strengthening political polarisation's impact on youth voters[59], [60].

Another gap here is the knowledge of how TikTok's short-form content format affects the understanding of political issues of the younger voters. Studies may respond to whether, in its efforts at delivering content in bite-sized bits, TikTok affects its users' capacities to think critically about political information and how this impacts their voting decisions[61], [62]. In this regard, more profound research needs to be carried out on the issue of TikTok content moderation and how it can suppress the spread of false information in a political context.

Lastly, most of the previous studies focus on the influence of TikTok in the United States, thus creating a gap in understanding its influence in other cultural and political contexts. Given that the audience of TikTok cuts across many global regions, future studies could explore how its role in political engagement differs from one country to another and how local contexts influence its use as a tool in political communication and voter mobilization[63], [64]. Addressing such research gaps will offer a more comprehensive understanding of how TikTok plays a role in contemporary political landscapes and inform strategies to harness its potential while minimizing its risks.

CONCLUSION:

This paper examined the growing influence of TikTok on young voters' political behavior and emphasized its specific role in shaping electoral decision-making. The format of TikTok, the short-form, engaging videos, essentially blurs the lines between entertainment and politics, keeping hard-to-understand and complexly styled politics relevant and accessible to the younger population. Ingrained as pioneers in raising political engagement, voter education, and even increasing voter turnout through the infusion of political messages into viral trends by influencers and content creators on TikTok, their influence on society is double-edged because it fosters increased political participation. It also raises concerns about echo chambers, misinformation, and the oversimplification of political content. The review identifies such challenges and calls for further scrutiny of TikTok's content moderation and algorithmic biases. Such future research shall better fill those gaps in knowledge, especially regarding the extent of TikTok's global political influence and long-term implications on continuous young voters' political engagement. This shall ensure that the platform positively contributes to democratic processes.

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