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Mapping Government Use of Social Media Influencers for Policy Promotion

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Abstract

This study explores how national governments leverage social media through influencer partnerships and digital campaigns to promote cultural values and policy goals. Covering a broad spectrum of governmental bodies (e.g., ministries and officials), the research highlights the variety of influencer–government partnerships and collaborations. The study comes at a time when diverse regulatory frameworks are emerging globally to govern influencers' activity, mandating transparency in sponsorships, protecting consumer interests, and setting boundaries on influencer involvement in governmental and political campaigns. The methodology combines two main steps: (a) a web search of news articles and blogs to identify relevant examples of government–influencer collaborations; (b) a manual annotation of government-led influencer strategies of the retrieved examples based on thematic areas, degree of autonomy in the partnership, and narrative strategy. The study focuses on France, the US, and Canada, chosen for their advanced digital environments and initiative-taking approaches in both social media regulation and public diplomacy. The main contribution of the study is to develop a typology of government–influencer collaborations to align public perception with (inter)national policy goals and reach their target audiences.

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1. Introduction

Governments worldwide are increasingly experimenting with digital communication strategies to shape public perception, promote policy initiatives, and engage with diverse audiences (Mergel, 2016). At the same time, previous studies have shown that influencers are impactful actors for policy promotion (Ding et al., 2023; Powell & Pring, 2024) and that news influencers are highly focused on governmental affairs and elections (Stocking et al., 2024). One significant aspect of this transformation is the strategic use of social media influencers to disseminate government messages (Pawennei et al., 2024), diplomatic actions (Webb, 2022), and build trust with the public (Michel et al., 2024). This study focuses on public-sector social media influencers, referring to content creators who collaborate with government agencies to promote civic or policy-related content, excluding partisan campaigning or opposition attacks. This approach contrasts strongly with traditional political communication that relies on mainstream media and official government statements. The study seeks to systematically map and categorize the types of government collaborations with online content creators to promote cultural values and policy goals. It deliberately excludes influencer engagements whose primary purpose is electoral campaigning, misinformation propagation, or partisan attacks.

In the US, Canada, and France, government-led influencer campaigns have been deployed in areas such as public health (e.g., Covid-19 awareness campaigns), election participation, climate action advocacy, and tourism promotion (e.g., Dekoninck & Schmuck, 2022; Ding et al., 2025). These initiatives reflect a shift in governmental communication from one-way, top-down messaging to more interactive, audience-centric engagement facilitated by influencers who are perceived as trusted, relatable intermediaries. For instance, public agencies contacted influencers to promote and diffuse health information during the Covid-19 pandemic (Pöyry et al., 2022) and, more recently, the US government reached out to TikTok influencers to share its views on the current war in Ukraine in a way that resonates with digital-native audiences (Lorenz, 2022). While empirical evidence is limited on the full scope of these partnerships, such examples point to the type of influencer–government strategic partnership. These examples suggest that influencers are considered strategic partners for governments. In parallel, many European countries (e.g., France, the Netherlands, and Germany) have introduced legislation requiring clear disclosure of paid partnerships, reinforcing ethical guidelines for influencers' participation in government messaging.

The integration of influencers into political and governmental communication raises several concerns. These include ethical considerations (transparency in sponsorships), regulatory challenges (disclosure laws, fair representation), and the potential instrumentalization of influencers for political opportunism (Schaffer, 2025). When collaborating with influencers, governments must navigate an evolving landscape where reach, credibility, and public reception are highly contingent on platform-specific dynamics. This study addresses the following research question: In what ways are governments in the US, Canada, and France structuring collaborations with social media influencers to promote public goals, and how can these forms of engagement be categorized according to the type of influencer, as well as the influencer's degree of autonomy, narrative strategy, and thematic affinity?

To answer this question, the study uses a qualitative mapping approach. It draws on publicly accessible data from 30 documented cases of government–influencer collaborations between 2020 and 2024, including government press releases, news coverage, transparency registers, and influencers' public disclosures. Rather than analyzing the content of influencer posts, this study focuses on the institutional and strategic

dimensions of collaboration (e.g., degree of autonomy, main narrative strategy, and thematic affinity with influencers' expertise or core focus). The goal is to inductively develop a typology of government–influencer relations, offering an initial conceptual framework for understanding this emerging practice. Given its exploratory nature and reliance on secondary sources, this study aims to offer an empirically grounded typology that can inform future research using more systematic or comparative methods, including audience reception studies or interviews with stakeholders.

2. Theoretical Background

2.1. The Blurred Boundaries Between Social Media, Public Sector, and Political Influencers

Social media influencers can be broadly defined as individuals who cultivate a sustained presence on social media platforms and maintain a large, engaged audience, serving as opinion leaders (Harff et al., 2025). Their influence stems from perceived authenticity, relatability, and consistent interaction with followers. They typically operate in commercial contexts, promoting products, lifestyles, or personal brands, though some also engage with political or societal themes.

Public-sector social media influencers, by contrast, refer specifically to social media influencers who enter explicit collaborations with government agencies or public institutions to promote policy-related, civic, or informational content. These collaborations are formalized to varying degrees, ranging from paid partnerships to co-branded campaigns or institutional outreach, and serve state communication goals (Abidin, 2021). Importantly, a public-sector social media influencer may not self-identify as political but become part of state communication efforts due to the nature of the collaboration. This study is primarily concerned with this category, as it reflects a structural partnership between influencer and state.

Political influencers, meanwhile, are typically defined as individuals who regularly engage with political content, take public stances on civic issues, or participate in public debates and political campaigns (Goodwin et al., 2023), regardless of whether they collaborate with governments. They may be journalists, activists, or entertainers with political platforms. However, the boundaries between categories are fluid: Influencers who are not typically political may temporarily become political influencers when participating in a government-led campaign with relevance in public policy. For example, when a celebrity like Olivia Rodrigo appears in a White House video encouraging Covid-19 vaccination, she participates in government communication that is political in nature (but not necessarily as a political influencer) by temporarily assuming the role of a celebrity-partner in a state campaign—a form of strategic symbolic engagement (Van Zoonen, 2005).

In this study, we treat government communication as a form of political communication, in line with scholarship that sees public-sector messaging on policy issues (e.g., health, climate, voting) as inherently political in function and effect. The present study focuses on public-sector social media influencers—regardless of whether they are regular political content creators or not. It does not assume that all influencers involved in civic campaigns are political influencers, but rather that they engage in political communication through institutional public partnerships.

2.2. General Context of Collaborations Between Governments and Influencers

The growing use of influencers in public communication occurs in an environment of limited regulation and evolving professional norms. The lack of clear regulations in the influencer industry makes it difficult to trace political sponsorships, raising ethical questions about accountability and potential manipulation (Hund, 2023; Schmuck et al., 2022). Critics argue that the commodification of politics through influencer marketing risks reducing political engagement to a branding exercise rather than fostering meaningful discourse (Riedl et al., 2023). Furthermore, influencers have at times played a role in spreading misinformation and conspiracy theories, complicating their reliability as political intermediaries (Harff et al., 2022). Additionally, a risk associated with government–influencer collaborations is disinformation campaigns. An illustrative example is the Fazze case, where influencers in France and Germany were secretly offered financial incentives to spread false claims alleging high death rates among recipients of Pfizer's Covid-19 vaccine. Fazze, a Russian-linked marketing firm, orchestrated this campaign, highlighting how influencer platforms could be exploited to propagate misinformation rapidly.

While influencers provide governments with a powerful avenue for reaching and mobilizing the public, their involvement in political discourse remains contested, as it challenges traditional notions of political accountability, authenticity, and democratic engagement (Arnesson & Reinikainen, 2024). Van Dijck and Alinejad (2020) stress that governments' strategy in collaborating with influencers to promote public messages might not be without risk, notably because influencers can be mandated by multiple interested parties. The authors report on the case of the Dutch government who hired vloggers and popular YouTube influencers to promote the coronavirus measures. However, some influencers turned their backs on health authorities' messages and started to support anti-government groups afterwards, thus sending a double message to the public.

2.3. Desacralization of Politics or Political Opportunism

Traditional media theories, such as two-step flow theory (Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1955), suggest that opinion leaders mediate political information between governments and the public. In the framework of the present study, this model suggests that influencers are not passive conduits of information but instead interpret, modify, and reshape governmental messages before they reach audiences. In addition, uses and gratifications theory (Blumler & Katz, 1974) emphasizes the agency of audiences, suggesting that people follow opinion leaders for entertainment, relatability, or expertise. A critical question is whether influencers mandated by governments can be considered political actors or merely tools of government communication (Arnesson, 2022; Dafrizal et al., 2025). Drawing from these fundamental theories, governments' reliance on influencers can be explained by a strategic partnership with influencers who already command trust among target audiences, bypassing traditional skepticism toward official institutions.

One of the key debates surrounding government collaboration with influencers is whether it represents a move toward more informal, engaging, and accessible political discourse or a form of political opportunism that exploits influencers' credibility to push state agendas (Suuronen et al., 2022) or to engage with certain audiences, especially younger people (Peter & Muth, 2023). While democratic communication ideally fosters open, deliberative debate, the state's reliance on influencers—whose typical activity prioritizes entertainment, relatability, and personal branding—raises questions about authenticity, agenda-setting, and

public manipulation. By leveraging influencers, governments can control which issues gain prominence in public discourse. These partnerships can also be seen as a form of political opportunism, where governments strategically outsource political messaging to online personalities who possess high engagement levels and parasocial relationships with their followers (Michel et al., 2024). Whether these government–influencer collaborations are democratizing public communication or reinforcing state-controlled narratives in an informal and highly persuasive format is still open to debate (Kotkaniemi et al., 2024; Woolley, 2022).

2.4. Important Dimensions of Influencer–Government Collaborations

In this study, we pay particular attention to the theoretical dimensions critical to understanding influencer–government collaborations, specifically examining the type of influencer involved, their degree of autonomy, narrative strategies employed, and the thematic focus of their campaigns.

First, the type of influencer significantly influences the scope and effectiveness of government collaborations. For instance, nano- and micro-influencers, characterized by smaller but highly engaged niche audiences, might yield different outcomes compared to macro-influencers or celebrities who typically have broader, but potentially less intimate, connections with their followers. The type of influencer is theoretically relevant as it shapes the perceived authenticity and relatability of the messaging, affecting the overall efficacy of public communication.

Second, influencer autonomy constitutes a critical theoretical dimension, directly linked to public perception of credibility. Influencers who maintain greater autonomy in their collaborations are often seen as trustworthy and authentic sources, distinct from traditional governmental or institutional messaging. Conversely, perceived lack of autonomy, where influencers appear as mere conduits for government propaganda, can undermine the effectiveness and trustworthiness of the campaign (Chou et al., 2023). Thus, theoretical considerations of autonomy should address the balance between influencer independence and governmental control or oversight.

Third, narrative strategies utilized by influencers for the specific campaign significantly impact audience engagement and persuasion. Theoretically, strategies such as humor, emotional appeal, or personalization enhance audience receptivity by creating emotional resonance and relatability (Nisbett & Schartel Dunn, 2021). Feng et al. (2021) underscore the critical role narratives play in mediating the potentially negative effects of explicit sponsorship disclosures by embedding promotional messages within authentic personal experiences and emotional connections.

Finally, the thematic focus of the collaboration aligns theoretically with influencer expertise or established areas of influence. Collaborations where government messages resonate with influencers' established thematic niches (e.g., health, environment, civic engagement) tend to be perceived as more legitimate and credible by their audiences (Goodwin et al., 2023; Vallström & Törnberg, 2025). Therefore, examining the alignment between influencers' core interests and government objectives is crucial for understanding the theoretical underpinnings and practical effectiveness of these collaborations.

3. Data and Method of Analysis

This study seeks to identify the range of government-led influencer campaigns across the US, Canada, and France. The selection of countries is guided by both theoretical relevance and practical considerations. These three democracies represent diverse media ecosystems and regulatory environments, yet they share a common trend of experimenting with influencer collaborations for public communication. The US is notable for its decentralized and innovation-driven approach to digital communication, where individual agencies and even local governments have partnered with influencers, often without overarching regulatory frameworks. France, by contrast, has introduced some of the most stringent transparency regulations in Europe governing influencer marketing, including state-sponsored content, making it a valuable case for exploring institutional oversight. Canada occupies a middle ground, where public institutions have used influencers in coordinated campaigns (particularly during the Covid-19 pandemic) while navigating evolving ethical and governance standards.

To identify the relevant cases, the study draws on a systematic Google search using the queries "government AND influencers AND [country X]," with terms such as "White House" or "administration" also being used as alternative terms to "government." From this first stage, we considered only newspaper and media channel articles, governmental pages, blogs (e.g., university labs, media blogs, specialized communication blogs), or networking platforms (e.g., LinkedIn), which enabled us to identify relevant cases. Then, we relied on a snowball strategy by using a similar search query but adding the names of specific influencers as follows: "government AND influencers AND [country X] AND [influencer X]." This typically returned results with additional examples which we considered for the typology elaboration. The approach carries several notable limitations. Primarily, using Google search restricts the findings to influencer–government collaborations that gained attention outside social media platforms, typically through traditional or specialized media channels. Consequently, campaigns exclusively conducted within social media environments, which constitute the majority, are inherently excluded unless they achieve a level of external notoriety. This means our analysis includes campaigns that attracted external media interest, potentially introducing bias towards well-publicized or high-impact collaborations and limiting the visibility of smaller or exclusively social media-based campaigns. The aim of our data collection is not exhaustive coverage but to capture emblematic and illustrative examples. Thus, while these limitations constrain the generalizability of the findings, they nonetheless enable an insightful exploration of prominent influencer–government collaboration patterns. In total, we analyze 30 cases (8 for Canada, 12 for France, and 10 for the US).

For coding the identified cases along the four dimensions (type of influencer, degree of autonomy, narrative strategies, and thematic expertise), the following detailed categories and coding criteria were established based on the theoretical framework: type of influencer, degree of autonomy, narrative strategies, and thematic expertise.

The type of influencer is categorized based on follower count. The categories are nano-influencer (<10k followers), micro-influencer (10k–50k followers), mid-tier influencer (50k–500k followers), macro-influencer (500k–1M followers), and celebrity influencer (>1M followers).

The degree of autonomy is defined and inferred from the nature of the influencer–government relationship described in articles. The categories are direct sponsorship (financial or material compensation to generate

content or organize campaign events), government collaboration (joint creation of messaging with or without financial transaction), and political engagement (influencers independently promoting political messages aligned with governmental policies or values without explicit or direct collaboration).

Narrative strategies are based on the main communication style of the campaign. The categories are entertainment/humor (e.g., humorous content or entertaining elements, including memes), personal storytelling (e.g., sharing of personal experiences, anecdotes or expertise as central narrative), public discourse (e.g., contribution or engagement with broader societal debates, including call to action), and educational/informative (e.g., campaign structured to educate or inform about a specific topic or issue, including fact-based advocacy).

Thematic expertise indicates whether the influencers have expertise on the topic of the campaign as indicated by their public profiles or regular content themes (coded as yes/no) considering only the primary expertise (e.g., health/lifestyle influencers regularly combine health-specific topics with general lifestyle elements).

4. Results

4.1. Aggregated Results

Table 1 provides a comparative analysis of influencer–government collaborations across Canada, France, and the US, highlighting distinct national patterns in terms of collaboration type, influencer expertise, narrative strategies, and type of influencer.

Table 1. Aggregated counts for the analyzed government–influencer collaborations.

		Canada	France	US	Total
Type of influencer	Celebrity influencer (>1M followers)	0	7	7	14
	Macro-influencer (500k–1M followers)	0	3	1	4
	Micro-influencer (10k–50k followers)	1	0	1	2
	Mid-tier influencer (50k–500k followers)	2	2	1	5
	Nano-influencer (<10k followers)	1	0	0	1
	Varied	4	0	0	4
Type of collaboration with the government	Direct sponsorship	4	5	2	11
	Government collaboration	1	2	7	10
	Political/personal engagement	3	5	1	9
Influencer expertise	No	4	7	7	18
	Yes	4	5	3	12
Main narrative	Educational/informative (fact-based advocacy)	4	5	0	9
	Entertainment/humor (including memes)	0	2	0	2
	Personal storytelling (personal expertise)	4	2	2	8
	Public discourse	0	3	8	11

In terms of collaboration type, Canada appears to rely more heavily on direct sponsorship arrangements and political or personal engagement, with limited cases of formal government co-creation. This suggests a model

in which influencers may be contracted more transactionally or may act autonomously in support of public messaging. France presents a more balanced distribution across the three collaboration types, indicating varied strategies and a more adaptive or case-by-case approach. In contrast, the US shows a strong preference for government collaboration, suggesting structured partnerships and coordinated messaging efforts between the state and influencers.

Regarding influencer expertise, a general trend emerges across all three countries: Most influencers (60%) do not have clear domain-specific expertise. Canada stands out with an even split between influencers with and without relevant expertise, implying a more deliberate match between influencer background and campaign content. France and the US tend to use influencers regardless of specific knowledge, potentially prioritizing popularity or reach over subject-matter alignment.

Narrative strategies also differ. Canada and France rely heavily on educational or informative narratives. The US, in contrast, leans heavily into public discourse, emphasizing broader societal conversations or opinion-shaping rather than didactic messaging. Personal storytelling is used across all three countries, but is slightly more prominent in the US, while entertainment or humor appears only in French cases, reflecting a cultural preference for blending information with levity.

Finally, the type of influencer deployed reveals that France and the US use celebrity influencers with over one million followers, suggesting a focus on broad visibility and mainstream appeal. In Canada, campaigns draw from a varied pool of influencer sizes, including macro- and mid-tier. This indicates a more diversified or experimental strategy that potentially aims for authenticity or targeted reach.

Overall, Canada tends to prioritize informational content and balanced partnerships with mid-level influencers, while France leverages celebrity status with a wide narrative palette. The US emphasizes government collaboration and public discourse through highly visible, though not necessarily expert, personalities. These national patterns reflect different institutional logics, but also audience expectations and communication cultures, in shaping how public authorities engage influencers for strategic communication.

4.2. Specific Examples

This section highlights selected cases from the broader dataset presented in Annex 1 of the Supplementary File. Annex 1 provides a detailed analysis of the identified government–influencer collaborations coded for influencers' type, thematic expertise, degree of autonomy, and narrative strategies. Illustrative examples that underscore key patterns and strategies across contexts are presented hereafter.

Governments across Canada, France, and the US are progressively turning to social media influencers as strategic communicators, marking a shift from traditional media towards platforms and voices that resonate more directly with younger and digitally engaged demographics. As the Canadian news outlet CTV reported, "In 2021 the Canadian government turned to social media influencers to promote federal initiatives on multiple occasions, from the Covid-19 vaccine rollout to Winterlude 'staycations,' spending more than $600,000 in the process" (Aiello, 2022). In France, this shift was encapsulated by coverage from Les Echos, noting, "Le gouvernement parie sur les influenceurs pour séduire la jeunesse" (in English, government bets on influencers to attract young people; Clinkemaillié, 2021), emphasizing the state's efforts to engage youth

through digital content creators. Similarly, in the US, the White House acknowledged this evolving media landscape, with President Biden referring to influencers as "the new source of news," as reported by City News in 2024. This is particularly evident in campaigns related to public health (e.g., Covid-19 vaccination), mental health, climate action, and digital policy advocacy.

The collaborations operate along a spectrum of autonomy. At one end, direct sponsorship represents state-led communication with clear financial compensation and messaging guidelines. This model was prevalent in Covid-19 campaigns (e.g., Health Canada's contracts with influencers like iamsukhmangill and Kairyn Potts), with one creator posting a picture of himself posing in a shirt promoting the Covid-19 vaccine after the start of the contract with Health Canada. In France, similar arrangements were used to promote the Universal National Service. At the other end, collaborations rooted in political or personal engagement allow influencers to retain greater autonomy while still promoting government-aligned narratives. Such engagements, like EnjoyPhoenix's meeting with French spokesperson Gabriel Attal, stated that the goal was to share her concerns about the management of the crisis. Government collaborations (e.g., structured co-productions without overt sponsorship) represent an intermediary model, prominently used in the US during briefings or in Canada's broader federal outreach strategies, including cybersecurity awareness month.

Narrative strategies employed by influencers are equally diverse. First, entertainment/humor influencers are mobilized for health awareness and youth-focused civic engagement campaigns. In France, this was exemplified by McFly & Carlito's collaboration with President Macron, where a viral "anecdote competition" reached over 10 million views. A second major narrative is educational/informative (fact-based advocacy), particularly effective in complex and technical areas. Canada's Canadian Centre for Cyber Security engaged tech influencers, while France's Hugo Lisoir and Micode communicated on space governance and AI policy, respectively. As in Hugo Décrypte's interview with Macron, where the head of state was questioned about the future of young people in France, addressing themes such as mental health, the environment, inequality and education. Furthermore, tech and science influencers (e.g., Micode, Hugo Lisoir) are brought in to facilitate fact-based advocacy in policy areas like artificial intelligence, space strategy, and cybersecurity. A third personal storytelling strategy emphasizes emotional resonance and relatability. Gurdeep Pandher's joyful Bhangra dance promoting vaccination in Canada was widely referenced. Likewise, Gaspard Guermonprez addressed student struggles during the pandemic: "He had published a video a few days earlier on the distress of students due to the health crisis" (Clinkemaillié, 2021). Louise Aubery's work on gender equality illustrates how influencers use lived experience to humanize complex issues. Meme-based activism and entertainment-infused content are also visible, particularly in France's collaborations with McFly & Carlito. Finally, public discourse strategy emerges as a dominant narrative in the US and France, where influencers often host interviews, moderate discussions, or raise political issues directly with government officials. Olivia Rodrigo's engagement reflects this: "She is part of a growing list of creators...who are interested in working with the White House to deliver a pro-vaccine message" (Rogers, 2021). The same strategy was used by Gen-Z for Change in the US to mobilize TikTok users to attend briefings on Ukraine when the Biden administration enlisted Gen-Z for change to help organize a briefing about the war in Ukraine.

5. Discussion of the Main Findings

The typology of influencer–government collaborations illustrates how states strategically leverage digital personalities for public persuasion, engagement, and mobilization. This aligns with Pawennei et al. (2024)'s findings on the increasing strategic role of influencers in government messaging. This phenomenon aligns with the broader trend of the desacralization of politics (Suuronen et al., 2022) where governments move away from formal, institutionalized communication to more informal and relatable digital interactions. While this shift increases accessibility and engagement, it also raises concerns about political opportunism, as discussed by Michel et al. (2024), particularly in cases where influencers function as intermediaries without fostering meaningful deliberation.

The use of entertainment influencers for health campaigns (e.g., McFly & Carlito in France, Olivia Rodrigo in the US) exemplifies how states exploit parasocial relationships to humanize policy messages, an approach critiqued by Kotkaniemi et al. (2024) as potentially repackaging state narratives in more digestible but less critical formats. This raises concerns about whether influencers enhance democratic engagement or simply repackage political messaging in a persuasive format without fostering critical discourse, thus echoing critiques of the commodification of politics through influencer marketing (Riedl et al., 2023).

The findings also reinforce the debate on whether influencers function as political actors or communication tools (Arnesson, 2022; Dafrizal et al., 2025). In practice, they often occupy both roles simultaneously, especially within the context of political communication. The observed degrees of autonomy, direct sponsorship versus organic political engagement, suggest different scenarios where influencers serve as mediators of political information or more passive conduits. Direct sponsorship, observed in cases such as Health Canada's Covid-19 campaign and the French National Service Promotion, implies a top-down, controlled communication strategy where influencers serve as amplifiers of government messages rather than independent voices. This aligns with Arnesson and Reinikainen's (2024) concerns about authenticity and government influence over public discourse. It also raises ethical questions about transparency, as highlighted by Schmuck et al. (2022), especially when influencers do not clearly disclose their financial ties to the state. Conversely, non-sponsored collaborations (e.g., Hugo Décrypte's political interviews, EnjoyPhoenix's engagement on youth policy) highlight cases where influencers maintain relative autonomy, acting as intermediaries between governments and their audiences and blurring the boundary between political participation and communication facilitation. This suggests a more bottom-up model of public engagement, where influencers facilitate policy discussions rather than simply transmitting state-approved messaging. Such examples reflect what Peter and Muth (2023) describe as governments' attempts to connect with younger audiences in more informal spaces, though the boundary between engagement and instrumentalization remains unclear. However, even in such cases, their role as political actors may remain ambiguous: Do they shape discourse independently or are they still entangled in state legitimacy efforts (Michel et al., 2024)?

Country strategies diverge in meaningful ways that reflect broader institutional, cultural, and regulatory environments. Canada tends to balance a mix of influencer types and narratives reflecting the country's emphasis on multicultural inclusion and policy diversity. France often leans on celebrity-driven entertainment content, such as YouTube collaborations with the Élysée, but these efforts show variable levels of transparency, influenced by ongoing national debates about media ethics and centralized state

communication. The US emphasizes influencer briefings and coordination initiatives (e.g., Gen-Z for Change), frequently built around unified talking points. This reflects both the country's politicized media ecosystem and a more campaign-style approach to public communication, raising concerns about centralized narrative control. These national differences not only shape how influencers are selected and framed but also affect how audiences perceive authenticity, transparency, and trust in government communication.

The analyzed cases also highlight ethical concerns regarding transparency, disclosure, and potential government co-optation of influencers' credibility. A key concern is the lack of transparency in paid collaborations, where influencers did not initially disclose their compensation, raising concerns about covert government propaganda. This problem reflects broader regulatory challenges outlined by Hund (2023) and the need for clearer sponsorship disclosure frameworks (Schmuck et al., 2022). The issue extends beyond France, as election-related initiatives, such as the White House's use of TikTok influencers for midterm voter engagement, could be perceived as partisan mobilization rather than neutral democratic outreach. This issue directly engages debates about instrumentalization (Schaffer, 2025; Woolley, 2022).

Furthermore, the debate over the role of influencers in shaping versus relaying political discourse remains unresolved. Cases such as Macron's engagement with influencers during elections highlight the blurred line between democratic engagement and strategic public relations. While some influencers facilitate meaningful dialogue (e.g., Micode's discussion on AI policy), others risk serving as government mouthpieces, particularly when financial incentives or access to political figures are at stake. This ambiguity is consistent with concerns raised by Harff et al. (2022) about the reliability of influencers as political intermediaries and with the broader question of whether such collaborations contribute to democratic discourse or dilute it (Arnesson & Reinikainen, 2024).

6. Limitations and Future Research

The findings underscore how government–influencer collaborations reshape political communication by leveraging digital platforms as new arenas of public engagement. While fact-based advocacy dominates science and policy-driven campaigns (e.g., cybersecurity, climate change, AI governance), mobilization strategies such as call-to-action and meme-based activism are central to youth engagement and election-related efforts. This demonstrates the versatility of influencer-based messaging but also raises concerns about the depth of political engagement fostered through such interactions.

This study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the dataset was compiled through purposive web searches and manual annotation, which, while systematic, may be subject to selection bias and limit reproducibility. Second, the scope was confined to three Global North democracies (France, Canada, and the US), which restricts the generalizability of the findings across political systems and media environments. Third, the study focuses on government-led campaigns and does not incorporate audience-side data, leaving questions of perception, trust, and influence unaddressed. Finally, without longitudinal analysis, it is difficult to assess the long-term impacts of these influencer partnerships on public engagement or political behavior.

Future research should more systematically investigate this tension by assessing not only state intentions but also audience reception and perception over time. Key questions include: Do these collaborations foster

long-term democratic habits? Or do they normalize a persuasive communication culture under the guise of participation? Longitudinal studies examining audience trust, perceived authenticity, and behavioral outcomes could offer stronger answers. Moreover, to enhance generalizability, future studies should adopt a more systematic and scalable approach to data collection—such as increasing the number of cases, incorporating multilingual and cross-platform data, and using computational tools for influencer identification and campaign tracking.

Additionally, regulatory frameworks must evolve to ensure transparency and democratic safeguards in state-affiliated influencer campaigns. This includes developing clearer disclosure standards and accountability mechanisms to mitigate the risks of misinformation and undue political influence (Muñoz, 2023). While this comparative study of France, the US, and Canada offers valuable insight, expanding the geographic and political scope would deepen understanding. Countries such as Germany and Finland, which balance influencer outreach with strict transparency regimes, or Spain and Italy, where influencer strategies intersect with populist dynamics and mediatized politics, offer contrasting models (Starita & Trillò, 2022; Suuronen et al., 2022). Furthermore, studying authoritarian contexts—where influencers are often directly co-opted for propaganda—would clarify how these dynamics operate under constrained civic conditions and inform a more global view of influencer governance.

Finally, future research needs to assess the audience's reception of influencer content as motivated by trust, entertainment, or perceived authenticity. While influencer collaborations present a powerful tool for state communication, they also introduce significant risks regarding autonomy, transparency, and the potential manipulation of public discourse (Ascolese, 2023). The challenge moving forward is ensuring that these digital engagements enhance democratic dialogue rather than simply reformat state narratives in an informal and highly persuasive format.

Conflict of Interests
The author declares no conflicts of interest.

Data Availability
The detailed coding of the influencer–government partnerships and collaborations is available upon request.

LLMs Disclosure
ChatGPT (OpenAI, GPT-4) was used solely for English language proofreading. The author reviewed and approved all edits. No generative AI tool was used for data analysis, interpretation of results, or decision-making related to the study's conclusions.

Supplementary Material

Supplementary material for this article is available online in the format provided by the author (unedited).

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