4 Ways Creators Have Influenced The 2024 Presidential Election

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American politicians are desperate to be fluent in the language of the internet, a desire that reflects a larger trend in politics: that politicians can't just be leaders anymore. They have to be influencers. And they're tapping into the creator economy to engineer virality in a way that translates to the polls.

Online creators are extraordinarily valuable to political movements because of the sway they have over young people's perspectives and opinions. Creators model the lifestyles their viewers want. They make their audiences feel seen. They build community and, as every politician knows, community is power.

As we race toward November 5, this power will only expand and could ultimately determine who takes the Oval Office.

The digital third places

Both sides of the aisle are capitalizing on the influence of the creator economy this election cycle. While it's an obvious

tactic to court younger voters, it’s also the digital parallel of a campaign tactic as old as politics: meeting people where they are.

More and more young people are congregating and making friends online, and the creator economy has been a pivotal force in catalyzing these connections. People are meeting like-minded peers through fandoms around their favorite creators and streamers. Discord servers and Twitch chats are becoming digital third places.

Social media platforms themselves are also becoming more fertile ground for political organizing. Algorithmic feeds boost posts from people with similar opinions and interests onto users’ timelines. Platforms are also becoming more creator-friendly and embracing content monetization, which opens the medium to more industries and makes fundraising—the backbone of all political action—all that much easier.

The streaming effect

The creator economy encompasses a vast range of online content, from YouTube videos to TikToks to Substack newsletters. Still, politicians are especially drawn to livestreams as they look to bottle the creator economy lightning.

Livestreaming as a political tactic took off in the pandemic era. In-person rallies were off the table, but politicians could assemble hundreds of thousands of voters in the same live chat. Viewers who may have been barred from attending an event due to location, cost, or physical ability suddenly had the opportunity to participate.

At this time, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez made headlines for her Among Us livestream with YouTuber Hasanabi (Hasan Piker). The stream amassed over 430,000 concurrent viewers, cementing it as one of the most-watched Twitch streams ever. However, she

wasn’t the first of her party to stream. Arguably, the movement started a year prior, when Bernie Sanders kicked off his Twitch channel with Streamlabs, which built him a custom Creator Site to help his campaign start livestreaming.

Since then, the movement hasn’t stopped. Following the reinstatement of the former president’s previously banned account, Donald Trump did a livestream with Adin Ross to drum up support for Ross’ largely conservative viewer base. Twitch qualified the decision by recognizing the power of streaming in connecting candidates with their would-be voters.

In the opposite camp, livestream chatrooms are becoming a crucial organizing space, such as in the viral “White Dudes for Kamala” fundraiser, which drew the likes of Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg and actor Jeff Bridges, perhaps our culture’s most famous “Dude.” Kamala Harris also recently launched a Twitch channel of her own to compete with Trump’s.

The livestream format is so galvanizing because it’s the closest thing the internet has to a rally. People strike up connections in real-time in the chat, like synapses firing. A creator you admire might notice you if you agree with their opinion in the chat. Streamers can bring special guests or viewers to participate in the action, building stronger connections.

Streaming lets politicians converse with their entire voter base in real-time. The format is also highly lucrative for fundraising, especially as streaming platforms become more creator-friendly with monetization and revenue sharing. Raising money on stream is how many creators maintain their livelihoods, but it’s also how they drive donations to causes that matter, making politician–streamer partnerships all the more powerful.

The relationship factor

People have deep emotional investments in the creators they

follow. These creators are often more accessible than the traditional celebrity or sports star, as many build their followings from the ground up, forging personal connections with early fans and followers. Their audiences feel more authentic connections with them, and that authenticity has strong persuasive power.

Political organizations are also capitalizing on creator-audience relationships. For example, Axios reported that political action committees (PACs) Priorities USA and Somos Votantes have partnered with lifestyle YouTubers to increase voter turnout among young Latin Americans. Then, in a major acknowledgment of the power of creators, the DNC gave five of its highly coveted speaking slots to influencers, hoping to reach their audience of a collective 24 million followers across platforms.

Creators also realize their own political power, and it's not restricted to politically focused creators like Hasan Piker. MrBeast, known widely for his philanthropic work, announced earlier this year that he would run for president if he were old enough. When content creation is already a gateway to bigger careers in industries like entertainment and fashion, it's unsurprising that politics could be an increasingly popular option.

Voting with views

Young audiences want to know their favorite creators' political views because they want to support creators whose beliefs align with their own. According to McKinsey's research, Gen Z has embraced content consumption as an expression of their identity and morals. This could be why politicians contentify their approaches or seek voters through the content they're consuming.

The same behavioral trends that launch careers in the ever-growing creator economy are building political movements. On

platforms like X and Instagram, users are aligning themselves with politicians in a way that’s reminiscent of creator and celebrity “stan culture.” Some might say that’s a bad idea, but it could be the thing that kickstarts many young people’s civic engagement. Today’s politicians are banking on the latter.

To 2028 and beyond

With the increasing politicization of the creator economy, the nature of livestream content will also change. Like other forms of social media, live shows and their chats will evolve beyond entertainment to become the places where we discover new products and services, transform our opinions and ideals, and connect with new communities. All these trends will lead to more creator-friendly platforms, or legacy platforms will have to adjust their strategies to give creators the reins.

As the creator economy continues to grow, so will its political influence. Like any major industry, it will become a hotbed for lobbyists, the subject of new legislation, and the audience of new campaign promises.

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