

Politicians Are Turning to Influencers, Just Like Brands Are

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Jasmine Enberg

As the 2020 presidential race continues, some candidates are turning to social media influencers to spread their messages and garner support for their campaigns. It was **reported** that former New York City mayor Michael Bloomberg recently partnered with popular Instagram accounts to create meme content for promoting his candidacy, called the Meme 2020 project.

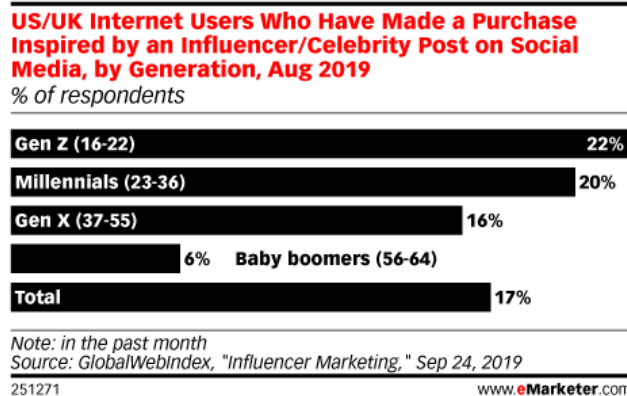
The appeal of influencer marketing is the same for politicians as it is for commercial brands: It allows them to reach a younger audience that is increasingly resistant to traditional advertising tactics.

With young voter turnout expected to reach an all-time high in 2020, connecting with that age group is crucial for candidates. According to Chegg's 2019 "State of the Student" report, 80% of US college students intend to vote in 2020. That's significantly higher than the college student voter turnout in 2016, which was 48.3%, according to data from The National Study of Learning, Voting, and Engagement (NSLVE) and Tufts University.

It remains to be seen how many of those young voters will actually head to the polls on Election Day, but partnering with influencers in an attempt to mobilize the youth is a safe bet for candidates. For many

young adults, influencers are an important part of their digital lives. They are more likely than other age groups to consider influencers trustworthy and take action based on their recommendations.

According to an August 2019 GlobalWebIndex survey, 22% of Gen Z and 20% of millennial internet users in the US and UK had made a purchase inspired by an influencer or celebrity post on social media in the previous month.



But influencers also offer political candidates an additional bonus, as they can help campaigns sidestep some of the new political advertising rules. Twitter, for instance, still allows unpaid political influencer marketing on its platform, and Google has said that it has no further requirements for political influencer marketing than other forms of brand-influencer partnerships. Creators simply have to check a box if their videos include paid product placements or endorsements.

The Bloomberg campaign's meme strategy includes creating posts that look like images of fake direct messages from the candidate's Instagram account and are clearly labeled as being sponsored.

"We're trying to be innovative with how we're translating the campaign message on social, trying to do it how the internet actually works," a Bloomberg campaign aide [told The New York Times](#).

"Tweeting from @mikebloomberg is a very 2008 strategy."

But whether Bloomberg's tactics will resonate with voters is still up for debate. In a February 2020 CivicScience survey, just 14% of US adult

internet users supported political campaigns using social media influencer marketing. More than half (53%) opposed, but a full third of respondents were undecided.

Influencer marketers are torn, too. Maria Sipka, co-founder and executive vice president of brand strategy at influencer marketing platform Linqia, said politician-influencer partnerships should be allowed only if they are genuine and authentic. “It’s absolutely OK for politicians to identify influencers that are talking about every issue they are experiencing, form a connection with those influencers and start to build that relationship. But money should never exchange hands.”