

Social Media Influencers and the Shaping of Cultural Awareness among Algerian Youth

Abbad Djameleddine ¹, Oulhi Henen ²

¹ University of Souk Ahras, Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities,
dj.abbad@univ-soukahras.dz

² University of Souk Ahras Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities,
h.oulhi@univ-soukahras.dz

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Abstract:

This research underscores the significance of a profound understanding of the role of social media influencers and investigates how their impact on the cultural awareness of youth in Algeria, as well as the shaping of their cultural values and attitudes, can be enhanced. This is achieved through observations and a review of multiple prior studies. The findings indicated that these influencers possess the capability to disseminate knowledge and interact with young audiences in ways that foster dialogue and critical thinking. The study concludes by presenting a set of recommendations that emphasize the necessity of guiding the role of social media influencers towards positively enhancing cultural awareness and directing them to provide more valuable content. Furthermore, it highlights the importance of channeling efforts to encourage youth to develop critical thinking skills to understand the true impact of the information they receive via social media.

Keywords: Algerian Youth, Critical Thinking, Cultural Awareness, Cultural Values, Social Media Influencers

1. Introduction

The world is currently experiencing an era of advanced digital communication, wherein social media platforms have become essential for individual lives and societal interaction (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). These platforms influence personal, social, cultural, and economic domains, and have created opportunities for individuals and institutions alike (Kietzmann et al., 2011). Social media has evolved from personal communication tools to crucial instruments for marketing, brand development, and rapid dissemination of

information and ideas (Kietzmann et al., 2011; Boyd, 2014). Users now actively engage in shaping cultural and political conversations and enhancing awareness of social and environmental issues (Livingstone, 2019).

The role of social media influencers (SMIs) has become particularly prominent. Influencers, with their reach and credibility, are powerful agents in inspiring, educating, and shaping the attitudes and behaviors of their audiences (Abidin, 2016; De Veirman et al., 2017). By disseminating diverse content and advocating for relevant societal topics, SMIs offer models for youth and contribute to knowledge, learning, and cultural awareness (Casaló et al., 2020; Lou & Yuan, 2019). The effectiveness of their influence depends not only on their follower counts but also on their authenticity and constant engagement, which help form stronger connections and trust (Freberg et al., 2011; Lou & Yuan, 2019).

Algeria, as an Arab nation with increasing statistics on social media usage, constitutes a rich environment for addressing the role of social media influencers in building cultural awareness among youth. These influencers disseminate diverse cultural content through their digital platforms, thereby positioning them as influential elements in shaping the consciousness of rising generations.

Thus, this research seeks to explore how social media influencers impact young people's cultural awareness, the benefits and issues involved, and effective ways to ensure their positive contribution to culture and society, by posing the following main research question: What is the role played by social media influencers in building cultural awareness among Algerian youth?

This main question gives rise to a set of sub-questions:

1. What is meant by social media influencers?
2. What is meant by cultural awareness among youth?
3. What is the nature of the relationship between social media influencers and cultural awareness among Algerian youth?

1.1. Significance of the Research

This research is conducted within the context of increasing scholarly and public interest in the role of social media platforms in shaping the consciousness of youth and their impact on their respective societies. With the escalating use of these platforms in Algeria, it becomes paramount to comprehend how social media influencers can play a positive role in building cultural awareness and fostering social understanding among the youth demographic

2. Social Media Influencers

Among the most significant phenomena currently pervading social media is that of "influencers," also known as "bloggers," or "content creators." These individuals present their lifestyles on these platforms and have emerged as prominent figures occupying a distinct position within society, playing an increasingly significant role over time. They have become magnets for attention, sought after in various fields, particularly in humanitarian and marketing contexts. The rapidly increasing numbers of their followers serve as evidence of the significance of this phenomenon.

2.1. The Digital State in Algeria in 2023

The following are the key headlines regarding the adoption and use of digital technology in Algeria at the beginning of 2023:

- There were 32.09 million internet users in Algeria at the start of 2023, with an internet penetration rate of 70.9%.
- There were 23.95 million social media users in Algeria in January 2023, equivalent to 52.9% of the total population.
- There was a total of 48.53 million active mobile cellular connections in Algeria at the beginning of 2023, a figure equivalent to 107.2% of the total population.

These key statistics provide an overview of the "digital state" in Algeria. However, to understand how digital trends and behaviors are evolving, a deeper dive into the data is necessary.

2.2. Social Media Statistics in Algeria in 2023

There were 23.95 million social media users in Algeria in January 2023. Indeed, analyses of various data points from reliable third-party sources such as GWI and data.ai indicate that there has been no discernible decline in overall social media usage; in most countries, social media use continues to increase. Consequently, readers should regard any such discrepancies as "corrections" in the data, rather than as evidence of a decline in social media adoption.

The number of social media users in Algeria at the beginning of 2023 was equivalent to 52.9% of the total population.

Simultaneously, data published in the advertising planning tools of major social media platforms indicate that there were 22.10 million users aged 18 and above using social media in Algeria at the beginning of 2023, which is equivalent to 75.4% of the total adult population during that period.

Overall, 74.6% of Algeria's total internet user base (regardless of age) used at least one social media platform in January 2023.

At that time, 41.9% of social media users in Algeria were female, while 58.1% were male. (DataReportal 2023)

2.3. Definition of Social Media Influencers

Influencers are micro-celebrities who gain a following by sharing aspects of their personal lives online in ways that facilitate product and service promotion (Abidin, 2016). These influencers often cultivate relationships with their audiences through consistent content creation and engagement on platforms such as Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok (Khamis et al., 2017). Unlike traditional celebrities, today's influencers emerge primarily through their activity on social media rather than previous fame in entertainment or other domains (Marwick, 2015).

With the democratization of content creation tools and the speed at which social media distributes content, everyday individuals now have the opportunity to become influential figures—a phenomenon that has significantly changed the dynamics of advertising and branding (Freberg et al., 2011). Hennessy (2018) argues that influencers should be distinguished from traditional celebrities since the former build their personal brands primarily through social media presence, not via mainstream fame. Despite often lacking formal qualifications or elite career status, many social media influencers generate lucrative incomes from their online presence, thus transforming influencing from a mere activity into a profession (Cotter, 2019).

Indeed, platforms themselves compete to attract and support these content creators, as they drive traffic, user engagement, and platform loyalty (Barker, 2022). Influencing is no longer a side hustle but an established career path for many individuals, facilitated by the algorithms, monetization models, and brand partnership structures developed by major platforms like Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube (Duffy, 2017) (Jaafari 2022).

2.4. The Phenomenon of Social Media Influencers

Social media is defined as a means of content creation by users, commonly abbreviated as User Created Content (UCC) (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010)¹. The proliferation of these media is attributed to the vast expansion of communication technology and the technological leap that has affected communication means in general (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). This is in addition to the ease of use and low cost of these social platforms, alongside the existence of an entire generation of youth possessing computer and technology skills from a young age (Prensky, 2001).

Among the most significant impacts of social media platforms is their profound influence on the views of young users, particularly through their engagement with individuals known as Social Media Influencers (SMI) (Freberg et al., 2011); (Khamis et al., 2017). These are individuals who exert online influence over a large number of people; these influencers market themselves and possess the ability to attract further attention. Most of these influencers rely on various social platforms, primarily Instagram, followed by Facebook, Snapchat, Twitter, and YouTube (Khamis et al., 2017).

It can be asserted that Social Media Influencers (SMI) are those who shape public trends through various blogs, tweets, Facebook posts, Instagram comments, or other social media channels (Freberg et al., 2011); (Marwick, 2015).

Previous studies have demonstrated that individuals most influenced by social media influencers are those born after 1980, termed Digital Natives (Prensky, 2001), due to their significant immersion in modern technology. These individuals were raised and matured in a digital era and became accustomed to using social media platforms. Consequently, they acquire a familiar interaction on such digital sites without needing to be taught or compelled to do so. Therefore, most influencers themselves are Digital Natives (Khamis et al., 2017), which has facilitated their ability to establish connections between themselves and their younger followers (Abd Al-Maqsoud 2019).

2.5. Classifications of Influencers

Influencers are classified according to multiple criteria. Scholars such as Kapitan & Silvera (2016) and Vrontis et al. (2021) commonly classify influencers based on their number of followers and sphere of influence into:

- **Nano-influencers:** They have a relatively small audience on social media platforms and limited experience in branding. The number of followers on Instagram or YouTube ranges from 1k – 10k (Kay et al., 2020).
- **Micro-influencers:** They have a slightly larger following on social media compared to nano-influencers and typically possess some experience in collaborating with brands. The number of followers on Instagram or YouTube ranges from 10k – 50k (Kay et al., 2020).
- **Mid-tier influencers:** This type of influencer represents the middle segment. They are skilled in brand collaborations; therefore, they are difficult to secure as they are in demand, and their advertising rates are relatively low compared to the next two types. The number of

followers on Instagram ranges from 25k – 100k, and the number of followers on YouTube ranges from 50k – 500k (Vrontis et al., 2021).

- **Macro-influencers:** This type of influencer is considered professional in product marketing. However, increased efficiency is met with inflated marketing costs. The average number of followers on Instagram ranges from 500k – 1m; the average number of followers on YouTube ranges from 500k – 1m (Vrontis et al., 2021).
- **Mega-influencers (Celebrities):** These are celebrity influencers with a very high impact. This category includes influencers with more than one million followers. They are usually highly professional on social media and include singers, actors, entrepreneurs, and fashion models. The number of followers on Instagram or YouTube: >1m (Schouten et al., 2020).

The study by Singh & Diamond (2012) also classified influencers according to the nature of the influencer's specialization into:

- **Referent Influencer:** These are multi-field influencers who cover various consumer interests and maintain significant congruence with their followers. Followers typically accept their recommendations due to their perceived expertise and authenticity.
- **Specialist Influencer:** These are influencers specialized in a specific field, whom the audience considers experts in that domain. Audiences consult them when planning to purchase a product within their area of expertise.
- **Positional Influencers:** These are influencers whom their followers view as friends or as part of their families. Regardless of their expertise, the audience trusts their opinions and recommendations for products and brands (Abu Abah 2021).

2.6. Following Social Media Influencers

The act of following social media influencers can be attributed to various motivating factors, such as inspiration, entertainment, knowledge acquisition, sense of community, social interaction, personal influence, fashion, emotional connection, and access to news and information (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017; De Veirman et al., 2017; Lou & Yuan, 2019).

- **Inspiration and Encouragement:** Social media influencers inspire and motivate individuals to achieve personal and professional goals by providing advice in areas like fitness, business, and travel (Lou & Yuan, 2019).
- **Entertainment and Leisure:** Social platforms offer entertainment and leisure; followers enjoy content that helps them relax and escape daily pressures (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017).

- **Learning and Knowledge Acquisition:** Influencers share expertise, making influencer content a source of learning and development (Casaló et al., 2020).
- **Belonging to Communities:** Following influencers fosters a sense of belonging to communities of shared interests and values (De Veirman et al., 2017).
- **Social Interaction and Networking:** Social media enables interaction and networking with others who share similar interests (Boerman, Willemsen, & Van Der Aa, 2017).
- **Influence on Personal Choices:** Influencers' recommendations affect followers' choices and behaviors (Lou & Yuan, 2019).
- **Fashion and Beauty:** Fashion influencers guide followers on trends and appearance (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017).
- **Emotional Connection:** Followers can develop emotional bonds with influencers, strengthening their loyalty (Casaló et al., 2020).
- **Source of News and Information:** Influencers serve as news and information sources, becoming knowledge resources for their audiences (De Veirman et al., 2017).

3. The Relationship between Social Media Influencers and Electronic Word of Mouth (EWOM):

The significance of social media influencers is seen in how they shape eWOM, referring to any positive or negative statements made by current, former, or potential consumers about products or services through online platforms (Cheung & Thadani, 2012). Influencers frequently function as opinion leaders and prior consumers, whose recommendations are regarded as trustworthy and credible by their followers (Freberg et al., 2011; Lou & Yuan, 2019). This peer-to-peer communication facilitates consumers' ability to share experiences and evaluations, with WOM recognized as a highly trusted information source in marketing (Ismagilova et al., 2020).

Brands and companies increasingly capitalize on the popularity of influencers by encouraging them to highlight the positive aspects of their offerings. Influencers' ongoing, interactive relationships with followers enable them to subtly communicate product features, fostering consumer trust and loyalty (Boerman et al., 2020). Followers, influenced by this relationship, are often persuaded to try products or services recommended by influencers (Lou & Yuan, 2019). As studies suggest, eWOM on social media not only raises awareness and knowledge but can also prompt further information search and actions like liking, sharing, or purchasing, ultimately

impacting purchase intention and trial (Ismagilova et al., 2020) (Abd Al-Maqsoud 2019).

4. Impacts of Following Social Media Influencers

Following social media influencers is a widespread phenomenon among youth and can influence attitudes, consumption patterns, mental health, ethical behaviors, and educational inspiration (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017; De Veirman et al., 2017).

- **Influence on Attitudes and Beliefs:** Social media influencers significantly shape followers' attitudes and beliefs in areas such as fashion, health, politics, and lifestyle (Freberg et al., 2011; De Veirman et al., 2017).
- **Influence on Consumption Patterns:** Influencers can reinforce consumption patterns by showcasing products or services, thus shaping followers' preferences and shopping habits (Lou & Yuan, 2019; Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017).
- **Influence on Mental Health:** Comparisons with influencers' "perfect" lives may lead to mental health issues such as anxiety and low self-esteem among youth (Casaló et al., 2020; Sherlock & Wagstaff, 2019).
- **Ethical and Legal Challenges:** Undisclosed sponsored content or misleading endorsements by influencers can present ethical and legal issues (Boerman et al., 2017).
- **Educational Opportunities and Inspiration:** On the positive side, influencers can offer educational support, advice, and motivation in fields like education, sports, and entrepreneurship (Abidin, 2016). Therefore, critical thinking and cultural awareness are imperative among youth when following social media influencers. They must exercise caution and appropriately utilize these platforms and their content, and always seek reliable information and sources to ensure they make informed and responsible decisions.

5. Cultural Awareness

Cultural awareness is widely defined as the ability to understand personal and societal values, beliefs, and perceptions, as well as those of other cultures, enabling individuals to recognize the cultural values that shape behavior and identity (Spitzberg & Changnon, 2009). This awareness involves not only understanding and preserving one's own cultural heritage and authentic principles but also safeguarding them from external influences (Deardorff, 2006; Bennett, 2009).

Developing cultural awareness equips individuals with the skills to observe, interpret, and adapt to prevalent cultural ideas, values, concepts, and beliefs in their society, making them more perceptive

and conscious (Byram, 1997). This, in turn, encourages the formation of cultural structures that guide personal behavior and social interactions while fostering openness, acceptance of difference, comprehension of internal and external dynamics, and critical insight into political and societal contexts (Arasaratnam, 2016; Deardorff, 2006). Such awareness is especially important in multicultural and interconnected societies, where understanding diverse identities and perspectives is key to reducing intolerance and promoting resilience (Al-Ruwaili & Al-Yahya 2017).

5.1. The Importance of Developing Cultural Awareness

The importance of developing cultural awareness among university students has grown with the expansion of technology and global communication, which has increased integration and sometimes led to the erosion of certain local cultural elements (Byram, 1997; Deardorff, 2006) (Fahmy, 1996). Globalization contributes to the dominance of certain aspects of Western culture, which may cause cultural homogenization, loss of identity, and challenges to youth's sense of belonging and social responsibility (Sorrells, 2016; Arasaratnam, 2016).

Educational institutions play a vital role in fostering cultural awareness as a key component of modern curricula, offering both a defense against negative aspects of cultural globalization and a means of empowering youth to develop resilient, inclusive identities (Bennett, 2009; Deardorff, 2006). Developing cultural awareness helps equip students to navigate and adapt to cultural diversity, understand societal values, and approach social challenges with a critical and open-minded perspective (Byram, 1997; Spitzberg & Changnon, 2009).

5.2. Manifestations of the Spread of Cultural Awareness

Many manifestations reflect the spread of cultural awareness, including:

- Emphasis on reading, book clubs, and the availability of electronic resources increases cultural knowledge and linguistic skills among students at various educational levels (Bennett, 2009; Byram, 1997).
- Organization of numerous cultural competitions across age groups supports cultural exchange and appreciation (Byram, 1997).
- Rapid access to information through technological development and the internet accelerates cultural learning and broadens perspectives (Deardorff, 2006).
- The proliferation of cultural magazines, newspaper sections, and satellite channels dedicated to cultural topics aids in widespread

knowledge dissemination and the promotion of creativity (Arasaratnam, 2016; Sorrells, 2016).

- Support for creative individuals and clubs helps refine young talents, reinforcing creative contributions to society (Bennett, 2009).
- The growth of volunteer work, international exchange campaigns, and participation in cultural activities empower youth to learn from other cultures and promote intercultural competence (Byram, 1997; Spitzberg & Changnon, 2009).
- Educational institutions focused on language, leadership, and communications are central to building globally competent youth (Deardorff, 2006; Bennett, 2009) (DZ bit ,2023).

5.3. Cultural Awareness and Technology

Modern technology and the rapid advancement of communication tools have significantly expanded human perspective and increased awareness, particularly in the realm of cultural awareness (Sorrells, 2016; Deardorff, 2006). The ongoing pursuit of innovation through technology creates new pathways for transmitting and evolving cultural knowledge, making art and language dynamic rather than static resources (Bennett, 2009). Digital platforms and advanced communication means play a vital role in deepening and disseminating cultural awareness, as they allow individuals to access, create, and share cultural content beyond traditional barriers of time and geography (Arasaratnam, 2016; Byram, 1997). In such a technological context, humans become active producers and innovators of culture, embodying heightened awareness in the continuous creation of new artistic and social expressions (Sorrells, 2016).

6. New Media and Youth Culture

New media is a communication phenomenon that has significantly transformed youth culture by altering communication, identity, learning, and the relationship with heritage (Livingstone, 2019; Boulianne, 2015) (Bousbat & Laouira 2019/2020, 85).

- **Changing Means of Communication and Social Interaction:** Young people rely on social media platforms to interact with the world, leading to rapid changes in communication and social interaction (boyd, 2014; Livingstone, 2019).
- **Shaping Identity and Values:** New media shapes youth identities and values, serving as a platform for self-expression and reinforcing beliefs (Buckingham, 2008; boyd, 2014).

- **Learning and Professional Development:** Youth use new media for skill-building and career advancement, often benefiting from online learning resources (Greenhow & Lewin, 2016).
- **Social and Psychological Challenges:** Continuous exposure to digital content can introduce stress, anxiety, and other mental health concerns among youth (Keles, McCrae, & Grealish, 2020).
- **Influence on Political and Social Decisions:** New media empowers youth political participation, letting them campaign and express views (Boulianne, 2015).
- **Challenges in the Field of Culture and Heritage:** Growing engagement with digital culture sometimes undermines traditional cultural practices and can lead to assimilation or cultural replacement (Cohen & Mihailidis, 2013; Livingstone, 2019).

7. The Relationship Between Influencers and Raising Cultural Awareness Among Youth

Social media influencers play a pivotal role in shaping youth cultural awareness due to their capacity to communicate with large audiences, deliver messages authentically, and foster engagement around key social issues (Abidin, 2016; Lou & Yuan, 2019; De Veirman et al., 2017).

- **Addressing Important Topics:** Influencers help disseminate information on contemporary youth concerns such as mental health, education, technology, human rights, and social awareness, making them valuable conduits for information and catalysts for action (Abidin, 2016; Casaló et al., 2020).
- **Authentic Communication:** Building genuine relationships based on transparency and honesty increases trust and positions influencers as role models and sources of motivation (Lou & Yuan, 2019).
- **Support and Inspiration:** By sharing personal stories and challenges, influencers inspire and motivate youth to set and achieve their own goals (Casaló et al., 2020).
- **Dialogue and Discussion:** Organizing live discussions on important topics encourages participation, exchange of viewpoints, and deeper awareness (Boerman et al., 2017).
- **Participation in Awareness Campaigns:** Influencers play a key role in spreading awareness on issues such as diversity and inclusion by joining or leading social campaigns (De Veirman et al., 2017).
- **Motivation and Social Change:** Influencers can mobilize youth for social initiatives that promote and preserve cultural heritage, helping bridge tradition and modernity (Abidin, 2016).

- **Challenging Old Concepts:** Influencers use their platforms to question outdated cultural norms and promote creativity and cultural renewal among youth (Lou & Yuan, 2019).

8. Findings

Social media influencers have emerged as cultural actors in the Algerian digital landscape, contributing to shaping behaviors, values, and norms among youth.

- Digital platforms have reshaped how Algerian youth communicate and interact with their surroundings, with influencers playing a key role in delivering cultural messages in a simplified and relatable way.
- Influencers present a blend of local and global cultural elements, leading to the formation of hybrid cultural identities among youth that combine tradition with openness to new patterns.
- Influencers vary in type based on their follower count and content focus—such as fashion, comedy, religion, civic engagement, and digital entrepreneurship—each contributing differently to cultural influence.
- The extent of cultural influence is closely tied to the influencers’ perceived credibility and authenticity; “relatability” is seen as a core factor in building trust and impact.
- Young people do not engage with influencer content passively; rather, they actively participate in its production, sharing, and interaction, making them co-creators of digital culture.
- Social media platforms have become alternative spaces for cultural production and identity construction, especially as traditional institutions such as family, school, and state media lose their influence in guiding youth culturally.

9. Recommendations

9.1. At the Level of the State and Decision-Makers

- Develop a comprehensive national strategy to enhance cultural awareness in the digital environment, taking into account the role of influencers in shaping youth orientations.
- Support youth initiatives that produce committed cultural content, and provide targeted funding for purposeful media projects.
- Strengthen the legal frameworks regulating digital content without undermining freedom of expression, and impose oversight on content that undermines national values.
- Integrate concepts of digital literacy and media citizenship into school curricula starting from early educational stages.

9.2. At the Level of Family and Society

- Promote a culture of dialogue within families regarding the digital content consumed by children, and encourage critical thinking about the impact of influencers.
- Reinforce the family's role in instilling cultural and national values through continuous guidance in children's digital practices.
- Involve local associations in organizing awareness campaigns on the safe and value-conscious use of social media platforms.
- Create alternative cultural spaces within society that allow youth to engage with their cultural heritage in modern and attractive ways.

9.3. At the Level of Media and Digital Platforms

- Encourage public and private media outlets to produce youth-oriented, interactive content that highlights Algerian cultural diversity.
- Build partnerships between digital platforms and cultural institutions to promote national values through influential and engaging means.
- Optimize platform algorithms to favor meaningful local content and reduce the spread of misleading or value-empty messages.
- Strengthen the presence of positive influencers in traditional media as digital role models for the youth.

9.4. At the Level of Universities and Scientific Research

- Support academic research focused on studying the influence of digital influencers on the cultural and social behaviors of Algerian youth.
- Integrate courses on new media and digital influence into university curricula, especially for students in media and social sciences.
- Establish digital research centers that monitor and analyze influencers' content and their cultural implications.
- Link academic research outcomes to public policy decisions through participatory consultation mechanisms between universities and state institutions.

9.5. At the Level of Influencers Themselves

- Encourage Algerian influencers to produce meaningful cultural content that resonates with youth and reinforces national identity.
- Raise awareness among influencers about their ethical responsibility in shaping their audience's awareness and attitudes.
- Organize training programs on digital media and professional ethics for active influencers on social platforms.
- Promote the image of the exemplary influencer who combines creativity with commitment, serving as a positive role model in the digital space.
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10. Conclusion

In summary, influencers possess the capacity to shape the opinions and behaviors of youth by providing useful, inspiring, and interactive content on social media platforms, which contributes to raising awareness and directing youth towards positive pathways. Conversely, they can also exert an opposite effect; consequently, it is incumbent to establish laws and regulations for the optimal utilization of these influencers on social media platforms.

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