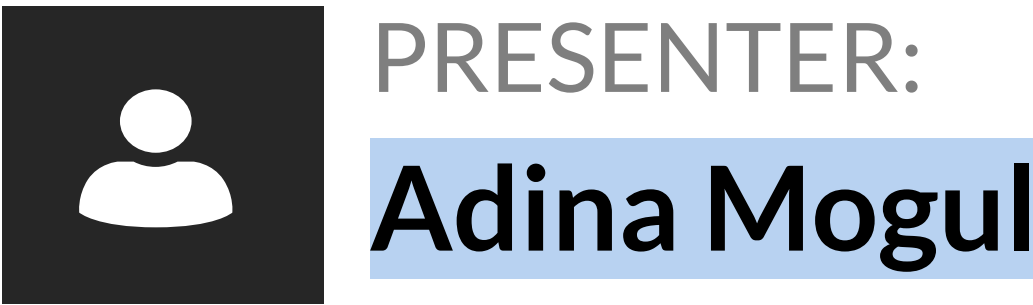


The Power of Social Media in Politics

How the use of Social Media is Shaping Democracy Online



BACKGROUND:

Teenagers and young adults are hijacking democracy, and it's working. TikTok isn't just for dance videos. It's a tool for digital protest. Memes and hashtags are shaping public opinion and influencing elections. Politicians are watching what teenagers post online and responding. Gen Z isn't waiting to be old enough to vote. They're already shifting the conversation.

If we don't understand how teens are reshaping activism through social media, we're ignoring the future of democracy.

METHODS:

- Social Media Influence Identification
- ↓
- Platform Presence & Engagement Analysis
- ↓
- Issue/Movement Association (e.g., climate change, racial justice, gun control)
- ↓
- Engagement Metrics & Political Mobilization
- ↓
- Patterns in Political Impact & Polarization

RESULTS

- **Social media** lowers barriers to political participation for **young adults**.
- It drives **both activism and polarization**.
- **Platform features** (like sharing, hashtags) enable fast **mobilization**.
- But **echo chambers** and **misinformation** are major risks.



Social media isn't just where young adults talk about politics. It's where they do politics.

Social media drives youth political engagement and activism, but also drives polarization and spreads misinformation.

For this generation, social media isn't optional... it's essential to political action.

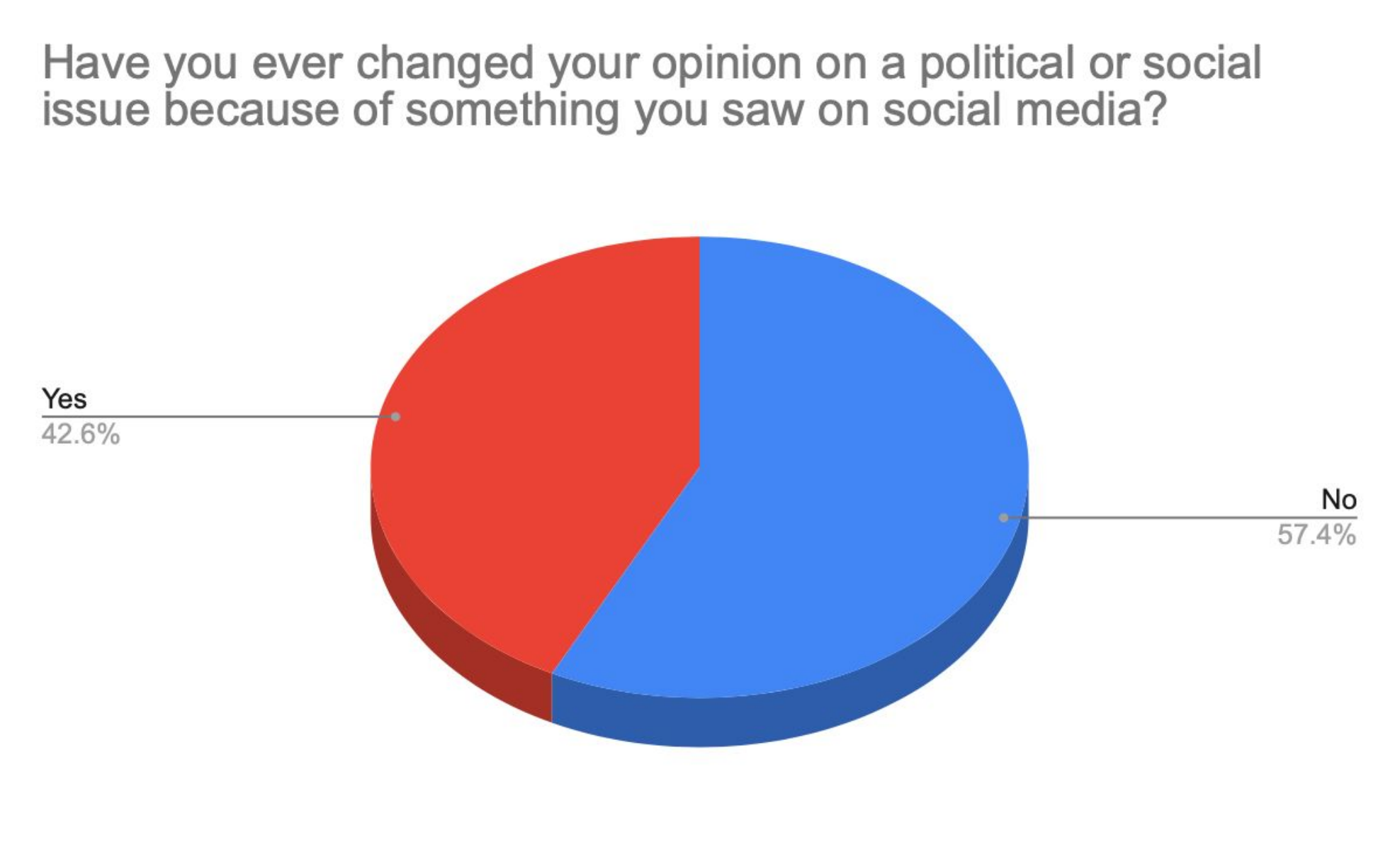
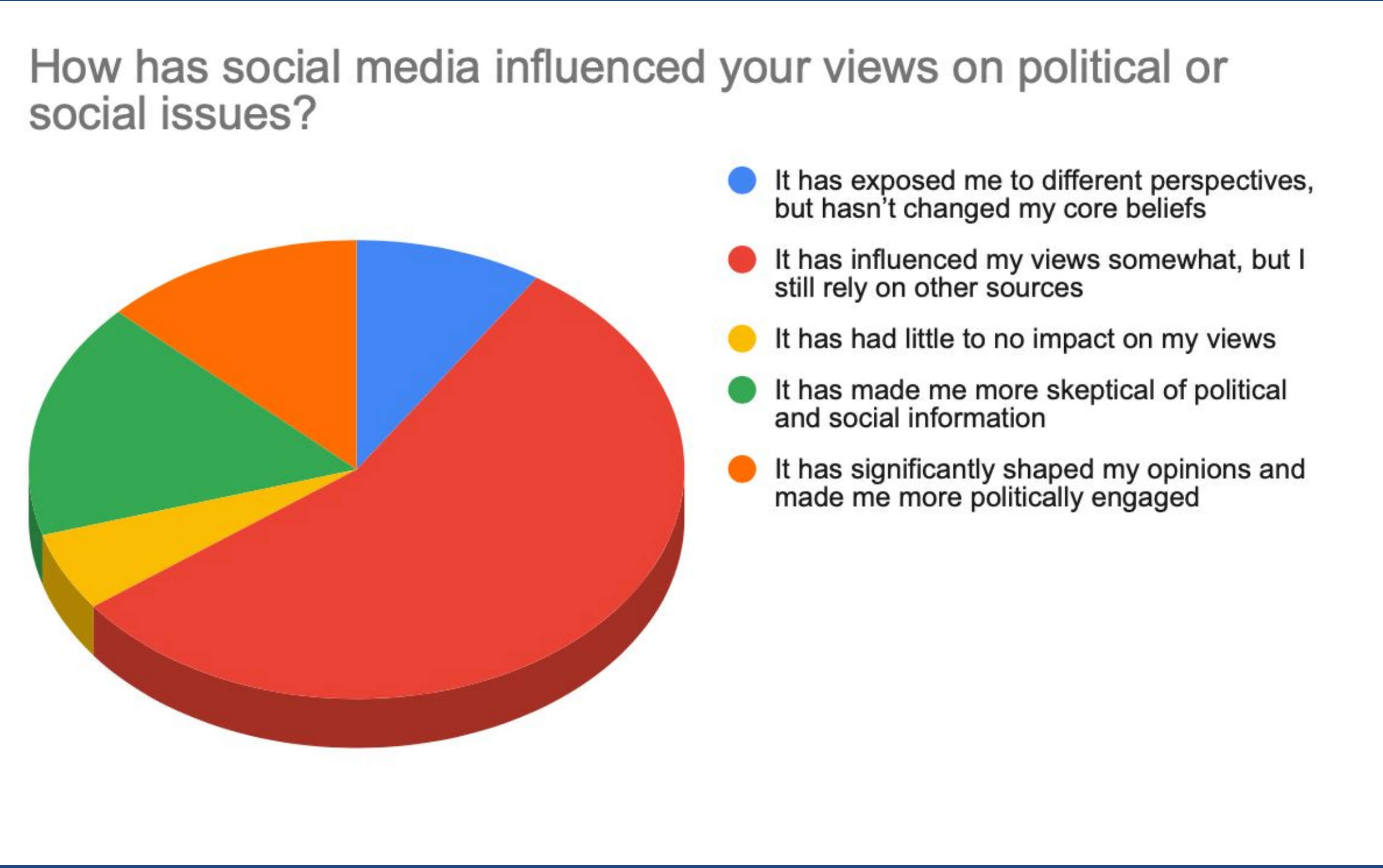
Influencers Shaping Young Men's Political Views on Social Media

Dean Withers: A young, progressive voice with 1 million+ followers on TikTok, often debating conservative views online. His debates on issues like Gaza and Trump have gained attention from both Trump and Democratic supporters. **Brian Tyler Cohen:** A Democratic influencer with 3.4 million subscribers, highlighting how Republicans use culture to engage young men politically, while the Democrats lack similar infrastructure.

The Nelk Boys: Influential among young men, the Nelk Boys blend politics and entertainment on social media, with podcasts featuring figures like Donald Trump Jr. and Elon Musk. Their informal style attracts young followers.

Dave Portnoy: Leader of Barstool Sports, tapping into male-centric demographics with content on sports, gambling, and politics. His vocal criticism of political shifts also resonates with young conservative audiences.

Masculinity Politics: Young men are more likely to favor Trump, with a significant gender gap—young men supporting Trump by 13 points and young women supporting Harris by 38 points. First-time voters often see Trump as an antihero.



What Bing Students Say:

- 80% of Binghamton students surveyed listed social media as one of their main sources of political news.
- Respondents noted that exposure to political content on social media has influenced their participation in political activities, such as attending protests or voting.
- A notable number of participants expressed concerns about encountering misinformation on social media. This points to the need for media literacy and critical evaluation skills among users.
- Many participants reported actively engaging in political discussions online. This suggests that social media serves as a forum for political discourse, enabling young adults to express opinions and debate issues.

Scan this QR code to read the full research paper!



Dividing America: Social Media & Polarization

- Users with strong opinions treat social media as a **public platform to promote their beliefs**, but unlike past platforms that required active participation, **social media delivers political content directly**, increasing exposure and intensity.
- The structure of social media encourages a **“them vs. us” mentality**, which heightens **polarization and emotional responses**.
- This has created **echo chambers**, where users mainly engage with content and people who **reinforce their existing beliefs**.
- As a result, **disinformation spreads quickly**, while balanced or bipartisan dialogue becomes less visible.
- Algorithms **prioritize engagement over diversity**, pushing users toward content they agree with, which further deepens polarization and can radicalize opinions over time.

How Social Media Reshaped Political Engagement

- Different platforms shape political behaviors with each offering unique features (e.g., Twitter for debates, Instagram for visual activism).
- Social media allows young adults to combine personal identity with activism through posts on climate change, racial justice, and more.
- Hashtags, reshares, and comments help spread messages and mobilize quickly.
- Young adults can create influence without traditional institutions like political parties, seen in movements like Black Lives Matter.
- Social media drives real-world actions such as voting, protesting, and campaigning.

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