

How are influencers affecting politics?

This is not a word-for-word transcript.

Beth

Hello, this is 6 Minute English from BBC Learning English. I'm Beth.

Pippa

And I'm Pippa. Everywhere you look online, from gaming and fashion to music, travel and culture, you'll find social media influencers. These social media influencers do what they're famous for: influencing and creating trends. Do you follow any social media influencers, Beth?

Beth

Erm... I don't follow any specifically, I would say, but I do see influencers on Facebook and Instagram – things like that.

Pippa

Well, the most successful influencers have millions of followers and, not surprisingly, this has caught the attention of another group of people trying to get their message out to the public: politicians.

Beth

Politicians using the media to win elections is nothing new but, in this episode, we'll be finding out what happens when social media influencers become politicians themselves. As usual, we'll be learning some useful new words and phrases, and remember – there's a transcript of this episode to read along with while you listen. It's available now on our website: bbclearningenglish.com.

Pippa

But first, I have a question for you, Beth. The most followed Instagram account of 2025 belongs to footballer Cristiano Ronaldo, but how many followers does he have?

- a) 6.7 million,
- b) 67 million, or
- c) 667 million?

Beth

Ooh... I'm going to go down the middle: 67 million.

Pippa

Well, we'll find out the answer later in the programme. Around the world, politicians are realising that they can reach a lot of people through social media influencers. There have even been allegations of politicians paying for the support of influencers in places like Colombia, Argentina and Indonesia.

Beth

And one place where politics has become a big topic on social media is Nigeria.

Pippa

Nigeria is a country with a huge, young population. There are around 200 million people in total and 70% of them are under 30. Many of these young voters are **turned off**, meaning not interested, in traditional media, but they do follow social media influencers.

Beth

Adline Okere is BBC Igbo news editor in Lagos, Nigeria. She spoke with BBC World Service programme The Fifth Floor about the situation there:

Adline Okere

Influencers are **super** important to **shaping the narrative** of these young people. Some of them started in, you know, activism. Some of them started out with lifestyle and then **branched into** politics.

Pippa

Adline thinks influencers are **super** important in Nigerian politics. She uses **super** to mean very, extremely, or more than usual. For example, if you say you're **super** happy about something, you mean you're very happy about it.

Beth

In Nigeria, influencers are **shaping the narrative** of elections. If someone **shapes a narrative**, they have a strong influence over how something is presented or understood. Influencing things, of course, is exactly what influencers do, but now, more and more social media personalities are **branching out into** politics. When

you **branch out**, you start doing something different from what you usually do, such as a new activity or job.

Pippa

So, what happens when influencers become politicians themselves? Here, Adline Okere explains more to Faranak Amidi, presenter of BBC World Service's The Fifth Floor:

Faranak Amidi

What about in Nigeria? Is there a **pushback** against these influencers who got involved in promoting political parties?

Adline Okere

Absolutely – a huge **pushback**! They will also go back and **dig up** information about these people from their personal lives and then publish them on social media.

Beth

In Nigeria, there was a **pushback** against social media influencers turned politicians. A **pushback** is a negative reaction or rejection of something that has happened.

Pippa

In fact, the public reaction was so bad, people started to **dig up** information about influencers who promote politicians. If you **dig up** information about someone, you try to find details about them. We have a similar phrase – **dig up dirt on** someone, which means trying to find information about someone which could damage their reputation.

Beth

So, social media can be a powerful tool for politicians but getting involved in politics doesn't always go well for social media influencers. OK. Pippa, isn't it time you revealed the answer to your question?

Pippa

Yes, I asked, "How many followers does Cristiano Ronaldo, the footballer, have?" And the answer was c) 667 million, at the time of recording. That's a lot more than I have, Beth.

Beth

And me... wow!

Pippa

OK. Let's recap the vocabulary we've learned, starting with the phrasal verb **turned off**, meaning uninterested.

Beth

When **super** is placed before an adjective, it means very or more than usual.

Pippa

Social media influencers who **shape the narrative** have a strong influence over how something is presented or understood.

Beth

If you **branch out into** something new, you start doing an activity or job that is different from what you usually do.

Pippa

A **pushback** is a negative reaction to something new that has happened.

Beth

And finally, the phrasal verb **dig up** means to try and find information. This is often about a person and their private life in order to try and damage their reputation. Once again, our six minutes are up, but why not head over to our website, bbclearningenglish.com, to try the quiz and worksheet for this episode? See you there soon, but for now, goodbye!

Pippa

Bye!

VOCABULARY

turned off

uninterested; repulsed

super (+ adjective)

very, extremely, more than usual

shape the narrative

have a strong influence over how something is presented or understood

branch out (into)

start doing something different from what you usually do

pushback

negative reaction to something new that has happened

dig up

search for hidden or forgotten information, often details that could damage someone's reputation, referred to as digging up dirt on someone