SOCIAL INFLUENCERS AND SOCIAL INFLUENCING IN NIGERIA: A CASE STUDY OF DAN BELLO (BELLO GALADANCHI)

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the role of social media influencers in shaping political discourse and civic engagement in Nigeria through a case study of Bello Galadanchi (Dan Bello), a Nigerian-American filmmaker and digital activist. Using a qualitative case study design, data were generated from an in-depth interview with Dan Bello, analysis of his social media content, and relevant documentary sources. The study draws on Social Influence Theory, Cultural Hybridisation Theory, and Networked Activism to explain how Bello's transnational identity, bilingual communication style, and satirical content contribute to his growing influence among Nigerian youths. Findings reveal that Bello's influence is anchored on three major factors: cultural hybridity, which enables him to connect local and global audiences; satirical storytelling, which simplifies complex political issues; and digital network building, which facilitates civic engagement and public discussion. The study further finds that Bello's content functions as a form of digital civic education by encouraging political awareness, accountability, and citizen participation. The paper contributes to emerging scholarship on digital influencers in Africa by demonstrating how social media personalities increasingly function as alternative public intellectuals and agents of civic mobilisation within Nigeria's evolving digital public sphere.

Keywords: Cultural hybridisation; Digital activism; Social influencers; Networked public sphere; Political communication; Youth civic engagement;

Introduction

Social media has transformed Nigeria's public sphere, giving rise to a new class of opinion leaders who blend entertainment, activism, and cultural commentary. This paper examines the phenomenon of social influence in Nigeria through the case of Bello Galadanchi, also known as Dan Bello, a Nigerian-American filmmaker and media activist whose satirical political commentaries have captured the attention of audiences across Northern Nigeria and the diaspora. Using biographical analysis and theoretical frameworks from media sociology, the study interrogates how Bello's unique transnational upbringing, creative strategies, and digital activism exemplify the evolving role of social influencers in shaping political discourse, civic engagement, and youth culture in contemporary Nigeria.

Throughout history, societies have consistently created figures such as characters, heroes, legends, and myths to provide guidance and shape human behaviour (Valentine, 2023). These archetypes, often reinforced by religions, sciences, and esoteric practices, served as vessels for ideologies, allowing one individual to influence many others. Societies have always relied on figures like heroes and myths to guide human behaviour (Allison & Goethals, 2024). In the 21st century, traditional institutions such as philosophy and religion have seen a decline in their influence. A new type of guiding figure – the "influencer"- has risen to prominence in the context of the 4.0 revolution (the emergence of social influencers, individuals who use social media platforms to shape opinions, mobilise publics, and reconfigure cultural narratives) (Rachmad, 2023). The concept of influencers emerged with the advent of applications and the expansion of the Internet, contributing to their growth. The more active the applications, the greater their pioneers, and the more they attract a broad audience of followers seeking what satisfies their needs in terms of acquiring knowledge and exploring multiple and diverse forms of satisfaction. Influencers produce knowledge that satisfies the audience's needs using appropriate social media methods, such as TikTok, Snapchat and Instagram.

In Nigeria, a country of over 200 million people and one of the world's fastest-growing digital markets, influencers have become central actors in political debates, entertainment economies, and social mobilization (Benaiah & Osuntoki, 2024). From the #EndSARS protests to grassroots advocacy on health and education, influencers are creating new forms of civic participation that rival traditional media and political elites. Within this dynamic ecosystem, Dan Bello (Bello Galadanchi) occupies a distinctive position. A dual citizen of the United States and Nigeria, Bello's biography, spanning childhood street trade in Abuja, academic excellence in Pennsylvania, and award-winning filmmaking, offers a window for understanding the hybrid identities and transnational competencies of Nigeria's new generation of social influencers.

Research Problem

While existing studies (Onyechi,2018; Akinyetun, 2022; Abdullahi, A., Abdullahi, S., & Abdulrauf, Y. A., 2026) have extensively examined the relationship between social media and political participation in Nigeria, limited scholarly attention has been devoted to understanding

how individual social media influencers shape civic consciousness, political engagement, and public discourse. Much of the literature focuses on social media platforms, online activism, or youth participation in politics, often treating digital actors as a collective phenomenon rather than examining the specific mechanisms through which influential personalities mobilise audiences.

Furthermore, little is known about how transnational identities, cultural hybridisation, and digital storytelling practices contribute to the effectiveness of influencers operating within Nigeria's socio-political environment. The growing prominence of Dan Bello as a digital activist presents an opportunity to explore these issues. This study therefore investigates how Dan Bello deploys cultural identity, satire, and digital media to influence political discourse and civic engagement among Nigerian audiences.

Biographical Context and Early Influences

Born on December 12, 1987, in State College, Pennsylvania, to Habeeb and Halisa Galadanchi, Bello spent his formative years in Abuja, Nigeria. His adolescence in Nigeria exposed him to both the entrepreneurial hustle of street vending and the layered socio-economic realities of a developing African city. Jobs ranging from construction to handmade footwear fabrication (notably the traditional *kumazie* sandal) instilled a practical understanding of Nigeria's informal economy and grassroots creativity. In 2006, Bello returned to the United States for higher education at The Pennsylvania State University, graduating in 2009 with a double major in Bioengineering and Classical History and minors in Film Studies and African Studies. This unusual combination of STEM training and humanities scholarship foreshadowed the intellectual versatility that characterises his later social media work(Delors, 1988).

While still a student, Bello began producing short films—*Charles in Arms*, *Unknowing Separation*, *Water for Baby*, and *Taken by Storm*—initially for contests and campus programmes. His breakthrough came in 2011 when a grant from the Nigerian Film Festival enabled him to produce political films for the Nigerian government. By 2012, at just 24, he had written, directed, and co-produced the feature film *A Dark Place*, earning multiple awards at global short-film festivals.

These early successes demonstrated a capacity to merge technical skill with socially conscious storytelling, positioning Bello as both an artist and a civic communicator.

Emergence as a Social Influencer

Bello's shift from filmmaker to digital influencer reflects broader transformations in Nigeria's media ecology. Leveraging platforms such as Facebook, X (formerly Twitter), Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok, he produces short-form videos—often in Hausa with English subtitles—that employ satire and simplified political commentary to dissect issues including corruption, economic disparity, and legislative excess.

This bilingual, cross-cultural style allows Bello to reach diverse audiences – Northern Nigerian youth, who identify with his Hausa idioms and grassroots humour. He also appeals to urban middle classes, who appreciate the cosmopolitan framing of his political critique, and to diaspora Nigerians, who view his content as a bridge to homeland realities. Social media is one of the most important weapons used by Dan Bello in raising and cultivating Nigeria's future leaders and addressing present issues. Social media has given people a new political orientation and amplified their voices in ways that were previously impossible.

Literature Review

Social influence is a concept that refers to a change in an individual's thoughts, feelings, attitudes, or behaviours that results from interaction with another individual or group (Gass&Seiter, 2022). It refers to the behaviour change that one person causes in another, intentionally or unintentionally (Aranson, Wilson, &Akert, 2010). It is "the degree to which an individual perceives that it is important for others to believe that he or she should use the new system" (Venkatesh et al., 2003, p. 4). Social psychologists have long been deeply interested in the concept of social influence, resulting in a robust body of experimental research spanning over half a century. This extensive investigation began with Sherif's (1935), which explored the autokinetic effect, laying the groundwork for subsequent studies in the field. Over the decades, researchers have meticulously identified a wide array of variables, encompassing both personality traits and situational factors, that significantly impact an individual's propensity to influence (Shahzad, 2022).

In essence, the study of social influence and conformity has evolved into a comprehensive field, revealing that human behaviour in group settings is a complex interplay of various personal and environmental factors. Globalisation has led to the hybridisation of culture, making it an increasingly interesting research topic. This reflects the cultural changes in modern society. Globalisation allows for and also causes interaction between cultures worldwide. Consequently, different cultures interact with each other, resulting in a hybrid culture. (Turner, 2023) The process of globalisation has been accelerated by advancements in communication, transportation, and technology on a global scale. (Betz & Hein, 2023) This has increased mutual interaction between cultures worldwide, accelerating cultural hybridisation. Cultural hybridisation within the context of global media has implications for societal norms, individual identity, and cultural diversity.

Drawing upon postcolonial theory and Internet studies to consider TikTok affordances as tools that are relevant to understanding how cultural, national, and religious identities are shaped and presented in digital spaces, Civila and Jaramillo-Dent (2022) found that the memetic and intersectional aspects of the mixed-couple identity emerge as central in the convergent nature of the platform and their lived experiences. The study constitutes the first exploratory analysis of Moroccan-Spanish mixed couples' (self)representations and identity construction as reflected by their TikTok content. This was arrived at through an initial analysis of 8,653 TikTok videos,

which identified 6 creators accounts with more than 10K followers to conduct a deeper multimodal content and discourse analysis of 146 videos. The results enabled the researchers to propose the concept of *performative hybridisation*, which involves discursive markers within these couples' TikTok content that reflect a fluid integration of two cultures, while the pervading visual and narrative components reflect the dominance of one set of identity traits over the other. In this case, Moroccan culture is more prevalent.

Hallin et al. (2023) in their paper – "The Concept of Hybridity in Journalism Studies" argue that the concept of hybridity has played a crucial role in reorienting the field of journalism in response to significant social change processes. The study found that hybridisation has been invoked in three ways: focusing on new media and the blurring of professional boundaries it produces; focusing on global flows of journalistic culture; and a third approach that treats hybridity not as a novel but as quotidian and rooted in the structural context of journalism in general.

To determine whether engagement in online activism during the 2023 Nigerian elections is positively correlated with increased levels of political knowledge among Nigerian youth, and whether the extent of exposure to diverse online information sources mediates the influence of engagement in online activism on political knowledge, Akeusola, (2023) employs a quantitative approach incorporating techniques such as Pearson's correlation and mediation analysis. The findings reveal a significant positive correlation between online activism and political knowledge, substantiating the hypothesis that active participation in digital advocacy enhances political awareness among Nigerian youths. Furthermore, mediation analysis showed that exposure to diverse online information sources mediates the relationship between engagement in online activism and political knowledge, emphasising the role of online platforms as conduits for political information and awareness.

Guided by the Civic Voluntarism Model, Maxwell (2025) explores how resource constraints (time, money, and civic skills), psychological engagement (political efficacy and trust), and recruitment networks influence youth involvement in formal politics. Findings reveal that economic hardship, limited time availability, and widespread disillusionment with political actors significantly hinder youth engagement. Although digital platforms, especially social media, have amplified youth voices, much of this activity remains confined to online spaces and does not translate into offline political participation, reinforcing the concept of slacktivism. Furthermore, the study identifies a misalignment between youth readiness for political involvement and the perceptions held by political elites, who often marginalise youth contributions.The study focuses on youth political participation generally but does not investigate how social media influencers motivate or shape such engagement.

In a survey of 400 respondents, comprising youths in Benin City, the capital of Edo State, Arijeniwa, & Nwaoboli, (2023) found that social media is used during an electioneering campaign to promote aspirants and their political parties to the electorate. The study also found

that social media has been largely successful in its agenda-setting function on political issues in Nigeria, particularly as the 2023 general election campaign begins. In the present era of screen age and social media, every facet of human endeavour has been affected, either covertly or overtly, by the mass media. During this period, social media has had a significantly greater influence on human activities than any other medium.

Ofei et al (2024) reviewed social media as an alternative medium for political participation in Nigeria, investigating diverse demographic groups and their engagement patterns. The research reveals a dynamic social media landscape in Nigeria, with active participation across various age groups. Young adults, especially those aged 25-34, are prominent users, indicating their active involvement in political discussions. Social media platforms serve as vital channels for disseminating political information and mobilising citizens, with roles expanding from basic information sharing to active political campaigning.

Okereke et al. (2024) examined the role of social media in shaping youth political participation in Awka Metropolis, Anambra State, from the perspectives of religious institutions, specifically Catholic and Pentecostal churches. Findings revealed a significant relationship between subjective norms and political participation, as well as perceived usefulness and perceived behavioural control, and political participation. Hence, supporting various theoretical frameworks and empirical literature on youth engagement in politics.

In light of persistent political challenges and social unrest in Nigeria, Ojo and Afolaran (2024) examine the transformative potential of the nation's youth, whose rich history of activism has significantly shaped the country's political landscape. Findings reveal that the role of social media in mobilising Nigerian youth is of particular significance, providing a platform for collective action and amplifying their voices in the public discourse. Despite the undeniable agency demonstrated by Nigerian youth, numerous barriers impede their ability to effect lasting political reform. In response, this paper proposes a strategic framework for empowering Nigerian youth for leadership, encompassing initiatives such as education and awareness campaigns, the creation of spaces for youth representation in government, and the strengthening of youth-led organisations.

Imoka (2023) explores the efforts of an online youth leadership programme “Days of Change”, which succeeded in galvanising, uniting, and engaging Nigerian youth both online and offline, across social, class, and ethnic divides concerning nation-building. The paper demonstrates that online media have become veritable sites of popular urban youth cultures, through which young people negotiate the unstable landscape of post-coloniality imposed by the African state on its vulnerable youth population.

In relating social media usage patterns and their correlation with civic engagement metrics among youths, Ologunebi and Taiwo (2025) found that social media platforms have emerged as critical arenas for political discourse, mobilisation, and activism, enabling citizens to voice their opinions and organise collective actions rapidly. This has been particularly evident in recent

movements advocating for social justice, anti-corruption, and electoral reforms, where digital tools have played a pivotal role in amplifying marginalised voices and challenging prevailing power dynamics.

Okafor et al. (2024) explore how social media facilitates citizen engagement and policymaking in Nigeria and Senegal. Results from the online survey revealed that discussion forums and live Q&A sessions with policymakers were the most effective features for citizen participation. Social media can empower traditionally marginalised voices, but overcoming language barriers and the digital divide is crucial for equitable participation.

Although these studies demonstrated the relationship between online activism and political knowledge among Nigerian youths, youth political participation generally and highlighting social media as a platform for political participation, they pay little attention to the influence of specific digital actors who drive online conversation sit does not. Also, the studies did not investigate how social media influencers motivate or shape such engagement, or examine the role of individual digital influencers in facilitating this process or how social media influencers motivate or shape such engagement. No existing study has specifically examined Dan Bello as a social influencer using cultural hybridisation and networked activism frameworks. This is the gap this study fills.

Methodology

This study adopted a qualitative case study design to examine the social influence strategies and digital activism of Dan Bello. The case study approach was considered appropriate because it allows for an in-depth exploration of a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context.

Data were generated from three sources: (1) an in-depth interview conducted with Dan Bello, (2) analysis of selected social media posts and video content produced by him across platforms such as Facebook, X, YouTube, and TikTok, and (3) documentary materials including media reports and biographical records.

The data were analysed using thematic analysis. The analysis involved identifying recurring themes relating to cultural hybridisation, digital activism, civic engagement, social influence, and network building. Direct quotations from the interview were used to support the identified themes and enhance the credibility of the findings.

Theoretical interpretation was guided by Social Influence Theory, Cultural Hybridisation Theory, and Networked Activism Theory.

Theoretical Framework

Cultural Hybridisation Theory

Cultural hybridisation is a defining characteristic of the contemporary globalised era. It describes the process through which cultures interact, borrow from one another, and evolve into

new identities through adaptation and fusion. Rather than viewing culture as fixed or pure, the concept emphasises its fluid and dynamic nature. Cultural hybridisation occurs when practices, values, beliefs, and symbols from different cultural traditions combine to create new forms of identity and expression.

Scholars such as Stuart Hall, HomiBhabha, Paul Gilroy, and Arjun Appadurai have significantly contributed to the development of the concept. Hall (1990) views culture as a continuous process of becoming, shaped through interaction and historical experiences. Bhabha (1994) conceptualises hybridity as occurring within a "third space" where cultural meanings are negotiated and reconstructed. Gilroy (1993) explains hybridity as the outcome of encounters between different cultures, while Appadurai (1996) argues that global flows of media, ideas, technologies, and people have detached culture from fixed geographical locations, creating new forms of transnational identities.

The theory is relevant to this study because it provides a framework for understanding how Dan Bello's dual Nigerian-American identity enables him to combine local cultural expressions with global communication practices, thereby increasing his influence among diverse audiences.

Networked Activism Theory

The emergence of digital technologies has transformed civic engagement and political participation. Drawing from Habermas' concept of the public sphere and Castells' theory of the network society, networked activism refers to the use of digital communication technologies to facilitate collective action, information sharing, and civic mobilisation.

Digital platforms such as Facebook, X, YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok have become contemporary spaces for public discourse, enabling citizens to exchange ideas, organise activities, and influence public opinion. Unlike traditional activism, networked activism is characterised by decentralisation, rapid information dissemination, and the ability to connect geographically dispersed audiences.

Networked activism is particularly relevant to this study because it explains how Dan Bello uses digital media platforms to amplify civic messages, encourage political conversations, and mobilise audiences beyond conventional media structures.

Social Influence Theory

Social influence refers to changes in an individual's attitudes, beliefs, feelings, or behaviours resulting from interaction with other individuals or groups (Gass&Seiter, 2022). Aronson, Wilson, and Akert (2010) define social influence as the process through which one person intentionally or unintentionally affects another person's behaviour.

Social Influence Theory suggests that individuals are more likely to adopt ideas, opinions, and behaviours when communicated by credible, relatable, and trusted sources. Through

repeated exposure and social interaction, influential individuals can shape perceptions and actions within a society.

The theory is applicable to this study because it explains how Dan Bello's content influences public opinion, political awareness, and civic engagement among his followers through persuasion, identification, and repeated exposure to his messages.

Findings and Discussion

Unless otherwise indicated, all quotations presented in this section were extracted from the in-depth interview conducted with Dan Bello. The data is presented in themes. The themes are organized thus:

1. Cultural Hybridisation as a Source of Social Influence
2. Satirical Communication as a Tool for Civic Education
3. Networked Activism and Digital Mobilisation
4. Ethical Credibility and Trust Building
5. From Entertainment to Civic Engagement

Theme One: Cultural Hybridisation as a Source of Social Influence

The findings reveal that cultural hybridisation constitutes one of the major foundations of Dan Bello's influence. His dual Nigerian-American identity enables him to navigate multiple cultural spaces while communicating effectively with diverse audiences.

Reflecting on his transnational experience, Bello stated:

"America showed me systems that work, Nigeria showed me why we must fix ours."

Similarly, he explained his communication strategy by noting:

"I code-switch for diaspora and elites."

These statements demonstrate how Bello strategically combines global experiences with local realities. His ability to blend Hausa language, Northern Nigerian cultural references, and global media aesthetics allows him to connect with audiences across social and geographical boundaries.

This finding supports Hall's (1990) argument that identity is continuously produced through interaction and experience rather than being fixed. Bello's content represents a practical manifestation of cultural hybridity, where local and global influences converge to create a distinctive communication style. His hybrid identity therefore serves as a source of credibility and broad audience appeal.

Theme Two: Satirical Communication as a Tool for Civic Education

The study found that satire serves as Bello's primary strategy for engaging audiences and communicating complex political issues.

According to Bello:

"Entertainment is bait, but truth is the hook."

He further explained:

"I pick topics that sting the public nerve—what people whisper but fear to shout."

These responses suggest that humour and satire are deliberately employed to simplify governance issues and stimulate public discussion. Rather than presenting political issues in conventional academic or journalistic formats, Bello packages them into short, entertaining, and accessible digital content.

This finding aligns with Social Influence Theory, which posits that individuals are more likely to internalise messages that are relatable and engaging. Bello's use of satire reduces the complexity of political discourse while increasing audience comprehension and participation. Consequently, entertainment becomes a vehicle for civic education and political awareness.

Theme Three: Networked Activism and Digital Mobilisation

The findings indicate that Bello perceives social media as a critical platform for civic engagement and collective action.

Discussing the changing nature of activism, he stated:

> *"I moved to digital because the street is now online—attention lives on TikTok, YouTube and X."*

He further observed:

"If I started today, I would invest earlier in networks—change is faster with a collective."

These statements highlight Bello's understanding of the power of digital connectivity in shaping contemporary activism. Through social media platforms, he reaches audiences across Nigeria and the diaspora while facilitating conversations around governance, accountability, and social justice.

This finding supports Castells' (2012) conception of networked activism, which emphasises the role of digital networks in facilitating mobilisation and participation. Bello's activities demonstrate how online platforms can function as alternative public spheres where citizens engage in civic discourse and challenge dominant narratives.

Theme Four: Ethical Credibility and Trust Building

The findings further reveal that credibility and ethical communication constitute important elements of Bello's influence.

Bello emphasised:

> *"Entertainment is bait, but truth is the hook—misinformation kills credibility, so I fact-check twice."*

He further stated:

> *"Never punch down, never lie, and never glamorise corruption."*

These responses demonstrate a deliberate commitment to accuracy and ethical responsibility in content creation. Bello views trust as a critical resource that sustains audience engagement and influence.

This finding resonates with Habermas' notion of rational public discourse, which emphasises truthfulness and accountability in public communication. In an era characterised by misinformation and digital manipulation, Bello's commitment to ethical communication enhances his legitimacy and strengthens audience trust.

Theme Five: From Entertainment to Civic Engagement

The study found that Bello's influence extends beyond entertainment and contributes to civic engagement and political participation.

According to him:

> *"Impact is when people change action, not just scroll."*

Reflecting on audience reactions, he noted:

> *"I knew it had shifted when people started quoting my skits in political arguments, not just laughing."*

He further observed:

> *"I see ripples—youth groups forming, civic debates heating up, even small protests."*

These statements suggest that Bello's content stimulates critical thinking, public discussion, and collective action among audiences. His influence therefore transcends digital visibility and manifests in tangible civic outcomes.

This finding corroborates previous studies that identify social media as an important platform for political mobilisation and civic participation among Nigerian youth. Bello's activities demonstrate how influencers can function as informal civic educators, encouraging citizens to engage with governance issues and public affairs.

Overall, the findings show that Dan Bello's influence is rooted in a combination of cultural hybridity, satirical communication, digital networking, ethical credibility, and civic engagement. Together, these factors position him as a significant actor within Nigeria's emerging digital public sphere and illustrate the growing role of influencers in shaping political discourse and civic consciousness.

Conclusion

This study examined the phenomenon of social influencing in Nigeria through the case of Dan Bello (Bello Galadanchi), a Nigerian-American filmmaker, content creator, and digital activist. Drawing on Social Influence Theory, Cultural Hybridisation Theory, and Networked Activism, the study explored how Bello's transnational identity, communication strategies, and digital engagement practices have enabled him to emerge as an influential voice within Nigeria's evolving digital public sphere.

The findings reveal that Bello's influence is rooted in three interconnected factors. First, his hybrid cultural identity enables him to bridge local and global perspectives, making his messages accessible to diverse audiences across Nigeria and the diaspora. Second, his use of satire, storytelling, and vernacular communication simplifies complex political and social issues, thereby enhancing audience engagement and political awareness. Third, his strategic use of social media platforms demonstrates the growing significance of networked activism in mobilising public opinion, encouraging civic conversations, and promoting accountability.

The study further demonstrates that contemporary social influencers increasingly function as alternative public intellectuals who shape public discourse outside traditional media institutions. Through the combination of cultural authenticity, digital fluency, and ethical messaging, Dan Bello has transformed entertainment-oriented content into a platform for civic education and social critique. His activities illustrate how social media influencers can contribute to political consciousness and citizen engagement in ways that complement conventional forms of political communication.

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