

## The impact of technology through the influence of parasocial relationships with celebrities and influencers on American voters in the 2024 elections

Technology has allowed us to know and interact with celebrities and influencers much more intrusively, creating parasocial relationships, than before through social media platforms like Twitch and Instagram. Parasocial relationships are seemingly face-to-face relationships between a spectator and a performer (Horton & Wohl, 1956). With parasocial relationships, the spectator may have no or little responsibility or obligation. It is also a mostly a one-sided relationship controlled by the performer (Horton & Wohl, 1956). Technology allows us to consistently access the continuous relationship offered by the performer (Horton & Wohl, 1956) and allows a more intrusive aspect due to the spectator being able to access content by the performer whenever desired.

This intimate bond through parasocial relationships has come into play in the 2024 American elections. A prime example for this case is Taylor Swift and her endorsement for Kamala Harris on Instagram. *National Public Radio*, the American public broadcasting organization, stated “When Taylor Swift speaks, her fans listen” (Sullivan, 2023). Within 24 hours of Swift’s Instagram post pushing her followers to register to vote, 405,999 visitors accessed [Vote.gov](https://www.vote.gov) via the link Swift has posted on her story and more than 52 thousand people registered to vote (Moore, 2024). Swift has “a long history of building a loyal audience” said Stacy Rosenberg (Segal, 2024) and has been interacting with fans since around 2010 on Tumblr (Smith, Intagliata, & Kelly, 2024). Swift’s developed and deeply intimate relationship with her fans allows her to influence her fans into taking action and encouraging her fans to register to vote.



Figure 1 Taylor Swift's Endorsement (Swift, 2024)

Similarly, the nine-time Grammy award winner Billie Eilish, who’s popular with younger audiences, has also endorsed Harris. Eilish said “Vote like your life depends on it – because it does” (Kurtz, 2024) and Eilish’s video received millions of views and likes within hours. Both Eilish and Swift as performers control the relationship with the spectator and hence can influence the viewer’s political ideas as the spectator wants to please the performer and further develop the relationship.

Jenny Odell’s book *How to Do Nothing: Resisting the Attention Economy* (2019) discusses the idea of “doing nothing as an act of political resistance to the attention economy” (p. xi). Odell’s idea of resistance is well present in Hasan Piker’s political commentary as he regularly discusses resisting political ideologies pushed by far-right wing politicians. Hasan Piker is a left-wing political commentator with 2.7 million followers on the streaming platform Twitch and averages over 26 thousand viewers per stream. Piker regularly addresses American topics as well as global issues and uses his platform as a form of resistance against Western mainstream media (Nouri, 2024). Piker’s political commentary being live-streamed regularly allows him to influence his audience’s political ideas and he encourages his audience to vote left wing and to disengage with far-right political news and ideas. Piker pushes his audience to vote in the 2024 American elections and further his audience’s political engagement.

Therefore, technology has influenced everyday human life through media platforms, such as Instagram and Twitch. These media's accessibility and availability allows celebrities like Taylor Swift and Billie Eilish and influencers such as Hasan Piker to develop parasocial relationships with very large audiences as they perform for spectators, which are social media users. Their constant interaction with their huge audiences allows them to develop an influence on their audience, which can be utilized to encourage a large amount of Americans to vote left-wing in the 2024 elections: technologies can influence American voting decisions.

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