The Edu-Influence Evaluation Matrix (EEM): Reframing Credibility in Digital Pedagogy

Ajita Deshmukh
MIT Art Design & Technology University, Pune, India

ajita.deshmukh@mituniversity.edu.in

Abstract: The expansion of platform mediated learning has given rise to educator-influencers who distribute pedagogic, affective, visibility-oriented forms of educational engagement across digital ecosystem. While existing scholarship has examined influencer culture and social media in education separately, there has been limited research on how educational authority, credibility and pedagogic influence are constructed across platforms. This study addresses that gap through a qualitative exploratory analysis of select educator influencers operating across YouTube, Instagram and LinkedIn. Drawing on theories of micro-celebrity, networked scholarship and affective publics, the study examines how pedagogic intent, visibility practices and credibility signals are operationalised within platform specific environments. Using structured qualitative content analysis, this study analyses a purposive sample of Indian educator-influencers while drawing selectively on international educator influencers for contextual references. The findings demonstrate clear platform differentiation.: YouTube emerged as the primary site of pedagogic depth and structured instruction; Instagram functioned as affective-relational ecosystem centred on aspiration, community engagement while LinkedIn continued to operate as a space of institutional legitimacy and professional growth. The study further identifies a distinction between learner-facing and professional-facing forms of educational influence, revealing how pedagogic, relational and visibility labour are strategically distributed across platforms. From these empirical patterns, the study develops the Edu-Influence Evaluation Matrix (EEM), comprising three analytical domains: pedagogic intent, visibility practices and credibility signals. The EEM offers a platform-sensitive framework for evaluating educational influence beyond engagement metrics, with implications for researchers, educational institutions and policymakers in increasingly algorithmic learning environments.

Keywords: Educator–Influencers, Digital Pedagogy, Platform Affordances, Educational Influence, Credibility, Microlearning, Edu-Influence Evaluation Matrix

1. Introduction

The digital transformation of education has dramatically expanded the avenues through which learners access knowledge, interact with instructors, and engage with learning communities. Among the most significant developments in this shift is the rise of educator–influencers—teachers who leverage social media platforms to cultivate large, engaged audiences beyond formal institutional settings. These educators operate at the intersection of pedagogy, affect, and visibility, constructing digital personas that influence learner motivation, engagement, and, in some cases, academic outcomes (Marwick, 2015; Senft, 2013). While influencer culture has been widely examined in commercial and lifestyle domains, the phenomenon of edu-influencers remains under-theorized, particularly in relation to how credibility, trust, and pedagogic authority are constructed in digital environments (Greenhow & Lewin, 2016; Jenkins et al., 2016).

Edu-influencers differ from traditional educators in that their authority is not solely derived from institutional affiliation or formal credentials. Instead, it is co-constructed through platform affordances, audience interaction, and sustained visibility. Platforms such as YouTube enable structured instructional delivery, including conceptual scaffolding and problem-solving sequences, while Instagram facilitates microlearning, affective engagement, and community-building practices. In contrast, professional-facing platforms such as LinkedIn tend to emphasize institutional positioning, leadership discourse, and personal branding, often with limited direct engagement with learners (Veletsianos & Kimmons, 2012; Beer & Burrows, 2013). This distinction raises a critical question: where is meaningful educational influence actually produced within the contemporary social media ecosystem?

The Indian context provides a particularly compelling site for examining this question. Edu-influencers such as PhysicsWallah (Alakh Pandey), Gagan Pratap, and Mohammad Kashif (Dear Sir/Apni Kaksha) have built extensive learner communities, particularly among first-generation and socioeconomically marginalised students. Their content ecosystems typically position YouTube as the primary pedagogic engine, while Instagram functions as an affective-relational layer, amplifying narratives of struggle, aspiration, and achievement. International educators such as Sal Khan (Khan Academy) and Ali Abdaal similarly demonstrate how platform affordances can be strategically leveraged to combine accessibility, instructional clarity, and audience engagement.

Despite their growing significance, systematic frameworks for evaluating edu-influencer impact remain limited. Existing research often privileges quantitative metrics such as follower counts, views, and engagement rates,

which do not adequately capture pedagogic quality, relational trust, or credibility construction. At the same time, evolving debates around platform governance, misinformation, and digital accountability have intensified concerns regarding expertise, credibility and learner protection in online educational environments (Gillespie, 2018; Bucher,2018).

This study addresses this gap through the development of the Edu-Influence Evaluation Matrix (EEM), a qualitative analytical framework designed to evaluate educational influence across three dimensions: pedagogic intent, visibility practices, and credibility signals. Rather than treating influence as synonymous with popularity, the EEM enables differentiation between instructional depth, affective engagement, and professional visibility.

The study is guided by three objectives:

- To analyse how edu-influencers operationalise pedagogic intent, visibility practices and.." credibility signals across social media platforms.
- To examine how platform affordances shape learner-facing and professional-facing educational influence
- To develop the Edu-influence Evaluation Matrix [EEM] as an evaluative framework for analysing educational influence in platform mediated learning environments

By combining qualitative content analysis with emergent framework development, this study contributes to both theory and practice. Theoretically, it extends micro-celebrity theory, networked scholarship, and affective public frameworks to the domain of digital pedagogy. Practically, it offers actionable insights for educators, administrators, and policymakers seeking to understand, evaluate, and optimise educational influence in social media environments.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1 The Rise of Edu-Influencers in Platformed Education

The expansion of platform-mediated learning has blurred distinctions between formal and informal education. Social media platforms increasingly function as parallel learning infrastructures, particularly in exam-oriented systems. In India, the proliferation of low-cost mobile internet has enabled educators to bypass institutional gatekeeping and reach large learner populations directly.

Edu-influencers differ from traditional content creators in three keyways:

- Sustained instructional continuity rather than isolated content
- Strong relational engagement with learners
- Hybrid roles as educators, entrepreneurs, and community builders

This hybridity necessitates a theoretical framework that integrates pedagogy, visibility, and relational dynamics.

2.2 Micro-Celebrity and Performed Pedagogic Authority

Micro-celebrity theory conceptualises online influence as a strategic practice involving visibility management, authenticity performance, and audience engagement (Marwick, 2015; Senft, 2013). In educational contexts, this performativity intersects with epistemic authority. Edu-influencers must simultaneously signal expertise and accessibility, balancing instructional rigour with relatability.

Unlike lifestyle influencers, however, educational credibility cannot rely solely on personality. Pedagogic clarity, conceptual depth, and demonstrable learner outcomes remain central to legitimacy.

2.3 Networked Scholarship and Distributed Learning

Networked scholarship highlights the distributed nature of knowledge production in digital environments (Veletsianos & Kimmons, 2012). In edu-influencer ecosystems, learners actively participate through comments, live interactions, and peer validation. Authority is therefore not solely credential-based but is co-constructed through ongoing engagement.

2.4 Affective Publics and Relational Infrastructure

The concept of affective publics (Papacharissi, 2015) provides insight into the role of emotion in digital learning environments. Platforms such as Instagram facilitate narratives of aspiration, struggle, and success, fostering community cohesion and sustained engagement.

In high-stakes educational contexts, affective validation often precedes cognitive engagement. Instagram thus operates as a relational infrastructure supporting pedagogic ecosystems anchored elsewhere.

2.5 Platform Affordances and Activation of Influence

Different platforms afford distinct forms of influence:

- YouTube: instructional depth and conceptual scaffolding
- Instagram: microlearning and relational engagement
- LinkedIn: professional visibility and institutional legitimacy

Educational influence is therefore platform-dependent and must be analysed accordingly.

2.6 Towards the Edu-Influence Evaluation Matrix (EEM)

Synthesising these perspectives suggests that educational influence is multidimensional. The EEM emerges as a framework that operationalises this complexity by examining how pedagogic intent, visibility practices, and credibility signals interact across platforms.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative exploratory research design employing structured content analysis to examine how educators–influencers operationalise pedagogy, credibility, and visibility across social media platforms. The study is interpretivist in orientation, seeking to understand how educational influence is constructed, performed, and perceived within digital ecosystems (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Rather than testing a pre-existing framework, the study develops the Edu-Influence Evaluation Matrix (EEM) inductively through iterative analysis. The EEM is thus positioned as an emergent analytical construct, developed through repeated cycles of coding, comparison, and theoretical alignment (Charmaz, 2014), drawing on micro-celebrity theory (Marwick, 2015), networked scholarship (Veletsianos & Kimmons, 2012), and affective publics (Papacharissi, 2015).

The research design integrates:

- Cross-platform comparison
- Iterative thematic coding
- Framework emergence through analytic abstraction
- Theory-informed interpretation: This structure ensures methodological transparency and theoretical grounding while preserving exploratory flexibility.

3.2 Research Questions

The study is guided by the following research questions:

RQ1: How do educator–influencers operationalise pedagogic intent, visibility practices, and credibility signals across YouTube, Instagram, and LinkedIn?

RQ2: What platform-specific affordances shape the construction of educational influence?

RQ3: How does learner-facing engagement differ from professional-facing visibility in the production of educational impact?

RQ4: How can the Edu-Influence Evaluation Matrix (EEM) emerge as a structured evaluative framework from empirical patterns observed in educator content?

These research questions are embedded within the methodological process and inform sampling, coding, and analytical synthesis.

3.3 Sampling Strategy

A purposive sampling strategy was employed to identify educator–influencers meeting the following criteria:

1. Primary focus on educational content (exam preparation, conceptual teaching, academic skill-building)
2. Active presence on at least two social media platforms
3. Demonstrable learner engagement (comments, testimonials, community interaction)
4. Minimum follower/subscriber base indicating sustained influence

The sample included Indian educator–influencers with strong learner-facing presence:

- PhysicsWallah (Alakh Pandey)
- Gagan Pratap (Mathematics)
- Mohammad Kashif (Dear Sir / Apni Kaksha)

For comparative contextualisation, international educators such as Sal Khan and Ali Abdaal were examined selectively to illustrate global parallels. The Indian cases were prioritised due to their relevance in democratising access to education for rural and first-generation learners.

3.4 Data Corpus

Data were collected from three primary platforms:

- YouTube (long-form pedagogic delivery)
- Instagram (microlearning, stories, relational engagement)
- LinkedIn (professional positioning and brand visibility)

The corpus included:

- 30 YouTube videos (10 per primary Indian educator)
- 45 Instagram posts and stories (15 per educator)
- 15 LinkedIn posts (across all educators where applicable)

Sampling focused on content posted between January 2024- February 2025 to capture contemporary platform practices.

The unit of analysis in this study is the individual content artefact (video, post, or story), rather than the creator account as a whole.

The unit of analysis included:

- Video structure and sequencing
- Caption content
- Engagement strategies (calls-to-action, learner prompts)
- Comment interactions
- Visual branding and thumbnails
- Credential references

The study is non-interventionist and relies exclusively on publicly accessible content.

3.5 Data Analysis Procedure

3.5.1 Phase 1: Open Coding

Initial coding was conducted inductively. Codes emerged around:

- Conceptual clarity
- Stepwise scaffolding
- Emotional storytelling

- Student testimonials
- Thumbnail optimisation
- Credential signalling
- Platform-specific affordances

This phase generated approximately 45 preliminary codes.

3.5.2 Phase 2: Axial Coding

Codes were clustered into broader thematic domains. Three stable clusters consistently emerged across platforms:

1. Pedagogic Intent
2. Visibility Practices
3. Credibility Signals: These clusters became the foundational domains of the emerging EEM.

3.5.3 Phase 3: Selective Coding and Theoretical Alignment

The three domains were refined into structured sub-criteria informed by theory:

- Micro-celebrity theory → relational labour, audience intimacy
- Networked scholarship → participatory engagement
- Affective publics → emotional resonance
- Platform governance studies → algorithmic visibility: This stage transformed thematic groupings into evaluative indicators.

3.6 Emergence of the Edu-Influence Evaluation Matrix (EEM)

The EEM emerged through iterative abstraction. Rather than pre-defining indicators, the matrix was constructed through:

1. Cross-case comparison
2. Cross-platform differentiation
3. Theoretical anchoring
4. Repeated refinement of operational indicators

The final structure includes three domains with layered sub-criteria:

3.6.1 Pedagogic Intent

- Conceptual clarity
- Instructional scaffolding
- Assessment integration
- Cognitive engagement prompts
- Microlearning adaptation
- Continuity across episodes

3.6.2 Visibility Practices

- Thumbnail and caption optimisation
- Posting frequency
- Cross-platform linking
- Call-to-action mechanisms
- Algorithm-aware structuring
- Audience segmentation strategies

3.6.3 Credibility Signals

- Qualification disclosure
- Evidence citation
- Transparency practices

- Student outcome narratives
- Relational authenticity
- Community trust markers

Each indicator was operationalised through observable content markers. For example:

- Stepwise numerical problem-solving sequences → coded under "Instructional scaffolding"
- Student rank announcements with parental testimonials → coded under "Community trust markers"
- LinkedIn award announcements → coded under "Professional credential signalling"

Thus, the EEM is not imposed but analytically derived.

Table 1:

Domain	Analytical Focus	Key Indicators	Primary Platform Activation
Pedagogic Depth	Cognitive scaffolding and instructional quality	Structured explanation, conceptual sequencing, worked examples, exam alignment	YouTube (High), Instagram (Low–Moderate)
Affective–Relational Infrastructure	Community formation and emotional anchoring	Student testimonials, motivational narratives, gratitude signalling, accessibility cues	Instagram (High), YouTube (Moderate)
Credibility Signalling	Legitimacy construction and authority performance	Qualifications, outcomes, institutional partnerships, transparency markers	LinkedIn (High), YouTube (Moderate)
Visibility & Platform Strategy	Algorithmic optimisation and audience amplification	Posting frequency, thumbnails, hooks, calls-to-action	All platforms (Varied intensity)

3.7 Trustworthiness and Rigour

To enhance credibility and dependability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), the study employed:

- Iterative coding cycles
- Cross-platform triangulation
- Theory-guided interpretation
- Transparent indicator operationalisation: While single-researcher coding was conducted, repeated re-analysis reduced interpretive drift.

3.8 Ethical Considerations

All data were drawn from publicly accessible content. No private data were accessed. The study focuses on public performance and educational communication rather than individual profiling. Educator names are referenced due to their public academic visibility and established institutional identities.

3.9 Methodological Contribution

The principal methodological contribution of this study is the development of the EEM as an emergent evaluative framework, grounded in empirical patterns rather than speculative theorisation. Unlike prior studies that focus on engagement metrics alone (likes, views, follower counts), this study operationalises qualitative dimensions of educational influence, including pedagogic depth, relational labour, and credibility construction.

The EEM thus serves as:

- An analytical lens
- A comparative evaluative tool
- A policy-relevant assessment framework

- A theoretical bridge between influencer studies and digital pedagogy

4. Findings and Discussion

The findings are organised in relation to the research questions, while simultaneously advancing an integrated analytical discussion. Rather than imposing the Edu-Influence Evaluation Matrix (EEM) a priori, the analysis first identifies recurring empirical patterns across platforms. The EEM is then shown to emerge as a structured abstraction of these patterns.

4.1 Platform-Differentiated Educational Practice

A consistent pattern emerged across cases: platform affordances strongly shape how educational influence is enacted. This reinforces the argument that social media platforms are not neutral channels but structured environments that shape communication practices and visibility (Bucher, 2018; Cotter, 2019).

1. YouTube: Structured Pedagogic Authority

Across the educator–influencers studied, YouTube functions as the primary site of instructional depth Videos typically include clearly stated objectives, stepwise problem-solving demonstrations, board-based conceptual explanations, and structured sequencing of content (definition → example → practice → recap). Video titles frequently employed exam-oriented framing such as “Last Minute Tips” and “How to Study,” while thumbnails used urgency cues including “Key Points,” “Don’t Lose Hope,” and “Do It Now.” Extended video durations (20–60 minutes) allow for cognitive pacing and scaffolded instruction.

This aligns closely with multimedia learning theory, which emphasises segmentation, scaffolding, and cognitive load management in video-based instruction (Mayer, 2014; Fiorella & Mayer, 2018). The pedagogic rhythm observed across cases resembles formal classroom instruction, with deliberate pacing and explicit moments for clarification.

At the same time, the sustained presence and recognisable teaching style contribute to the construction of micro-celebrity authority, where visibility and expertise are co-performed over time (Marwick, 2015). However, unlike lifestyle influencers, authority here is anchored in demonstrable instructional competence rather than personality alone.

Across cases, YouTube exhibited high pedagogic density, explicit instructional sequencing, and a predominantly formal teaching persona, with limited emphasis on affective storytelling during core instruction. YouTube therefore functions as the primary pedagogic domain within the platform ecosystem.

2. Instagram: Affective Community and Microlearning

Instagram presents a markedly different pattern. Pedagogic depth is largely displaced by affective and relational content, including student success stories, motivational narratives, and community-building posts.

This shift can be understood through the lens of affective publics, where emotional expression and shared narratives generate collective belonging and sustained engagement (Papacharissi, 2015). Instagram operates as a relational infrastructure in which learners connect not only with content but with identity, aspiration, and community.

Posts frequently foregrounded narratives of aspiration and social mobility through phrases such as “first doctor from the village,” “AIR rank,” and “dream fulfilled. The emphasis on storytelling, gratitude, and student journeys reflects forms of relational labour characteristic of influencer culture, where authenticity and emotional proximity are strategically cultivated (Abidin, 2021; Duffy & Wissinger, 2017). These practices strengthen learner attachment, even in the absence of deep instructional content.

Microlearning elements do appear in the form of short reels and conceptual snippets. However, consistent with existing research, these function more effectively as reinforcement tools rather than standalone pedagogic units (Major & Calandrino, 2018; Hayes et al., 2020).

Thus, Instagram is best understood not as a primary site of instruction, but as an affective–relational ecosystem that sustains engagement with the pedagogic core located elsewhere.

LinkedIn: Professional Visibility and Institutional Legitimacy. LinkedIn presents a distinct communicative shift, characterised by professionalised tone, institutional positioning, and thought leadership discourse. Content typically includes organisational milestones, strategic reflections, and professional insights.

This aligns with networked scholarship, where digital platforms are used to construct professional identity, visibility, and legitimacy within broader knowledge networks (Veletsianos & Kimmons, 2012). However, unlike learner-facing platforms, LinkedIn shows limited interactive engagement and minimal direct pedagogic activity.

The emphasis here is on institutional credibility rather than instructional practice. This was reflected through recurring discourse centred on terms such as “vision,” “growth,” “mission,” and “impact,” often framed through institutional milestones, partnerships, and expansion announcements. As such, LinkedIn functions primarily as a stakeholder-facing platform, reinforcing legitimacy and professional authority rather than facilitating learning.

4.2 Emergent Domains of Educational Influence

Across platforms, three recurring domains consistently structured educational influence: pedagogic intent, visibility practices, and credibility signals. These domains emerged inductively but align strongly with existing theoretical frameworks.

4.2.1 Pedagogic Intent

Pedagogic intent was most visible through structured explanation, scaffolding, and progressive difficulty. This reflects principles of effective instructional design and multimedia learning (Mayer, 2014).

Importantly, pedagogic intent was highly platform-dependent. YouTube consistently demonstrated strong instructional structuring, while Instagram and LinkedIn showed limited explicit pedagogic organisation. This reinforces the argument that educational practices are shaped by platform affordances rather than solely by educator intention.

4.2.2 Visibility Practices

Visibility practices included thumbnail optimisation, caption strategies, emotional hooks, and algorithm-aware posting frequency. These practices reflect the logic of algorithmic visibility, where content must be structured to align with platform dynamics in order to reach audiences (Bucher, 2018; Cotter, 2019).

Instagram, in particular, demonstrated strong deployment of visibility strategies through reels, hashtags, and emotionally resonant narratives. These practices are consistent with micro-celebrity strategies that prioritise attention management and audience engagement (Marwick, 2015).

Visibility practices emerged as analytically distinct from pedagogic intent, though they occasionally intersect, particularly in the use of hooks to draw learners into longer instructional content.

4.2.3 Credibility Signals

Credibility was communicated through qualifications, institutional affiliations, student outcomes, and testimonial narratives. In the Indian context, credibility is strongly outcome-driven, often tied to examination success and student achievements.

This aligns with emerging understandings of hybrid digital authority, where legitimacy is constructed through a combination of formal credentials and visible impact (O’Meara et al., 2008). Credibility is therefore not static but continuously performed and reinforced through content and community interaction.

4.3 Learner-Facing vs Professional-Facing Influence (RQ3)

A clear bifurcation emerged between learner-facing and professional-facing platforms. YouTube and Instagram prioritised direct engagement, emotional connection, and instructional support, while LinkedIn emphasised institutional communication and professional discourse.

This distinction reflects broader shifts in digital education, where learning increasingly occurs within informal, networked environments rather than exclusively within institutional structures (Greenhow & Lewin, 2016; Jenkins et al., 2016).

Instagram further amplifies aspirational narratives, embedding pedagogy within broader socio-cultural contexts of mobility and identity. This resonates with scholarship on digital aspiration and mediated achievement (Banaji & Buckingham, 2013).

Thus, educational influence is not uniformly distributed but strategically segmented across platforms and audiences.

4.4 Microlearning and Platform Adaptation

Short-form content such as reels and shorts reflects adaptation to reduced attention spans and algorithmic pressures. These formats prioritise brevity, repetition, and engagement.

However, consistent with microlearning literature, such content functions most effectively as reinforcement rather than replacement for structured instruction (Major & Calandrino, 2018; Hayes et al., 2020). This supports the observed pattern in which long-form platforms retain pedagogic depth while short-form platforms enhance visibility and engagement.

4.5 Emergence of the Edu-Influence Evaluation Matrix (RQ4)

From these empirical patterns, three domains consistently emerged in the construction of educational influence: pedagogic intent, visibility practices, and credibility signals. These domains were not evenly distributed across platforms but were differentially activated based on platform affordances and audience expectations.

The Edu-Influence Evaluation Matrix (EEM) therefore emerged as a structured analytical abstraction grounded in empirical observation and theoretical synthesis. The domains operated distinctly across platforms:

- YouTube → Pedagogic Dominant
- Instagram → Relational and Visibility Dominant
- LinkedIn → Professional Credibility Dominant

This differentiation necessitates an evaluative framework capable of distinguishing pedagogic depth, algorithmic popularity, and institutional legitimacy.

The EEM constitutes the primary intellectual contribution of this study. It extends existing research by integrating insights from micro-celebrity theory, networked scholarship, and digital pedagogy into a unified evaluative model. Unlike approaches that prioritise engagement metrics, the EEM enables multidimensional assessment of educational influence across platform ecologies.

Importantly, the framework does not position visibility as antithetical to pedagogy, nor does it equate popularity with educational value. Instead, it offers a structured mechanism to evaluate how pedagogic, relational, and credibility dimensions are distributed, balanced, and operationalised.

5. Implications for Stakeholders

The findings indicate that educational influence in digital environments is stratified across platforms and cannot be adequately assessed through follower counts, brand visibility, or institutional presence alone. The Edu-Influence Evaluation Matrix (EEM) therefore offers differentiated value for multiple stakeholders operating within expanding digital education ecosystems.

5.1 Implications for Researchers

For scholars of digital pedagogy, influencer culture, and platform studies, the EEM provides a structured analytical scaffold for examining educators–influencers beyond descriptive case narratives. Existing literature has tended to focus either on micro-celebrity practices or institutional social media strategies; comparatively less attention has been given to how pedagogic authority is operationalised within learner-facing environments.

The EEM enables systematic, cross-platform analysis of:

- Pedagogic depth
- Relational infrastructure
- Credibility signalling
- Visibility strategies

By analytically separating these domains, researchers can identify where influence is enacted and for whom. Crucially, this enables differentiation between professional visibility (e.g., LinkedIn discourse) and direct pedagogic engagement (e.g., YouTube instruction). The framework thus supports longitudinal, cross-cultural, and comparative research across disciplines and contexts.

5.2 Implications for Educational Institutions and EdTech Organisations

For universities and EdTech organisations, the findings reveal a critical strategic misalignment: professional-facing visibility does not necessarily translate into learner-facing pedagogic influence.

While institutional efforts often prioritise LinkedIn presence and brand amplification, meaningful educational engagement—conceptual explanation, motivational anchoring, and community-building—occurs predominantly on learner-facing platforms.

The EEM can therefore function as an internal audit tool, enabling organisations to distinguish between:

- Pedagogic outreach (instructional value delivered to learners)
- Relational engagement (community formation and affective anchoring)
- Brand amplification (institutional signalling and scale visibility)
- Professional positioning (ecosystem legitimacy and partnerships)

Such differentiation is essential in competitive educational environments where digital presence increasingly shapes enrolment decisions and reputation. The matrix enables alignment between platform strategy and educational mission.

5.3 Implications for Policymakers and Regulatory Bodies

As digital education ecosystems expand, questions of credibility, accountability, and expertise have gained urgency. Emerging regulatory signals in global contexts reflect growing concern about misinformation and commercialised influence in high-stakes domains such as education.

This study suggests that policy discussions require evaluative frameworks capable of distinguishing:

- Domain expertise
- Pedagogic integrity
- Commercial visibility
- Algorithmic popularity

The EEM offers a structured baseline for such differentiation. Rather than relying solely on credentials or engagement metrics, regulatory approaches may benefit from incorporating multi-dimensional indicators of pedagogic practice and transparency.

Importantly, the findings indicate that epistemic influence is primarily exercised within learner-facing platforms. Regulatory frameworks that overlook platform-specific dynamics risk conflating institutional visibility with actual instructional impact.

5.4 Implications for Students and Parents

For students and parents navigating competitive examination ecosystems, platform literacy becomes critical. Educational value is not located within a single platform; rather, pedagogic substance and relational trust are distributed across learner-facing environments.

YouTube functions as the primary site of instructional depth, offering structured explanation, conceptual scaffolding, and exam-aligned learning. Instagram, by contrast, operates as an affective–relational infrastructure, providing community signals, motivational reinforcement, and credibility through student narratives.

A practical evaluative approach emerges:

A) Assess pedagogic depth on YouTube:

- Are concepts explained step-by-step?
- Are examples solved transparently?

- Is there continuity across lessons?
- Are outcomes visible?

B) Assess relational credibility on Instagram:

- Are testimonials consistent and credible?
- Is the educator responsive?
- Does the community appear sustained and supportive?

LinkedIn, in contrast, primarily signals institutional positioning and is less relevant for evaluating day-to-day pedagogic competence.

The EEM thus functions as a practical evaluation guide, enabling learners and families to triangulate pedagogic quality with relational trust, rather than relying on superficial popularity indicators.

6. Conclusion

This study set out to examine how educator–influencers construct and distribute educational influence across social media platforms, and whether such practices can be systematically evaluated. The findings demonstrate that educational influence is not a singular or stable attribute, but a platform-mediated construct shaped by affordances, audience expectations, and strategic communication practices.

A central contribution of the study is the identification of a structural differentiation between learner-facing and professional-facing ecosystems. YouTube emerges as the primary site of pedagogic depth, characterised by structured explanation and instructional scaffolding. Instagram functions as an affective–relational infrastructure, sustaining learner motivation, trust, and community belonging. LinkedIn, in contrast, operates as a space of institutional legitimacy and professional visibility, with limited direct pedagogic engagement.

Across these platforms, three analytically distinct but interrelated domains consistently structure educational influence: pedagogic intent, visibility practices, and credibility signals. These domains do not operate uniformly; rather, they are distributed across platforms in ways that reflect both algorithmic logics and audience needs.

The Edu-Influence Evaluation Matrix (EEM) emerges from this patterned differentiation as a structured analytical framework. Rather than equating influence with popularity or credentials alone, the EEM enables a multi-dimensional evaluation of educational practice, distinguishing between instructional depth, relational engagement, and visibility optimisation. In doing so, it bridges a critical gap between influencer studies and digital pedagogy.

The study also highlights the need to move beyond reductive binaries such as “serious educator” versus “commercial influencer.” Educators–influencers operate as hybrid pedagogic actors, navigating the demands of teaching, visibility, and audience engagement within platformed environments. Their authority is not given, but continuously negotiated through performance, interaction, and demonstrable outcomes.

While the study is exploratory and contextually grounded in the Indian education ecosystem, its conceptual implications extend to broader global discussions on digital learning, platform governance, and educational credibility. Future research may build on the EEM through larger samples, longitudinal analysis, and cross-cultural comparison, as well as through integration with learner outcome data.

In an era where educational access, aspiration, and authority are increasingly mediated by digital platforms, the ability to critically evaluate educational influence becomes essential. The EEM offers one such approach, analytically grounded, platform-sensitive, and responsive to the evolving realities of social media–mediated education.

Ethical Considerations

All data were drawn from publicly accessible content. No private data were accessed. The study focuses on public performance and educational communication rather than individual profiling. Educator names are referenced due to their public academic visibility and established institutional identities.

AI Declaration

The paper has utilised the AI tools such as Quill Bot, GPT, Grammarly for paraphrasing to fit the word limit, devising key words, and for grammar and language.

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