

Are digital political influencers opinion leaders? The role played by people in the flow of digital communication

Influenciadores digitais de política são líderes de opinião? O papel exercido pelas pessoas no fluxo da comunicação digital

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ABSTRACT: The part played by people in the flow of mass communication is the subtitle of the classic book written by Elihu Katz and Paul Lazarsfeld, published in 1955: *Personal Influence*. In it, the authors give greater density to the concept of opinion leaders in order to understand how messages produced, reproduced, and circulated on a mass scale exert their effects on public opinion through fundamental social mediations. In the era of digital communication, the current almost exclusive concentration of research on structural characteristics, affordances, curation systems, and generative tools has drawn greater attention to what communication does to people, instead of what people do with communication and, more specifically, to the roles that individuals occupying prominent positions in networks of digital relationships have played in contemporary public debate: the (digital) political influencers. As part of an initial effort of bibliographic organization, this article aims to analyze how the literature dedicated to political influencers defines this social category, especially with regard to its relationship with the classic concept of opinion leadership. The central question is: are we dealing with a new phenomenon, or merely a new version of something long known, catalogued, and theoretically organized?

Keywords: political influencers; democracy; opinion leaders.

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RESUMO: O papel exercido pelas pessoas no fluxo da comunicação de massa é o subtítulo do livro clássico escrito por Eliah Katz e Paul Lazarsfeld, publicado em 1955: *Personal Influence*. Nele, a dupla de autores dá maior densidade ao conceito de líderes de opinião para que se compreenda como as mensagens produzidas, reproduzidas e circuladas massivamente exercem seus efeitos na opinião pública por meio de mediações sociais fundamentais. Na era da comunicação digital, a atual concentração quase exclusiva da pesquisa em características estruturais, *affordances*, sistemas de curadoria e ferramentas generativas tem convocado maior atenção não ao que a comunicação faz com as pessoas, mas ao que as pessoas fazem com a comunicação e, mais especificamente, a que papéis indivíduos com posições de destaque em redes de relações digitais têm exercido no debate público contemporâneo: os influenciadores digitais de política. Como parte de um esforço inicial de organização bibliográfica, este artigo carrega o propósito de analisar como a bibliografia dedicada aos *political influencers* define essa categoria social, principalmente no que diz respeito à relação com o conceito clássico de lideranças de opinião. A pergunta central é: estamos a tratar de um novo fenômeno ou apenas uma nova versão de algo há muito conhecido, catalogado e teoricamente organizado?

Palavras-chave: influenciadores digitais de política; democracia; líderes de opinião.

Introduction

The world has been undergoing a rapid and widespread process of digitalization of the social, economic, cultural, and political dimensions of human interactions. Each of these dimensions has certain specificities inherent to the nature of the relationships that constitute them. However, it is possible to highlight a common element that unites them and expresses, perhaps, one of the most important phenomena of the digital age: *the part played by people in the flow of online communication*.

The italicized emphasis in the last sentence of the paragraph above does not serve to highlight a fundamental concept or conclusion of the text, but rather to link this observation to a phenomenon that has been cataloged, conceptually structured, and widely absorbed for more than half a century in communication theories and in political science and communication: opinion leaders. “The part played by the people in the flow of mass communication” is the subtitle of the book *Personal Influence*, written by Elihu Katz and Paul Lazarsfeld, originally published in 1955.

In it, the authors present results and reflections stemming from field research that have given even greater theoretical and empirical robustness to the concept of opinion leadership, originally conceived in the study conducted in Erie County, Ohio, which gave rise to the book *The People's Choice: How the Voter Makes Up His Mind in a Presidential Campaign*, by Paul Lazarsfeld, Bernard Berelson, and Hazel Gaudet, published in 1948. As Dubois and Gaffney (2014, p. 1,274) emphasize, “the notion of opinion leadership was seminal in the field of media studies and political communication because it connected theories of community and group dynamics to theories of mass media and political messaging”.

For purely contextual and introductory purposes, the concept of opinion leader, in its classical sense, can be defined as those individuals who serve as a link between the mass media outlets and the general public. It would be up to opinion leaders to act as mediators, allowing different

entities that produce information, news, and mass content to reach an audience that, for various reasons — such as a lack of interest in specific topics — would not be reached by their messages spontaneously.

In other words, this perspective argues that opinion leaders function as channels capable of guiding — as the etymological nature of the expression suggests — the course or flow of mass communication currents. As is widely known in many subfields of the Humanities, the concept of opinion leadership forges one of the most important explanatory models in communication theories: the two-step communication model, or, in the original Anglo-Saxon spelling, the two-step flow model of communication (WOLF, 2008).

This model tends to be, to a large extent, the most striking emblem of this school of research commonly referred to as “administrative research” because it adds to studies on the influence of media the dynamics of mediation in social relations and interactions through which media messages circulate. Thus, the social fabric that serves as the carpet upon which news, information, and content unfold becomes central to understanding the processes of public opinion formation in societies whose social, economic, cultural, and political systems are becoming increasingly tied to mass communication.

Almost a century before the investigations by researchers at Columbia University, John Stuart Mill (2017) — albeit with a generous dose of pessimism and displeasure — had already detected the “revolutionary” potential of opinion leaders in the flow of information in the age of print communication:

And what is still greater novelty, the mass do not now take their opinions from dignitaries in Church or State, from ostensible leaders, or from books. Their thinking is done for them by men much like themselves, addressing them or speaking in their name, on the spur of the moment, through the newspapers (STUART MILL, 2017, p. 155).

John Stuart Mill (2017) was definitely not concerned with making a philosophical (and perhaps groundbreaking) contribution to the

formation of a theory that encompassed an explanatory model of the interrelation between mass communication and the formation of public opinion. In the passage quoted above, Stuart Mill (2017) describes a moment of historical transformation in which traditional instances and institutions with the capacity for political influence, such as the Church, the State, and public authorities, give way to a new social category of political influencers: opinion leaders, in the very sense coined almost a century later.

Although imbued with somewhat platonic epistemological concerns, since the English philosopher laments what he understands to be a “collective mediocrity” governing public opinion, Stuart Mill’s reflections (2017) are nothing more than the detection of the emergence of fundamental elements that ended up realizing some liberal and democratic principles, such as the very notion of self-government and the free market of ideas: the rise of leaders originating from the sphere of citizenship itself — devoid of the emblems of religious and aristocratic distinction — that, through mass print communication, dethrone traditional institutions and authorities from the almost exclusive position of political influence on a massive scale.

To a large extent, mass media outlets have absorbed these influencers into their own operational structures and business model by selecting certain individuals and elevating them to the position of columnists and commentators. This model is also linked, originally, to the bourgeois opinion press itself and, in a certain way, to the party press — ventures that largely structured the liberal and, later, democratic experiences of the modern public sphere, as theoretically characterized by Wilson Gomes (2004).

In the current context, the dynamics of public opinion formation would dispense with the fluid capacity to articulate ideas, visions, and interpretations of information and news coming from traditional media outlets, in conjunction with the broad social interactions of opinion leaders in their classical sense. In this sense, “The mass context is still important, but more as an affirming echo chamber than as a social cueing system” (BENNETT; MANHEIM, 2006, p. 215).

Although these researchers are accurate in characterizing the current fragmented state of the public sphere — somehow fractured and constituted by political and ideological niches formed by tribes resistant to the onslaught of contradiction and information and news that clash with the beliefs of their groups —, a new category of social subjects has undoubtedly become notable for conducting, to varying degrees, the discussions, debates, conversations, controversies, clashes, opinion climates, and political mobilizations that take shape in the flows of information and communication in digital environments and overflow from them into arenas ranging from family environments to decision-making bodies that affect the entire political community: digital influencers.

This phenomenon has consistently brought to light the concept of opinion leaders in the literature dedicated, in particular, to political influencers active on digital platforms. And perhaps such leaders represent one of the most striking indicators of how political communication in the digital age has been defined by the logic of political and ideological niches. Thus, acknowledging the existence of a fractured public sphere hardly negates the glaring fact that a fragmented communication environment actually has an even greater and more important profusion of vital links for the flow of communication on social networks.

There are at least two reasons that explain this phenomenon and justify expanding research efforts dedicated to this new (?) category of leadership.

The first relates to the fact that, to a large extent, we live in an era of great transformations in social and political dynamics through which opinions, beliefs, attitudes, behaviors, and gatherings of positions are formed, capable of fostering engagements, mobilizations, movements, and political organizations. The flows of information, interaction, and communication in the digital age no longer operate according to the imperatives that defined the era of mass communication. And much of this change stems from the social appropriation of new tools, resources, and opportunities for the production, reproduction, and circulation of information and content that were previously reserved almost exclusively for those with privileged access to traditional media outlets.

Moreover, even when we duly consider the resilience of a more centralized communication model represented by the influential positions that traditional media outlets continue to occupy in the information flows of online platforms, it is still necessary to note that digital influencers have far more powerful conditions to influence members of their various contact networks and guide information flows than the classical era version of opinion leaders, including media opinion leaders.

In this line of reasoning, political influencers in the digital age seem to have at least four key differences compared to opinion leaders of the mass communication era:

- the possibility of building networks of influence composed of distant, unknown, and virtually unreachable people, except through digital networks;
- the ability not only to build much more extensive networks of contact compared to face-to-face possibilities, but also to establish a near-permanent regime of interaction with members of their networks without the restrictions of face-to-face communication or even the programming and periodicity logics of traditional mass communication;
- the concrete opportunities to become political leaders with broad and massive reach without needing to previously occupy a prominent social or political position and, most importantly, without the endorsement of the press and other media outlets;
- last but not least, digital political influencers have managed to reverse the logic of social capital accumulation and recognition that has long been established in modern societies.

In institutional politics, digital influencers have managed to gain electoral clout — some with prominent and historic brands — by bypassing traditional paths to building political and electoral capital, such as involvement in party organizations and affiliations with social groups, organizations, and movements. In the press, there are already many who became opinion leaders on digital networks before being hired (and

therefore were hired) as newspaper columnists and radio and television commentators. That is, there are already many cases in which the press does not convert individuals into opinion leaders, but rather adopts them based on that pre-existing condition.

The second concerns the paths that research on political communication in digital environments has taken in recent years. For some time now, the field has been heavily focused on structural features, affordances, curation systems, and generative tools, obscuring “the role played by people in the flow of digital communication,” if I may use the alliteration. The exaggerated focus on the effects of algorithms, for example, has largely generated a resurrection of old hypotheses about the strong, direct, and unconscious effects of mass communication, which relegated individuals to a secondary and vulnerable role as receptacles for harmful and malicious media stimuli. As Wilson Gomes (2025) aptly summarizes:

The hyper-media-conscious of 2004, who saw the media controlling everything, have become those who, in 2024, see the platforms as the ventriloquists and puppeteers of public life, pulling the strings and pulleys that move us and reciting the texts that others seem to say. In 2004, they believed that everything could be cured by regulating the media, while today’s imperative is the regulation of platforms and algorithms. [...] And citizens have more responsibility for any state of affairs, including the way social interaction and integration mediated by digital environments occur, than the perspective of the citizen as a passive victim of communication can comprehend (GOMES, 2025, p. 22-23).

In Brazil, as in many parts of the world, it is difficult to find weekly examples of controversies, polemics, clashes, and public discussions that have not been enabled or, in fact, arisen from some comment, information, or content published, retransmitted, and framed by a digital political influencer.

Therefore, a deep understanding of the political life of contemporary societies requires different theoretical, conceptual, and methodological approaches to investigating these fundamental links between the general public and the political themes, messages, and information

that take shape, are structured, and forge perceptions, judgments, opinions, manifestations, decisions, and social practices through the logic of digital networks. As Winter and Neubaum (2016) argue, efforts to analyze the characteristics of these opinion leaders are fundamental to understanding the dynamics of public opinion formation in contemporary media ecology.

Digital political influencers have largely played the role of fundamental cogs in the machine for manufacturing opinion climates capable of exerting influence in instances ranging from the simplest and most disorganized to the most complex and structured, such as small communities and the three branches of government. Similarly, they raise urgent concerns about the influence they have due to the quality of their knowledge and skills to pontificate on certain political topics and issues. As Hasell and Chinn (2025) emphasize, digital political influencers often “seek credibility and authority by renouncing specialized knowledge, and the very search for digital influencers, as some studies point out, is associated with skepticism towards experts” (HASELL; CHINN, 2025, p. 5).

As part of a supposedly broader research effort on digital influencers in Brazilian politics — which will encompass a comprehensive characterization of the main political networks on digital platforms and the different types, degrees, and functions performed by these individuals — this article focuses on preliminarily organizing the main discussions on the definition of digital political influencers and their various characterizations through an initial survey of the specialized bibliography.

This effort is justified by the fact that the concept of opinion leadership has gained not only new terminological versions, but also conceptual complications with a strong impact on methodological and empirical challenges in dealing with this phenomenon. After all, to what extent can digital political influencers be considered opinion leaders in the original sense of the word? What are the similarities and differences in relation to the classic concept conceived by researchers at Columbia University? What is the risk of us attributing the appearance of novelty to just another manifestation of an old and well-documented phenomenon?

Preliminary methodological procedures

Based on searches conducted in Sage journals, initial surveys were carried out to identify academic articles that contained the combination of the terms “political” and “influencers.” Using Google Scholar, the respective equivalent terms in Portuguese were searched. After this initial survey, only those articles that address the dimension of digital influence in the strict territory of politics were selected, that is, what is being called here digital political influencers. The list was expanded using the “snow-ball” method, which, through citations and references, allowed access to more works dedicated to this category of digital influencers.

Thus, a total of 34 articles were considered in order to organize the theoretical meanings and definitions used by different authors in characterizing digital political influencers. As already mentioned, the intention is to present a conceptually clearer picture of what kind of social category we are dealing with and what relationships of similarity (perhaps synonymous) and differences are established with the classic concept of opinion leadership, given that such an association presents clear outlines of associative inevitability.

Outline of results

Influencers without opinion leadership

As expected, of the 34 articles analyzed, only nine did not associate, to some extent, the definition of digital political influencers with the concept of opinion leadership, albeit for different reasons. Acharoui *et al.* (2020), Nyangulu and Sharra (2023), and Smith *et al.* (2025) are the only cases in which this association is not present due to the authors’ reluctance to engage in a conceptual discussion around the expression. To a large extent, these studies did not address this theoretical challenge due to their extremely methodological and quantitative nature, or because of a greater focus on describing cases of activists labeled as influencers than

on the properties that define them as such — as in the cases of Nyangulu and Sharra (2023).

In the remaining cases, there is a significant variety of definitions. In two cases, the conceptual approximation is made with the concept of celebrities. According to Alsharawy, Anstett and Landgrave (2025), these influencers are defined as micro-celebrities with a relatively large number of followers who differ from traditional celebrities by more effectively captivating their followers' identification with them. Khan (2024) merges the idea of celebrity with the ability to manage one's image in the same way as managing a brand or any other asset.

Bakshy *et al.* (2011) support a definition of influencers related to a very specific conception of influence. From the authors' perspective — who address a quantitative research front much more closely linked to network analysis and digital action metrics — influencers are those capable of producing a much faster and more widespread dissemination of content than others. It is a definition anchored in the capacity not only (or not necessarily) to influence opinions, but to produce individual and collective actions that imply the differentiated dissemination of messages and content.

From a perspective less focused on ripple effects, Bene and Juhász (2025) define political influencers as content creators who take political positions, engage in social causes, or support certain candidates through the materials they produce or share on a given digital platform.

Following a similar line of thought that incorporates the market logic of digital platforms, De Gregorio and Goanta (2022) define these influencers also as content producers, but who place the perspective of profit derived from the monetization logic of the platforms on the horizon of their actions. Harris, Foxman and Partin (2023) also adopt a similar marketing approach when defining this category of people as individuals who combine self-branding strategies with their ideological beliefs. There is a combination here with elementary notions of public image management.

Finally, there are definitions that correlate with the concept of opinion leaders without explicitly citing it as a reference. This is the case of Gaw

et al. (2025), who define digital political influencers as new political operators who evaluate and interpret current political issues and themes for their audiences, legitimizing and amplifying certain political messages.

Leaders and leaders: digital political influencers and their conceptual variations

This section will consider and discuss the works that represent the set of selected articles that use the concept of opinion leadership to address digital political influencers. It is necessary to note that such studies do not necessarily claim that digital political influencers are opinion leaders. On the contrary, many take the concept as a reference point to argue about its usefulness and limitations in dealing with this new (?) social category.

Riedl, Lukito and Wooley (2023) do not link the definition of digital political influencers to the concept of opinion leaders for a reason that has gained traction in research on political communication and technologies: from the dominant perspective, digital platforms occupy an essentially differentiated territorial position in relation to any other environments of social interaction.

Thus, the characteristics, affordances, and logics of digital platforms alone would forge another social category of leadership. In line with this perspective, the fact that celebrated and traditional opinion leaders do not achieve their social influence through a digital platform would essentially distinguish them from digital influencers, whose fame is a direct product of the intertwining of their actions and strategies with the characteristics of these platforms. Herein lies the entire argument for differentiation, supported by the observation that digital political influencers are a “simply mirrored” reflection of the structures and mechanisms controlled by the interests of the platform owners.

In short, the trio of authors defines political influencers as those content creators who endorse a political position, social cause, or candidate through the content they produce or share on a digital platform. In this context, political influencers may act with the goal of politically

influencing their audiences, forming alliances around political or social causes, obtaining symbolic and financial gains, or a combination of these elements. Thus, political influencers are distinguished from other types of influencers by necessarily linking their online influence to social and political causes, whether intermittently or centrally to their actions. The authors emphasize that the definition also has contextual components related to geography, timing, and the dynamics of the discourse.

From this perspective, as is evident, the distinction between digital political influencers and the traditional concept of opinion leaders lies in a structural and technological perspective: the media environment in which something takes place and comes to life is sufficient for things that may be similar or identical to be distinguished in essential terms. A television commentator would be distinguished from a political commentator on digital networks because each inhabits a media environment with distinct characteristics and logics.

Dubois and Gaffney (2014) follow a similar line of thought. The pair of authors opt for two “theories” that explain the political influence of individuals: the “opinion leader” uses social support and social pressure to influence their networks of contacts/personal relationships, and “influencers” use their position of visibility in a broad network of contacts to disseminate messages on a large scale. The first engages with individuals who hold relevant roles in the political discussions of their communities, while the second is linked to the work of disseminating innovations and creating informational cascades.

Winter and Neubaum (2016) link the idea of digital political influencers with the concept of opinion leaders and the two-step communication model through important distinctions. The face-to-face contact of the original two-step flow model would be transformed into influence exerted in remote contact networks that expand far beyond the constraints of in-person interactions.

Thus, from this perspective, political influencers in the digital age would have at least three advantages over opinion leaders in mass communication: the possibility of building networks of influence

composed of distant, unknown, and virtually unreachable people, except through digital possibilities; the ability not only to build much more extensive networks of contact compared to face-to-face capabilities, but also to establish an almost permanent regime of interaction with members of their networks without the restrictions of face-to-face communication or even the programming and periodicity logics of traditional mass communication; and the concrete opportunities to become political leaders with broad and massive reach without needing to previously occupy a prominent social or political position and, most importantly, without needing the endorsement of the press and other media outlets.

Riedl *et al.* (2021) link the concept of influencers to the concept of opinion leaders, pointing to an important difference between the two. The new characteristics of digital platforms, related to connectivity and self-representation, have expanded the classic concept of opinion leadership by granting a wider and more diverse range of subjects the power of social influence. Among the qualities of these influencers, credibility, authenticity, and trustworthiness stand out.

The group of authors also argues that the inclusion of political themes among the content posted by these influencers is largely due to an effort to avoid appearing superficial, inauthentic, and unreliable. It would therefore be a marketing operation aimed at preserving or acquiring attributes that can be converted into greater effectiveness in digital advertising and marketing efforts.

Dekoninck and Schmuck (2022) present important taxonomic contributions to understanding the characteristics of digital influencers (including political influencers) in relation to the traditional concept of opinion leaders. In dialogue with some of the specialized literature, the authors list three of what would be the main characteristics of opinion leaders according to their classical definition: they represent certain values, they are more socially active and have more social ties than the average individual, and they have a high level of knowledge and expertise on certain topics.

Dekoninck and Schmuck (2022) argue that, given primarily the third characteristic, it would be unwise to adopt the concept of opinion leaders to define digital influencers, considering that individuals who fall under this label do not necessarily possess outstanding knowledge about the topics they address on their accounts and profiles on digital platforms. The pair of authors emphasize that, perhaps due to this lack of knowledge, digital influencers may use their profiles to generate, intentionally or unintentionally, “misinformation scandals”.

Beyond these observations, the pair of authors add two more characteristics that would be distinctive of digital influencers: self-representation and the ability to “monetize” the influence exerted over their followers. However, unlike other types of media influencers, such as television and film celebrities who convert their symbolic capital into commercial appeals through advertising, digital influencers would win and maintain a connection with their followers through the perception of similarity and authenticity that they evoke in their audience. The influence would come less from admiration for something distant and idealized than from ordinary similarities with its followers.

Goodwin *et al.* (2023) make a direct association with the notion of opinion leaders to discuss digital influencers in general, but they make a unique distinction regarding the political modality of this category: political digital influencers would be unique in terms of the reciprocal relationships they cultivate and the approachability they offer to their followers. Hasell and Chinn (2025) follow a similar line of thought when defining digital influencers as highly credible opinion leaders who cultivate an image of trusted experts.

Martin *et al.* (2024) follow a more classic line when defining influencers as those who shape public opinion through a form of persuasion that develops through the “calibration” of the personas they construct on digital platforms. Rothut *et al.* (2024), in dialogue with the specialized literature, argue for the existence of four types of influencers: content production specialists, message multipliers who master techniques capable of promoting a wide reach of content across multiple networks,

moderators capable of initiating interaction with and between users of digital platforms, and protagonists focused on self-representation/presentation strategies.

Martino (2018) says that the notion of digital influencers is a new guise for an expression that persists in different forms: opinion leaders. In other words, digital influencers would be distant descendants of opinion leaders. Finally, Soares and Recuero (2021), Boichak (2023), Uwalaka and Enyindah (2025), and Watson (2025) make correlations with the concept of opinion leaders without further discussion of possible elements distinguishing them from digital political influencers.

General considerations

This text was conceived with the intention of providing an initial mapping of a literature that is still little investigated in the area of communication and politics research in Brazil. The decision to discuss the notion of digital political influencers in relation to the concept of opinion leadership was made for three reasons. The first is that, in ordinary everyday conversation and even in many considerations made in academic debates, the relationship between opinion leaders and digital or political influencers occurs almost naturally. Secondly, because this is effectively the concept that most frequently appears in the literature as theoretical support for attempts to define this social category. The third point concerns the fact that, however naturally the association may occur, prudent research dictates that the theoretical basis of the claim should be investigated, after all, any rigorous examination must begin by clearly outlining the lines that define the taxonomic boundaries of the chosen object.

There is no intention to produce a precise synthesis of the conceptual definitions presented in the analyzed articles, but rather to present a snapshot of where the conceptual discussion of digital (political) influencers has been going. As can be seen, it appears that the authors who have dedicated themselves to the subject do not generally support a

synonymous relationship between this concept and the classic definition of opinion leadership. Many variations are presented in the exercise of these conceptual reflections.

However, in terms of a provisional conclusion and contribution to the debate, it may be necessary to add a critical analysis regarding the scarcity of further reflections on the multiple forms of media opinion leadership that precede the digital age and which were given little consideration in the articles analyzed.

Following this line of reasoning, it would be beneficial to consider some critical notes on the definitional efforts analyzed here.

The first concerns the disregard for opinion leaders established by traditional media outlets, as suggested above. Newspaper columnists, as well as radio and television commentators, have possessed (and still possess), for over a century, almost all the distinctive characteristics listed by most of the authors considered here. They had and still have a massive reach.

The second concerns personalization. These media opinion leaders have used, and continue to use, the strategy of creating personas, distinctive brand images, and theatrical attributes that have helped and continue to help them segment, retain, and expand their audiences. In the Brazilian context alone, we could cite hundreds of them over just a few decades, such as Paulo Francis, Arnaldo Jabour, Gil Gomes, Mônica Bergamo, Barros de Alencar, Miriam Leitão, Osmar Santos, and José Paulo de Andrade.

Perhaps one of the only truly useful taxonomic categories for distinguishing opinion leaders from digital influencers is the cost of becoming one of the two, coupled with the expansion of opportunities for someone to become politically influential. Digital platforms have dethroned large media outlets from the exclusive position of empowering individuals to fully reach many people, simultaneously and remotely, through broadcasting — the distinctive attributes of mass communication, according to Denis McQuail (2011). In this way, many of the traditional barriers that stood between individuals and privileged opportunities for the mass

dissemination of information and opinions were displaced, opening important opportunities so that many people could effectively rise to positions of influence and prominence in many networks and flows of political information and discussion via digital platforms.

While contemporary societies may have lost the benefits inherent in the selection and recruitment criteria of journalism, which exclusively defined which individuals would enjoy the privilege of assuming a position of mass reach for their political opinions — largely granted through the recognition of outstanding skills, experience, balance, and professionalism —, it is undeniable that digital platforms have delivered a new regime for the distribution of symbolic capital and political recognition to competent individuals who, otherwise, would not achieve a media status of public influence.

This text has merely attempted to shed light on some of the many efforts to conceptually situate the notion of digital political influencers — and, to some extent, more broadly, of digital influencers in general. Issues such as the relationship between the absence of ethical mediations in journalism and the lack of editorial barriers on digital platforms, coupled with the incursion of many influencers into crucial contemporary problems such as disinformation about politics and science, are fundamental objects for future scientific research; as well as the methodological and analytical examination of how these subjects establish communication flows in the daily lives of contemporary societies.

For that to happen, however, it is essential to have conceptual clarity about the object we are dealing with — its nature, characteristics, singularities and similarities.

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