Call for papers
Communication & Society

Title: Political influencers and opinion leaders in the digital public sphere

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Paper submission deadline
Articles should be submitted before November 30, 2019 for the peer-review process. Authors should indicate in the "author comments" section that this article is for this monograph.

The proposed articles must comply with the journal's style standards which can be found on the following link:
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Social media have introduced a new actor in the field of political communication which is the political influencers or ‘digital’ opinion leaders; whose main role originates from the digital public sphere. Nevertheless, they do not renounce from participating in conventional or mainstream media. Instead, they try condition the configuration of the public agenda and public opinion through the exercise of technologically mediated personal influence. For that purpose, they present new dynamics, relationships, and processes in the digital public sphere and the field of political communication. The objective of this monograph is to analyze the roles, characteristics, and effects of political influencers or "digital" opinion leaders on the current political communication, democracy, and society.

The study of opinion leaders comes within a long tradition of research that focused on how influence is exercised. This core issue grabs the attention of the pioneer researchers working in the field of communication. Authors such as Katz, Lazarsfeld, Berelson or Gaudet developed their researches in the mid-1950s, including The People’s Choice and...
Personal Influence, to examine the impact of their presence in the public opinion formation process.

These studies found that the change in citizens’ attitudes and political opinions were more conditioned by personal influence than media influence. Moreover, the exercise of influence was at the hand of opinion leaders. This approach was greatly adopted in the field of Communication until it was disregarded by the strong effects theories, which returned the prominence to the traditional media as the main actor in the communicative processes at the social level.

However, due to the emergence of social media and the digital public sphere, the personal influence and the role of ‘digital’ influencers or opinion leaders became a core issue and an important field of study. One of the main novelties introduced by digital technologies is the ability to empower users and give them considerable personal influence capable to trigger public debate on the networks, and thereby the dynamics of political communication and the digital public sphere. These users become influential subjects with a symbolic and persuasive power over other people. Connectivity, interactivity, self-communication, and other attributes of digital platforms are redefining the concept of opinion leaders in a technologically mediated field. Therefore, this context adopted to the digital environment is an important area of study that requires attention and investigation.

In this framework, this special issue calls for ambitious empirical research or solidly grounded theoretical approaches that contribute to a better understanding of 'digital' opinion leaders or political influencers and their effects on political communication, journalism, democracy, and society. In this regard, possible topics can include the following:

- Characteristics, roles, functions, and performance dynamics of ‘digital’ opinion leaders or political influencers.
- Political influencers versus opinion leaders in the mainstream media. Changes and continuities.
- Productive routines and professional sociology of political influencers.
- The connection between digital opinion leaders and the media. The impact of influencers in the elaboration of information and political news.
- Relation between influencers and political actors (parties, governments, etc.).
- Ability of digital opinion leaders to influence the media, political and citizen agenda in the digital public sphere framework.
- Incidence of political influencers in the processes of circulation and viralization of information and in the consumption of news as well as political knowledge by citizenry.
- Communicative strategies of political influencers.
- Methods to measure the influence of opinion leaders in the digital environment and social media.
- The activity of political influencers and their effects on democracy and digital public sphere.