

INFLUPOL Influencers and Politics in the Digital Age: Exploring Dynamics between Social Media Influencers, Political Organizations, and Citizens

The INFLUPOL comparative project investigates the role of Social Media Influencers (SMIs), specifically Political Social Media Influencers (PSMIs), as emerging connectors between political and media organizations on one side and citizens on the other. The project explores the interactions between these actors, focusing on four research objectives: 1) how political actors and mainstream media employ SMIs and PSMIs as "brokers" between themselves and citizens; 2) how, conversely, SMIs and PSMIs interact with institutionalized political actors and the media in terms of mobilization; 3) the organization of labor behind the scenes of PSMIs, through communication agencies, agents, or political parties; and 4) citizens' reactions to the presence of SMIs and PSMIs in politics.

Methodologically, the project employs a mixed-method approach that includes: 1) mapping SMIs and PSMIs through social media network analyses; 2) conducting in-depth interviews and reviewing official documentation to assess their relationship with political and media organizations; 3) analyzing content published by PSMIs during campaign and non-campaign periods, both through automated (machine learning) and non-automated methods (visual analysis) to identify mobilization effects; and 4) analyzing their audience through: (a) user profiling, (b) community reactions, and (c) a survey. This Czech-Polish project is part of a broader European research initiative studying SMIs and PSMIs in Austria, France, the Czech Republic, and Poland. Comparing these four EU countries will provide context-based knowledge on the role of influencers in European democracies and a better understanding of their capacity to re-mobilize voters in a politically unstable and mistrusted environment.