

# Influencer and Content Creators Digital in the Congress of the Republic of Colombia 2022: Professional politicians or by eventuality?

## *Influencer y creadores de contenido digital en el Congreso de la República de Colombia 2022: ¿políticos profesionales o por eventualidad?*



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### Abstract:

The present inquiry is linked to a series of studies on populism and electoral processes in Colombia, which in turn raised the question: What were the media and advertising structures that

### Resumen:

*La presente indagación está vinculada a una serie de investigaciones sobre el populismo y los procesos electorales en Colombia, que a su vez generó el cuestionamiento sobre ¿Cuáles fueron las estructuras mediáti-*

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led social media influencers to transition from their regular content to obtaining a seat in the legislative branch? As a result of the analysis of content generated by influencers who participated in the 2022 legislative elections, a classification or categorization of factors was made, showing that the emotions and lifestyles displayed on social media were decisive in their political participation. This inquiry allowed for the expansion of theoretical frameworks to differentiate, in future research, the characteristics of long-established traditional politicians in the Congress of the Republic of Colombia from the actions of influencer-congresspeople in the 2022-2026 legislature.

**Keywords:**

Influencer; Colombian politics; social networks; emotions; professional politician.

*cas y publicitarias que llevaron a los influenciadores de redes sociales a pasar de sus contenidos cotidianos a una curul en la rama legislativa? Como resultado del análisis de los contenidos generados por Influenciadores que participaron en las elecciones legislativas de 2022, se permitió una clasificación o categorización de factores que conllevaron a que las emociones y los estilos de vida expuestos en redes sociales, fueran determinantes para que participaran en política. Está indagación permitió ampliar las estructuras teóricas para diferenciar en futuras investigaciones, las caracterizaciones del político tradicional de vieja data en el Congreso de la República de Colombia, y las actuaciones de los influenciadores-congresistas en la legislatura 2022-2026.*

**Palabras clave:**

*Influencer; política colombiana; redes sociales; emociones; político profesional.*

## 1. Introduction

The expectation of social and political change during the 2022 elections was a central theme in many campaign processes. The outspoken goal of dismantling the traditional political models that had governed the Colombian state for decades was the primary objective of most new candidates running for the Colombian legislative branch. This sentiment was not unfounded; it was driven by a series of social claims and mobilizations in Colombia, which began in 2019 and continued through 2021, strongly resisting various bills proposed by the government of Iván Duque Márquez.

Amid the many mobilizations broadcast on television and the hundreds of videos on social media showcasing the protests and their events, a few protagonists emerged. These individuals not only shared their experiences but also voiced their opinions about the sitting government. Such was the case of Susana Gómez Castaño, a representative to the Chamber for the department of Antioquia, known on social media by the pseudonym Susana Boreal. She gained recognition during the social protests in Medellín, where she conducted an orchestra of more than 200 musicians on one of the days of the demonstrations. This exposure catapulted her into fame, which she leveraged to launch her candidacy through the very social media platforms that brought her to prominence, ultimately leading her to the Congress of the Republic of Colombia.

But she would not be the only candidate to emerge from social media. The case of the YouTuber Jonathan Ferney Pulido Hernández, known on social media as Jota Pe Hernández, also stands out. He began his social media career as a Christian music singer, and during the many events of the aforementioned social mobilizations, he crafted a cacophonous, repetitive, and redundant discourse on corruption, issuing public accusations and denunciations without prior legal-administrative or even legal explanations to support his vehement claims.

The list of influencers who sought to participate in the Colombian legislative process continued to grow. Actors and television presenters without political experience, such as Agmeth José Escaf Tijerino, secured a seat representing Atlántico with the *Pacto Histórico* party. Similarly, influencers who discussed topics lacking in-depth analysis or academic rigor, like Miguel Polo

Polo from Cartagena de Indias, made their way into politics. Most of Polo Polo's videos before his candidacy for the House of Representatives focused on extolling capitalism as the true political system for Colombia while positioning himself as a staunch opponent of the alleged communism represented by the right-wing opposition in Colombia. Among many others, even the administrator of a political meme page, known as Movimiento Naranja, Francisco Rojas, decided to run for the Senate with the goal of changing the country's reality.

The numerous cases of influencers entering the legislative arena during these elections are vast. However, the focus of this inquiry –though recent and considered relevant in the Colombian political sphere– is to analyze the structures and factors that can be identified in these influencers who entered politics. This study does not delve into specific case studies, as their content is highly personalized, making it methodologically difficult to provide a comprehensive analysis of the issue. There are still no established categories for this, but after multiple observations, one superficial yet undeniable factor was identified: social media.

In addition to social media, other essential factors were identified, such as the emotions through which influencers connected with their audiences, the personas they portray in their various social media videos, and the establishment of a phraseology or discourse that is often consistent and repetitive. In light of this, this inquiry does not conduct a case study but rather offers some exemplifications of proposed categories, which may lead to future questions such as: Why did voters choose this particular type of candidate? Or did the social situation in Colombia at the time influence the electorate to seek political inexperience as a solution to the social reality?

For this reason, it became necessary to revisit some classical political science authors, such as Max Weber, with his essential question about the vocation of the politician, as well as conceptual elements that explain why societies, in this case, Colombian society, decide to link political emotions to exclusively political-administrative problems. This highlights the power of phraseologies as rationales and Fake News as truths.

### *1.1. Conceptual Framework*

First, it is valuable to ask: How do these influencers manage to connect with the political realm in Colombia? The development of this research proposal has a starting point that is considered crucial, as will be demonstrated, and that is political emotions. In her work *Political Emotions* (2014), Martha Nussbaum initially argued that the strongest emotions in politics are not necessarily linked to political fanaticisms such as fascism and Nazism. Instead, they are related to cultural stability and the establishment of social values, particularly in liberal societies, which almost always aspire to justice and equal opportunities. However, what may come into debate is that many of these equal opportunities require regulation in terms of knowledge and experience processes when it comes to political participation. This does not mean that people should not participate politically, but rather that education surrounding politics is essential for effective participation.

At times, the pain and suffering inflicted by an armed group on a specific victim can become a reason for political transformation, driving individuals to engage in political participation processes to change that particular situation. Emotional experiences like suffering and indignation can become sources of knowledge and experience for a body that becomes political. What is

debatable and complex, however, is when emotions and feelings are generated through the manipulation of information and fake news to gain certain support.

Dagatti (2017) discusses these emotions as part of a discursive model of study, recognizing that, in their most basic structure, emotions are expressed through syntactic procedures aligned with the order of words, exclamatory sentences, and attempts to resolve the emotional issue through “the design of a study model of projective pathos in monological oral addresses” (2017, p. 47). He aims for the study of political emotions to be understood through this model across different cases, moments, and locations. However, the term pathos can be broad, generalizing, and ambiguous when it comes to political emotions.

Studies like that of Perilla (2018), who takes a closer look at political emotions through the lens of political mobilization processes in Colombia, particularly during the 2016 plebiscite for peace, recognize a key factor: citizen participation in social networks:

The dynamics within the social movements that supported both the peace talks and the peace process in Colombia, which emerged following the rejection of the plebiscite, are quite complex and worth tracing back to cyberspace. Social media platforms like Facebook, X (formerly known as Twitter), and online press sites, among others, concentrated hashtags and messages alluding to the importance of maintaining the peace process. They also conveyed messages celebrating the rejection of the agreements. These posts were, of course, accompanied by a varied and intense circulation of ‘online emotions’ –as I will call them throughout this article– which clashed and created a polarized environment in the country (Perilla, 2018, p. 157).

The author initially recognizes the digital world stemming from this event as a space for a political anthropology of cyberspace, where political participation is displayed through agreements and disagreements, consistent with the rejection of the plebiscite for peace, even without showing the levels of knowledge people had on the issue. However, she emphasizes a fundamental point: the emotional participation of internet users, leading to an emotional polarization with little to no argumentative basis. The author measures political participation levels based on these participation posts.

Thus, Amado and Tarullo’s (2015) question regarding whether social media in politics is unidirectional or conversational helps to understand not the function of social media in politics itself but rather the diversity of formats in which it can be used for political participation. As the authors point out:

When investigating which factor of the communication process is emphasized, it is possible to understand what type of communication the political leader prioritizes. Thus, a post that focuses on the sender shows that they prioritize the dissemination of their message over any potential exchange it might provoke. More often, it has the intention of telling the audience what is happening to the sender and making the audience aware of it, rather than considering their reaction. When the context is chosen as the fundamental factor, the post refers to journalistic informational texts, where the focus is on what is being reported. If the form is more relevant than the content, the goal is to highlight the message over its content in order to draw attention to the message itself rather than what it appeals to. Messages that attract through their aesthetic, even if their content is not necessarily understood or prompts little response beyond admiration for the piece, are examples of this type of message (Amado & Tarullo, 2015, p. 106).

The authors emphasize how politicians on social media fragment particular contexts to present only parts in which they could be seen as protagonists or victims of a given situation. In most cases, the focus is on form rather than content, with a favorable

image aesthetic being decisive. This process has been crucial in constructing personal branding in political marketing, particularly during political campaigns in the last two decades, through personal image or brand.

This is why works such as those by Cazorla, Montabes, & López-López (2022) demonstrate how the media, especially social networks, are crucial in developing political emotions in internet users, using social networks as a means to observe citizens' emotional levels. Along similar lines, Rivera, Lagares, Pereira, & Jaráiz (2021) establish measurement variables in social networks to identify the political uses of these platforms by users, their motivation in participation processes, and the identification of emotions that each user associates with politicians during electoral processes. This allows for the establishment of social media's usefulness in political campaigns in other studies (D'Adamo, García Beaudoux, & Kievsky, 2015) and the construction of political discourse through these platforms (Altamirano Benítez, Ruiz Aguirre, & Baquerizo Neira, 2022).

Undoubtedly, the reflections above serve as starting points for understanding two important phenomena in this inquiry. First, it identifies those influencers who entered politics had a substantial base: social media. Although it may seem superficial, it is important to recognize that their future recognition as politicians only occurred through this medium. Second, the creation of personal branding, in the style of political marketing, was essential when entering politics, linking their actions and decisions with the emotions of their audience or followers.

Regarding personal branding, Pérez-Curiel & Limón Naharro (2019) conduct an important study, first recognizing Donald Trump more as an influencer in politics than as a politician in the strict sense. He ran a campaign with a brand image and with a wide projection toward spectacle rather than political argumentation:

“Donald Trump, the candidate on Twitter [now known as X], far surpassed his online presence during his presidency. A profile of an influencer who, in most cases, operates disconnected from party politics, applying communication and marketing techniques, and who found in social networks a fast format and effective discourse that captured the attention of active communities, despite the almost total absence of direct interaction with his followers. Some studies on the use of social networks in electoral campaigns have demonstrated the low level of interactivity. Instead, they make intensive use of these digital technologies primarily as mechanisms for self-promotion of their proposals and the dissemination of their own content” (Pérez-Curiel & Limón Naharro, 2019, p. 60).

An important analysis highlighted by the authors is the recognition of Donald Trump's behavior on social media, noting that his actions are often disconnected from the political reality of parties and, consequently, from political reality itself. This allows the establishment of a kind of political microcosm, leading to the conclusion of “Donald Trump as a political influencer on social media [...]. General traits such as echoing and the ability to mobilize opinions, generate reactions on specific issues, increase audience and participation levels, and engagement, along with the use of a simple, brief, rhythmic, and almost syllabic language, disguise a discourse of domination, empowerment, and leadership” (2019, p. 71).

In other words, in most of the actions of influencers related to politics, they often lack the availability or willingness to engage in political debate at an argumentative or even academic level. The essential task of the influencer is not to demonstrate or provide evidence, but rather to emotionalize their audience, which makes them susceptible to the spread of fake news and manipulation. In the post-electoral process within the framework of the Catalan process, Pérez & García (2018) argue:

The percentages related to Appeals to Ignorance, False Cause, Appeal to Emotion, and Begging the Question reach their peak for all candidates. In the case of Puigdemont, the percentages of fallacies surpass the rest, with some exceptions (Arrimadas reaches maximum values in Appeals to Ignorance and False Cause). The percentage of slanting or the use of images on Twitter [now known as X] to attract attention stands out. Ultimately, these are mechanisms that identify a common behavior on the Internet. The use of fallacious messages is widespread, although the candidates representing the most visceral forces among separatists and constitutionalists stand out. The degree of personalization is concentrated in one strong idea: humanizing the message and creating a pseudo-discourse (2018, pp. 1037-1038).

The categories used by the authors, particularly those related to appeals to emotion, provide credibility to other appeals, justifying falsehoods with the authenticity of reality in a given political situation. The complex part of the discussion is that the authors identify this as a common behavior on the internet, which undoubtedly sustains the particular interests of candidates or potential candidates on social media. This is the essential concern of this article: the construction of influencers as new actors of political participation in Colombia.

Finally, virtual influencers as opinion leaders, who can even significantly distort the socio-political reality, are explored by Amaya (2018). She develops important considerations about opinion leaders on social media, stating that “beyond methodological approaches, everyone agrees that opinion leaders are people with the necessary knowledge and experience to influence both the attitudes and behaviors of others. Their high familiarity (in this case, with politics), their level of involvement with it, and their power of persuasion within their close environment make them an interesting population segment due to their potential to originate and modify public opinion trends in our country” (2018, p. 15).

In the author’s words, they are true transformers and builders of political reality –not because they generate that reality, but because they allow themselves to interpret and reinterpret events. They can modify the origins and development of these events, and if they are in a political campaign, they can present themselves not only as the best interpreter of that event but also as its potential problem-solver.

Therefore, according to Rodrigo, Muñoz, & Rodrigo-Martín (2022), the better and more elaborate the messages they emit, the greater the impact they will have on their audience. As a result, the agencies responsible for promoting influencers create a narrative thread for their lives to attract the largest number of followers possible. In this way, the influencers’ microcosm not only showcases a life but also presents a worldview in relation to politics, one that connects emotionally to gain credibility without argumentation.

## 2. Methodology

The study employed a qualitative method with content analysis and the construction of conceptual classifications, as it deals with a relatively new phenomenon, approached phenomenologically with contrasts between facts and realities regarding the rise of influencers in politics.

The research emerged from the viewing and analysis of over 223 videos by Colombian influencers related to Colombian politics during the 2022 legislative campaign period. Key issues such as the type of content, concepts used, and general treatment of important political events were thematized. The observation of these videos led to the identification of more than 50 variables

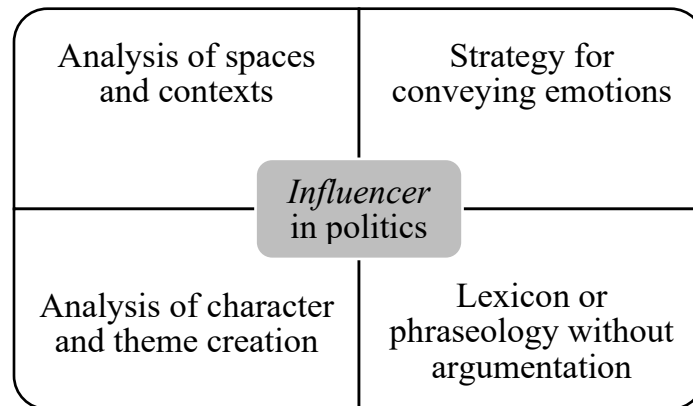
for analysis. Even a single influencer could present 10 to 15 variables for analysis, which were not always consistent due to the diverse and complex ways in which they expressed opinions and addressed topics—not in terms of content and arguments, but rather in the particular approaches each influencer took toward those topics.

This made it difficult to provide an interpretation and a conceptual classification of the phenomenon of influencers in politics. As a result, the initially proposed case studies were set aside in favor of an exploratory approach aimed at developing a conceptual framework based on a single identified phenomenon: their diverse content on social media.

Given the scattered nature of the variables related to the analysis of influencers in politics, it was challenging to formulate a clear theoretical interpretation of the phenomenon. Many of their videos on current political issues were often redundant in their opinions, repetitive in others, and frequently lacked argumentation. This led to the emergence of another potential conceptualization for theoretical analysis that ultimately had no concrete conclusion.

In light of this, processes of quantifying these influencers were established, focusing on basic data such as follower counts and the number of voters, as well as measurements of the type of content on their different social media platforms. This allowed for distinctions to be made regarding their origins and political projects, enabling a characterization based on four points of analysis, as presented in Table 1:

**Table 1. Analysis Categories**



**Source: own elaboration**

This characterization initially allowed for the identification of common patterns in their “discourses” on political topics. However, at times, these patterns exceeded the possibilities for interpretation, which made it difficult to fully approach the phenomenon from a political science perspective. As a result, the study turned to foundational elements of political science, such as Max Weber’s *The Politician and the Scientist*, to minimally discuss the essence of a politician—not the accidental

nature of becoming a politician through a viral critique video, but rather the root of their functions as administrators in the public sphere, the debate around law, and, above all, the professionalization that is a constitutive part of being a politician.

### 3. Results

#### 3.1. *From influencers and content creators to the legislative branch: A theoretical approach*

Can influencers be politicians, or are they political actors? The answer to this question tends to be highly relative and problematic when disseminating ideas or opinions about political contexts on social media. This can even lead to questioning the intimate relationship between ideology and technology as a foundation for the sustainability of democracies, particularly where major tech monopolies reserve the right to block any idea that seemingly threatens the fundamental rights of any person.

When it comes to digital social media, there is an undeniable reality: long before the rise of influencers who became political actors –even those with legislative representation, as in the case of Colombia– these networks were undoubtedly the primary communication channel for politicians during campaigns. Multiple dynamics intersect here, related to current events and entertainment as dictated by the agendas of different social media platforms and opinion creators. In other words, the political arena would almost be incomplete without the spectacle that generates a wide range of emotions.

The differences between political reasoning, the argumentation of ideas, and political proposals do not seem to provoke a variety of reactions unless they are accompanied by events that touch on human emotions –whether it be the love of supporters or the venomous hatred of the opposition. In the age of social media, opinions– or rather comments –are rarely expressed without referencing the feelings they generate. Given the marked absence of analytical readings and contrasts regarding government decisions or what certain politicians think and say, all that remains is an emotional reaction based on the internet user’s intuitive perception of what seems good or bad for their final political decision.

Written arguments on Facebook, for example, rarely elicit the same reactions as a video clip. Beyond any argumentation, thirty seconds of action –hugging people from vulnerable communities or stirring any empathetic response– evokes deep emotions. In other words, written words in politics are inefficient in a society that demands transparency, where everything must be disclosed and shown, regardless of the origins or motives.

In light of this, the first aspect is the most clearly identified by current influencers involved in politics: the staging of their contexts and video backgrounds, the situations in which they are presented, the way emotions are conveyed in each video, the radical nature of their statements, and the absence of arguments. These are often key factors in gaining followers and, for a moment, considering running for legislative positions in each country. Therefore, this analysis focuses on four categories that emerged as hypotheses after over 80 hours of observing videos from influencers involved in politics and decision-making processes:

- Spaces and contexts where the video is recorded
- Character and theme creation
- Strategy for conveying emotions
- Phraseology without argumentation

To approach these four categories of analysis, it is necessary to distinguish between an influencer and a content creator. Of the four categories mentioned, three are essential to influencers. This does not mean that a content creator cannot employ these categories –especially in political content– but they are less common in their development scenarios.

It is essential to recognize that an influencer is constantly building their own brand and identity. Their face and everyday life settings correspond to a sense of familiarity with their audience. In a simple guide to influencer marketing, Ramos (2019) defines that “the content generated by the influencer can be classified within the concept of testimonial advertising (the written or spoken statement of a person praising the virtues of a product), where they themselves play the role of a potential buyer” (2019, p. 5). In other words, they construct a narrative of their emotions, daily life, and product endorsements as a fundamental part of their identity.

The same occurs with influencers involved in politics. They tend to acknowledge that there is little difference between political marketing and the development of their content. They often begin by opposing or supporting the current government, thus creating a political brand identity.

Content creators, on the other hand, do not necessarily create a personal identity, although most tend to have one. Their focus is more on creating a kind of micro-celebrity, preparing the clip they want to share, editing out what they consider irrelevant, and usually generating surprising content. One of the emotions they invoke in followers is precisely the blurred line between person and character (Castaño, 2014). In contrast, influencers tend to emphasize their personal identity to gain credibility and trust from their audience, ensuring their message has validity and stands out. However, to achieve this, the four previously mentioned scenarios are necessary.

The spaces and contexts where videos are recorded are often related to the message the influencer wants to convey. Content creators, more than influencers, tend to focus on preparing these settings to achieve their goals, ensuring they align with the central objectives of their messages. Influencers, on the other hand, often use fixed settings where their image and personal brand are always easily identifiable, though this is not a universal rule.

Regarding character and theme creation, influencers usually address opinions about social, political, or entertainment issues that are currently relevant in the news. This is one of their most distinctive traits –audiences are always eager to know what their figure thinks or what opinion they hold about a national news event or trending topics on social media.

As for the strategy for conveying emotions in their videos, it is always closely related to the situations presented. Creating a connection between the influencer’s emotions on certain topics and their audience generates a shared sentiment. Often, audiences are not drawn to the quality of the argument, but rather to the opinion or emotion the influencer expresses about the issue. This emotional resonance creates familiarity with the influencer and their message, which subsequently gains the support of their audience, often reflected in a kind of opinion battle with other lower-tier influencers or content creators.

Finally, phraseology without argumentation is closely linked to the strategy for conveying emotions. Phrases on social media often turn into short video clips accompanying content about a specific situation. What stands out most is the way the message is conveyed, rather than the evidence behind it. These phrases are rarely debated but are simply taken at face value by the audience.

These four proposed categories can be theoretically analyzed from four academic perspectives, which will provide a conceptual framework for understanding the various phenomena or case studies regarding influencers in the Colombian political sphere.

**Table 2. Definition of categories**

The spaces and contexts of the video clip	Relationship between the situation and the themes presented	Strategy for conveying emotions	Phraseology lacking argumentation
<p>Not only have the stories that influencers share about their daily lives on social media ceased to be intimate, but the spaces they inhabit have also become part of public exposure. Before, “in contrast to the hostile protocols of public life, the home was transformed into the territory of authenticity and truth: a refuge where the self felt protected, where one was allowed to be oneself” (Sibilia, 2008, p. 74).</p>	<p>Sibilia (2008) believes that in the narrative self, there is always the possibility of constructing fictional characters based on oneself, or as Orozco (2021) suggests, analyzing virtual reality through Baudrillard: “If reality, through its social order, denies certain ways of relating, the digital space allows the establishment of simulacra to assume what is not permitted in the offline world—culturally, politically, or economically” (p. 11). It is the possibility to distort and construct events according to one’s own beliefs.</p>	<p>Eva Illouz (2010) presents a prominent theory of emotional rationalization, where she argues that “The rationalization of emotions created its own inverse reality, which could be characterized as the ‘emotionalization of economic behavior.’ This reciprocal process points to a broader cultural phenomenon that I call emotional capitalism. In emotional capitalism, emotional and economic discourses shape each other in such a way that affection becomes an essential aspect of economic behavior, and emotional life” (p. 83).</p>	<p>In this context, Sartori (2013) highlights what he calls “common language” when it comes to politics: “Common language is entirely devoid of self-awareness, used in a completely instinctive and reflexive way, which leads to serious inconveniences. The first inconvenience is that we do not worry about defining the words we use; thus, every discourse becomes vague, generic, and escapes the limits of basic communication. [...] The second inconvenience is that ordinary conversation pays no attention to the demonstrative procedure with which every discourse should be constructed. In ordinary conversation, logic and syntactic logic are conspicuously absent” (pp. 19-20).</p>

Source: own elaboration

Thus, a framework can be reconfigured to understand, from a political perspective, the actions of influencers who become involved in legislative decision-making in the country. As shown in Table 1, the elements by which today’s voters choose a candidate emerging from social media are not necessarily related to their physical interaction and presence across the vast territories of the national geography, but rather to those territories reached by the Internet and social media interaction.

What stands out here is that influencers involved in politics, according to observations, aim to create moments of indignation in their audience, as well as in voters, while also offering hope for change. The first step, generating indignation, is always crucial for presenting oneself as a symbol of hope and encouragement for political change in the country. This has resulted in a shift from screens to direct participation in electoral processes.

In the case of the 2022 legislative elections, approximately 11 candidates with a significant number of followers across their various social media platforms ran for office (it should be noted that there may have been more, but the focus was on those with the most prominent follower counts). Table 2, which includes specific data, is presented below:

**Table 3. Analysis of results**

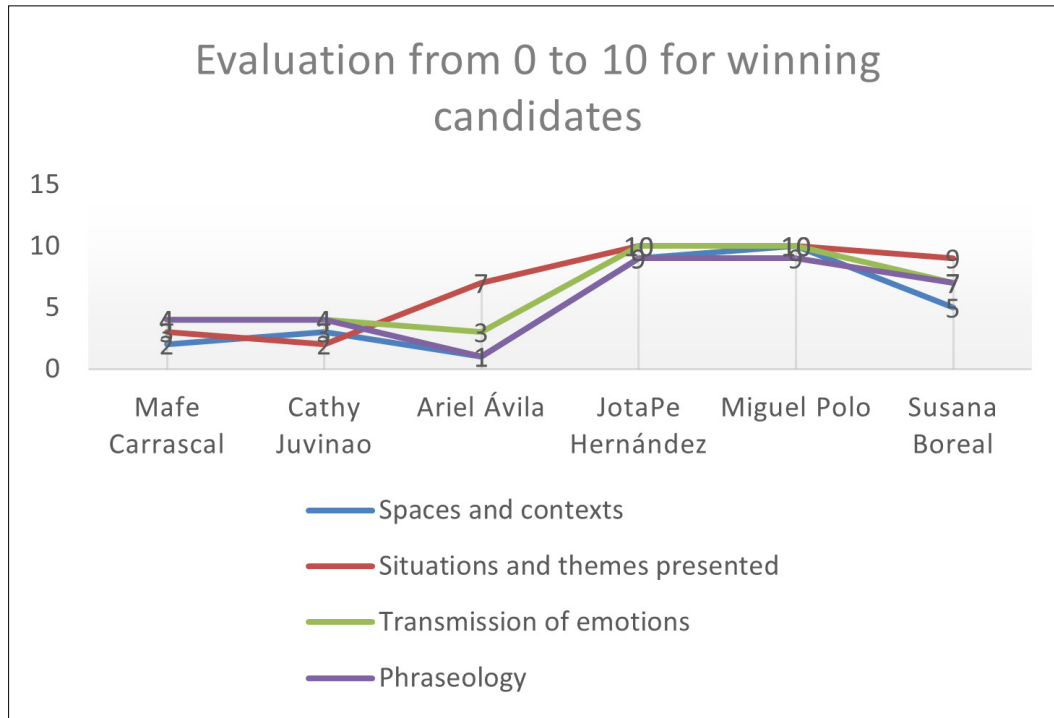
<b><i>Influencers Candidates</i></b>	<b>Main social media platform and followers</b>	<b>Number of votes obtained</b>	<b>Political party</b>	<b>Was elected</b>
Miller Soto	X: 106.685	8.130 (0,05 %)	Centro Democrático (Senate)	NO
Gilberto Tobón Sanín	X: 599.236	173.558 (1,07 %)	Fuerza Ciudadana (Senate)	NO
Fernando Posada	X: 64.474	6369 (0,24%)	Nuevo Liberalismo (House of Representatives)	NO
Movimiento Naranja	Facebook: 366.000	2.170 (0,01 %)	Fuerza Ciudadana (Senado)	NO
Oswaldo Ortiz	Instagram: 66.134	6.099 (0,04 %)	Centro Democrático (House of Representatives)	NO
Mafe Carrascal	X: 399.734	816.070 (7,01%)	Pacto Histórico (House of Representatives)	YES
Cathy Juvinao	X: 390.373	45.882 (0,77%)	Alianza Verde (Cámara)	YES

Ariel Ávila	X: 387.944	97.470 (0,60 %)	Alianza Verde (Senate)	YES
Jota Pe Hernández	YouTube: 1.180.000	189.291 (1,16 %)	Alianza Verde (Senate)	YES
Miguel Polo Polo	Facebook: 284.200	40.053 (0,71%)	Consejo Comunitario Fernando Ríos Hidalgo (House of Representatives)	YES
Susana Boreal	X: 105.784	Closed list	Pacto Histórico (House of Representatives)	YES

Source: own elaboration

It is important to note that among the 11 candidates analyzed and characterized, 60% were elected to bicameral positions. Of the six elected candidates highlighted here, four primarily used X as their main social media platform, while the other two (Miguel Polo Polo and Jota Pe Hernández) emphasized their participation on Facebook and YouTube. Of those elected, 66.6% had over 300,000 followers on their social media platforms, and the same 66.6% received more than 50,000 votes in their respective constituencies. Additionally, 50% of these candidates were affiliated with the Green Alliance Party, marking it as the most successful party among influencers who participated in the elections.

Based on the previous characterization, the following analysis was conducted for the winning candidates. A rating scale from 0 to 10 was used, providing an approximate quantification of each of the six candidates based on the content they produced and shared on their main social media platforms during the 2022 campaign period. The scale is as follows: a score of 0 to 2 indicates almost nonexistent content, 3 to 5 indicates moderate activity, 5 to 7 indicates very high activity, and 7 to 10 indicates constant presence.

**Table 4. Characterization Contrast**

Source: own elaboration

The content analysis of videos, messages, and images shows that the candidates who most frequently proposed distinct spaces and contexts, along with a wide range of highly repetitive phraseology, were Miguel Polo Polo and Jota Pe Hernández. It is no coincidence that their main social media platforms were Facebook and YouTube, where images dominate over written messages (as opposed to X). Much of their content is closely related to the spectacularization of images and situations, with recurring emphasis on denunciation and strong opposition.

For example, Miguel Polo Polo combines image analysis and discourse construction as crucial elements for the categorical examination proposed here. Additionally, his content correlates with the generation of key moments previously mentioned: audience indignation, voters, and hope for change, where relevant contradictions can sometimes be found.

Miguel Polo Polo has consistently presented aesthetically enhanced settings both before and after becoming a candidate. The dominance of the image reflects a shift and reorganization in the production of his content, moving from an expository-narrative style to the propaganda of his personal image as a Representative to the House. In this same example, messages such as: “Someday we will implement true free-market capitalism in Colombia,” “If I were president, I would privatize education

without a second thought,” “The problem here isn’t the guns; it’s that they’re in the wrong hands,” stand out. In many cases, these statements can stir emotional responses from audiences with limited political background, but who recognize keywords that resonate with their ideal conception of a perfect political system.

On social media platforms where images dominate, likes and various reactions serve as metrics of approval or disapproval, provoking significant polarization, with expressions of extreme hatred or sympathy. However, phenomena or figures that began by sharing opinions about politics often end up as political actors, such as Jonathan Ferney Pulido Hernández, known as Jota Pe Hernández, Senator of the Republic of Colombia (2022). He transitioned from being a Christian music singer on YouTube to a legislative representative, deleting his earlier videos and presenting a new persona on his YouTube channel –this time as a political actor. Weber (2021) offers fundamental insight on state and political party administration:

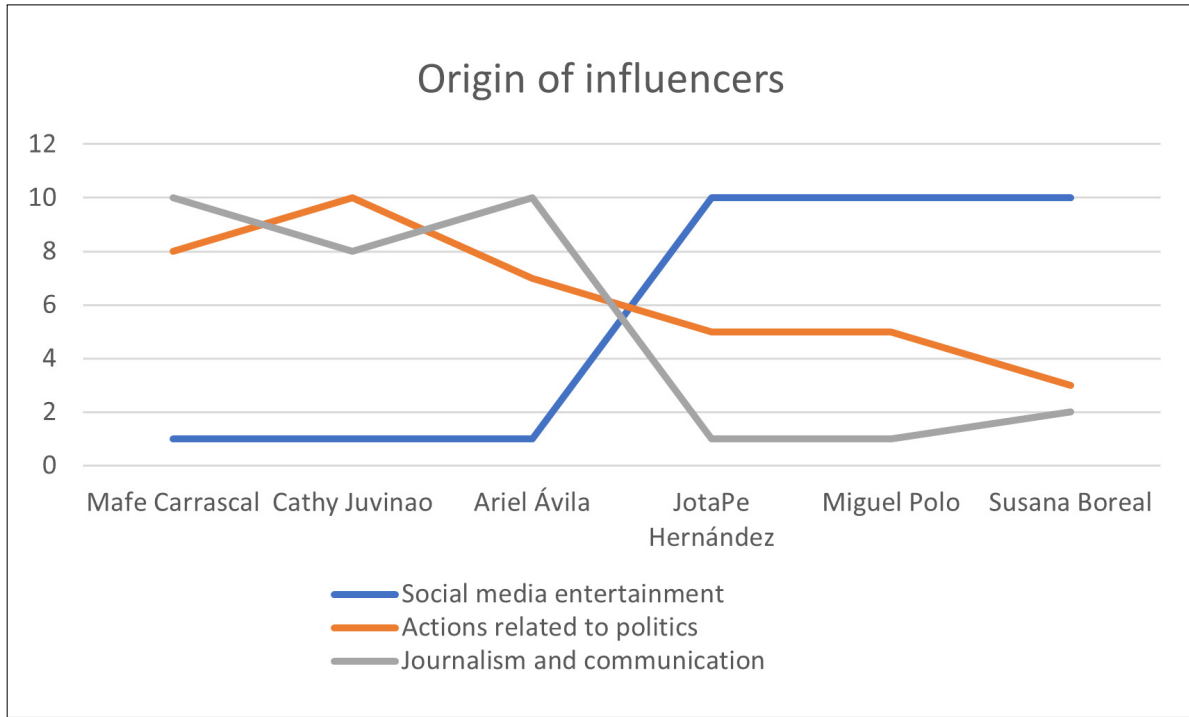
The leadership of a State or Party by people who, in the economic sense, live for politics and not from politics necessarily leads to a ‘plutocratic’ recruitment of the politically ruling classes. This statement does not imply, of course, the reverse. The fact that plutocratic leadership exists does not mean that the politically dominant group will not also seek to live from politics and may habitually use its political dominance for its own private economic interests (p. 93).

Weber’s statement remains relevant today, raising a question that may seem essentialist but is necessary in the current context: Can we still speak of professional politicians today? Beyond the various administrative procedures a politician might carry out, it is clear in the age of social media that the criteria for professionalization are nearly nonexistent. Administrative functions are carried out by specialists in areas that the political leader may not even understand or manage. The branding of the politician’s name becomes a fundamental axis of credibility for a specific audience, but not necessarily for consistent governance.

It seems that audiences or followers set the tone for electoral processes, where phraseology tends to stand out more than arguments. The detailed explanation of figures and percentages to the public almost always seems irrelevant, while the ability to evoke emotions from the audience becomes paramount.

In the same vein, an analysis was conducted on the backgrounds of influencers elected to the legislature, revealing a wide variety of origins, not always directly linked to politics. The next table (Table 3) follows the same quantification process as Table 2.

**Table 5. Origin of influencers**



Source: own elaboration

As seen in the previous table, the political inclinations of influencers stem from very different domains, including entertainment, journalism, and political participation. Influencers with high quantification levels, such as Jota Pe Hernández and Miguel Polo Polo, use social media platforms very different from the rest of the influencers or content creators, as their format is much more focused on visuals. For example, Senator Jota Pe Hernández, who began by producing Christian music videos, leveraged the same YouTube account for his political intentions, with those same subscribers becoming key supporters of his new content centered on political denunciations, stemming from the National Strike of 2019.

Miguel Polo Polo, on the other hand, has consistently been active in expanding his video clips, promoting capitalism as a suitable political system for Colombia, while strongly opposing socialism. However, none of his pre-candidacy videos contain an academic or structured discourse. Instead, they relate his ideas about capitalism to the poverty in the municipalities of Tolú and Cartagena de Indias, where he lived and was originally from, blending them with his daily life like a digital diary. This diluted the structural processes of a concrete political and ideological discourse, making it challenging to relate his content directly to the political sphere.

In contrast, Susana Boreal, as mentioned in the introduction, became involved in politics accidentally, after gaining recognition on social media for conducting an orchestra during the National Strike in 2021. She had no prior political involvement or affiliations with political parties or organizations. Her emotional expression through music led to her recognition, which eventually prompted her to run for the Congress of the Republic.

This highlights Weber's idea that the professionalization of politicians is necessary for those holding legislative positions, ensuring that their political role is legitimized through experience and preparation –not just through media presence. More than being spectacular figures, they must be professional politicians.

Candidates such as Ariel Ávila, Mafe Carrascal, and Cathy Juvinao have had a closer relationship with politics than with media or spectacle. Ariel Ávila, through his numerous videos, has consistently focused on explaining the structural aspects of the armed conflict in Colombia, approaching politics academically and conducting important journalistic work on the emergence and development of illegal groups. Mafe Carrascal served as an advisor in the Legislative Work Unit of Senator Inti Asprilla and is the founder of Ideas por Bogotá and the Citizen Movement El País Primero. Cathy Juvinao was a journalist on the radio show *La Luciérnaga* on Caracol Radio and founded the oversight initiative ¡Trabajen Vagos! aimed at the Congress of the Republic.

These varied backgrounds illustrate that influencers come from diverse origins, as do their approaches to legislative participation. Some already have direct political experience, while others are transitioning from influencers to political apprentices in the legislative sphere.

The biographical traces of each influencer on social media echo Weber's concept of politicians who "live from politics," the "prebendaries" or "salaried officials" who can assume the role of "entrepreneurs" and view their political activities as capital investment, from which they seek to gain influence and profit. As Weber notes: "Simultaneously with the rise of professional civil servants, there is also, though less visibly, the evolution of 'political leaders'" (2021, pp. 99-103). Some influencers began by seeking recognition and followers on social media, rather than aiming for full political participation.

Weber emphasizes that those who "live from politics" see it as their profession for survival. However, the difference with influencers in politics is that every profession requires a calling. According to Weber, a true official should not engage in politics but should limit themselves to "administering," and above all, impartially. "This statement also holds true, at least officially, for political officials, except when 'reasons of state' –that is, the vital interests of the prevailing order– are at stake. The official must perform their duties 'sine ira et studio' –without anger or prejudice" (2021, p. 115).

In this same interpretative line, the professional politician is one who can carry out their administrative functions without emotional attachment. This underscores the importance of a political leader who, regardless of their branch of public power, can manage their activities without speculative distractions. Those who fail to do so were traditionally recognized as sensationalist demagogues. The difference between a sensationalist demagogue and an influencer in politics lies in the latter's ability to act as their own press director, managing their audience's emotions and promoting the image of a politician-brand.

Since the emergence of electoral marketing as a new branch of politics, it has become understood that consumers are deeply emotional. As a result, politicians in campaigns must appeal not just to their voters, but to their audiences on social media and television. In this context, the professionalization of politicians becomes dependent on social media audiences, fake news,

and the various dynamics offered by social networks. Illouz (2010) refers to this emergence of emotions in society as the rationalization of emotions:

Throughout the 20th century, under the guidance of therapeutic discourse, emotional life was infused with the metaphors and rationality of economics; conversely, economic behavior was systematically shaped by emotions and feelings. The rationalization of emotions created its own reverse reality, which could be characterized as the ‘emotionalization of economic behavior.’ This reciprocal process signals a broader cultural phenomenon I call emotional capitalism. In emotional capitalism, emotional and economic discourses shape each other so that affection becomes an essential aspect of economic behavior, and emotional life –especially for the middle classes– follows the logic of relationships and economic exchange (p. 84).

In the electoral contest, partiality, impartiality, or political professionalism, from Illouz’s perspective, are reduced to emotional control. This does not mean that people were not emotionally engaged in politics before the 19th century (perhaps even more so), but the difference is that they were directly involved. Today, politics is experienced through screens. The 19th-century reading of the press is not equivalent to screen-based media, where the image creates consumable prototypes, while reading involves a direct relationship between the written word and reflection.

Thus, images more easily shape emotional repertoires because they do not stage reality but represent it from a specific interpretation. Regardless of political orientation, Gramsci’s idea of direct action provides a better account of political participation based on emotions, unmediated by the economic exchanges proposed by politician-brands. Instead, political participation occurs in the streets, in public squares, and in spaces where manipulation is more limited compared to the episodic lives of these new influencers and their truncated depiction of continuous political life.

In an effort to restructure Colombia’s legislative processes, President Gustavo Petro Urrego’s political reform proposed the implementation of closed lists, in which parties and political movements are voted for, rather than individual candidates. Open lists allow voters to directly choose candidates. Influencers, including Jonathan Ferney Pulido, known as Jota Pe Hernández, were among the most vocal opponents of this reform, arguing that closed lists lead to clientelism and manipulation. He claimed that without open lists, his audience would not have secured his election.

#### 4. Conclusions

*El Colombiano* newspaper published comments from Beatriz Gil, coordinator of the *Congreso Visible* project at the University of the Andes, noting that “most first-timers had to learn –especially those who didn’t come from the political world– how the processes, timing, methods, and protocols work [...]. Such ‘rookie mistakes,’ combined with entrenched dynamics in Congress –such as delays, apathy, clientelism, and pork-barrel politics– took their toll. Of the 676 bills introduced, less than half (256) passed the first debate, and only 69 made it to a second discussion” (Penagos, 2023).

These considerations, observed after just one year of the legislative session in which many of these elected influencers participated, underscore the importance of political careers in well-established and dense democracies like Colombia. It highlights the need to reconsider the role of politicians, as Max Weber proposed, not from an essentialist view that some are born for politics, but rather from a perspective that emphasizes the seriousness of political processes that determine the nation’s most important decisions.

This also leads to relevant questions for democratic processes, such as the concept of the rational voter. What considerations are new voters in Colombia's legislative processes making? Are the majority of young people, who grew up with digital social networks and whose idols later became aspiring politicians, shaping a new way of understanding political processes –one that is disconnected from the administrative complexities that underpin these political decisions?

The observations noted that the various phraseologies used by most influencers in relation to Colombia's political reality may differ. However, upon deeper analysis, their discourse can become cacophonous, repetitive, and redundant. Words like *change* and *corruption* become decisive in stirring the emotions of future voters. For many new young voters, the appearance of youth and aesthetic beauty among these candidates becomes a reference point when choosing whom to support.

After identifying the four factors deemed important for the political analysis of these new electoral phenomena –namely, influencers– a debate is also needed on the fundamental characteristics of a politician not only as a leader but also as an administrative official, as a public servant, and as someone whose work plays a crucial role in the nation's future. This would enable quantitative studies to be conducted that could more accurately predict processes, stability, and balance in Colombia's legislative branch, in the face of an apparent leadership crisis, where knowledge of public administration is increasingly scarce, while leaders with catchy but disconnected slogans dominate.

As seen in Table 2, some of the elected figures had little to no significant experience in politics, yet they received remarkable support, as was the case with Jota Pe Hernández. Here, the social media platform used by influencers and content creators plays a fundamental role in shaping their political intentions, as well as their background and training to handle the protocols of the Congress of the Republic and their legislative duties.

These influencers and content creators seem to come from two distinct contexts within social media. One is tied to personal image and entertainment (politician-brand), while the other is more closely related to established political leaders and the processes taking place in public debate, or, in some cases, to accidental recognition, as was the case with Susana Boreal.

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## 6. Specific contributions of each author

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Conception and design of the work	Andrés Fernando Orozco Macias
Methodology	Andrés Fernando Orozco Macias and Pedro José Madrid Garcés
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Discussion and conclusions	Andrés Fernando Orozco Macias and Pedro José Madrid Garcés
Drafting, formatting, version review and approval	Andrés Fernando Orozco Macias

## 7. Conflict of interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest contained in this article.

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