

Influencers, Content Creators and the Transformation of Journalism

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ABSTRACT

The digital transformation of the media ecosystem has fundamentally altered the ways in which news is produced, distributed, and consumed. Over the last decade, a new category of information intermediaries, commonly referred to as influencers, content creators, or “news creators”, has emerged as a significant source of information and commentary on social media platforms. These creators operate largely outside traditional journalistic institutions, yet often reach audiences comparable to or larger than those of established news organizations. This article examines the rise of creator-driven news ecosystems and analyzes their implications for journalism and democratic communication. Drawing on recent research, this paper explores how creators reshape media authority, audience trust, and political communication. It also examines recent political cases, including elections in Romania, Cyprus, and the United States, that illustrate how digital creators increasingly function as intermediaries between political actors and the public. This report argues that, while creators are unlikely to fully replace traditional journalism, the growing process of media disintermediation introduces significant challenges for democratic governance, including risks related to misinformation, polarization, and the erosion of institutional gatekeeping.

1. Introduction

The global media landscape has undergone profound transformation over the past two decades. Digitization, social media platforms, and algorithmic content distribution have fundamentally altered how information circulates in contemporary societies. Historically, the production and dissemination of news were dominated by institutions such as newspapers, television networks, and professional journalists working within structured editorial systems. These institutions acted as gatekeepers, filtering information and shaping public discourse through established journalistic norms.

The internet has shaped and continues to shape a completely new communication landscape.

According to Leandros (2011), a new communication paradigm has begun to emerge in the global media industry, with key features being the digitization of information, the convergence of newsrooms, mobile platforms, social media and audience fragmentation. Papathanassopoulos(2011) considers the convergence of media as the most important event in the developments that have changed all the data in the field of communication (Triantafyllou 2020 & 2025; Triantafyllou & Apostolopoulos, 2025). It is obvious that the ecosystem of information and journalism is changing radically and at a great speed. New media, new ways and vehicles of information dissemination emerge, creating a completely new environment and a completely new and chaotic landscape, in which traditional assumptions and hierarchies of information are overturned, leading to the emergence of a new reality. The outbreak of the global economic crisis in 2008, combined with the revolution that took place in the media industry, completely overturned the traditional business models of media. Newspapers gradually lost their loyal audience as well as their market value, while advertising revenues decreased, forcing many media companies to either operate online or adopt subscription models (Leandros, 2013; Triantafyllou, 2020 & 2025; Triantafyllou & Apostolopoulos, 2025).

Researchers in the field (Bardoel & Deuze, 2001; Leandros, 2011; Rigou, 2014; Spiteri, 2009) claim that the public played an important role in the developments and the new communication landscape. As a result, the journalist lost the role of the gatekeeper of news, which they now share with the public. Actually, the public can now interact and, in some cases, produce and distribute content. In recent years, a new disruptive technological development was added that has been radically changing the landscape of the media ever since. This is artificial intelligence, which is transforming not only journalism and labour relations, but the whole society. In some cases, journalists share this role with machines, which can now produce journalistic content. (Triantafyllou, 2020 &2025; Triantafyllou & Apostolopoulos, 2025).

In that new landscape, the public has a new and critical role, where it can interact and in some cases, can produce and distribute journalistic content, which means that journalists are not anymore the unique producers of journalistic content (Bardoel&Deuze, 2001; Leandros, 2011).According to Daly (2012), the internet has changed the traditional way of transmitting the news from the media and the journalists to the public. Now this can be also from the public to the media and the journalists whereas the public is now intervening in the communication procedure (Triantafyllou & Antonopoulou, 2022).

Today, however, the rise of digital platforms has enabled individuals outside traditional news organizations to reach mass audiences and participate directly in the dissemination of news and political commentary. Among these individuals are influencers and independent content creators, who produce commentary, analysis, and news-related content across platforms such as YouTube, TikTok, Instagram, and podcast networks. These creators often combine journalistic practices

with entertainment, personal branding, and audience engagement strategies that are native to social media platforms (Newman N. R., 2025). As a result, they have developed large and highly engaged audiences, particularly among younger users, who increasingly rely on digital platforms as their primary source of information (Triantafyllou & Antonopoulou, 2022).

Recent empirical studies highlight the scale of this transformation. Reports identify creators as a rapidly expanding ecosystem of individuals producing news-related content across social and video networks in multiple countries. These creators frequently operate independently of traditional news organizations and are often perceived by audiences as more relatable or authentic than institutional media outlets.

This development raises critical questions for journalism studies and democratic theory. Are influencers and content creators becoming a new form of journalist? How do they differ from traditional reporters? And what implications does their growing influence have for the quality of public information and the functioning of democratic systems?

2. Methodology

This study employs a qualitative research design based on a comprehensive literature review and comparative case study analysis. The theoretical framework is primarily informed by recent empirical data from the Reuters Institute's 2025 report on mapping News Creators and Influencers in Social and Video Networks. This report is analyzing data from 24 countries and identifying approximately 40,000 unique individuals. The report highlights a seismic shift in audience attention. It reveals that in many markets, audiences now pay more attention to independent creators than to mainstream news brands when navigating social media. It also identifies YouTube and TikTok as the primary battlegrounds for this transformation. These video-centric platforms have enabled a new form of "personality-led" journalism that prioritizes visual storytelling and emotional resonance over traditional editorial distance.

To analyze the shifting dynamics of media authority, the research focuses on three distinct political contexts: Romania, Cyprus, and the United States. These cases were purposively selected to illustrate the diverse ways in which digital creators function as political intermediaries across different electoral systems. Case study is a research methodology that develops in depth and explains or describes a snapshot of a problem, that is, a case. It allows us to examine "why" and "how" certain digital strategies succeed in one political culture (e.g., the high-stakes polarization of the USA) versus another (e.g., the anti-establishment sentiment in Cyprus). By focusing on these three distinct cases, Romania, Cyprus, and the United States, this research identifies common denominators in the "creator-led" political era while acknowledging the unique socio-political factors that shape each national information ecosystem.

Furthermore, the study utilizes typological analysis to categorize creators into "Hard News" and "News-Adjacent" groups, evaluating their respective impact on public discourse. Typological analysis is a strategic qualitative method used to classify complex data into distinct, multidimensional categories, based on shared attributes and functional roles. For this study, typological analysis was applied to differentiate between the various forms of digital intermediaries.

By synthesizing academic theories, such as Social Identity Theory and Gatekeeping Theory, with real-time engagement metrics and electoral outcomes, this paper examines the structural transformation of the contemporary media ecosystem.

3. Definitions

The contemporary media environment, characterized by accessible global distribution and advanced digital tools, has fostered the emergence of a diverse array of content creators. This shift has led to a proliferation of information across various genres, most notably in the realm of news and current affairs. As audiences increasingly migrate toward social and video-centric platforms, traditional news organizations have responded by adapting their output, often utilizing "personality-driven" accounts to maintain relevance, particularly among younger demographics (Newman N. R., 2025) (Newman N. F., 2024).

With the term Independent News Creators, we refer to individuals or small collectives operating outside the framework of established media institutions, and *have some impact on public debates around news and current affairs*. Often referred to in academic literature as "newsfluencers" (Hurcombe, 2024) or "peripheral actors" (Hanusch, 2022), they exert a measurable influence on public discourse through platform-native content.

Independent Journalists are a growing segment of high-profile professionals who have transitioned from traditional newsrooms to independent platforms, seeking greater editorial autonomy or more lucrative monetization models.

The News are anything related to the political, war, and other traditional agenda.

There is also the "News-Adjacent Content" term, which is a broader category favored by younger audiences (Collao, 2022), which integrates information with entertainment, gaming, or lifestyle topics. This approach often utilizes informal formats, such as memes or satirical commentary, to engage viewers.

The rise of creators also signals a broader process known as media disintermediation. This process refers to the bypassing of traditional intermediaries, such as journalists and news

organizations, in favor of direct communication between political actors and audiences. Digital platforms facilitate this dynamic by enabling politicians, activists, and influencers to communicate directly with millions of followers. As a result, traditional media institutions, which historically served as a mediator that verified information, lose their gatekeeping role while the risk of misinformation, manipulation, and polarized narratives increases.

4. The Emergence of Creator-Driven News

The rise of news creators is closely tied to the structural transformation of media distribution. Social media platforms have evolved from communication tools into primary channels through which people encounter news and political information. Today's digital ecosystem enables information to circulate almost instantaneously across multiple platforms. Within this context, journalistic organizations increasingly rely on digital infrastructures and social media platforms to reach audiences, monitor trends, and shape editorial strategies.

News creators typically operate as individuals or small teams that produce content focusing on current events, politics, social issues, or explanatory journalism. Their work often blends reporting, commentary, and personal storytelling. Unlike traditional journalists, creators rarely operate within formal newsroom structures.

Instead, they rely on digital platforms and algorithmic distribution to reach audiences directly.

Several factors have contributed to the rapid expansion of creator-driven news ecosystems. First, the technological barriers to media production have significantly decreased. Digital tools and online platforms enable individuals to produce professional-quality video, audio, and written content with relatively minimal resources. Second, social media algorithms reward engagement and shareability, allowing creators to reach large audiences without institutional backing. Third, audiences increasingly prefer personalized and conversational forms of communication. Creators often present news in a more informal and accessible manner compared to traditional journalism.

As a result, many creators have developed substantial followings that rival those of traditional media outlets. In some cases, a single influencer can attract millions of followers across multiple platforms.

The success of content creators is closely linked to generational changes in media consumption. Younger audiences increasingly rely on digital platforms rather than traditional news sources such as television or newspapers. Studies consistently show that individuals under the age of thirty-five are more likely to encounter news through social media feeds, video platforms, and podcasts than through conventional media outlets. Platforms such as TikTok, YouTube, and Instagram have become central environments for news discovery. These platforms encourage

short-form video storytelling and direct interaction with audiences, formats that creators are particularly skilled at producing. Creators frequently present complex political developments through simplified explanations, humor, or narrative storytelling that resonates with online communities.

Traditional media organizations often struggle to adapt to these formats due to institutional constraints, production routines, and editorial cultures. As a result, younger audiences frequently perceive creators as more accessible, relatable, and trustworthy than established news brands.

The generational shift in media consumption therefore plays a critical role in explaining the growing influence of creators in contemporary information ecosystems.

5. A Typology of Digital Intermediaries: Distinguishing Between Hard News and News-Adjacent Creators

The contemporary digital public sphere is characterized by a high degree of hybridity, where the traditional boundaries between "hard news" and "soft entertainment" have become increasingly porous.

The diversity of the creator-led news ecosystem can be categorized into four primary operational models, each presenting distinct challenges and opportunities for traditional journalism (Newman, Arguedas, Mukherjee, & Fletcher, 2025).

The first ones are the Political Commentary and Opinion-Led Discourse represents. They are the most prevalent category among news creators. Figures such as Joe Rogan and Tucker Carlson have their own online political chat show, which require minimal infrastructure compared to traditional newsrooms. Unlike institutional journalists, these creators are often unconstrained by regulatory frameworks or impartiality norms. While in the U.S. this space is largely dominated by right-leaning voices, in countries with restricted press freedoms, such as India or Thailand, commentary creators serve as vital counter-narrative hubs critical of governmental policies.

Although less common due to the high resource requirements, some creators engage in direct reporting and investigative journalism. Some examples are creators in Ukraine, who provide detailed news about the latest fighting, or in Kenya, where citizen journalists have been documenting police brutality in recent street protests.

Another category are the explanatory creators, such as France's HugoDécrypte with over 7m followers on TikTok and 5m on Instagram, who focus on making complex news accessible to younger audiences. This group maintains a symbiotic relationship with traditional media; rather than attacking legacy institutions, they "remix" and "decode" mainstream reporting into

platform-native formats (TikTok, Reels). This approach addresses the "news avoidance" trend among Gen Z by transforming news from a "chore" into an engaging, interactive experience. Other examples are Kovy, a young online personality from the Czech Republic known for explanatory videos about politics and Herr Anwalt from Germany, with a TikTok account with 7m followers who explains legal issues to Gen Z audiences. This group of content creators has managed to connect with the younger audiences, while the traditional media still struggle to.

The final category consists of specialists who focus on specific domains, such as legal analysis, personal finance, or sports, often at a depth that generalist newsrooms cannot match. Many of these individuals are former professional journalists (e.g., Fabrizio Romano in sports with 25m followers on X and over 2m subscribers to his YouTube channel, or Taylor Lorenz in internet culture) who transitioned to a creator model to gain editorial autonomy. Their influence is built on high-trust communities, allowing them to monetize their expertise directly through subscriptions and memberships.

Another powerful category of people, are the ones who don't even claim to be journalists end up having more political influence than traditional newsrooms. While the first category of creators focuses on the traditional news agenda, a second, larger group of "news-adjacent" influencers has emerged. These actors do not primarily identify as journalists, yet they command vast audiences and high levels of perceived authenticity, allowing them to exert significant influence over public discourse and political debates.

Satirical creators and comedians (Cody Johnston in the US with 1m followers of his Some More News show on YouTube or The Deshbhakt in India) utilize humor to make complex political issues accessible and engaging. This "soft" entry point into politics is particularly effective for younger audiences who often find traditional news formats alienating. By framing political critique through satire, these creators can challenge institutional narratives more aggressively than traditional reporters, who are bound by norms of professional neutrality.

High-profile lifestyle and business podcasters have become essential stops for political figures seeking to reach niche demographics. A notable example is Kamala Harris's appearance on Alex Cooper's *Call Her Daddy* podcast (1.7m subscribers on YouTube covers dating, mental health, and personal empowerment), a move designed to engage young female audiences who may be disengaged from mainstream news but are deeply invested in themes of personal empowerment and mental health. Unlike traditional news programs, these "infotainment" platforms often lack rigorous fact-checking structures, leading to criticisms regarding the amplification of health-related or political misinformation.

In the digital-native ecosystem, gamers (Ibai on Twitch) and musicians (Rezo in Germany)

possess immense cultural capital. While their content is primarily entertainment-based, they frequently pivot to social advocacy. Viral videos from such creators, addressing climate change, the rise of extremist politics, or institutional failures, can trigger massive social movements, demonstrating that platform influence can be seamlessly converted into political mobilization.

For a significant portion of social media users, the definition of "news" has expanded to encompass any information that is personally relevant or "new" within their digital community. Mega-influencers in the lifestyle and fashion sectors (Virginia Fonseca or Ria Ricis, an Indonesian influencer making hijab tutorials and lifestyle content, with 44m followers on YouTube and 47m on TikTok) command followings in the tens of millions. Their ability to shape consumer behavior and social norms represents a form of "cultural gatekeeping" that increasingly overlaps with the traditional role of media in setting the public agenda.

6. Characteristics of Creator-Based Journalism

Although creators vary widely in their approaches and political orientations, several common characteristics distinguish creator-based journalism from traditional news production.

One of the defining features of content creators is the centrality of personal identity. Creators build their audiences around personal brands rather than institutional affiliations. Their credibility is often tied to authenticity, personality, and the sense of direct connection they establish with followers.

Creators design content specifically for digital platforms. Short videos, livestream discussions, podcasts, and visual explainers dominate the creator ecosystem. These formats are optimized for algorithmic distribution and audience engagement.

Many creators occupy hybrid roles that combine journalism, commentary, activism, and entertainment. Some provide daily news summaries, while others focus on investigative storytelling or political analysis. These hybrid roles blur traditional distinctions between journalism and opinion, making it increasingly difficult to categorize creators within existing media frameworks. Personal commentary tends to lack of accountability and is unconstrained by regulation or norms around impartiality that may exist for television or radio. In the United States the vast majority of political commentary comes from creators who self-identify on the right and are supportive of Donald Trump. But in other countries such as India and Thailand, where debates in mainstream media tend to be more controlled, creators tend to be critical of the government. This contrast shows that the role of the influencer depends on the political system. While in democracies they polarize, in authoritarian regimes they liberate (Newman, Arguedas, Mukherjee, & Fletcher, 2025).

The emergence of news creators also presents opportunities for the democratic public sphere. First, creators can expand access to information by reaching audiences that traditional media often fail to engage. Younger users, minority communities, and politically disengaged groups may encounter news through creators rather than institutional outlets. Second, creators frequently experiment with innovative storytelling formats. Interactive livestreams, visual explainers, and collaborative content allow audiences to engage more actively with political information. Third, the creator economy lowers barriers to entry in media production. Individuals from diverse backgrounds can participate in public discourse without relying on traditional media institutions.

According to the *Digital News Report 2025*, there is some substantial geographic digital divide of creator attention and impact between countries. The chart below (Newman N. R., 2025) shows that in markets such as Brazil, Mexico, Indonesia, the Philippines, Thailand, and the United States (as well as Nigeria, Kenya, and South Africa), news creators are having a very significant impact. In most of these markets a significant segment of the audience prioritizes content from influencers over established news brands on social media platforms. On the other hand, Northern European countries and Japan exhibit a different trend. In these markets, the impact of independent creators remains secondary to that of legacy media. Audiences in these regions continue to gravitate toward recognized news organizations and professional journalists, even within social media environments. These differences could be explained by the extent to which social platforms are used as primary news sources in these areas or by the societal norms regarding information consumption, even though the size of these markets.

7. The Power of the Click: Big Data, Social Identity Theory, and the New Agenda-Setters.

The transition of journalism to the digital environment has also led to the emergence of new forms of storytelling and communication. Journalists increasingly adopt hybrid practices that combine traditional reporting with social media monitoring, audience feedback, and digital analytics. Consequently, journalistic narratives are now more interactive, participatory, and embedded within broader social and political contexts. News stories are often shaped, not only by reporters and editors, but also by the digital dynamics of online communities and social media networks.

An important component of this transformation is the growing use of big data, which refers to large and complex datasets originating from multiple heterogeneous sources and produced at high velocity in various formats such as text, audio, images, and video. In the context of social media analysis, big data typically refers to the massive amount of information generated by platforms such as X (formerly Twitter), Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube. These data streams include user interactions, audience engagement statistics, algorithmic trends, and user-generated content. For journalists and digital content producers, these data play a crucial role in evaluating

the performance and impact of posts circulating in the digital public sphere.

Engagement metrics provide valuable indicators for identifying which topics resonate with audiences and which narratives gain visibility in online discussions. Consequently, they serve as important tools for understanding how information spreads across digital networks and how audiences respond to specific narratives or viewpoints. Engagement analytics, in particular, represent a quantitative measurement of audience interaction with digital content. Metrics such as organic reach, likes, shares, comments, views, and watch time allow platform managers, journalists, and content creators to assess the visibility and influence of a particular post. These indicators offer a detailed picture of audience engagement and contribute to strategic decision-making regarding content production, communication strategies, and audience development.

At the same time, the emergence of digital public relations has significantly altered the relationship between content producers and audiences. Influencers and digital content creators increasingly use social media platforms not only to distribute information, but also to cultivate communities around their personal brands and narratives. Through direct interaction with followers, they create a sense of belonging and collective identity, transforming audiences into active participants within a shared digital environment. In this sense, followers are not merely consumers of information but also contributors to the circulation and amplification of digital content.

Social media have therefore fundamentally changed the way users communicate and interact with information. Users are no longer passive recipients of news but active participants who modify, share, remix, and reinterpret content according to their personal interests and values. This participatory culture encourages users to engage more actively with information, shaping the visibility and circulation of narratives across digital platforms. Research has shown that social media users often engage with content in order to satisfy personal needs, values, and interests, making them more likely to explore, comment on, and share information. Within this participatory media environment, audience identification with a particular narrative or community plays a significant role in determining patterns of engagement.

This phenomenon can be understood through Social Identity Theory, which suggests that individuals derive part of their self-concept from their membership in social groups. In digital environments, users frequently express their identity through interactions with posts, comments, and shared content. By engaging with specific narratives or influencers, they signal their belonging to particular communities or ideological groups.

In this context, digital content creators increasingly function as agenda setters, particularly during periods of social or political crisis. In some cases, posts published by influencers or

prominent digital figures can shape the public debate and influence the topics covered by traditional media outlets. When content creators publicly comment on political or social issues, their posts may quickly gain visibility and attract widespread engagement. As a result, traditional media organizations often respond by reproducing, interpreting, or critically examining these statements in their news coverage.

This dynamic creates a complex digital ecosystem in which content creators, audiences, and media organizations interact continuously in real time. The boundaries between journalism, commentary, and user-generated content become increasingly blurred, giving rise to new forms of hybrid news production.

Within this evolving ecosystem, the working conditions of journalists are also undergoing significant transformation. The digitalization of the media environment requires journalists to constantly adapt to new technological tools, data analytics, and algorithmic systems that influence the distribution of information. As Triantafyllou (2025) noted, journalism is currently experiencing a transitional phase in which technological developments, particularly the integration of artificial intelligence, are redefining the processes of news production and dissemination, while simultaneously reshaping the professional identity of journalists.

Consequently, contemporary online journalism is closely connected with the monitoring and reproduction of social media posts. Journalists increasingly incorporate posts from influencers, public figures, and digital communities into their reporting, often providing commentary or contextual analysis. In doing so, they simultaneously reflect the editorial policies of their respective media organizations while responding to emerging trends within the digital public sphere.

When determining which posts are significant enough to become news stories, journalists frequently examine the digital footprint of a post across social media platforms. Engagement metrics, audience reactions, and viral trends are carefully analyzed in order to assess the potential impact of a post on public discourse.

Furthermore, digital trends such as hashtags, mentions, and viral narratives play an important role in shaping the visibility and interpretation of events. These symbolic markers function as tools for organizing information within digital networks and for framing political, ethical, or social interpretations of emerging issues.

Ultimately, the transformation of journalism in the digital era illustrates the emergence of a hybrid media environment in which traditional news institutions coexist with influencers, content creators, and participatory audiences. Within this new ecosystem, the boundaries between news production, digital communication, and public engagement continue to evolve, redefining the

role of journalism in the contemporary public sphere.

8. Political Cases Illustrating the Rise of Creator Influence

Recent political developments across several countries illustrate how the growing influence of digital creators is reshaping electoral politics. The elections in Romania, Cyprus and the USA will be analyzed as examples.

In the first round of Romania's presidential elections in 2024, the far-right, anti-European and pro-Russian candidate Călin Georgescu unexpectedly emerged as the leading candidate. Although the elections were later annulled, the political significance of the result remains substantial. Georgescu had limited visibility within traditional political structures, but had gained recognition as a YouTube personality and online commentator. His campaign relied on a decentralized network of supporters who amplified his "pro-sovereignty" and "traditionalist" rhetoric through viral clips. His electoral success demonstrated how digital visibility can translate into political capital in contemporary communication environments. This phenomenon highlights how high-velocity content can create a "political dark horse" effect, where digital visibility translates into sudden electoral capital, catching traditional pollsters and media outlets off guard.

A similar example occurred in the European Parliament elections in Cyprus, where the 24-year-old YouTuber Fidias Panayiotou was elected as a Member of the European Parliament. Panayiotou did not belong to any established political party and ran as an independent candidate. However, he had previously built a substantial online following through his YouTube channel. Fidias did not run on a specific policy platform; instead, he leveraged his "parasocial relationship" with his audience, presenting himself as a transparent, "non-politician" who learns the process in real-time. His electoral success illustrates how digital popularity can function as a substitute for traditional political structures and party organization. His victory also suggests that for younger demographics, digital intimacy and authenticity are becoming more persuasive than ideological alignment or party loyalty. He effectively replaced the "party infrastructure" with "platform infrastructure."

The growing importance of creators in political communication was also evident in the most recent United States presidential election campaign. Both major candidates increasingly relied on podcasts and digital creators to reach voters, reducing their appearances in traditional media outlets. Donald Trump in particular participated in numerous interviews with podcast hosts and online commentators, rather than conventional television networks. Audience data also highlight this shift. Data indicates that left-leaning news influencers were particularly active on TikTok, with roughly 45% of election-related posts on the platform originating from liberal-leaning creators.

Under the ownership of Elon Musk, the platform X (former Twitter) functioned as a central hub for right-leaning political discourse. During the campaign, nearly 79% of all posts by news influencers mentioning the candidates occurred on X. Independent audits suggest that X's algorithm significantly amplified high-engagement, often emotionally charged content. Research indicates that right-leaning users experienced the highest levels of "exposure inequality," as the platform's recommendations increasingly prioritized a few high-popularity accounts, including those of Musk himself. Kamala Harris also campaigned through Tik-tok, by utilizing meme-based storytelling, to foster cultural fluency and mobilize Gen Z. According to Nielsen ratings, Fox News attracted approximately 9.8 million viewers during prime-time coverage of the elections, while CNN reached about 4.7 million viewers. The combined prime-time audience across 18 television networks totaled around 42.29 million viewers. At the same time, YouTube recorded approximately 45 million viewers following election-related content, demonstrating the growing importance of digital platforms as arenas for political communication.

9. Discussion: Hybrid Futures for Journalism

Despite the structural disruptions identified, the rise of digital creators does not signify the obsolescence of traditional journalism. Rather, contemporary media systems are transitioning toward hybrid operational models. This convergence is characterized by a "dual adaptation": news organizations are increasingly incorporating creator-led formats, such as personality-driven newsletters and vertical video storytelling, while independent creators are, in some cases, adopting professional journalistic standards to enhance their credibility.

This shift suggests that the professional identity of the "journalist" is being redefined. The modern reporter is no longer just a gatekeeper but a personal brand who must navigate the tension between institutional objectivity and platform-native authenticity. However, this evolution introduces a critical democratic challenge. As the boundaries between creators and journalists continue to blur, the primary concern remains the preservation of accountability.

The future of democratic discourse depends on the development of new frameworks that can successfully marry the innovation and accessibility of creator culture with the ethical rigor and verified reporting of professional journalism. The goal is not the replacement of one by the other, but the creation of a symbiotic information ecosystem that is both engaging and trustworthy.

10. Findings and Conclusions

The analysis presented in this article leads to several key findings. First, digital influencers and content creators have established themselves as intermediaries within the contemporary information ecosystems. Their ability to reach large audiences, particularly younger users, makes

them increasingly important intermediaries in political communication. Still their impact varies considerably across countries (Newman N. R., 2025).

Second, the rise of creators reflects broader processes of media disintermediation enabled by digital platforms. Traditional journalistic gatekeeping structures are gradually being bypassed as political actors communicate directly with audiences through creators and social media (Newman, Arguedas, Mukherjee, & Fletcher, 2025).

Third, recent political developments, including the cases of Romania, Cyprus, and the United States, demonstrate how digital visibility can translate into political influence. Creators can mobilize large audiences and, in some cases, convert online popularity into electoral success.

Fourth, the process of disintermediation introduces significant democratic risks. The absence of editorial oversight, the influence of algorithmic amplification, and the potential for political manipulation all raise concerns regarding the reliability of information circulating in digital environments.

Finally, the future of journalism is likely to involve hybrid forms of media production that combine institutional reporting with creator-driven communication strategies. Traditional news organizations must adapt to new audience behaviors while maintaining their essential role as providers of verified information and democratic accountability.

In conclusion, influencers and content creators should not be understood simply as replacements for journalists but rather as new actors within an evolving media ecosystem. Their growing influence reflects broader transformations in communication technologies, audience practices, and political communication strategies. However, ensuring that this transformation strengthens rather than undermines democratic systems will require renewed attention to media literacy, platform regulation, and the preservation of journalistic standards in the digital age.

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