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## **DIGITAL INFLUENCE AS AN ALGORITHMIC CONDITION: COMPUTATIONAL AUTHENTICITY, ALGORITHMIC ENTREPRENEURSHIP, AND DIGITAL VISIBILITY**

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### **Introduction**

Since Meta's acquisition in 2013, Instagram has undergone an infrastructural transformation, shifting from a chronological feed to an algorithm-driven model in 2016. This transition redefined content organization, ranking posts based on user behavior rather than publication time, restructuring visibility through opaque criteria of affinity and relevance (Mahapatra, 2020). No longer a byproduct of chronology, visibility has become a condition by design, shaped by algorithmic logic that determines what is seen, by whom, and under what circumstances.

This shift presents a structural challenge for digital influencers—whose visibility directly impacts their reach, engagement, and monetization. They must navigate algorithmic systems that govern distribution while operating in a market where authenticity has traditionally been linked to direct audience relationships (Bishop, 2019; Cotter, 2019; O'Meara, 2019). While existing literature explores authenticity, visibility management, and the commercialization of the self, it often treats platforms as spaces where influencers compete for attention rather than ontological infrastructures that shape influence itself.

This paper examines how algorithmic shifts reshape content distribution and rupture the traditional framework of digital influence studies. We ask: How do these changes redefine the very practices of digital influence? We argue that digital influence is not simply the outcome of audience relationships but emerges from a network of interactions between influencers, algorithmic systems, and platform infrastructures.

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Here, the “digital influence” we refer to concerns the practice of influencing in, with, and through the digital, rather than the influencer as an individual, and it can extend to influencers, content creators, or even users who aspire to that status on platforms. To influence in digital spaces means acting for, on behalf of, and through the digital itself. We conceptualize this through three interrelated modes: computational authenticity, algorithmic entrepreneurship, and digital visibility.

### **What kind of digital influence are we discussing?**

The literature on digital influence is commonly structured around three primary axes: authenticity, visibility management, and the commercialization of influence. Research on authenticity has examined how influencers build relationships with their audiences through self-presentation strategies and affect (Marwick, 2015; Abidin, 2015; Pöyry et al., 2019). Visibility, a central component of influence, is often seen as being shaped by platform rules and the opaque nature of recommendation systems (Bishop, 2019; 2020; 2021; Cotter, 2019; O’Meara, 2019). Meanwhile, the commercialization of influence is understood as the commodification of influencers’ labor and the industrialization of the sector (Karhawi, 2016; Usher, 2018; Campbell & Farrell, 2020).

Yet, these perspectives often reduce platforms to spaces where influencers compete for attention. They center on influencer-audience dynamics while overlooking how algorithmic processes shape authenticity and value. When platform agency is acknowledged, it is typically framed as opaque, with studies focusing on algorithmic imaginaries and influencer speculation about platform constraints (Eslami et al., 2016; Bucher, 2016; Pathak, 2017; Bishop, 2018; 2019; 2020; 2021; Cotter, 2019; O’meara, 2019; Arriagada, A., & Ibáñez, F. 2020; Karhawi, 2022). As a result, algorithms are treated as content filters reinforcing economic dependency rather than as ontological agents shaping influence through their rules and interfaces (Bitencourt, 2025).

Thus, if we understand digital influence solely through the prism of authenticity, visibility, and commercialization without fully accounting for the distinct agency of digital and their algorithmic processes, what kind of influence are we honestly discussing? If we genuinely seek to study digital influence, shouldn't we first ask: what role does the digital itself play in this concept, methodologically and epistemologically?

### **What does it mean to influence the digital?**

Changes in visibility regimes are evident in evolving practices, business models, and engagement strategies aimed at maximizing reach. Metrics and analytics dashboards actively shape behavior, reinforcing the idea that visibility is not simply achieved but must be strategically negotiated within digital infrastructures. Meta’s investments in clones and influencer resources, along with tactics such as targeted engagement strategies (O’Meara, 2019; Karhawi, 2022, 2024), like farms (Grohmann et al., 2022), and the rise of CGI influencers (Bitencourt et al., 2021), expose how influence is no longer just about audience reception but also about aligning with algorithmic priorities. These practices, designed to affect the digital for greater reach, reveal how visibility is both a contested space and a product of engagement with platform rules. This ongoing negotiation between users and platform infrastructures defines the

conditions of influence in algorithmically mediated environments. While platforms dictate engagement parameters, users develop strategies to “sensitize” the system by manipulating metrics, refining content formats, and optimizing platform affordances. This dynamic has fueled the emergence of a specialized social media market, where agencies manage CGI influencers and marketing firms engineer visibility strategies tailored to algorithmic conditions (Bishop, 2020). As influence becomes inseparable from the infrastructures that mediate it, these interactions rupture traditional perspectives that treat it as a stable or human-centered phenomenon, revealing it instead as a continuous adaptation to digital logic.

If the digital is fundamental to influence—distinguishing digitally native celebrities from those in traditional media—our conceptual framework must reflect this entanglement. To be a digital influencer, one must learn to affect the digital on its terms by negotiating with its inherent sensitivities, conditions of being affected, and its own grammar, practices, and affordances. These fissures in existing theories call for a new perspective: one that recognizes that to be influential in digital spaces is to affect the digital itself.

## **Reframing Modes of Influence**

We propose reconceptualizing digital influence as a network of interdependent practices shaped by influencers, audiences, business models, advertisers, and platforms. Influence is not centered on individual agency but emerges from interactions with the digital infrastructure. Therefore, exercising influence means acting for, on behalf of, and through the digital. We capture this process through three interrelated modes: Computational Authenticity, Algorithmic Entrepreneurship, and Digital Visibility.

Computational authenticity moves beyond traditional notions of self-presentation by recognizing a dual interaction: influencers must resonate with both human audiences and algorithmic systems. Platforms assess authenticity not as an inherent trait but as a pattern of affinity, identifying content that aligns with behavioral trends and engagement metrics. In this context, authenticity is negotiated rather than innate, shaped by the logic of recommendation systems, interfaces, and platform policies.

Algorithmic entrepreneurship extends beyond conventional views of market positioning and monetization. In algorithmically mediated environments, influencers must optimize engagement metrics, refine content strategies, and leverage platform affordances to secure visibility. This includes targeted content creation, engagement tactics, and even click farms to maximize algorithmic favorability. In this sense, entrepreneurial activity is inseparable from platform infrastructures, being both constrained by and dependent on negotiating algorithmic conditions that determine what is commercially desirable for the platform across contexts and infrastructural phases.

Digital visibility is not merely about being seen; it is an active and uncertain process of making content recognizable to the platform. Unlike traditional visibility, which implies passive accumulation of attention, digital visibility is constructed through strategies aimed at “sensitizing” the system—shaping how algorithms encode, score, rank, and recommend content. The unpredictability of algorithmic visibility underscores the distributed nature of influence, where no single actor fully controls who is seen or when.

Digital influence, then, is a continuous process of negotiation and adaptation within platform infrastructures. It is co-produced through human actions, algorithmic logic, and infrastructural constraints. Understanding influence requires moving beyond human-centric frameworks to recognize how platforms actively shape outcomes, redefining both visibility, authenticity and entrepreneurship. This perspective challenges traditional models of influence and opens new routes for methodological and theoretical inquiry into the evolving relationship between platforms, influencers, and digital infrastructures.

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