Politicization and depoliticization: a theoretical-methodological framework for the analysis of communication dynamics

Politização e despolitização: abordagem teórico-metodológica para análise de dinâmicas comunicacionais

MAIARA GARCIA ORLANDINI[a]
Federal University of Minas Gerais. Belo Horizonte — MG, Brazil

ROUSILEY CELI MOREIRA MAIA[b]
Federal University of Minas Gerais. Belo Horizonte — MG, Brazil

ABSTRACT
This article develops a theoretical-methodological proposal to analyze political discussions in digital environments and empirically understand the processes of politicization/depoliticization. Through operationalization via multimodal content analysis, the analytical framework integrates textual and visual elements, which are often treated separately. The study provides an analytical framework to grasp the processes of politicization and depoliticization through three interactional dynamics: framing analysis, visual analysis, interlocutors' performance.
Keywords: Politicization, depoliticization, multimodal analysis, political communication.

[a] Postdoctoral researcher in the Research Group on Media and Public Sphere (EME/Federal University of Minas Gerais - UFMG). Orcid: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0163-6102. E-mail: maiaraorlandini@hotmail.com.

[b] Full Professor in the Department of Social Communication at the Federal University of Minas Gerais (UFMG). Orcid: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8123-2406. E-mail: rousiley@fafich.ufmg.br.

RESUMO
Este artigo desenvolve uma proposta teórico-metodológica para analisar discussões políticas em ambientes digitais e compreender empiricamente os processos de politização/despolitização. A partir de uma operacionalização através da análise de conteúdo multimodal, o quadro analítico articula elementos textuais e visuais, os quais muito frequentemente são tratados em análises à parte. O estudo fornece um quadro analítico para apreender os processos de politização e despolitização a partir de três dinâmicas interacionais: análise de enquadramento, análise visual e atuação dos interlocutores. Essa metodologia ajuda a lidar com a complexidade das interações digitais e pode ajudar a entender como esses processos ocorrem simultaneamente.
Palavras-chave: Politização, despolitização, análise multimodal, comunicação política.

INTRODUCTION

In recent decades, the democratic crisis has sparked a growing debate on the processes of politicization and depoliticization of issues of common interest across different societies. Authors such as Burnham (2001), Wood and Flinders (2014), Hay (2007, 2014), and Jenkins (2011) have worked with these concepts. This framework contributes significantly to advancing social understanding, as contemporary notions of neoliberalism are often identified as one of the main influences on depoliticization, with attempts to remove responsibility and social agency and to empty the concept of politics. However, empirical research that presents an adequate operational design to systematically observe and measure the dynamics of politicization and depoliticization remains rare. Most studies are based on sophisticated but descriptive concepts. In contrast, our proposal in this article involves creating an operationalization capable of systematically identifying these processes in communicative interactions in digital environments.

The proposed analytical framework presents two main contributions. First, within research on online conversations and discussions, the digital environment expresses increasing complexity in terms of actors, referring to the diversity of groups, categories of agents, and plurality of voices. Antagonistic groups and discourses organize themselves in various environments, sometimes in homogeneous spaces (like-minded groups) and sometimes in heterogeneous spaces (plural groups), with frequent clashes between opposing discourses. There is also an increasing overlap of interactions and modes of action (conversations, mobilizations, and protests with different purposes) in the digital environment. Therefore, empirical analyses must strive to identify and analyze different actors and modes of online interaction.

The literature on digital media has produced an accumulation of knowledge about the varied uses of textual and visual resources in the production, distribution, and reconfiguration of content in these spaces. In this context, the second contribution of the proposed analytical framework is to combine quantitative and qualitative methodologies, capable of integrating text and image in line with multimodal studies (Maia et al., 2022a, b; Rizzotto et al., 2017; Wessler et al., 2016; Wozniak et al., 2015). Furthermore, research based on a single digital platform has clearly become insufficient to encompass the complex and plural dynamics of the digital terrain. The present framework for systematic analysis is sufficiently flexible to be employed across different digital environments, in alignment with cross-platform studies (Maia et al., 2015, 2022b).

Our proposal aims to provide an analytical framework for the operationalization of the concepts of politicization and depoliticization, where we seek to

understand the importance of discursive and visual resources. To achieve this purpose, our approach encompasses three main components: i) framing analysis, focusing on the processes of politicization and depoliticization; ii) visual analysis based on visual content related to the private, public, and governmental spheres; and iii) analysis of the performance of interlocutors, considering the design and capabilities of platforms, with a distinction between the performance of individuals, groups, organizations, and institutions.

POLITICIZATION AND DEPOLITICIZATION

Studies exploring the concepts of politicization and depoliticization have proliferated in the research agenda of Communication and related fields. Although the concern with the thought and dynamics of neoliberalism—as a way to reduce the boundaries of the state, restrict public responsibility, and limit administrative management to a minimum—is not recent, the terms politicization and depoliticization are today used more specifically. There is an overlap of studies dealing with politicization and depoliticization processes in theoretical, empirical, and analytical fields (Bates et al., 2014; Burnham, 2001; Hay, 2007, 2014; Jenkins, 2011, Wood, 2016; Wood & Flinders, 2014). The conceptual framework, with distinct types of politicization and depoliticization, has become particularly relevant for application in empirical research concerned with the crisis of democratic legitimacy, the advance of political parties, illiberal groups, and authoritarian leaders (Azevedo & Vimieiro, 2021; Fawcet et al., 2017; Maia, 2017, 2019; Maia et al., 2020).

Initially, it is necessary to clarify what politics understand in this line of studies. In his book *Why we hate politcs*, Hay (2007) adopts a broad definition of politics, going beyond the arrangement of institutions, parties, and governance processes. This author offers a list of some conditions for the existence of politics, such as: the possibility of choosing between alternative actions and solutions to perceived problems, the capacity for agency, public deliberation, communicational flows, and disputes of interest, among others (Hay, 2007, p. 65). Early studies on politicization and depoliticization tended to focus on the governmental sphere. Burnham (2001), for instance, refers to depoliticization as a dynamic related to the redistribution of tasks to other extra-governmental arenas and also as an attempt at dereponsibilization rather than accountability to citizens. In this line, Flinders and Buller (2006) suggest that depoliticization, as a strategy of rulers, involves an attempt to *remove* something (responsibility, social agency, or even politics itself). Politicization, in turn, means seeking to *add* something (responsibility, politics, or agency). The authors suggest that

the processes of depoliticization and politicization should be seen in relation to the set of political institutions and social arenas, and also associated with the perceptions and ideas (social perspectives) that sustain these institutions.

Hay (2007) conceives distinct stages for the processes of politicization and depoliticization, through three stages for each. Based on Hay's (2007) realms, Wood and Flinders (2014) develop a framework in which these types of politicization/depoliticization are viewed through the movement of demands and claims between the private, public, and governmental spheres. On one hand, politicization occurs when issues affecting people's lives come to be understood as "problems," that is, they cease to be seen as "natural" and, therefore, become, in some way, subject to transformation through the actions of individuals. On the other hand, depoliticization occurs when issues that were previously a concern of the governmental sphere return to the public and/or private spheres (Hay, 2007, 2014), as presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Developments of the processes of politicization/depoliticization

Hay (2007) typology	Wood and Flinders (2014) typology	Main action	Actors
Politicization type 1	Discursive politicization	Recognition of the damage suffered	Individuals
Politicization type 2	Social politicization	Deliberation and mobilization	Society and media
Politicization type 3	Governmental politicization	Advocacy and public policies	Government and institutions
Depoliticization type 3	Discursive depoliticization	Naturalization and/or denial of the damage	Individuals
Depoliticization type 2	Social depoliticization	Individualization and/or criminalization of struggles	Society and media
Depoliticization type 1	Governmental depoliticization	Delegation of state functions	Government and institutions

Note. Prepared by the authors based on the works of Hay (2007) and Wood and Flinders (2014).

In a recent collection, *Anti-politics, depoliticization, and governance* (Fawcett et al., 2017), researchers from Political Science, Public Administration, Philosophy, and Communication revisited these concepts and examined the processes of depoliticization and the increasing levels of dissatisfaction with politics as instituted processes and practices. In her contribution to this volume, Maia (2017) discusses the politicizing and depoliticizing effects of everyday conversations. She argues that the connections between governance networks and social spaces

are increasingly complex in a hybrid and interconnected media environment. Conversation and informal discussions are related to the construction of citizens' preferences and group interests; to the processing of debates about collective problems, including social conflict and parallel activism processes; and also to citizens' demands for political and social accountability. Therefore, the potential of everyday conversation in the processes of politicization and depoliticization must be conceived in a broad sense, establishing interfaces with the private, public, and governmental spheres. Subsequently, in contrast to approaches that regard formal forums or deliberative mini-publics as more democratic, Maia (2017) maintains that these spaces are necessarily interdependent, especially when viewed from the perspective of an interconnected system.

Conceptually, Type 1 politicization is the first and most basic process—it occurs through people's reflective perception and questioning of an issue that previously belonged only to the realm of fact. This type is associated with individuals' critical articulation capacity and the contestation of values or practices previously regarded as natural and, therefore, seen as "destiny" (beyond individual choice). In other words, Type 1 politicization occurs when an issue migrates from the realm of fact to the private sphere. At this stage, the issue begins to be understood as a product of the social or cultural structure and thus subject to transformation through individual action.

Type 2 politicization can be seen as a continuation of this critical process, occurring when themes and issues previously restricted to the private sphere gain public visibility and begin to be debated as matters of common interest, relevant to all. This implies their transition from the private to the public sphere, becoming objects of discussion in terms of principles or values to be defended or practices to be implemented. Thus, the understanding of causes and possible solutions comes to be addressed to (or sought by) the collective, moving beyond the merely individual or private scope.

The Type 3 politicization process is related to the governmental sphere. Issues of common interest that require regulation or reform become part of the formal political agenda. They become topics of debate in legislative houses, targets of public policies or administrative programs within executive bodies, or even subjects of disputes in judicial proceedings. At this stage, a transition from the public sphere to the domain of the State and government occurs.

The concept of depoliticization describes the displacement of decision-making from the State to society, following the reverse path. The first depoliticization, Type 1, is characterized by the delegation of State functions to non-governmental institutions, social agents, and the market (in the case of privatizations). Even though there is still State control, governments or public bodies restrict

themselves to ensuring compliance with rules or contracts through a set of laws or criminal sanctions (Wood & Flinders, 2014).

Type 2 depoliticization concerns issues that were previously discussed in the public sphere and related to collective interest, which are shifted to the private sphere. The erasure or silencing of certain conflicts (between social groups or between specific populations and public managers) from the media and digital platforms are examples. In the words of Wood and Flinders (2014), this stage can be conceived as the "process by which social deliberation around a political issue gradually erodes, as it effectively becomes depoliticized" (p. 159).

Finally, Type 3 depoliticization addresses the displacement of issues from the private sphere to the realm of necessity. Here, there is a refusal to make decisions regarding the issue at hand, or even a defense of the undesirability of implementing specific actions, such as educational, precautionary, or protective measures. Frequently, this process is associated with the framing of political processes as pre-established, "normal" facts justified by "common sense," leading to the naturalization of phenomena. Wood and Flinders (2014) use the term "discursive depoliticization" to describe the naturalization of contentious issues, the dilution of identity differences, and the evocation of moral panic to replace debate with immediate solutions to perceived problems. Under these conditions, depoliticizing discourses undermine the inquiry into alternative understandings of problems and/or the questioning of moral and ethical principles to be upheld in actions or public policies, or pursued in a given direction for solving social problems (Maia et al., 2023). In situations where broad consensus and crystallized unidirectional understanding prevail, depoliticizing discourses often present themselves as totalitarian, preventing criticism and contestation, as these are no longer socially recognized (Bates et al., 2014, p. 246).

FOCUSING ON THE SPHERES AND TYPES OF POLITICIZATION

There is a considerable number of studies addressing processes of politicization/depoliticization, especially in the fields of administration and governance (Flinders & Buller, 2006; Hay, 2014; Willems & Van Dooren, 2016; Wood, 2016; Wood & Flinders, 2014). For our purposes, it is important to highlight that, despite the significant interconnection between the private, public, and governmental spheres, empirical studies typically focus on one sphere to observe the movement among different types of politicization/depoliticization. In the first phase of research in this area (Hay, 2007, 2014; Wood, 2016; Wood & Flinders, 2014), studies predominantly concentrated on the governmental sphere, aiming to explore transitions along the vectors of politicization/depoliticization. In a

more recent phase, research (Azevedo & Vimieiro, 2021; Baptista et al., 2022; Maia, 2017, 2018; Maia et al., 2020; Orlandini, 2023; Orlandini & Maia, 2023, 2025) has become concerned with the processing of controversial political issues and social conflicts in the public sphere. Here, the investigation of discursive disputes and activist movements, which fight for transformation in a desired direction, gains central analytical attention.

Studies on the public sphere typically emphasize the importance of observing and tracking social and discursive changes, as these are associated with reforms and governmental decisions (Maia, 2012, 2014; Maia et al., 2023; Wood & Flinders, 2014, p. 152). Jenkins (2011), in particular, pointed out three main reasons for intensifying the interest in depoliticization and politicization processes in the extragovernmental spheres. These are: (i) contemporary currents of political theory and their efforts to politicize the social realm by valuing citizens' perspectives; (ii) depoliticization as a governance strategy in electoral democracies; and (iii) the use of the term "politicization" with a pejorative connotation to designate the undue penetration of partisan politics into arenas that should remain neutral and extrapolitical, such as sports, religion, and science.

Jenkins (2011) and Bates et al. (2014) argue that the dynamics of depoliticization seek not only to remove politics from the interactions among agents but also to destroy the perception of the possibility of making choices (eliminating alternative choices). In the words of Bates et al. (2014), "politicization helps to denaturalize, to reveal and contribute to contingency, openness, and autonomy; depoliticization generates discursive sedimentation, the restriction, removal, or suppression of our capacities for autonomy" (p. 246). In this context, politicization can be described as a process of discussion and deliberation within a context of choice, whereas depoliticization would be linked to fatalism and the restriction of debate.

In our proposal for empirical operationalization, we share the interest of Bates et al. (2014) in focusing on political and argumentative perspectives within the public sphere, in order to distinguish different framings, political judgments of accountability, and demands for action (or inaction). Through systematic analysis, we can shed light on the very understanding of the problem from the perspective of the enunciators, whether pertaining to the private, public, or governmental sphere, as well as the proposed or preferred solutions.

In our theoretical-analytical framework, we understand that the processes of politicization and depoliticization should not be viewed as alternative processes, as if one or the other occurs exclusively, as much of the literature suggests. The dynamics, even if moving in opposite directions, can operate in parallel and simultaneously. It is also important to highlight that the boundaries between

spheres should be treated as porous and, therefore, as objects of contestation and dispute. To operationalize the types of politicization/depoliticization in an empirical study, we intend to demonstrate that it is important to understand the arguments and speech resources, in our case, within the public sphere. Thus, what we seek is to apprehend the meaning articulated in the speech act and the understanding attributed to the problem, regarding the imputation of responsibility and the referral of solutions as pertaining to the private, public, and governmental spheres.

CHALLENGES OF OPERATIONALIZATION

Conceptual complexity

The operationalization of the concepts of politicization and depoliticization imposes difficulties of different natures on the researcher. Here, we indicate three challenges: (a) the multilevel understanding of politicization/depoliticization or processes with simultaneous dynamics; (b) the fluid boundaries between the "stages" or phases of development of the social conflict; and (c) the degree of institutionalization of the issue in the governmental and legal spheres. To address these difficulties, it is important to elaborate further on these challenges and on the tools for constructing the analysis.

The types of politicization/depoliticization, as Wood and Flinders (2014) recurrently warn in their work, should not be treated in a unidirectional manner, nor are they mutually exclusive. According to the authors, it is necessary to conceive the spheres as concentric and, in some cases, overlapping, so as neither to hierarchize nor delimit them, but rather to understand the complex interrelation between them. Depending on the research interest, researchers may employ different categories and subcategories of analysis. Our analytical framework proposes the methodological use of systematic content analysis, in order to scrutinize how the problem is viewed and contested by different social actors. As we will explain in the following section, content analysis allows for the capture and tracing of meanings under different conditions, with various modes of aggregation and levels of comparison within the studied case. Thus, processes of politicization and depoliticization can be examined as dynamics that may operate in parallel and simultaneously, even if in opposite directions.

The second difficulty in employing the concepts of politicization/depoliticization lies in apprehending the stages of the conflict at hand. Conceptually, we must understand the boundaries between the spheres as fluid and subject to recurrent contestations (Wood & Flinders, 2014). Systematic content analysis is also an appropriate methodology for addressing this difficulty. For example, Bates

et al. (2014) emphasize the importance of examining the content of conflicts as well as the context in which they occur. According to the authors, attention to the context of the debate (about the controversial political issue) "allows for the identification of processes of politicization and depoliticization within the same moment and the same political space, in which depoliticizing *content* may be found in contextual changes of politicization and vice versa" (Bates et al., 2014, p. 246). We highlight that, even though the transition between spheres (private, public, and governmental) may often appear ambiguous, maintaining a focus on the content expressed by different social actors (individuals, groups, social actors, or populations in one way or another) is fundamental. Content analysis enables mapping and tracking the transformations of arguments, discourses, or demands over time. In this sense, the researcher's dialogue with historical, cultural, and sociological studies on the issue at hand is crucial for substantively understanding the findings and interpreting them appropriately.

Finally, and in a related manner, demarcating institutionalization within the governmental, administrative, and legal spheres is the third challenge in developing empirical studies based on the concepts of politicization/depoliticization. The different levels of institutionalization may even affect the understanding of what triggers politicization or depoliticization (Beveridge et al., 2014; Burnham, 2001; Flinders & Buller, 2006) and/or what is defined as a political-party intrusion into a process that should maintain neutrality, remaining distant from partisan conflicts (Berg-Sørensen, 2006; Meyer-Sahling, 2008). A critical dialogue with previous studies offers researchers important parameters for examining decision-making processes, public policy designs, activism, and demands from social movements regarding the case at hand within a given society. As already indicated above, systematic content analysis, to address these challenges, must be anchored in a consistent literature review and document research, not only to construct analytical categories (codes) but also to comparatively understand substantive issues within a delimited space and time.

Complexity of digital environments

Studying the processes of politicization and depoliticization within the digital environment also requires careful attention to the unique dynamics of each digital platform. In our theoretical-analytical framework, we emphasize the importance of (i) examining different platforms and (ii) considering the peculiarities of forms of expression based on verbal and pictorial content within the digital environment. In the early studies on online conversation and discussion, research focused on a single platform. With the increasing interconnection of media, the multiplicity of digital environments, and their interlinkages, current

studies seek to understand interactions occurring across multiple platforms (Maia et al., 2015, 2022b; Yarchi et al., 2020). This strategy (cross-platform studies) avoids generic or oversimplified understandings and, instead, seeks to demonstrate types of engagement specific to each platform.

Platforms often encourage multiple forms of expression and interaction through their affordances, with textual content and nonverbal communication evoking a multiplicity of meanings, not always obvious at first glance, including political stances, emotions, reactions, and information on various subjects simultaneously. Studies on the discursive potential of images, for instance, highlight the importance of visual and socio-political aspects of conversation. Thus, visual content is also an essential element in communication across social networks and must be investigated with equal attention and analytical rigor.

OPERATIONALIZATION OF DIFFERENT STAGES
OF POLITICIZATION AND DEPOLITICIZATION

This section aims to develop an integrated analytical framework to employ the typology of politicization and depoliticization in studies on online conversation. We start from the premise that it is necessary to consider the variety of users' repertoires and modes of enunciative agency, as well as the specificities of digital platforms. A cautionary note is necessary here to emphasize that we conceive platforms as environments that bring forth the social, and not merely as spaces that mediate political debate (Van Dijck, 2013). To reiterate, due attention and analysis of platform design and technical interface (including technical devices, supports such as affordances, or resources for the production and sharing of text and images) are crucial for the study of online communication.

Our methodological proposal is based, in part, on the model of multimodal analysis (Wessler et al., 2016; Wozniak et al., 2015) and the combination of textual and visual element analysis expressed in the digital environment. Developed by Wessler et al. (2016) for the comparative analysis of journalistic coverage of climate change across different countries, the original model of this methodology integrates: (i) news framing analysis (Entman, 1993), (ii) narrative analysis (Wolf, 2018), and (iii) visual analysis of images illustrating the journalistic text (Rodriguez & Dimitrova, 2011).

To understand online communicative exchanges and the particularities of digital platforms, we propose an analytical framework that encompasses: (i) frame analysis focusing on processes of politicization and depoliticization; (ii) visual analysis based on the image content expressed in relation to the private, public, and governmental spheres; and (iii) analysis of the interlocutors' performance

(user analysis, considering the design and affordances of the platforms, distinguishing between the actions of individuals, groups, organizations, and institutions). Before describing the categories of types of politicization/depoliticization and illustrating the operationalization of the three units of analysis (i.e., text, user, and image), it is necessary to briefly characterize the case of street sexual harassment, also known as sexual misconduct, since some examples of the application of analytical operators are problematized based on this topic.

In our researches (Orlandini, 2023; Orlandini & Maia, 2023, 2025), the discussion around sexual harassment on social media raises crucial concerns related to the safety in the appropriation of public spaces and the preservation of individual choices. This phenomenon has been the subject of various debates on social media and is routinely defined as a form of harassment and misconduct of a sexual/verbal nature that occurs in public or private environments. This type of harassment includes actions such as catcalling, honking, uncomfortable staring, unwanted conversations, and sexually suggestive gestures.

Frame analysis

Frame analysis presents a variety of approaches concerning the components to be examined in empirical investigation. Goffman (2012) treats the concept of framing as a process inherent to the structuring of experience and meanings based on specific situations. Simply put, framing is the way a situation is defined when we ask ourselves, "What is happening here?" According to Goffman, we use frames of reference to elaborate our response. These frames are socially constructed and transform alongside social developments, through collective and everyday experiences. In the author's words, "frame analysis" is a perspective that explores the structuring of experience (Goffman, 2012, p. 34). Frames essentially serve as mechanisms of interpretation, enabling individuals to understand, perceive, and discern events, phenomena, and issues unfolding in the world.

One of the widely used operationalizations of framing, especially in the fields of communication and media, is formulated by Entman (1993). In this perspective, framing studies generally investigate how a given problem is defined, what its causes are, the moral evaluations, and the possible solutions proposed. In our research on the debate regarding sexual harassment on social networks (Orlandini, 2023; Orlandini & Maia, 2023, 2025), we constructed categories to capture politicization/depoliticization processes in Instagram posts as well as statements on Twitter. It is important to note that the listed options are not exhaustive. The description of the categories primarily aims to identify how the concepts of politicization/depoliticization provide guidance for the construction

of categories, translated into substantive terms of the chosen topic—which can be used in studies addressing other themes.

(a) Problem Definition: According to Entman (1993), what is understood as a problem—damages, costs, failures or harm, deficits in actions, etc.—is implicitly or explicitly articulated (and evaluated) based on shared cultural values. With regard to politicization and depoliticization, it is necessary to consider how the problem at hand can be apprehended, in reference to the spheres (private, public, or governmental). In our research, the definition of sexual harassment as a problem was categorized based on different understandings, that is, frames of meaning (Table 2). To construct the categories, it is important for the researcher to become familiar with studies on the chosen problem through a careful literature review in order to grasp the cultural and historical meanings involved in the issue.

Table 2

Politicization/depoliticization operators for problem definition

Process (type of politicization)	Reference sphere (to which realm the problem belongs)	How it manifests itself (how the problem is understood)
Polytization type 1	Accountability in the private sphere	Understanding of sexual harassment or bullying as inappropriate or unacceptable by those affected
Polytization type 2	Accountability in the public sphere	CUnderstanding harassment or bullying as a public problem, is unacceptable to those affected, those concerned and a wider group of citizens
Polytization type 3	Government accountability	Understanding the action as a violation or crime that can be punished by law
Depoliticization type 1	Unaccountability of the government sphere	Pestering, although seen as a problem (harassment), should not be criminalized
Depoliticization type 2	Unaccountability of the public sphere	Harassment is not seen as something of social relevance, of common interest, because it is up to people to define preferences and coordinate actions
Depoliticization type 3	Unaccountability in the private sphere	Harassment is not seen as harm or a problem, but as something natural and inherent to social relations

(b) Diagnosis of causes: Entman (1993) argues that framing consists of identifying the forces that originate or motivate a problem. Taking as an example the case of street sexual harassment (Orlandini, 2023; Orlandini & Maia, 2023, 2025), questions were raised regarding the attribution of responsibility for harassment.

Consideration was given to which sphere the blamed party refers. Therefore, it is essential to reflect on the context in which the individual or group held responsible is situated, considering that ordinary citizens tend to be associated with the private sphere, whereas public and social issues are typically situated within the public or governmental spheres, as illustrated in Table 3.

Table 3

Operators of Politicization/Depoliticization for Diagnosis of Causes

Process (Type of politicization)	Sphere of reference	How it manifests itself (who is held accountable)
Politicization type 1	Individual (private sphere)	Man (men should not harass under any circumstances)
Politicization type 2	Society/collective (public sphere)	Society (the patriarchal society as the driving force in shaping sexist men). Understanding harassment or sexual misconduct as a social problem, for which everyone is coresponsible in preventing or restraining such harmful behaviors and actions.
Politicization type 3	Rulers/laws (government sphere)	Institutional/State (laws and public policies must intervene through actions), and male harassers should be subjected to sanctions and punishments provided by law.
Depoliticization type 1	Rulers/laws (government sphere)	Displacement of responsibility from governmental institutions, suggesting that public agents should not be involved, but rather the family, churches, or relevant groups, without relying on the State.
Depoliticization type 2	Society/collective (public sphere)	Individuals must act autonomously and guide their behavior in a singular and individualized manner, such as women taking care/not taking care of their own safety.
Depoliticization type 3	Individual (private sphere)	Men and women have their behaviors justified by biological factors or the harassment is not held accountable.

(c) Suggestion of solutions: Entman (1993) argues that frames present approaches to perceived problems from a specific perspective that already signal or anticipate the desired or preferred resolutions. In our study, these solutions were categorized only within the processes of politicization, since depoliticization involves the non-recognition of harm. In other words, there is no reason to propose a solution to something that is not seen as a problem. Within this

dimension, it is necessary to discern how the solution is presented and to clarify which arena/sphere is responsible for its execution. Individual and isolated actions fall within the private sphere, whereas actions requiring collective support fall under the public sphere. Suggestions that call for institutionalized actions, in turn, fall under the responsibility of the governmental sphere.

Table 4

Operators of politicization for suggestions of solutions

Process (type of politicization)	Sphere of reference	How it manifests itself (Who is responsible for solving the problem)
Politicization type 1	Private sphere	The resolution falls individually to women (strategies for them to avoid harassment and unwanted sexual advances, for example: not going out alone at night, not wearing short clothes, not drinking excessively, etc.). Individual responsibility of men (men need to become politicized to prevent these situations).
Politicization type 2	Public sphere	The resolution involves a set of voluntary measures in the workplace or education sectors (informal programs, professional protocols).
Politicization type 3	Government sphere	Laws and government actions to implement programs, awareness campaigns by official agents, etc.

(d) Moral judgments: Entman (1993) states that framing performs a critical and evaluative analysis of the causal agents and their effects. Some studies did not identify this class of elements because they considered it difficult to apprehend, as in the study by Wessler et al. (2016). However, depending on the topic under analysis, it is feasible to construct a framework that takes into account the processes of politicization and depoliticization, as well as the positive and negative evaluations associated with these elements.

As we have mentioned, Entman (1993), in developing the categories described above, intended to conduct studies on media content, such as news and reports. However, these categories can also be employed in the analysis of other types of content, such as the processes of politicization/depoliticization of online discussions. Once the elements are identified, it is possible to quantify them, perform analyses and comparisons among them, or even use them to identify broader frames.

Table 5

Operators of politicization for moral judgments

Process	Express meaning	How it manifests itself (what is the source of demand)
Politicization type 1	Private sphere (individual)	Positive evaluation or judgment that considers personal stories.
Politicization type 2	Public sphere (society/groups)	Positive evaluation or judgment that considers claims made on behalf of groups/third parties.
Politicization type 3	Government sphere (public policies)	Positive evaluation or judgment that considers claims for the improved functioning of public policies.
Depoliticization type 1	Government sphere (public policies)	Negative evaluation or judgment involving depreciation or criticism of public policies (such as statements that belittle the effectiveness of the Maria da Penha Law or argue that the State should not be involved in such matters).
Depoliticization type 2	Public sphere (society/groups)	Negative evaluation or judgment regarding social movements (criminalization).
Depoliticization type 3	Private sphere (individual)	Positive valuation of harassment (harassment as a form of compliment).

Identification of interlocutors

The "complex ecology" approach in the context of the interconnected media environment offers a valuable starting point for understanding the actions and interactions of users. It is important to note that various digital applications and platforms create distinct opportunities and constraints while simultaneously establishing interconnected conversational spaces. First, since digital networks are intrinsically linked to the ever-changing dynamics of technological innovations, understanding these environments and how users engage with them is, to some extent, equivalent to understanding the transient and ephemeral nature of these spaces intended for entertainment, information-seeking, socialization, political discussions, etc (Maia et al., 2015, 2022b; Van Dijck, 2013). Second, users must be seen as agents involved in various social practices such as posting, commenting, sharing, liking, and many other available interactions. Third, online discussion is shaped by the design and purpose of the platform, as digital spaces are also largely governed by norms and behavioral expectations shared by users. Thus, the logic of interactions is associated with the nature of the environments. To assist in understanding how users and networks influence the processes of politicization/depoliticization, the following items should be observed:

(a) Types of users: To systematically explore different types of users, researchers can construct classifications that refer to different spheres: (i) those who speak on behalf of the State, encompassing executive, legislative, and judicial sectors, distinguishing secretariats, police departments, institutions, and official political representatives (elected), who play a fundamental role in echoing the perspective of the governmental sphere in online conversations; (ii) those who represent organized interests of civic associations, religious entities, identity groups, media organizations, and market and private sector agents; (iii) ordinary individual citizens, those who speak for themselves (and not on behalf of organized interests).

(b) Reach indicators: Unlike participants in face-to-face discussions, those involved in digital environments "like" posts and also share previous comments, enriching the content with their own perspectives and arguments (Maia et al., 2022b). Variables in the coding scheme may include metadata to understand the reach and repercussions of a given content. By examining "likes" and shares, for instance, we can infer the reach and scope of a specific discussion within the digital environment.

(c) Level of identifiability: By level of identifiability, we refer to users' presentation. On digital platforms, this implies the use of profiles that may operate under real identities, pseudonyms, or even nicknames without any identifiers. The level of identifiability employed affects the user's political participation and behavior (Asenbaum, 2018; Maia et al., 2015, 2022b). Thus, codes can capture both the lack of identification, such as user anonymity, and, on the other hand, identity confirmation, which can be verified through account verification badges provided by the platform itself.

Visual analysis

Visual communication, by definition, carries multiple meanings, not always evident at first glance, and offers various elements related to political stances, emotional reactions, feelings, and multilayered information (Highfield & Leaver, 2016). Regarding images and political communication, non-verbal forms are studied from different angles. In deliberation studies, visual communication can reveal, for example, processes of justification, inclusion or exclusion of marginalized actors in public debates; and also induce, reflect, and stimulate new ways of thinking about public controversies (Mendonça et al., 2022). In research on activism and political mobilization, images help uncover framings and reframings of complex messages, with varied effects on media agents, groups supporting the cause, and opposing groups (Karabelnik, 2021).

In our study on sexual harassment (Orlandini, 2023; Orlandini & Maia, 2023, 2025), we proposed, as a first step, a distinction among images related to the private, public, and governmental spheres.

a) Images from the private sphere: This category includes images that depict individuals' bodies (images with a sensual tone, using the body to express a message) or individual facial presence (selfies, for example).

(b) Images from the public sphere: This category encompasses images that depict expressions of collectivity (images showing groups), content with an informative and/or educational character (images that include infographics, diagrams), publicity (posters and promotional cards for events and actions), among others.

(c) Images from the governmental sphere: This category refers to images that provide information about laws and actions from the executive, legislative, or judiciary branches. It includes the dissemination of information about public policies, government campaigns, and official events. Additionally, it includes images showing direct interaction between government representatives and the community, such as in meetings, conferences, legislative sessions, or other events associated with the governmental sphere.

We begin with the premise that the "expressed meaning" through images is complex, with specific nuances and meanings (Rizzoto et al., 2021). In our research, the categorization of visual content, although relatively simple, proves highly promising when combined with the analysis of verbal and user content. This is because the image typology (private, public, and governmental) is integrated into the analysis of the three types of politicization and three types of depoliticization, and also examined in relation to the usage by different categories of users.

This scheme allows for multiple combinations. Through this integrated analytical framework, the researcher can systematically handle textual and visual elements based on evidence to uncover statistically significant patterns. It is thus possible to explore these dimensions in detail, highlighting how images reflect correlations with different realms and processes of politicization and depoliticization. This integrated analytical framework also enables the generation of new inquiries regarding the relationships among these different units of observation (user, text, image), paving the way for future investigations.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The debate on politicization, depoliticization, and repoliticization involves highly complex issues in terms of content. Few empirical studies have developed

appropriate methods to systematically observe and quantify the dynamics of politicization and depoliticization. Although many studies employ sophisticated concepts, the investigations tend to be limited to descriptions and interpretations. To address this gap, our approach aimed to introduce a methodology capable of systematically identifying processes of politicization and depoliticization within communicative interactions that occur in digital environments.

The methodology proposed in this article allows for an adaptation of multi-modal news framing analysis, with the purpose of apprehending such processes within online discussions. We hope to have demonstrated that the types of politicization/depoliticization can be operationalized through: (a) framing analysis capable of discerning between different types of processes and levels across the private, public, and governmental spheres; (b) analysis of social media users; and (c) visual analysis aimed at discerning the content of images associated with the private, public, and governmental spheres. Notably, the inclusion of visual analysis, which is concerned with incorporating pictorial content, is essential to understanding and interpreting the dynamics through which content is shaped by the logic and design of platforms and by user interactions. The combined analysis of text and images allows for a more nuanced and coherent engagement with the politicizing/depoliticizing nature of images in specific situations and contexts. Problematizing the type of user—official representatives, civil society actors, market agents, and ordinary citizens—by revealing who is speaking, the level of identifiability, as well as the reach and impact of their interactions, may provide valuable insights for understanding these dynamics.

The methodological proposal presented here also represents an effort to trace claims of suffered harm, aiming to understand how the actors involved recognize or fail to recognize the alleged problems, and/or how they contribute to the politicization or depoliticization of the debate. In the contemporary context of democratic legitimacy crises, erosion of foundational consensuses, and setbacks in institutionalized arrangements for inclusion and rights, seeking tools to observe and analyze how these processes may occur simultaneously seems both urgent and essential. M

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