

# Personas and Their Influencers in the Low Voltage Electrical Sector in Brazil

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**Keywords**— *Electricity consumer behaviour, influencers, personas.*

**Abstract**— *The Brazilian low voltage electricity sector has been experiencing a natural monopoly situation for decades, framed by a lack of competition and no customer focus. This environment tends to change, as like it did in other countries, where small customers can choose their electricity supplier. It is necessary for distribution utilities to modernize and get to know their customers better. Therefore, the objective of this work is to present the main personas previously identified for residential and commercial in energy sector in Brazil, identifying their main influencers and how the influence occurs. The article discusses the importance of knowing consumer behavior in a digital reality, bringing theoretical references about personas and influencers. The work also deals with the perceived credibility of influencers and the factors that make communication more effective. Some figures related to the digital world, such as the most accessed social networks in Brazil and in the world, are also presented.*

## I. INTRODUCTION

Digital technologies are increasingly present in people's lives, generating impacts on society, culture and almost each one's way of life. Connectivity brought new voices, and every individual became a potential vehicle of communication, with unlimited potential and capable of engaging an unparalleled number of followers.

It is indisputable that the Internet has changed the paradigm of communication. Through the web and, in particular, social networks, the individual assumes the position of a prosumer, capable of producing content about everything he consumes and of disseminating word-of-mouth more easily and efficiently. In this digital environment, users discovered the power they have, and their ability to propagate ideas, change concepts, leverage and destroy brands through visibility achieved through

social networks. Some people speak louder and certain individuals manage to gather large audiences around them, formed by other individuals who are prone to consume their content and who are influenced by them.

In this new reality, it is necessary to highlight the role of the consumer and its importance in the strategic influence in decisions of companies. More demanding, aware, and connected, this consumer starts to have direct participation in the way the operation of companies happens. The issues such as their feelings, beliefs, emotions, values and behavior become fundamental in the new market practices.

Faced with this new scenario, it is pertinent that organizations understanding to the role of digital influencers, a role that allows them to be closer to their customers. The organizations in this way became hostage

and must establish a relationship with their public. The influencers had re-signified the way companies dialogue with their consumers, horizontalizing this relationship and placing customers and companies on the same level.

## II. UNDERSTANDING PROBLEM AND RESEARCH OBJECTIVES: IMPORTANCE OF CONSUMER BEHAVIOR KNOWLEDGE

The Brazilian low-voltage electricity sector (110/220 V connections), composed, among others, by a class of consumers in residential and commercial, special the small ones, has been experiencing a natural monopoly relationship for decades, characterized by a lack of competition and no customer focus.

This situation will be change, in the same way occurred in other countries, where small consumers can freely choose their electricity supplier. Faced with this imminent modernization that allow the purchase of electricity, and choice of supplier, it is essential that energy distribution utilities modernize and adopt assertive customer relationship practices. Knowing their customers well is a necessary condition to provide products and services that meet real needs. Therefore, the objective of this research is to present the main personas previously identified for the residential and commercial energy sector connected in low voltage, showing their main influencers and how this process of influence normally occurs.

It is indisputable that the world has undergone constant transformations directly affected by technological advances. Digitalization and connectivity are the main agents of change related to business and communication. In this context, the consumer becomes the main character in companies strategic decisions and knowing their behavior, becomes something as important as the companies' financial balance sheets. Although such transformations are not directly associated with the electricity sector, the electricity consumer is the same one who undergoes and make decisions in all these changes in other industries. Therefore, the importance of the electric industry getting to know its consumer better, in a reality of exponential technologies, using personas and their potential influencers as tools, is mandatory.

In this sense, the article deepens the discussion on the behavior of consumers of electricity, connected in low voltage (residential and commercial) from the perspective of the methodology of personas and their potential influencers. This discussion is based on a comparative analysis between two qualitative studies carried out within the scope of the Research and Development program regulated by the National Electric Energy Agency (Aneel), the electricity formal regulator in Brazil. This project was

named a "Challenges to Establish Correct Regulatory Incentives in the Era of Exponential Technologies". The project is financed by the EDP Group and by Centrais Elétricas de Santa Catarina (Celesc). It is developed by the Electric Sector Studies Group (Gesel) of the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro (UFRJ).

The first research, carried out along the lines of the Delphi method, sought to relate the personas defined by the project to its main influencers. The second brings an analysis of the influence on contracting an essential service. This analysis was carried out based on the persona's files built through in-depth interviews with real customers (residential and low voltage commercial) of EDP and Celesc.

The article also discusses the importance of knowing consumer behavior in a digital reality, bringing theoretical references about personas and influencers. The work also deals with the perceived credibility of influencers and the factors that make communication more effective. Some figures related to the digital world, such as the most accessed social networks in Brazil and in the world, are also presented. The article ends with conclusions and bibliographic references.

## III. THEORETICAL FOUNDATION: PERSONAS AND THE PHENOMENON OF INFLUENCERS IN THE DIGITAL MARKET

In a more competitive scenario, personal relationships, the technological environment and management models have changed with digitalization and connectivity. Many economic activities lost space (such as physical bookstores) or ceased to exist (such as video rental stores), while others emerged (such as Amazon and Netflix, for example). In this context, knowing consumer behavior and offering them memorable experiences have been elements that guarantee a competitive advantage for companies. Satisfied customers become loyal and can even influence other customers, which ends up becoming a virtuous cycle for business.

Currently, consumers consider the characteristics, functional benefits and quality of the product or service, as a normal attributes, it means, no bad surprises are expected (Schmitt, 2002).

In this way, what they seek are products and services that stimulate their senses and emotions and that are able to incorporate them into their lifestyle. They want to get an experience and no longer want connect with companies only through their products and services (Patel, 2021).

Above all, they want to create relationships with humanized organizations, in addition an expectation to get

valuable experiences. Marroquín (2014) complements by stating that a company, in order to connect with this new consumer, needs to know them and, if possible, anticipate their needs. In addition, consumers expect organizations to be transparent in providing clear and detailed information about their products and services, helping them to make more informed choices.

In this sense, the importance of increasingly striking and meaningful experiences for consumers before, during and after the purchase is evident. The greater the interaction among consumers, product or service suppliers and its organizations, the greater the likelihood of triggering new experiences. Certainly, say Sargi and Mattos (2015), experiences have great value these days, making customers connect in a unique way with the organizations that provide them.

To help understand consumer behavior, the persona methodology presents itself as an efficient tool, by enabling a better understanding of customers, their needs and expectations. Personas are representations of types of customers; thus, in addition to their demographic characteristics, they present a lifestyle, habits, opinions, social preferences, influences, fears, desires, tendencies, pains, among other aspects.

Even though they are imaginary, they must be defined with rigor and precision, being a way to humanize the figure of the potential customer (Crippen, 2010). Calabria (2004) adds that the definition of a persona must consider characteristics of behavior, work environment, frustrations, relationships with other people, level of knowledge, in addition to some demographic data, name and photo (even it is imaginary).

Personas can serve different purposes, representing a desired customer, or an ideal customer. Can be useful as typologies for recruiting people (which may or may not be customers) to test products or services under development or submitted in improvement strategies. They can also be used to understand the customer journey<sup>1</sup> in its different phases, including before and after the actual purchase or use of a particular service.

The identification of personas can be carried out through qualitative research (interviewing real people) or with quantitative data, usually resulting from big data associated with the Internet and the scrutiny of behavior and decision-making of its users. It is recommended to

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<sup>1</sup> The customer journey can be contextualized within the study of the customer experience and presents aspects of process and experiences from the customers' point of view, describing the repeated interactions between customer-supplier, bringing together their reactions and emotions. The personas methodology is an essential element in building a customer journey.

frequently revisit personas to keep them up to date, as in practice they are based on available data, demographic information and informal observations and all of them are changing in a phenomenal speed.

The persona development methodology applied to the residential electricity sector presented in this article was built from the work of Lobbe and Hackbarth (2017). The authors cited, analysed the changes in the German electricity market, classifying consumers into five different groups with influence in the decentralized services market (utilities, traders, aggregators, NGOs, among others). They are; conservatives, liberal intellectuals, computer activists, 'in movement' and social-environmentalists<sup>2</sup>.

Although these five personas are also representative in Brazil, three new personas associated with the residential electricity market were also established, namely: home absentees, families with homecare<sup>3</sup> and indifferent. In addition, as it is the focus of this work to also understand the profile of low voltage commercial consumers, two more personas were idealized: conservative merchant and disruptive merchant. These ten personas are characterized in Table 1, as follow.

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<sup>2</sup> During the research, it was decided to change the name of the Social-Environmentalist persona to Environmentalists. This was due to the fact that the name Environmentalists better reflects the characteristics presented by the persona, and the change was only in the name, its attributes remain the same.

<sup>3</sup> Despite several attempts to contact homecare customers, none of them went ahead, and it was not possible to conduct interviews with consumers who represent such persona. As a result, Persona 7 was eventually dropped from research.

Table 1: Personas and their characteristics

| PERSONAS AND THEIR CHARACTERISTICS        |   |
|---|---|
| <b>PERSONA 1</b><br>CONSERVATIVES         | The supplier's responsibility, its leadership and market tradition represent the main attributes of interest that drive the option for a certain style of contracting and relationship.   |
| <b>PERSONA 2</b><br>LIBERAL INTELLECTUALS | Consumers with a higher level of education and for whom self-determination in commercial relationships is an important factor.  |
| <b>PERSONA 3</b><br>DIGITAL ACTIVISTS     | The service provided by digital connections is a must and the availability of Apps is fundamental for the selection of the supplier.  |
| <b>PERSONA 4</b><br>IN MOVEMENT           | Consumers who constantly choose to change their suppliers, characterized by a low level of commercial loyalty.  |
| <b>PERSONA 5</b><br>ENVIRONMENTALISTS     | They value aspects of environmental preservation in the most diverse aspects.   |
| <b>PERSONA 6 HOMES</b><br>ABSENTEES       | Professionals who are active in the market and who live alone or in a family that spends long hours away from home. They prioritize comfort and convenience while they are at home.   |
| <b>PERSONA 7</b><br>HOMECARE              | They are always at home and highly dependent on the continuity of electricity services.   |
| <b>PERSONA 8</b><br>INDIFFERENT           | He has other concerns in his daily life, although saving is among his goals. It does not follow the evolution of the energy sector and has no interest in updating itself on this subject, it just wants to continue receiving the service. |
| <b>PERSONA 9</b><br>CONSERVATIVE MERCHANT | Doesn't want to take any risk business. Convenience and predictability are desired so that the focus can be restricted to the business  |
| <b>PERSONA 10</b><br>DISRUPTIVE MERCHANT  | With an eye on the future, he wants to enjoy all the news that can result in lower costs and innovations for business and brand.  |

Source: Authors production.

Understanding and knowing how to identify the types of influencers and how they change the mind, the use of different personas is a fundamental tool to understand consumer behavior. It must be clear that the power of influence in people's daily lives is nothing new as influence exists as long time ago. From the influence at home, through family members, close people and friends, to the influence exerted by key people in the community, such as the head of the Church, the community leader, the mayor, among other leaders. There is still the influence of communication vehicles and, more recently, the influence of digital influencers. The fact is that influence has always been in the life of society in the most varied decisions, ideological, cultural, religious positions and in the decision to purchase a product or service.

The digital influencer is the individual who produces content who, through social networks, is able to inspire and persuade people, provoking changes in mind, mood

and behavior in the virtual and real lives of their followers (Felix, 2017 apud Souto et al., 2021). They are also defined as those individuals with influence in a subject's purchase decision process; power to put discussions into circulation; influence decisions in lifestyle, tastes and cultural assets of those followers in their networks (Karhawi, 2017).

According to Brito (2018), digital influencers, to be successful with their followers, must plan their communication strategically, choosing the appropriate content to be transmitted to their audience. The author also highlights that digital influencers are valued by their followers for formulating ideas and exposing feelings that their audience would want to convey, with an identification between followers and influencers.

For there, to exist an influence, highlights Fournier (1989 apud Brito, 2018), there must be an interdependence

between the follower and the influencer, generating a type of relationship. In this sense, it is essential that the influencer knows their audience, their language, their opinions, their consumption habits and what content they are interested in. In the same way, completes Ribeiro (2017 apud Brito, 2018), influencers must produce, differentiated and impactful content, always keeping up to date on everything that happens and finally communicating their perception in an attractive and transparent way. The success of influencers is greater depending on their ability to promote interaction with their audience. The challenge, in this sense, says Faria (2017 apud Brito, 2018), is to have the attention of an audience that is increasingly dispersed because it is exposed to a large amount of other social media.

It should be noted that it is not possible to talk about digital influencers as we do today, in any other time than the current one. This means, explains Karhawi (2017), once society today, with all its economic, technological and social characteristics, supports the emergence of these new actors. It is also worth mentioning, as part of this context, the birth of a generation immersed in the digital environment, with a more flexible mindset and aptitude for collaboration and co-innovation (Gomes and Gomes, 2017).

Called Millennials<sup>4</sup>, the contemporary generation is characterized by immediate, demanding, impatient, well-informed, multitasking, constantly connected people who move through the virtual world with ease (Tapscott, 1999, apud Gomes and Gomes, 2017). Born between the 1980s and early 2000s<sup>5</sup>, a period of great sociocultural transformations, Millennials behave as consumers and, at the same time, participants in the production process, being able to obtain information quickly and process several things at once, which characterizes his thinking as non-linear and hypertextual (Presky, 2001, apud Gomes and Gomes, 2017). Unlike previous generations, in which radio and television were the technologies with the greatest reach and influence, for Millennials, such media have become antiquated. These young people interact with the media so that they can decide how, where and when to access information.

### 3.1 The Perceived Credibility of Influencers and the Factors that Make Communication More Effective

<sup>4</sup> Also known as Generation Y, Digital Natives, Net Generation, among other nomenclatures.

<sup>5</sup> The term Millennials was coined by William Strauss and Neil Howe after realizing that this would be the first generation to graduate from high school and enter the job market in the 21st century (Gomes and Gomes, 2017).

Followers value the credibility of influencers and the information disseminated by them, also credibility is presented as one of the main factors in the power of influence exercised by the digital influencer. Several studies have sought to understand how the credibility of the information or source is perceived and how it influences consumer attitudes towards purchase intention (and the purchase itself), in addition to the behavior of individuals in general.

Even before the Internet, Hovland and others, as late as the 1950s, believed that the experience and reliability of the source had a significant impact on the message recipient's assessment of the credibility of information. In their work, the authors indicated that the effectiveness of the message emitted, depends on the perception, on the part of the receiver, of the experience and reliability of the source (Wathen and Burkell, 2002, apud Xiao et al., 2018).

Pornpitakpan (2004 apud Xiao et al., 2018) highlight these factors as the main dimensions related with credibility of the source issuing the message. Being an expert in an area, having the experience of doing something or having a title are factors that contribute to the formation of the sender's experience of the message perceived by its receiver. In this sense, individuals tend to agree with the sender they perceive as 'experts' (Crano, 1970; Crisci and Kassinove, 1973 apud Xiao et al., 2018).

Confidence is related to the apparent integrity of the source, trusting the source to communicate valid and honest statements. Thus, say Gass and Seiter (2011 apud Xiao et al., 2018), it is not enough to just appear experienced, it is necessary that message recipients recognize the reliability of the source, which can significantly influence the persuasiveness of a message and the individuals' assessment of their credibility. McGinnies and Ward (1980) and Lui and Standing (1989) (apud Xiao et al., 2018) consider that reliability is the most impacting factor of source credibility than its experience.

Regarding the factors that determine the effectiveness in the communication process, more specifically in the communication between the influencer and his follower, McGuire (1985 apud Xiao et al., 2018) talk about familiarity, sympathy and similarity. Familiarity, explains the authors, is described as the knowledge one has about the source of the information (influencer) from its exposure. Sympathy, on the other hand, concerns how much the information receivers (followers) are affected by the appearance or personality of the sources (influencers), while similarity is described as common characteristics between influencers and their followers. In the latter case, similarity in the attitudes of message senders and their recipients has a stronger influence on the credibility of the

source compared to other types of similarity, such as gender or appearance (Atkinson et al., 1981, Metzger et al., 2003, apud Xiao et al., 2018).

Finally, it is necessary to understand that true influencers are those who, in fact, engage and influence their followers and are not necessarily defined by the size of their audience. In this sense, explains Brito (2018), it is more important to observe its power of engagement, which will be defined by the shares and comments generated by its posts, than by the number of followers.

### 3.2 The Power of Influence These Days: Some Figures from the Digital World

Much more than bringing new paradigms to the business world, offering tools to influence the consumer's purchase decision and changing the form of relationship between the organization, its employees and customers, the Internet made it possible for individuals, anonymous or not, to exercise power of influence far beyond their family circle, friends or even the power that ordinary media could achieve. This only happened thanks to the emergence of social media, especially, social networks.

The advent of social media allowed, individuals started to have access to the most varied products and services, in an easy and instantaneous way, confronting traditional vehicles of communication, such as radio and television. In this sense, organizations recognize social media as a strategic tool to advertise their products and services and position themselves in the market. Even more, having the possibility to build solid relationships with their customers. The use of social networks, in particular, allows companies to engage and interact with their current and potential customers not only to sell their products and services, but to create a relationship of intimacy and trust that goes far beyond the commercial issue.

Today, explains Longo (2004 apud Brito, 2018), social media users have the freedom to write criticism, praise or suggestions on company websites without them having control over it. Likewise, search engines such as Google, blogs and social networks have become so popular that they have made it possible for people to express themselves and influence a much larger audience than they could in the physical world. Longo (2004) adds that today social networks guarantee everyone a voice. If someone has a complaint, it will go far, becoming the subject of posts, being shared instantly. All marketing, planning and communication strategies idealized by the organization could lose their value.

A market survey carried out by Nielsen, a global information, data and measurement company, in 2015, pointed out that 83% of individuals said they trust recommendations made by people they know, much more

than any type of advertising (Farias, 2020). Thus, it is not an excess to affirm that the digital influencer assumes a major role in the business strategies adopted by companies, whether large or small, once their followers consider and respect their influencers.

When it comes to media and social networks, the figures point to the immensity of what connectivity represents in the world today. With an estimated world population in April 2021 of 7.85 billion people, 4.66 billion individuals have access to the Internet, almost 60% of the population across the planet, according to data from the Digital Global Overview Report - Digital 2021, report published by Hootsuite in partnership with We Are Social (2021a)<sup>6</sup>.

Also, according to the same studies, 4.33 billion individuals are active users of social media, including social networks and messaging apps, which represents 55% of the population worldwide. Of this total, 99% of people access social media from their cell phones and spend around two hours a day browsing through.

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<sup>6</sup> Hootsuite and We Are Social are two digital marketing agencies specializing in social media operating around the world. Together, they carry out the Digital Global Overview Report, published every year, being one of the most consulted and respected studies in the area of digital marketing. The report presents a series of information and insights, such as the growth of each social network and the main trends in e-commerce. The survey results are consolidated for the entire world and divided by countries, including Brazil (Linka, 2021).

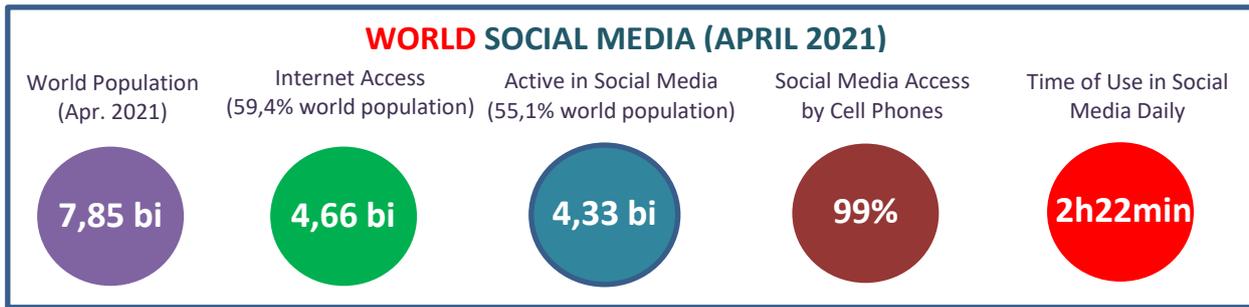


Fig. 1: World Social Media - some figures

Source: Authors Production based on Hootsuite e We Are Social, 2021a.

Brazil, with an estimated population, in January 2021, of 213.3 million people, 160 million individuals have access to the Internet, with 150 million being active users of social media, it represents an equivalence of 70.3% of

the whole population. (Hootsuite and We Are Social, 2021b). Brazilians people, 98.8% access social media through their cell phones, spending almost four hours daily connected (Fig. 2).



Fig. 2: Brazil Social Media - some figures

Source: Authors Production based on Hootsuite e We Are Social, 2021b.

When it comes to social networks and messaging apps<sup>7</sup>, in the world, as April 2021, Facebook is the absolute leader with 2.8 billion active users per month, followed by YouTube (2.3 billion), WhatsApp (2.0 billion), Facebook Messenger (1.3 billion) and Instagram (1.29 billion). Twitter appears much further back, with 396 million monthly active users (Hootsuite and We Are Social, 2021a). Data from Brazil, January 2021, show active users per month in the most accessed social platform is YouTube (154.2 million). It is followed by WhatsApp (146.7 million), Facebook (143.7 million), Instagram (138.1 million) and Facebook Messenger (109.6 million). In the country, Twitter is also not among the main social media, with 82.56 million active users per month (Hootsuite and We Are Social, 2021b) (Fig. 3).

<sup>7</sup> The Digital 21 report (Hootsuite and We Are Social, 2021a) also mentions several other social networks and messaging apps, such as TikTok, Pinterest, Telegram, LinkedIn, Badoo, Reddit, among others.



Fig. 3: Most's accessed social media in Brazil and world

Source: Authors Production based on Hootsuite e We Are Social, 2021a e 2021b.

Currently, the most influential personalities in the world and in Brazil are either people who appear in traditional media, such as artists, journalists, sportspeople, specialists, or are those present on social networks. The comparison among these celebrities, defines Brito (2018), can be made for the reasons that promote them. In the first case, such personalities stand out for the affectionate relationships they create with the public, for their controversial statements on certain subjects and for their visibility in soap operas, films, news and entertainment programs. Internet personalities, on the other hand, end up gaining notoriety as they approach their audience when they show their home, their routine, their lifestyle and their ideals. The language and topics covered also help such influencers to create intimacy with their audience.

#### IV. DELPHI RESEARCH AND PERSONA SHEETS: TWO DIFFERENT METHODOLOGIES TO RELATE PERSONAS TO THEIR POTENTIAL INFLUENCERS

To better identify who influences the ten personas<sup>8</sup> (people in residential and commercial class in the low-voltage electricity segment), qualitative research was carried out,

<sup>8</sup> When performing the Delphi method, persona 7 - homecare had not yet been discontinued from the research. This occurred later, during the in-depth interviews for the construction of the personas files.

using the same techniques as the Delphi Method<sup>9</sup>, involving the expanded group of Gesel researchers and project members. The survey was carried out in two rounds, with the participation of 33 respondents in total, between June and August 2021.

To carry out the research, the typology of influencers defined based on Singh, 2015 apud Faria and Benazzi, 2017 and Farias, 2020 was used (Table 2).

<sup>9</sup> Delphi research is a qualitative research tool that seeks a consensus of opinions from a group of experts on a topic. Such a tool allows researchers to obtain a more detailed and in-depth view around the opinions that exist on a specific problem. The method consists of a repeated circulation of questionnaires to organize opinions and responses from a group formed by specialists in the area under study, being widely used as a tool to aggregate individual judgments (Velez-Pareja, 2003 apud Ramos et al., 2020).

Table 2: Typology of influencers adopted by the project

| TYPOLOGY OF INFLUENCERS ADOPTED BY THE PROJECT |   |
|--|---|
| REFERENT                                       | <b>CELEBRITY:</b> recognized in the media, have a wide audience and high capacity to make a brand or idea known.  |
|  | <b>JOURNALIST:</b> in addition to the communication vehicles in which they work, they use social networks and other channels. They are usually present on social networks through blogs.  |
|  | <b>INFORMANT:</b> publish real-time information on a variety of topics.   |
|  | <b>TRENDSETTER:</b> they use the networks to defend causes they have experience, they have ownership in the subject they address.   |
|  | <b>ACTIVIST:</b> they defend one or several causes and, unlike the trendsetter, they have not necessarily lived the experience they defend.   |
| ESPECIALIST                                    | <b>MILITANT:</b> Easily create debates, provoke discussions, raise a topic.   |
|  | <b>AUTHORITY:</b> professionals specialized in specific fields and recognized for their work, by their peers and by society. Considered 'authorities' on the subject, they are respected regardless of their position or position in a given institution.       |
|  | <b>EXPERT:</b> specialists in a certain subject, they show their skills through studies, their experience and the teachings they share. Unlike the authorities, they use their publications and studies as a way of proving their knowledge of their expertise. |
| POSICIONAL                                     | <b>ANALYST:</b> They create insights from their knowledge of a particular subject.  |
|  | <b>Posicional:</b> Closer to their audience, they act in their circle of coexistence (eg family).   |

Source: Singh, 2015 *apud* Faria e Benazzi, 2017 e Farias, 2020.

During the course of the Delphi survey, influence was researched from a broader perspective, that is, the influencer's power over an opinion, lifestyle, ideological positioning, contracting a service, purchasing a product, among others. To participate in the Delphi survey, respondents were asked to fill a quiz in a correlation matrix, among the ten personas defined by the project and the typology of influencers indicated in Table 2. For this, each of the subjects, filled a spreadsheet for the respondent to make the correlation between the influencer (subject) and the personas potentially influenced by him.

After carrying out the Delphi survey, in a way to continue to build the personas of customers in the electricity industry connected to low voltage, 33 in-depth interviews were carried out with customers from the EDP and Celesc concession areas, with 26 residential customers and 7 commercial customers. These proceedings were developed between October 2021 and February 2022.

In the case of in-depth interviews, the influence potential was analyzed more specifically compared to that was done in the Delphi survey. Real customers were only asked about influence in contracting an essential service. This is due to the fact that electricity fits precisely into this kind of service.

Differently from what was done in the Delphi survey, in which the typology of influencers was made available to its respondents for the correlation with the personas, in the in-depth interviews, carried out to build the persona form<sup>10</sup>, addressed the question of influence through a question general and focused only on the use of essential services. For instance: What are your criteria and sources of consultation normally used to choose the companies that offer these services [essential services]?. Thus, the types of influencers were not presented to the interview participants in advance.

Fig. 4 indicates the main differences between the two methodologies adopted for the correlation between personas and their potential influencers.

<sup>10</sup> The persona form used by the research includes a fictitious name, photo and phrase that defines the persona, in addition to the main issues addressed in the in-depth interviews, which are divided into five blocks: the customer and exponential technologies, the customer and the essential services (block where the question of influence is addressed), electricity and the vision of the future, reflections on the future of electricity and the service provider model.

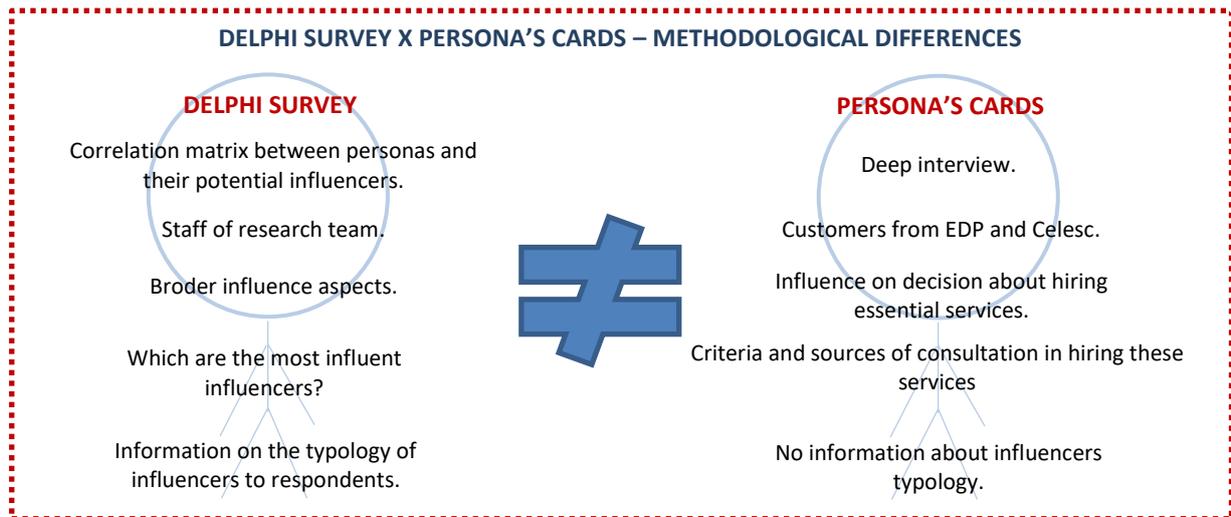


Fig. 4: Delphi Survey X Persona's cards – Methodological Differences

Source: Production by authors.

4.1 Analysis of Delphi results and personas sheets under the influence aspect

Table 3 presents the general result of the Personas and their Potential Influencers correlation matrix obtained from the Delphi survey.

Table 3: Personas and their influencers correlation matrix

| PERSONA S  | INFLUENCERS |            |           |             |          |             |           |        |         | POSITIONAL |
|------------|-------------|------------|-----------|-------------|----------|-------------|-----------|--------|---------|------------|
|            | Celebrity   | Journalist | REFERENT  |             |          | ESPECIALIST |           |        |         |            |
|            |             |            | Informant | Trendsetter | Activist | Militant    | Autorithy | Expert | Analyst |            |
| Persona 1  | 45,4%       | 90,9%      | 9,1%      | 27,3%       | 21,2%    | 12,1%       | 87,9%     | 78,8%  | 54,5%   | 81,8%      |
| Persona 2  | 9,1%        | 87,9%      | 57,6%     | 51,5%       | 39,4%    | 51,5%       | 75,7%     | 87,9%  | 78,8%   | 12,1%      |
| Persona 3  | 3,1%        | 48,5%      | 81,8%     | 78,8%       | 66,7%    | 72,7%       | 57,6%     | 84,8%  | 78,8%   | 15,1%      |
| Persona 4  | 81,8%       | 66,7%      | 87,9%     | 78,8%       | 78,8%    | 87,9%       | 39,4%     | 57,6%  | 63,3%   | 60,6%      |
| Persona 5  | 57,6%       | 78,8%      | 45,4%     | 84,8%       | 84,8%    | 87,9%       | 66,7%     | 81,8%  | 75,7%   | 21,2%      |
| Persona 6  | 24,2%       | 27,3%      | 39,4%     | 57,6%       | 48,5%    | 30,3%       | 48,5%     | 42,4%  | 39,4%   | 66,7%      |
| Persona 7  | 81,8%       | 84,8%      | 18,2%     | 36,4%       | 9,1%     | 12,1%       | 93,9%     | 75,7%  | 39,4%   | 87,9%      |
| Persona 8  | 39,4%       | 15,1%      | 12,1%     | 3,0%        | 18,2%    | 27,3%       | 18,2%     | 0,0%   | 12,1%   | 57,6%      |
| Persona 9  | 21,2%       | 84,8%      | 30,3%     | 42,4%       | 15,1%    | 9,1%        | 90,9%     | 54,5%  | 27,3%   | 81,8%      |
| Persona 10 | 75,7%       | 72,7%      | 69,7%     | 81,8%       | 72,7%    | 81,8%       | 66,7%     | 75,7%  | 87,9%   | 15,1%      |

Source: Production by Authors.

In Table 4, the three main influencers by persona are highlighted.

Table 4: Correlation matrix personas and their most cited influencers

| PERSONAS                                       | INFLUENCERS |             |                        | PERSONAS   | INFLUENCERS |             |                       |
|--|-------------|-------------|------------------------|--|-------------|-------------|-----------------------|
| <b>PERSONA 1</b><br><b>CONSERVATIVES</b>       | Journalist  | Autorithy   | Positional             | <b>PERSONA 6</b><br><b>HOME ABSENTEE</b>         | Positional  | Trendsetter | Activist<br>Autorithy |
| <b>PERSONA 2</b><br><b>LIBERAL INTELECTUAL</b> | Journalist  | Expert      | Analyst                | <b>PERSONA 7</b><br><b>HOMECARE</b>              | Autorithy   | Positional  | Journalist            |
| <b>PERSONA 3</b><br><b>DIGITAL ACTIVIST</b>    | Expert      | Informant   | Trendsetter<br>Analyst | <b>PERSONA 8</b><br><b>INDIFFERENT</b>           | Positional  | Celebrity   | Militant              |
| <b>PERSONA 4</b><br><b>ON MOVING</b>           | Informant   | Militant    | Celebrity              | <b>PERSONA 9</b><br><b>CONSERVATIVE MERCHANT</b> | Autorithy   | Journalist  | Positional            |
| <b>PERSONA 5</b><br><b>ENVIRONMENTALIST</b>    | Militant    | Trendsetter | Activist               | <b>PERSONA 10</b><br><b>DISRUPTIVE MERCHANT</b>  | Analyst     | Trendsetter | Militant              |

Source: Production by Authors.

The influencer most related to the personas defined by the project was the positional one, that is, the one who works in the persona's circle of coexistence. Journalist, authority, trendsetter and agitator influencers were also cited several times by Delphi survey respondents. The highlights go to persona 1 (conservative) and persona 9 (conservative commercial), highly related to journalist (90.9%) and authority (90.9%) influencers, respectively. The authority influencer, was the most related to Persona 7 (homecare), that is, the one with the highest percentage – 93.9%. On the other hand, the expert was not related by any of the respondents to Persona 8 (indifferent), presenting the lowest percentage – 0.0%.

With regard to the aspect of influence in contracting an essential service, a topic addressed in in-depth interviews,

the opinion and experience of their relationship network (friends, neighbors, family or known companies, in the case of commercial customers) are the main points in the decision for a service or provider, that is, such customers turn to positional influencers. Likewise, customers often consult social networks, digital influencers and complaint sites to decide on a service or provider. The exception is Persona 8 (oblivious and indifferent) who is not in the habit of seeking other opinions to hire a service or company.

Fig. 5 shows the scale that indicates the power of influence of positional influencers (close people) and the Internet on personas in the decision to hire an essential service.

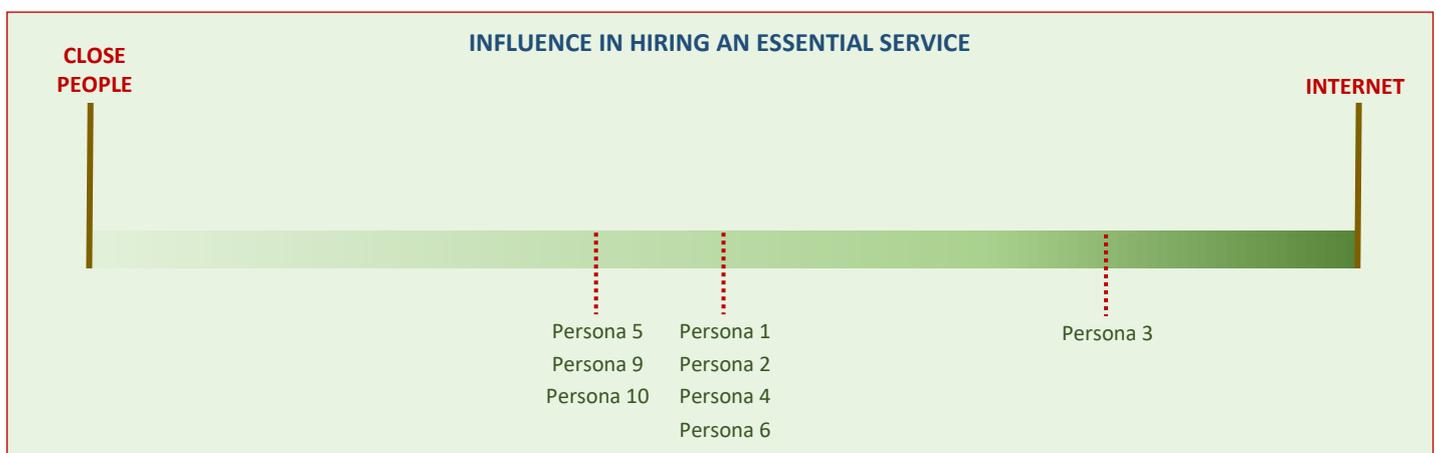


Fig. 5: Influence on hiring an essential service

Source: Production by Authors

There was no mention of any other communication vehicle (radio, TV, for example) other than the Internet for customers who seeks opinions outside their circle of coexistent in order to hire an essential service.

**V. ANALYSIS AND RESULTS: DELPHI RESEARCH X PERSONAL FILES**

Table 5 presents a comparison of personas and their potential influencers obtained from the Delphi survey and in-depth interviews.

Table 5: Comparison of personas and their influencers by Delphi methods and in-depth interviews

| PERSONAS E SEUS PONTENCIAIS INFLUENCIADORES |                     |   |
|---|---------------------|---|
| PERSONA                                     | PESQUISA DELPHI     | PERSONA'S CARDS   |
| PERSONA 1                                   | Journalist          | Positional (close people)   |
|   | Autorithy           | Browsing in the web   |
|   | Positional          |   |
| PERSONA 2                                   | Journalist          | Positional (friends/ neighbours)                                  |
|   | Expert              | Browsing in the web   |
|   | Analyst             |   |
| PERSONA 3                                   | Expert              | Posicional (friends)  |
|   | Informant           | Militant (complaint websites)                                     |
|   | Trendsetter/Analyst |   |
| PERSONA 4                                   | Informant           | Positional(friends, family)                                       |
|   | Militant            | Militant (complaint websites)                                     |
|   | Celebrity           | Social media  |
| PERSONA 5                                   | Militant            | Positional (friends, family)                                      |
|   | Trendsetter         | Digital influencer  |
|   | Activist            | Company advertising   |
| PERSONA 6                                   | Positional          | Positional (close people)   |
|   | Trendsetter         | Browsing in the web   |
|   | Activist/Autorithy  |   |
| PERSONA 8                                   | Positional          | Do not look for references, use the service available in the city |
|   | Celebrity           |   |
|   | Agitador            |   |
| PERSONA 9                                   | Autorithy           | Positional (friends, another companies)                           |
|   | Journalist          | Social media  |
|   | Positional          | Browsing in the web   |
| PERSONA 10                                  | Analyst             | Positional (suggestions)  |
|   | Trendsetter         | Browsing in the web   |
|   | Militant            | Brand best knew in the city                                       |

Source: Production by Authors

Even the typology of influencers (Table 2) was not presented to the subjects participating in the in-depth interviews, the positional influencer is easily identified

when such respondents mention seeking the opinion of family, friends and close people, when they decide to hire an essential service.

When analyzing the role of the influencer in the broad sense (Delphi research), the positional influencer was not unanimous, despite being the most connected to personas. Persona 6 (residential absent) and 8 (indifferent) were identified as the most influenced by positional influencers. Personas 1 (conservative), 7 (homecare) and 9 (conservative commercial) also had positional influencers as one of their main influencers. In the case of personas 5 (environmentally aware) and 10 (disruptive commercial), the positional influencer was the least cited.

Unlike what was pointed out by the Delphi survey, in the persona's files, with the exception of persona 8 (who does not usually seek influencers), the positional influencer was mentioned by all personas, almost unanimously. They were even cited by personas 5 and 10, who highlighted the influence of friends, family and other users in contracting an essential service.

The identification of the typology of influencers is not clear when the interviewed subjects report seeking opinions present on the Internet, on complaint sites, social networks, from digital influencers, in addition to Google searches. The exception is in relation to complaint sites, since the opinions present on such sites are made by ordinary consumers who are dissatisfied with the service provided and/or the product purchased. Such consumers, when making their complaints on these sites, can play the role of agitating influencers.

In the persona's files, persona 3 (digital activist) and 4 (on the move) claimed to use this type of channel to decide on hiring an essential service company. In the Delphi survey, the agitator influencer is one of the ones that most influences persona 4, differently the case of persona 3, identified as highly influenced by expert, informant, trendsetter and analyst influencers. The agitator influencer is also listed, in the Delphi survey, as a potential influencer of personas 5 (environmentalist), 8 (indifferent) and 10 (disruptive commercial). However, such influencers do not appear on these personas sheets.

As far as social networks are concerned, they are fueled both by the opinion of ordinary people and by digital influencers. Such influencers can represent any of the types of influencers within the typology chosen for the project, as long as they exert their influence through digital channels. They can be celebrities, journalists, informants, trendsetters, activists, agitators, authorities, experts and analysts. Unfortunately, it is not possible to identify what types of influencers act on personas 4, 5 and 9 when they cite the influence of social networks and digital influencers in the decision-making process for contracting an essential service.

Personas 1, 2, 6, 9 and 10, when mentioning the search for information on the Internet or Google search to decide on hiring an essential service, do not specify whether they are influenced by some type of influencer or if they use a specific channel to search for information, such as a complaints website, for example.

Persona 5 was the only one who cited the company's advertising as an influencing factor in her decision, and persona 10 mentioned the influence of the predominant brand in the city.

## VI. CONCLUSIONS AND FINAL CONTRIBUTIONS

Understanding consumer behavior has always been one of the main tools for defining companies' business strategies. However, in times of intense competition and products or services increasingly standardized and with similar levels of quality and values, the act of knowing the pains and desires of customers becomes a great competitive advantage for companies. Internet and connectivity emerge as facilitators in this context.

Although the relationship between the electricity distribution industry and its customer has not changed so much in recent decades, the profile, behavior and expectations of these customers are in a continuous process of transformation. This fact is mainly due to the exposure and interaction of these customers with other industries marked by innovation, connectivity and digitalization of their processes.

In this context, the digital influencer emerges as an important actor when acting in the approximation between companies and their customers. It should be noted that, from ever, the power of influence has been part of people's daily lives, from influence at home to the influence of community leaders, from media and those anonymous subjects who, through social networks, have the capacity to influence millions of people and generate millionaire businesses.

Even in a highly connected world with such availability of information, it is interesting and even surprising to see that the influence of family and friends still exerts great power over people.

Both the Delphi survey and the responses indicated in the persona's sheets showed the power of influence of these influencers. In a broader sense (Delphi research), the positional influencer was not unanimous, but configured among the most related to the personas defined by this study. In the case of persona files, with the exception of persona 8 (indifferent), talking to friends, family and close people was an option frequently cited by all personas in decision making. In this sense, it should be noted that the

positional influencer continues to have the power of influence, as it always had, or even more, due to the lack of trust and confidence in relation to 'professional influencers'.

In in-depth interviews, in addition to citing the influence of family and friends, people also seek opinions on the Internet, on complaint sites, social networks, from digital influencers, in addition to Google searches. However, it should be noted that there was no mention of any other communication vehicle other than the Internet, which demonstrates, both for the more conservative customers and for the more daring ones, how much everyone is connected and makes use of the Internet.

As the greatest influence received by the interviewed consumers, both in the moment prior to the acquisition of a service and in the permanence of the signed contract. The main point is the need for getting supported in choosing the daily solutions of their demands.

It should also be noted that positional influencers are in a direct hierarchy with the interviewed consumer, hence their greater relevance to the interviewees. In this way, positional use and "suffer problems" equally and in a similar way to the interviewees, possibly being their most reliable indications/suggestions.

While complaint sites are regularly accessed to view problems in the service provided by suppliers, it is understood that this is a channel that needs to be closely monitored by companies. An objective way of solving situations must be offered, since these types of portals can aggravate situations by the exponential diffusion of information.

Although no specifications were mentioned by consumers regarding the location of the search for information on the Internet, the relevance of this communication channel can be perceived, which could be used by providers for the dissemination of improvements and new models of service provision (items related to the desires of the personas interviewed). Digital influencers are consulted less frequently, but they can be the communicators of innovations created for consumers.

The results presented in this article provide unprecedented information about the process of influence experienced by consumers of energy connected to low voltage (residential and commercial). This knowledge allows distribution companies to establish competitive strategies to strengthen the virtuous relationship with their customers, which is fundamental, especially in the face of sectoral modernization and the implementation of competition also for this segment of customers, which, it is believed, should occur in the near future.

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