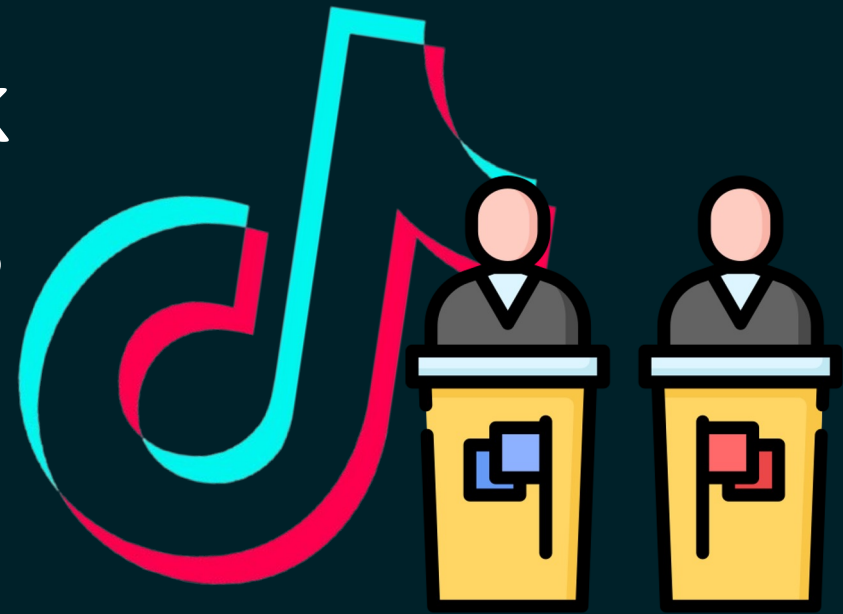


Campaigning Online: Strategic Use of TikTok Among Political Actors

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SUMMARY

1. THE ONLINE CAMPAIGNING CONTEXT

2. TIKTOK AFFORDANCES AS A SOCIAL PLATFORM

3. MAIN USES OF TIKTOK FOR CAMPAIGNING ONLINE

4. CASES STUDIES



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ONLINE CAMPAIGNING
COMMUNICATION AND
MEDIA STUDIES

1. THE ONLINE CAMPAIGNING CONTEXT

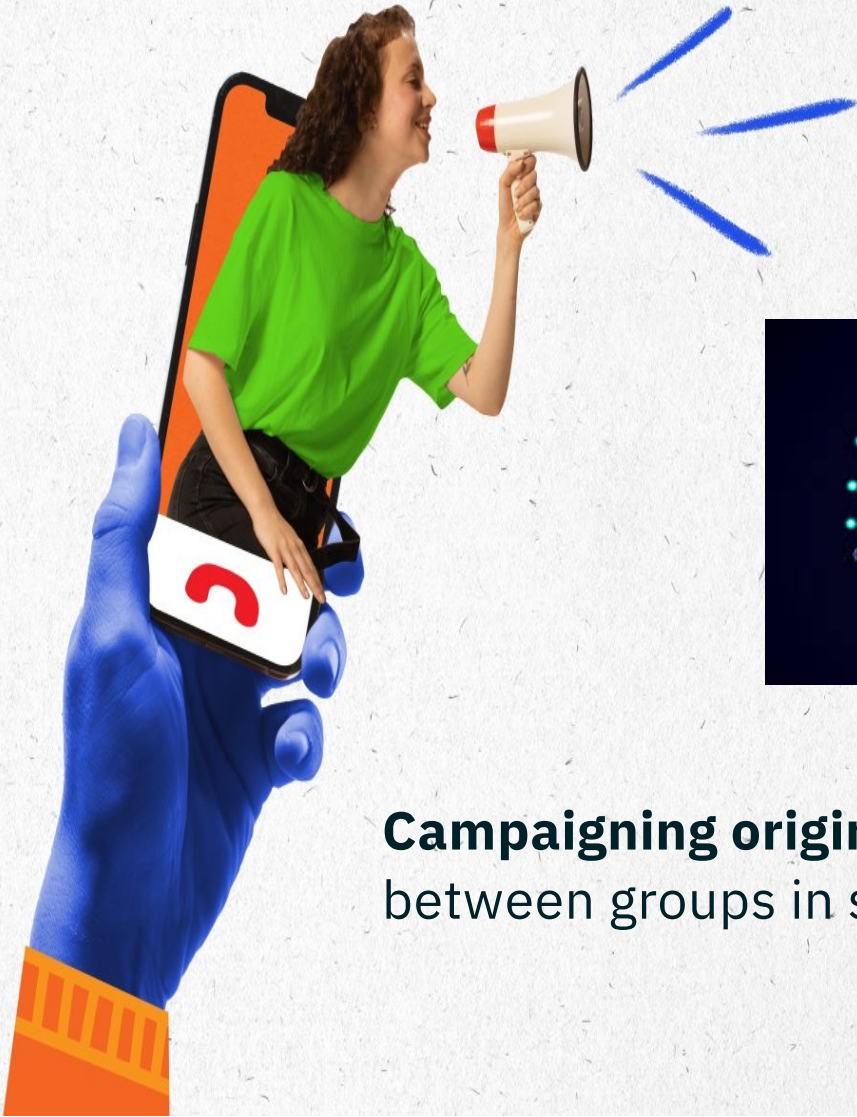


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Online campaigning refers to the **strategic use of digital platforms** and tools to **promote** a cause, candidate, brand, or initiative. It involves leveraging social media, websites, email, online advertisements, and other internet-based channels to **engage, mobilize, and influence** a target audience.



Campaigning originated with COMPETITION
between groups in society for the public support

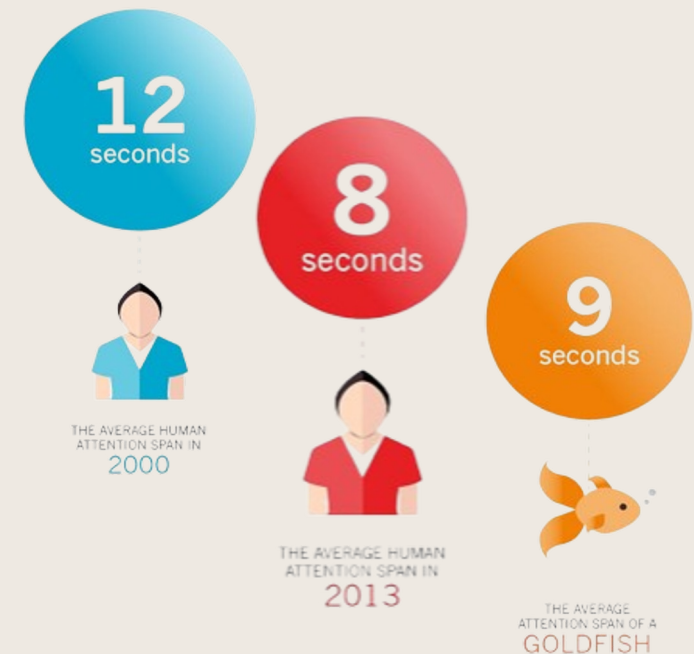
To understand how to run an electoral campaign in today's context,
it is essential to consider three key aspects of the contemporary online environment....



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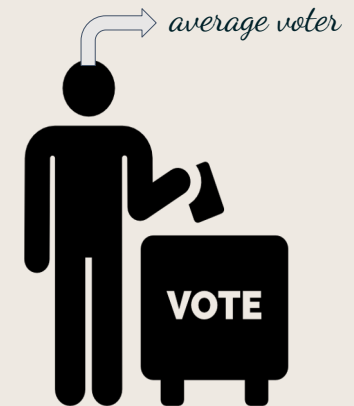
1. THE CHALLENGE OF MEMORABILITY IN A FLEETING AND FRAGMENTED SOCIETY

- The **constant connectivity** provided by the Internet is reshaping how we think, reflect, interact, and how we perceive and remember our surroundings.
- **Advantages** ⇒ mental agility, ability to quickly perceive and evaluate information, process information rapidly, hand-eye coordination, reflex response, visual signal processing...
- **Disadvantages** ⇒ people struggle to concentrate on reading for extended periods, are more prone to distractions, and become impatient when faced with lengthy arguments.
- People only have **8 seconds** of attention span and experience *micro-moments*.



2. INDECISION AND ELECTORAL VOLATILITY

- Today's **voters switch their votes** with extraordinary ease, connect and disconnect just as easily, make last-minute decisions based on immediate and situational criteria.
- In recent Spanish elections **41% of those planning to vote were still unsure** whom they would vote for—just fifteen days before the election.
- **"undecided voters"** as all those who are persuadable, meaning they are not firmly committed to any candidate ⇒ the ones who need to be persuaded.
- **Better-educated and well-informed individuals are more likely to participate in elections** than those with less education and information.



According to **Bartomeus (2018)**, campaigns should be:

- Permanent
- Personalized
- Attention-grabbing
- Unrelenting

3. COMMUNICATING IN A NETWORKED SOCIETY

- Traditional campaigning is still necessary, but the type of electoral campaign conducted should include a **hybrid scenario** (Chadwick, 2013).
- While reach is important, **relational capacity** is even more critical because **emotional bonds** with citizens are formed through relationships ⇒ **social interaction**
- One of the most critical aspect is **enabling activists to campaign on their own**, both online and offline, using the content and talking points provided ⇒ **engagement & mobilization**

Online campaigning allows to:

Reactivate former voters

Win over undecided voters

Mobilize activists

Discourage weak supporters of other parties

Leverage the creativity of supporters



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THE AIMS OF THE ONLINE CAMPAIGNS:

1. ***To raise the salience of an issue***, usually one that is central to a party's programme. This can set the agenda on an issue owned by the party or set up a counter argument from opponents (issue-based)
2. ***To persuade o convince*** the people about some thoughts, like for example, that monetary union would be bad for the economy and the state (persuassion)
3. ***To promote recognition*** for a candidate; a role performed for presidential challengers in the US. They are able to provide the candidate with an image (image management).
4. ***To mobilize supporters***, campaigns act as a reminder for supporters. Local activism is deemed important as it makes a campaign relevant, gives the voters a feeling of importance and permits interpersonal communication between voters and the candidate or party (activism & mobilization)



Pipa Norris (2004)

Table 1: Typology of the Evolution of Campaign Communications

	<i>Premodern</i>	<i>Modern</i>	<i>Post-Modern</i>
Predominant era	<i>Mid-19thC to 1950s</i>	<i>Early 1960s-late 1980s</i>	<i>1990s+</i>
<i>Campaign Organization</i>	Local and decentralized party volunteers	Nationally coordinated with greater professionalization	Nationally coordinated but decentralized operations
<i>Preparations</i>	Short-term, ad hoc	Long campaign	Permanent campaign
<i>Central coordination</i>	Party leaders	Central party headquarters, more specialist advisors	Special party campaign units and more professional consultants
<i>Feedback</i>	Local canvassing and party meetings	Occasional opinion polls	Regular opinion polls plus focus groups and interactive web sites
<i>Media</i>	Partisan press, local posters and pamphlets, radio broadcasts	Television broadcasts through main evening news, targeted direct mail	TV narrowcasting, direct and mediated websites, email, online discussion groups, Intranets
<i>Campaign events</i>	Local public meetings, whistle-stop leadership tours	News management, daily press conferences, controlled photo-ops	Extension of news management to routine politics and government
<i>Costs</i>	Low budget	Moderate	Higher costs for professional consultants
<i>Electorate</i>	Stable social and partisan alignments	Social and partisan dealignment	Social and partisan dealignment



KEY FEATURES of the postmodern campaigns:

1. Campaigns are **centrally orchestrated** but fought locally
2. The increased use of **professional campaign** units and consultants (professionalization)
3. The use of **market intelligence** (segmentation, microtargeting)
4. **Media management**. To ensure the messages are transmitted to the audience; hence spin-doctor has become a global term
5. **Narrowcasting** (segmentation, microtargeting) In an attempt to reach the individual, tailor messages are used.
6. The **permanent campaign**. It is necessary to have a constant presence and promote the image of the party if not its policy issues.



THE 4th PHASE: 'DATA-DRIVEN' POLITICAL CAMPAIGNING

-Democracies are now entering a fourth phase of campaigns (Plasser & Plasser, 2002): “data-driven” campaigning, “postdigital” campaigns or “hipermodern” campaigns

1. Hybrid campaigns (traditional and online platforms)
2. Microtargeting y big data (segmentation, personalized campaigns, data-driven)
3. Decentralized participation (including user generated content, social activism, lack of control)
4. Tech-based and gamification (inmersion, transmedia, entertainment)
5. Emotional Narratives emocionales based on identity (polarization)
6. Presence of disinformation and fake contents.



THE “FOURTH AGE” OF CAMPAIGNING...

Table 2: Phase 4 ‘Data-Driven’ Political Campaigning: Scientific and Subversive Modes

4 th Phase	FEATURE	Scientific	Subversive
Digital Tech & Data Analytics Core	Organisational		
	Leadership	Robotic, machine-like, algorithms are decisive	Highly personalized, charismatic, strong.
	Party organization	Strong	Weak, by-passed
	Campaign staffers	‘A-politicos’, a-partisan	Revival of a politicized personalized, patronage system
	Campaign strategy	Decided through analytics, Polarization, an unintended consequence	Polarization and division as strategy, analytics used to deliver on goals
Reliance on networks / virality	Communicative		
	Message production and dissemination.	Controlled and professionalized, message testing an experiments, research driven	Spontaneous and direct communication from leader to followers.
	Message/ content	Focus on issues, repackaging around particularized benefits. Voter as rational actor	Focus on emotions, fake news, use of ‘dark ads’.
	Primary goal	Mobilizing, informing, increase participation.	De-mobilizing, mis-informing, suppressing opponents turnout
Micro-targeted individual messages	Social media	Part of integrated media strategy	‘Stand alone’ tool, weaponized against broadcast /traditional media
Internationalisation of campaign sphere	External actors		
	Foreign influence/actors	International consultants, Knowledge sharing, International observers /election ‘watchers’	Anonymous, automated, disruptive, goal of delegitimizing outcome
	Orientation to the media	Open, engaged, goal is co-optation	Non-cooperative, media seen as the enemy

New Media & Society Follow

Article

Scientific and subversive: The two faces of the fourth era of political campaigning

April 2020 · New Media & Society 22(4):595-610

DOI: 10.1177/14614448198893979

Andrea Roemmele · Rachel Gibson

The “fourth age” of campaigning is not just a technological evolution, but a **shift in the logic of digital political power**, where scientific efficiency in campaigning coexists with opaque and manipulative tactics. (Roemmele & Gibson, 2020).

The new phase is distinguished, by a bifurcation, into two variants:

1. The **Scientific Face**:

- Advanced data use
- Algorithmic optimization
- Digital political marketing

2. The **Subversive Face**:

- Manipulation and disinformation.
- Dark and unofficial actors.
- Lack of regulation and transparency



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Accepted version. Please cite as:

Sältzer, M., & Wurthmann, L.C. (2025), Online Campaigning. In Nai, A., Grömping, M., & Wirz, D. (Eds). *Elgar Encyclopedia of Political Communication*. Edward Elgar Publishing.
Accepted version.

Online Campaigning

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This contribution examines the transformation of political campaigning in the digital age. It explores the shift from traditional mass media campaigns to personalized and targeted messaging. It also discusses the historical development of campaigning, from personal exchange to centralized strategies, and the subsequent transition to online platforms. It highlights the impact of social media and algorithmic logic on the reorganization of voters and the fragmentation of the campaign supply side. The concepts of selective exposure and homophily in online information consumption are explored, along with the role of algorithms in reinforcing users' existing preferences. Moreover, this contribution delves into the strategies and challenges of online campaigning, including the use of influential users and algorithms, community building, ethical considerations associated with negative campaigning and the spread of misinformation. Ultimately, it emphasizes the importance of responsible use of digital tools in order to harness the potential societal benefits of digitized political campaigns.

Keywords: Digital Campaign; Online Campaigning; Social Media; Campaign Online; Algorithm; Targeting

1

Sältzer & Wurthmann (2025) examine the transformation of online campaigning in the digital age:

- the shift **from traditional mass media campaigns to personalized and targeted messaging.**
- the historical development of campaigning, **from traditional gatekeeping (mass media logic) to algorithms-based restrictions (networks logic)**
- So, it implies **changes in the online consumption** and also **changes in the online strategy.**



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From traditional mass media campaigns **to personalized and targeted messaging....**

- Instead of only formulating messages for the broad mass of the population, **target group campaigning** is experiencing a renaissance (Norris 2000; Magin et al. 2017; Kruttschinki and Haller 2017).
- **Tailoring messages** to particular target groups is faster and comparatively cheaper in the digital space and can be implemented by a broader range of actors (Fowler et al. 2021).



From traditional gatekeeping (mass media logic) to algorithms-based restrictions (networks logic)



Classical gatekeeping (*mass media logic*) has been replaced by **algorithm-based restrictions** (*networks logic*) that allow less central actors to communicate their agenda (Gilardi et al. 2021)→**fragmentation** of the supply side of campaigns.

However, which actors gain attention now depends on their centrality in online networks, such as social media, or **their ability to gain the attention of these algorithms.**



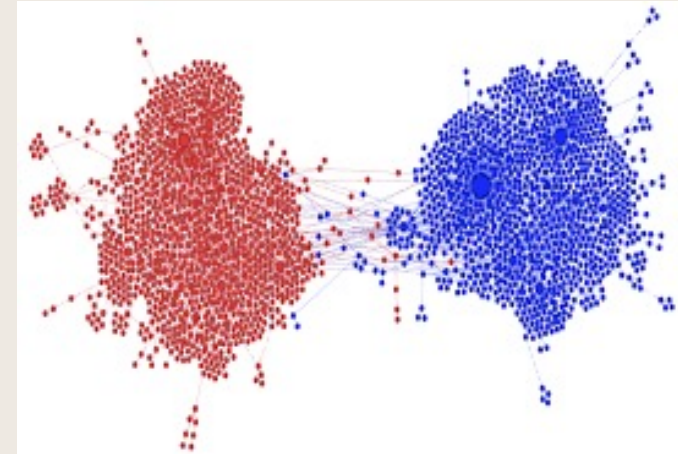
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Changes in the online information *consumption*...

The “collective” preferences online information consumption has become more personalised

Audiences tend to choose information sources they agree with to minimise cognitive dissonance. This is analogous to the choice of media outlets in mass media systems → (**selective exposure**).

These social networks are mainly with people who share one's social features like class, interests or nationality (eco chambers, bubble metaphors). So exposure to new information becomes rare if it comes from people who are a lot like the receiver → (**homophilia**).



2. WHAT ARE THE TIKTOK AFFORDANCES AS A SOCIAL PLATFORM?

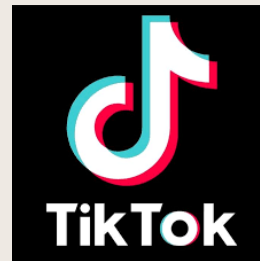


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"Pop Politics"

online "pop politics"
(Mazzoleni & Bracciale, 2019)
and the use of "politainment"
on social media (Berrocal,
2017; Berrocal et al., 2021).



Digital platform
affordance-based
approach

Visual Political
Communication
approach

framework on digital architectures of social
networks (Bosetta, 2008) in order to identify main
TikTok's affordances in political contexts.

(Veneti, Jackson & Lilleker, 2019; Russmann &
Svensson, 2017; Fahmy et al., 2014; Müller &
Geise, 2015)

Tik Tok: a short video platform for generation Z

- short-video platform **was launched** in 2016 from ByteDance (international version in 2017). In 2018, TikTok merged with the social media app Musical.ly to create one of the largest short video community.
- **boomed during the lockdown** and became the most downloaded application in 2020, reaching 8.4 million downloads.
- based on a “**memetic text**” (Zulli & Zulli, 2020) and a place for **creative expression** since users have a range of editing options, filters, and effects.
- **growing exponentially, among generation Z** (teenagers and preteen). They use the freedom of this platform to express their opinions, using the application as a “**backchannel**” (Seglem & Haling, 2018).



FEB
2025

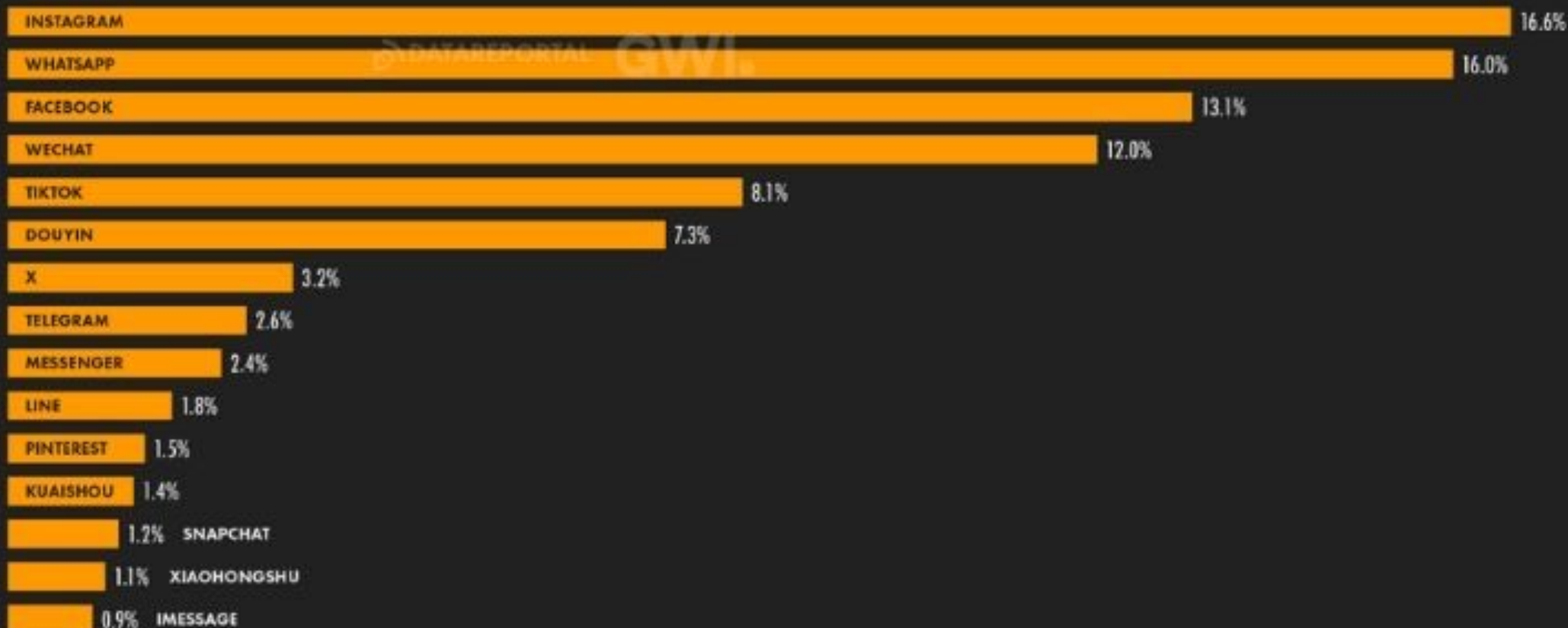
FAVOURITE SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS

PERCENTAGE OF ACTIVE SOCIAL MEDIA USERS AGED 16+ WHO SAY THAT EACH OPTION IS THEIR "FAVOURITE" SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORM

NOTE: YOUTUBE IS NOT AVAILABLE AS AN ANSWER OPTION IN THE SURVEY QUESTION THAT INFORMS THIS CHART



GLOBAL OVERVIEW



DATA REPORTAL GWI

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2025

FAVOURITE SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS

PERCENTAGE OF ACTIVE SOCIAL MEDIA USERS WHO SAY THAT EACH OPTION IS THEIR "FAVOURITE" SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORM

NOTE: YOUTUBE IS NOT AVAILABLE AS AN ANSWER OPTION IN THE SURVEY QUESTION THAT INFORMS THESE TABLES



FAVOURITE SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS AMONGST FEMALE INTERNET USERS

SOCIAL PLATFORM	AGE 16-24	AGE 25-34	AGE 35-44	AGE 45-54	AGE 55-64
INSTAGRAM	24.8%	20.8%	16.0%	13.9%	10.2%
WHATSAPP	12.7%	14.3%	15.4%	17.3%	21.1%
FACEBOOK	5.9%	10.6%	13.2%	14.9%	17.1%
WECHAT	8.2%	11.7%	15.5%	13.6%	12.0%
TIKTOK	15.5%	11.3%	7.8%	6.9%	5.0%
DOUYIN	6.6%	8.1%	9.8%	6.4%	5.4%
X	3.1%	2.1%	1.8%	1.6%	1.7%
TELEGRAM	2.6%	2.1%	2.0%	2.1%	2.2%
MESSENGER	1.7%	2.5%	2.5%	2.7%	3.0%
LINE	0.5%	0.8%	1.2%	2.6%	3.5%

FAVOURITE SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS AMONGST MALE INTERNET USERS

SOCIAL PLATFORM	AGE 16-24	AGE 25-34	AGE 35-44	AGE 45-54	AGE 55-64
INSTAGRAM	26.6%	18.4%	11.7%	9.4%	6.1%
WHATSAPP	14.1%	14.7%	17.3%	19.5%	21.9%
FACEBOOK	7.8%	13.5%	14.7%	16.4%	17.5%
WECHAT	8.2%	11.8%	16.0%	14.4%	14.4%
TIKTOK	9.6%	7.1%	5.7%	5.3%	4.3%
DOUYIN	6.5%	8.5%	8.2%	6.8%	6.6%
X	4.2%	4.6%	4.0%	3.8%	3.3%
TELEGRAM	4.0%	3.2%	3.2%	2.6%	2.5%
MESSENGER	1.8%	2.4%	2.2%	2.4%	2.3%
LINE	0.7%	1.0%	1.2%	2.4%	2.9%

SOURCE: OWI Q3 2024. NOTES: YOUTUBE IS NOT AVAILABLE AS AN ANSWER FOR THIS QUESTION IN OWI'S SURVEY. TABLE VALUES IN BOLD ORANGE TEXT IDENTIFY THE TOP VALUE FOR THE RESPECTIVE AGE GROUP. DATA ONLY INCLUDES INTERNET USERS WHO HAVE USED AT LEAST ONE SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORM IN THE PAST MONTH. SURVEY RESPONDENTS COULD CHOOSE FROM OTHER OPTIONS NOT SHOWN ON THIS CHART, SO VALUES MAY NOT SUM TO 100%. WE REPORT OWI'S VALUES FOR TIKTOK IN CHINA SEPARATELY AS DOUYIN, AS PER BYTEDANCE'S CORPORATE REPORTING. COMPARABILITY: CHANGES IN AUDIENCE COMPOSITION AND SURVEY METHODOLOGY. SEE NOTES ON DATA.

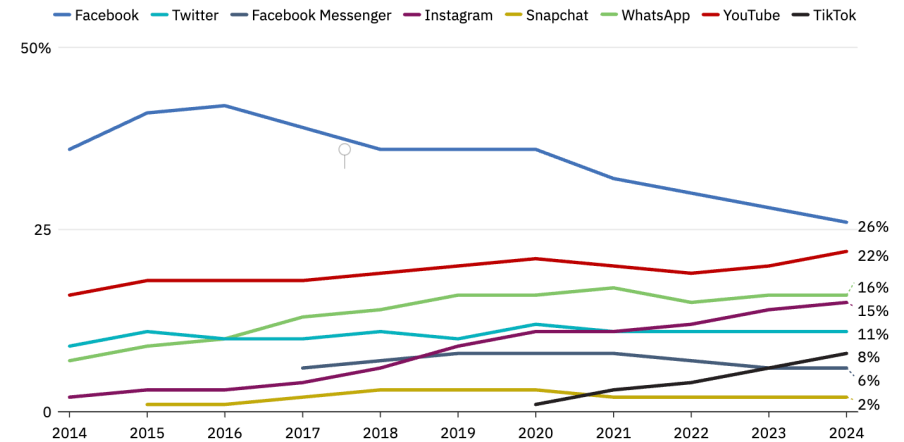
DIGITAL NEWS REPORT 2024

- **Video is becoming a more important source of online news**, especially with **younger groups**. **Short news videos** are accessed by two-thirds (66%) of our sample each week, with longer formats attracting around half (51%).
- Turning to the **sources** that people pay most attention to when it comes to news on various platforms, we find an **increasing focus on partisan commentators, influencers, and young news creators**, especially on YouTube and TikTok.

Proportion that used each network for news in the last week

2014–2024

Selected countries



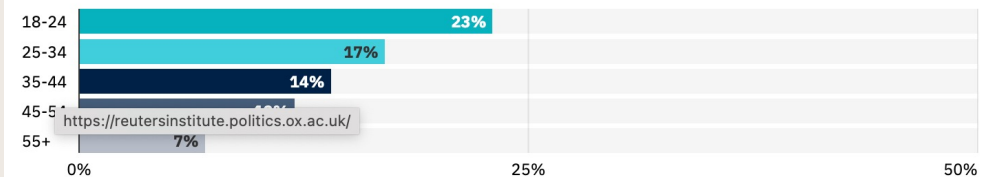
Also Threads: 1% | Mastodon: <1%

Q12B. Which, if any, of the following have you used for news in the last week? Base: Total sample in each country-year in UK, USA, Germany, France, Spain, Italy, Denmark, Finland, Japan, Australia (2014–24), Brazil, and Ireland (2015–24) ≈ 2000.

[Get the data](#) • [Embed](#)

TikTok use for news

BY AGE



Q12B. Which, if any, of the following have you used for news in the last week? Base: Total sample in each market ≈ 2000. Note: Respondents in India and Hong Kong were not asked about TikTok.

[Get the data](#) • [Embed](#) • Created with [Datawrapper](#)

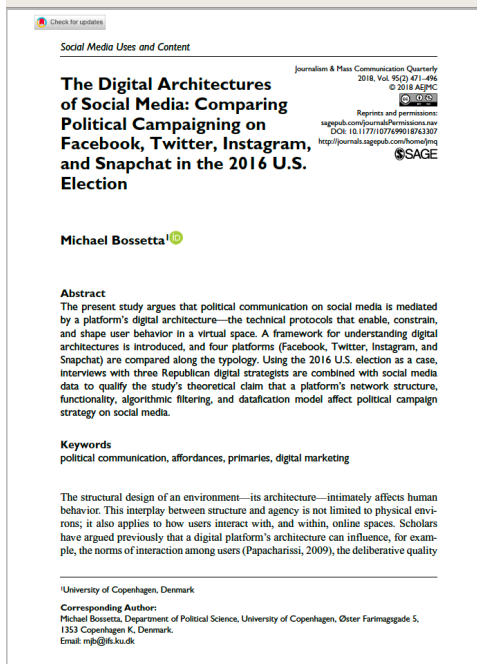


TIKTOK MAIN AFFORDANCES:

Following Bosseta's (2018) framework for understanding social media digital architecture:

■ *From the platform's structural perspective...*

- visual components orientated to entertainment, humor, simplification, appropriation, performance art, and the ability to dance convincingly.
- hyper-postmodern aesthetics based on a “memetic text” (Zulli & Zulli, 2020) that invites imitation and remix with a particular focus on the **influencer culture** (“silly dances”) (Vijay & Gekker, 2021).





■ *In terms of functionality...*

A) a place for creative expression and playful sociality (Abidin, 2021; Zulli & Zulli, 2020). **EDITABILITY** (Walther, 1993) allows for ‘rehearsability’, where users craft messages exactly as they intend it to be → The main **videos’ background music**. The music serves as part of a dance routine, a lip-synching battle, or as the backdrop for a comedy skit, so it can play a key role in the storytelling (Medina-Serrano et al., 2020; Highfield & Leaver, 2016).

B) **possibility for replication and VIRALITY** (Vijay & Gekker, 2021). TikTok videos has the potential to trigger the creation of another video or “**spreadability**” (Jenkins et al., 2013).

C) **possibility for ASSOCIATION**, that enables connection to other people and content (Treem & Leonardi, 2012), and more **interactivity** than other social media (Medina-Serrano et al., 2020) through two main genres:

-“**Challenge**”: community-created hashtags (often sponsored) in which tiktokers are invited to create videos showing themselves attempting to do a certain action/dance/trick proposed by others.

-“**Duet**”: users’ taking a video of another person (original) and adding themselves performing the same action (duet), scene, or choreography (Kennedy, 2020), which can contribute to the association affordance (Hautea et al, 2021).

■ *From the use of artificial intelligent,*

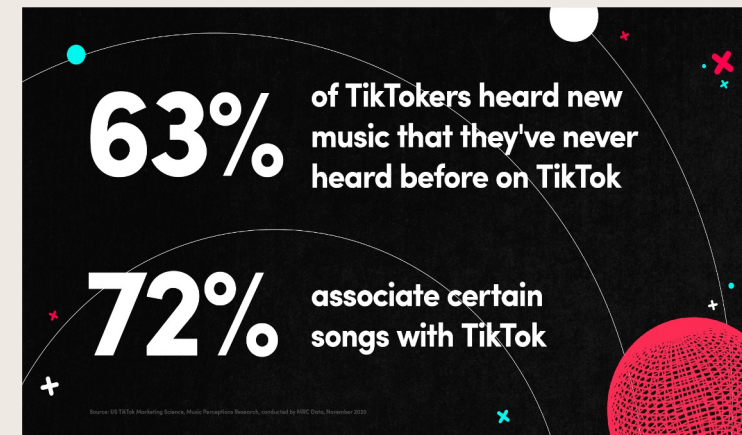
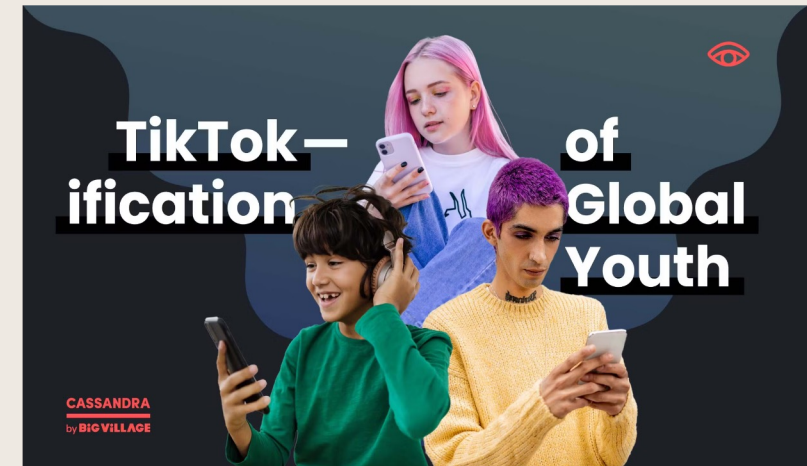
A) has an algorithmic **recommendation** system: personalized content feed for each user by viewing an algorithmically generated feed of videos through the **“For You” page**, a feed of videos that are recommended to users based on their activity.

B) Contents posted from **influencers “personalities”** are highly considered, comparing with traditional actors (media organization or politicians) (Andi, 2021).

C) a **rich information source (data privacy)**→ personal features of users (personalities, traits, vocal attributes, and points of views). Accused of excessive data extraction and data analysis practices

Connection to Pop Culture

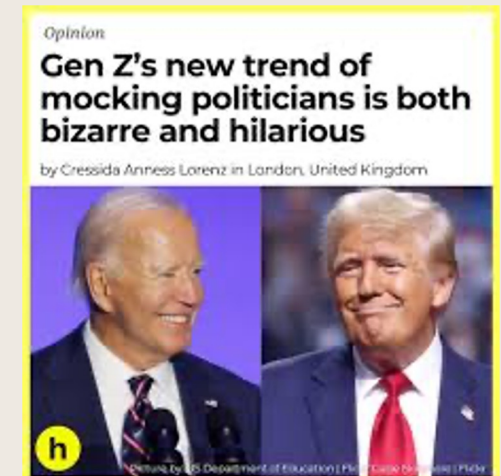
- Drives viral trends in music, fashion, and memes
- Creates new influencers and reshapes celebrity culture
- Serves as a platform for activism and social movements
- Influences traditional media, advertising, and entertainment
- Algorithm curates content, shaping global cultural conversations



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Visual engagement is the key to political persuasion

- Short-form videos make political messages more accessible
- Memes, filters, and music enhance campaign relatability
- Emotional and visual appeal boosts audience connection
- Influencers play a major role in shaping political narratives



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3. WHAT ARE THE MAIN USES OF TIKTOK FOR CAMPAIGNING ONLINE IN POLITICAL CONTEXTS?



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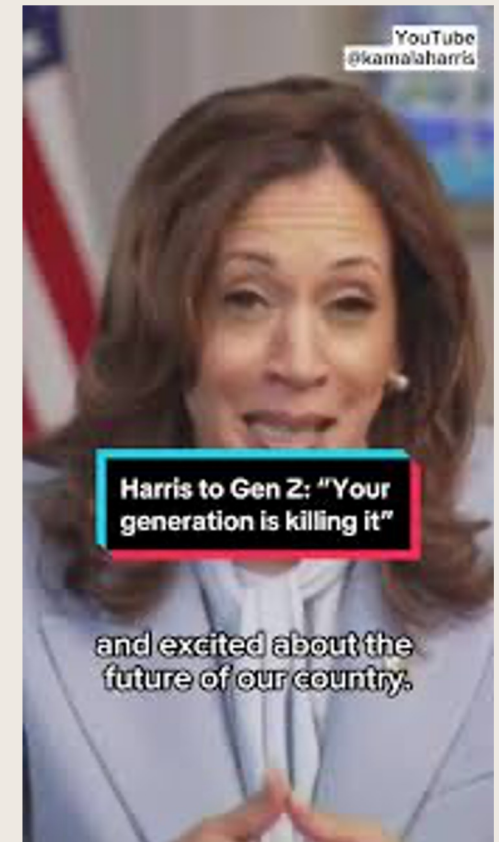
Campaigning On visuals

- The incorporation of visual platforms into political communication has increased focus on constructing **simplistic and emotionally resonant message** (Filimonov, Russmann & Svensson, 2016). → **Cognitive shortcuts**
- Political organizations have started to recognize the importance of participating on **youth-oriented platforms** (Dimitrova & Matthes, 2018).
- This playful political engagement -whether through satire, parody or the use of memes- democratizes politics and **engages audiences difficult to reach** (Hartley, 2020)
- This social network includes **new interactive ways of reconnecting** with young voters by using a **co-created space** for visual storytelling (Abidin, 2021). → Political organizations **need to adapt** existing content using new formats.
- However, the amateurish creation, co-creation and remixing on TikTok does not fit with traditional **message control practices**.



The Rise of Tik Tok in Political Campaings

- TikTok has emerged as a major platform for political messaging
- Young voter engagement is a key focus for campaigning
- Viral trends and challenges help spread political messages
- Grassroots movements and activism gain traction through TikTok
- A **third** of American adults under 30 getting their news on the platform, top contenders have taken directly to their voters' TikTok feeds to boost campaign visibility and take reputational jabs against opponents.



Examples



<https://vm.tiktok.com/ZNd8JaY45/>



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- TikTok can play an **important role in political contexts** (Medina-Serrano et al., 2020)
 - *as a grassroots social media platform for mobilizing followers and that enables youth collective political expression (Mirchandani, 2020).*
 - *a role in political self-expression through the sharing of opinions and collective action on controversial political topics (Vijay & Gekker, 2021; Hautea et al., 2021).*
 - *The platform's playful architecture shape political discourse and participatory expressions for online campaigning (Vijay & Gekker, 2021; Mirchandani, 2020; Medina-Serrano et al, 2020)*
 - *for image management to create a closer and more humanized political image of populist leaders (Bianchi, 2020; Sánchez-Castillo, 2020; Cesarino, 2020).*
 - *TikTok data can be easily reachable for data mining processes and political online campaigning or electoral databases (Wolf et al., 2017)*

PERSONALIZATION

Personalization: social media **strategy** that includes a process in which **individual political actors** have become more prominent at the expenses of parties and collective **identities**.

(a)**Individualization:** individual **politicians** gain more media **coverage** than the parties they belong to.

(b)**Privatization:** the importance of the politicians as **ordinary people** by disclosing **details** about their personal life.

Leads to **humanization of political figures** which in turn increases **citizen engagement**.



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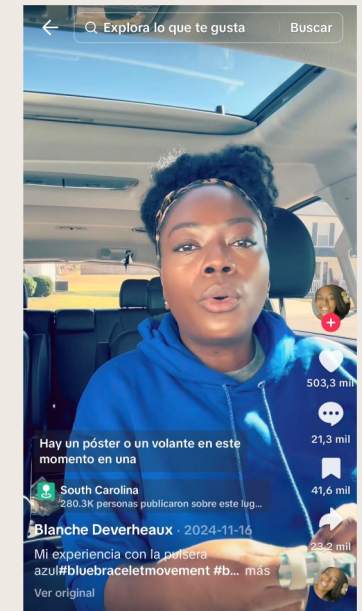
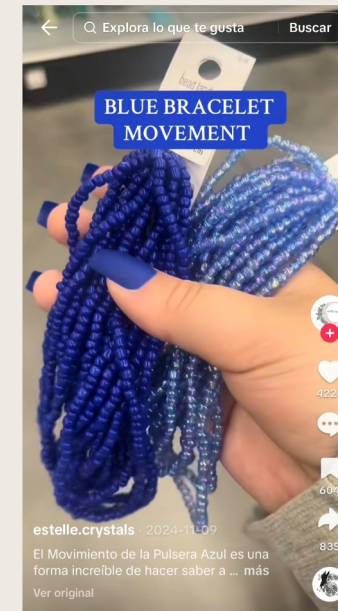
SOCIAL MOBILIZATION

Motivated activists with specific actions can change an election. Many political parties fail to grasp a fundamental truth: **if they don't give activists something to do, those activists will do nothing.**

In some regions, activists quickly find ways to contribute, which is crucial for a campaign. From making calls to putting up posters and distributing flyers—anyone could sign up.

However, activism is not limited to street work or relationship-building. Sometimes, "**slacktivism**" (or armchair activism) is also leveraged to encourage participation, increase visibility, and gradually integrate activists into an organization's daily activities. This is particularly important in **social media**.

Example ⇒ blue bracelet movement



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SOCIAL MOBILIZATION

USER PARTICIPATION IN POLITICAL CAMPAIGNS:

1. Creation and dissemination of political content
2. Participation in viral trends and challenges with political undertones
3. Engagement and debates in comment sections
4. Use of hashtags to organize content and mobilize communities
5. Political satire and memes
6. Influence of content creators and public figures

KEY TAKEAWAYS:

- Not soldiers, but spokespeople.
- Give them things to do.
- Combine online and offline activism.
- There must be a dedicated activist coordinator: someone responsible for planning actions, maintaining communication, and mobilizing supporters.



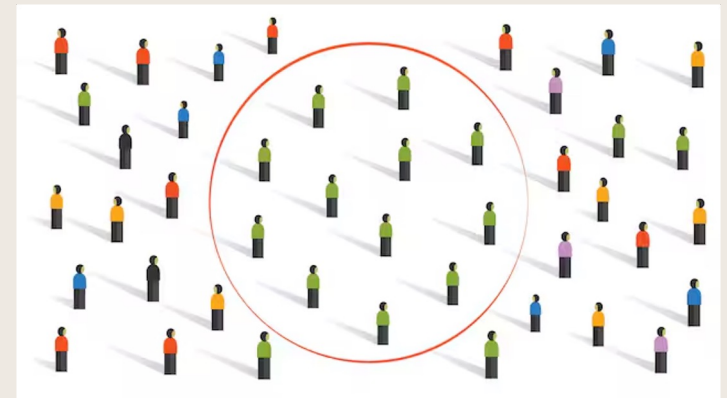
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POLARIZATION

Political polarization is the process by which **political attitudes and opinions become more extreme and divided**, often leading to a sharp distinction between opposing ideological camps.

An **echo chamber** is an environment, often within social media and online platforms, where individuals are exposed only to information and opinions that align with their preexisting beliefs. As people engage primarily with content that confirms their views, they **become more resistant to opposing perspectives, leading to increased polarization.**



PEDAGOGICAL

How can TikTok be used for political learning:

- Sharing ideas
- Exploring dissonances
- Negotiating meaning
- Synthesizing information
- Applying knowledge

-**Informal Learning** learning outside of formal educational places, mostly happens in **interactions** driven by individuals' **self-interests** embedded in meaningful contexts.

-**Nano Learning**: type of learning that offers **digestible** small learning units in less than **2 minutes**.



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Adapting Content to Young Audiences

- ❖ Engage with trends and memes
- ❖ Complex ideas should be simplified
- ❖ Personal & Informal Approach
- ❖ Encourage user participation
- ❖ Duets & Challenges
- ❖ Short and engaging videos

Mimetic communication: political messages resonate when they reflect **users' culture, habits, and social context**. Content that appears **ordinary, relatable, and authentic** is more likely to gain traction (Ordoñez, 2022).

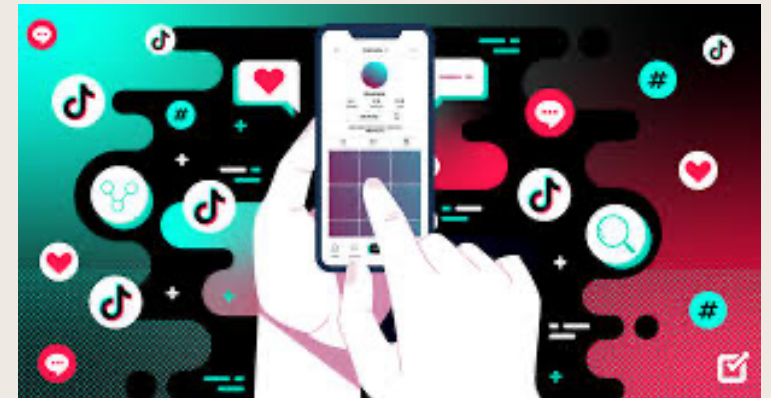


https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EXhtWv1QJSo&ab_channel=Channel4News

ENGAGEMENT

TikTok allows for five layers of interaction (Gamir-Ríos & Sánchez-Castillo, 2022):

1. Viewing
2. Giving a “like”
3. Sharing
4. Writing a comment
5. Creating new content based on existing pieces:
 - 5.1 Recording a new video using the audio from a previous one
 - 5.2 Recording a new video that includes clips from another
 - 5.3 Recording a duet, which itself constitutes a form of native storytelling and is later played alongside the original using a split-screen system



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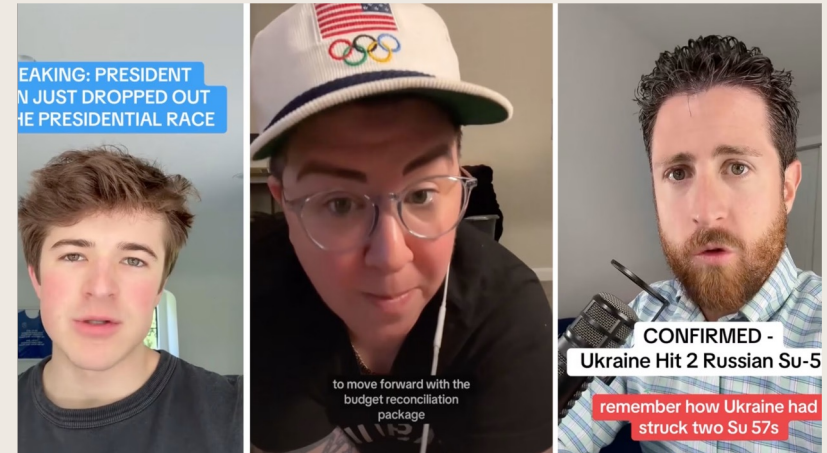
INFLUENCING

Political Relational Influencers: content creators who promote **political** and **social causes** toward their audiences by **expressing support** for them and **endorsing** them implicitly or explicitly.

Includes:

- Influencers who act at the behest of political campaigns.
- Influencers remunerated for their political activity.
- Influencers that operate without pay (Independent).

These influencers are perceived to cause **reciprocity** and **approachability**. They evoke friendship.



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CREATOR ECONOMY

Why so many influencers are running for election in Indonesia

More influencers are joining political parties and contesting elections, raising concerns about the spread of misinformation and the lack of leadership.



Natalia Sayuri for Rest of World

By MICHELLE ANINDYA

18 DECEMBER 2024 • DENPASAR, INDONESIA

LEER EN ESPAÑOL

- More than 20 influencers were elected into the Indonesian parliament this year.
- Influencers have the resources to contest polls, and are familiar to voters.
- Celebrities learn little about political ideology or leadership, critics say.

The social media feed of Indonesian singer and content creator Vicky Shu generally features her clothes, makeup, and family. But when she decided to run for the regional elections in November, her content quickly changed to show her meeting constituents and politicians, with Shu often wearing a headscarf.

Asia / Politics

CREATOR ECONOMY

Filipinos want the country's biggest YouTube star to be their next president

Raffy Tulfo's popular YouTube show helped him become senator. It may get him elected president.



Emily Scherer for Rest of World

By ANGEL MARTINEZ

31 JULY 2024 • MANILA, PHILIPPINES

LEER EN ESPAÑOL

- Raffy Tulfo has the most popular YouTube show in the Philippines.
- Ordinary Filipinos trust him to resolve their problems more than the country's courts.
- The show helped him win a Senate seat, but critics say his sense of justice is flawed.

Política

Empresario e influencer en la Alcaldía de Panamá

Mayer Mizrahi asegura que su objetivo es lograr una "ciudad moderna, tecnológica y que le de valor a todos y cada uno de los que habitan en la capital"



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4. CASE STUDIES:

Zamora-Medina, R. (2023). Politainment as dance: visual storytelling on TikTok among Spanish political parties. In Research handbook on visual politics (pp. 228-243). Edward Elgar Publishing.

Zamora-Medina, R., Suminas, A., & Fahmy, S. S. (2023). Securing the youth vote: A comparative analysis of digital persuasion on TikTok among political actors. Media and communication, 11(2), 218-231.

Pérez-Díaz, P.L, Zamora-Medina, R. & Pérez-Escolar, M.(2025). Divisions in Motion: Visual Affective Polarization on TikTok During the 2024 European Parliament Elections. VISUAL REVIEW International Visual Culture Review (accepted for publication in 2025)



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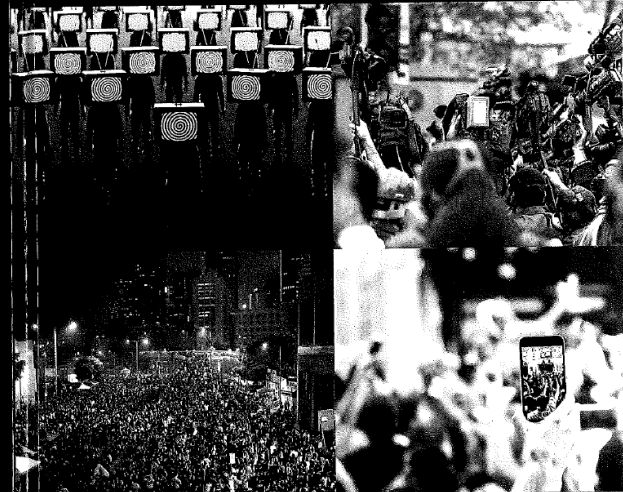
Facultad de
Medicina

1

RESEARCH HANDBOOK ON Visual Politics



Edited by
Darren Lilleker • Anastasia Veneti



ELGAR HANDBOOKS IN POLITICAL SCIENCE

Zamora-Medina, R. (2023). *Politainment as dance: visual storytelling on TikTok among Spanish political parties*. In *Research handbook on visual politics* (pp. 228-243). Edward Elgar Publishing.

17. Politainment as dance: visual storytelling on TikTok among Spanish political parties

Rocio Zamora-Medina

INTRODUCTION

Over the past few years, younger internet users have heavily adopted visually based social media platforms, such as Instagram, Snapchat and, most recently, TikTok. Launched in 2016 by ByteDance, this short-video platform is now the fastest-growing application among young users and generation Z, attracting a huge audience of 11.5 billion active users, 41% of whom are between 16 and 24 years of age (Zeng et al., 2021). The irruption of short-video platforms like TikTok has recently drawn a great deal of academic attention (Abidin, 2021; Abidin & Zeng, 2021; Zulli & Zulli, 2020) as they represent a new challenge for political strategists (Zeng et al., 2021; Medina-Serrano et al., 2020). Because of the increasing importance of visual images in politics (Veneti et al., 2019), politicians are currently turning their attention to TikTok for communicating with young voters. This effort represents a hyper-postmodern aesthetic, based on visual components oriented toward virality, entertainment, humor, simplification and performance art in order to communicate complex political issues in simple formats through the use of visual storytelling.

This chapter provides an opportunity to reflect on new challenges short-video formats pose as a developing form of political communication. It examines the ways political actors use this specific platform to connect with young voters from the understanding that politics may be “depicted” through visual media as entertainment. Previous studies have already shown the commitment of political parties to approaching younger audiences by using Instagram (Turnbull-Dugarte, 2019), YouTube (Berrocal et al., 2017), Snapchat (Gutiérrez-Rubi & Peytibi, 2016) and WhatsApp (Zamora & Losada, 2021). However, there is still a lack of research by media scholars into the political use of TikTok. This chapter provides an opportunity to consider the new challenges posed by the use of short-video platforms for political purposes.

Given that this is quite a new phenomenon linked to the idea of visual media as entertainment and playful technologies (Vijay & Gekker, 2021), the theoretical support of this chapter is first based on the spectacularization of politics and its consequences for political communication. We contextualize the use of TikTok as part of “pop politics” (Mazzoleni & Bracciola, 2019) and the use of “politainment” on social media (Berrocal-Gonzalo et al., 2021).

Based on the digital architectures of social media framework (Bossetta, 2018), the chapter provides a summary of TikTok’s main affordances that could prove useful in political contexts. In the second part we explore how political parties use TikTok’s main affordances to communicate with young voters as part of a creative, simplified and entertainment-based communication strategy. The research includes a quantitative analysis of the official TikTok accounts of the main Spanish political parties in order to measure to what extent they are employing politainment resources and formats in their videos and the impact that these enter-

228

Politainment as dance 229

tainment visual narratives have on levels of engagement. Differences between traditional and new political parties in Spain regarding the use of the platform’s main affordances will also be considered.

VISUAL POLITICAL COMMUNICATION IN THE CONTEXT OF SPECTACULARIZATION OF POLITICS

The implosion of social networks in the political arena has changed the way that political communication takes place (Lilleker et al., 2015). The dissolution of the dividing line between public and private spheres has led to the spectacularization of politics, a phenomenon that has been linked to the fusion of information and entertainment, also known as infotainment (Delli Carpini & Williams, 2011; Casero-Ripollés et al., 2014). Visual elements have been crucial in infotainment strategies, given their significant ability to arouse and stimulate emotional reactions based on visual impact. They are part of the spectacular discursive structures based on what some scholars have called the categorization of infotainment narrative strategies (Berrocal et al., 2014).

As indicators of spectacularization, researchers have mentioned the protagonism of emotions (Uribe & Gunter, 2007), as well as the revealing of information related to the private lives of political actors (Jellri et al., 2013). Other scholars have also pointed out the prominence of light-hearted content; the intense personalization and humanization of the leader; the tendency toward emotionality and the human approach in the treatment of politics, including the use of humor, criticism, and personal relationships; the prominence of individual action over the explanation of ideas; and the use of spectacular images with differing types of plane, scale, perspective, location, scenery, effects, etc. (Pellissier-Rossell & Pineda, 2014).

Spectacularization characterizes contemporary political communication as a performance (Salmon, 2013), a dramatic construction of reality (Berrocal et al., 2014). Consequently, politicians are now considered to be products of the media subculture and have become mere actors and performers, similar to pop idols. Scholars have suggested different terms for referring to this phenomenon. The first, *pop politics*, defines a global trend within visual political communication that consists of dealing with information, events, physical appearance and everything that ultimately involves politics in a spectacularized way, in order to construct the celebrity politician (Mazzoleni & Sbardini, 2009). Pop politics has increased its resonance within the political “memeification” of the online ecosystem (Mazzoleni & Bracciola, 2019).

A second term, *politainment*, describes the spectacularization of politics based on the two media-related functions of information: politics and entertainment (Nielsen, 2008; Sayre & King, 2010). Considered as a softening of political communication (Ott et al., 2016), the term refers to the inclusion of political actors, topics and processes within the culture of entertainment (Nielsen, 2008), and is understood to include the styles, narratives and scenery of the world of show business and entertainment, characterized by high levels of emotion in communicative repertoires (Berrocal et al., 2017; Berrocal-Gonzalo et al., 2021).

Political spectacularization in the context of politainment has led to alternative ways of political participation for hard-to-reach audiences (Vijay & Gekker, 2021). When political information is offered in the form of spectacularized politics, popular culture on social media can also prompt youth participation in collective political expression (Literat &

RQ1. Based on TikTok main affordances, what type of interactivity exists in this short video platform and to what extent can it be applied to strategic political communication contexts?

RQ2. To what extent do Spanish Political Parties use TikTok interactivity tools to communicate with generation Z ?

H1. Political parties continue broadcasting their messages based on traditional storytelling, instead of including creativity, emotionality and soft contents narratives.

RQ3. What is the impact of TikTok visual narratives on engagement levels?

H2. Including politainment narratives on TikTok posts leads to high engagement







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Sample

- Quantitative content analysis of Tik Tok short videos selected from **4 Spanish political parties** : (PP), (Ciudadanos), (Unidas Podemos), (VOX).
 - PP was the first party to join TikTok in March 2019, followed by Podemos in January 2020, Vox in February 2020, Ciudadanos in March 2020.
- Data collection was retrieved from each official Tik Tok profile from the 30th April, 2020 till 30th April 2021
- PSOE was excluded on the sample since by April 2020 they didn't have an official (verified) profile.
- Mainly visual content (textual content of each video was also consider)
- Manual coding
- Final simple: N=**282 videos**



Table 1. Spanish Political Parties TikTok accounts

Political Party	Profile	First post	followers	likes	N° post (30/4/2020 to 30/04/2021)
	@ciudadanoscs	18-03-2020	1797	26800	83
Partido Popular 	@partidopopular.es	12-04-2020	7018	57500	27
Podemos 	@ahorapodemos	28-01-2020	205600	3700000	162
Vox 	@vox_espana	13-02-2020	44500	175000	10

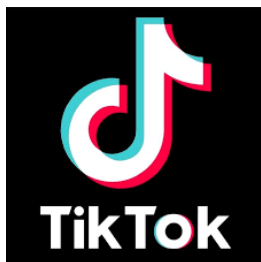


Variables

Table 2. Variables

Variable	Values
ENGAGEMENT VARIABLES	
Views	Number
Likes	Number
% Likes (Likes/views)	%
Comment	Number
% comments (Comments/views)	%
Shares	Number
% Shares (Shares/views)	%
FORMAT VARIABLES	
Music	0: without 1: with music
Text in image	0- without 1.-with text
Text caption	0- without 1.-with text caption
Sticker	0- without 1.-with sticker
Special effects	0- without 1.-with special effects
Hashtag	0- without 1.-with hashtags
Text	0- without 1.-with text
Type of post	0: normal video 1: challenge 2: duo

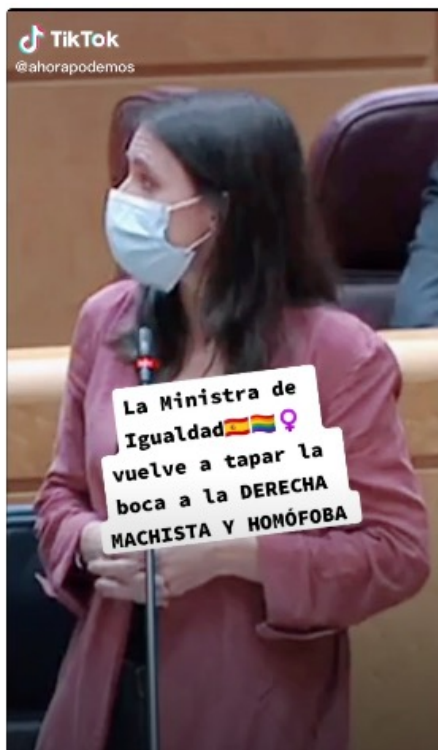
CONTENT VARIABLES	
Type of content	0: no political 1: political
Main issue	1. gender 2. health/covid 3. education 4. economy 5. indepeny/territorial policy 6. environment policy 7. political agreements 8. political corruption 9. racism 10. others 11. campaigning 12. ideological issues 13. monarchy
Who is mentioned?	1: the own political party 2: the own political leader 3: another political party 4: another political leader 5: other
Main actor on the visual	1: citizens 2: politicians from own party 3: politicians from other parties 4: others
Intention	1: Information and promotion 2: critic to other parties 3: movilization
Profesional quality	Scale from 1 (low profesionalization) to 5 (high profesionalization)



ahorapodemos PODEMOS · 2020-10-20

Así se le tapa la boca al machismo de la derecha. # irenemontero # feminismo # lgtbi

🎵 Epic - AShamaluevMusic



DUO



441.2K

4807



ahorapodemos

PODEMOS · 2020-10-29

Seguir

#dúo con ▶ ann.arias 🥰 Nos encantan los vídeos que estáis haciendo con los discursos de #irenemontero 🥰

🎵 irene presidenta - davidqsi



Instalar la aplicación

:20.tiktokcdn.com...

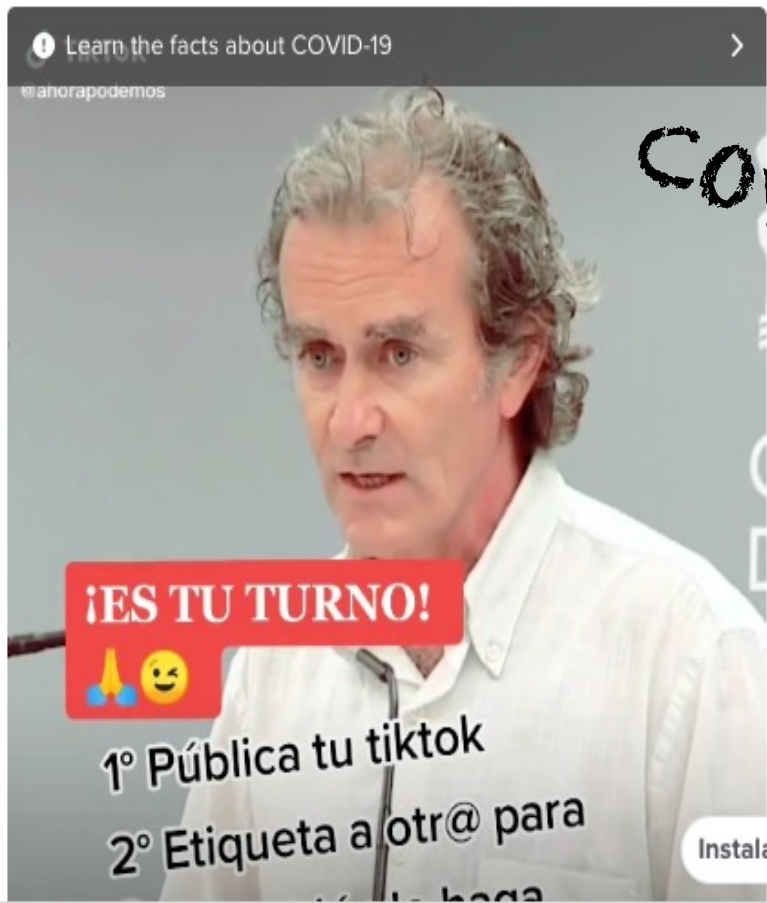


ahorapodemos

PODEMOS · 2020-8-21

#challengefernandosimon #fernandosimon
#challenge #covid #coronavirus

🎵 Seven Nation Army - The White Stripes



COVID
CHALLENGE



ciudadanoscs Ciudadanos · 2020-5-5

Te retamos a usar la mascarilla para derrotar al #coronavirus
#coronaviruschallenge #Póntela ¡Juntos derrotamos al #covid19 !
#españa #esp

🎵 sonido original - Ciudadanos





ahorapodemos

PODEMOS · 2020-6-23

#simetricos #vox #abascal #lgtbi #orgullo 🌈

🎵 original sound - 🗣️



a s20.tiktokcdn.com...

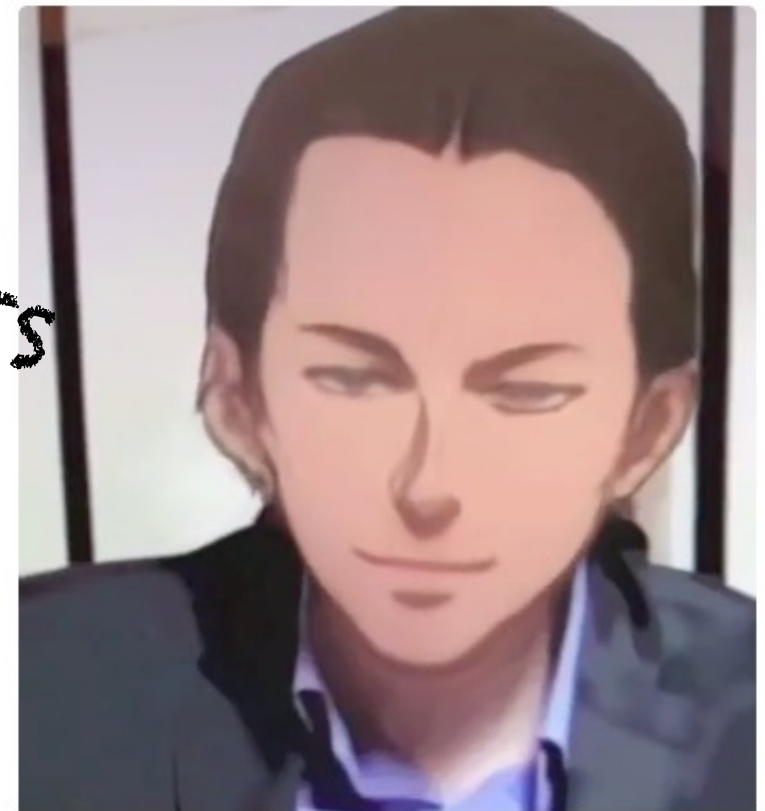


ahorapodemos

PODEMOS · 2020-9-29

Tenía que hacerse y lo hicimos 😊 #skins
#animefilter #anime #filtro #pabloiglesias
#podemos

🎵 sofia by clairo - .



EFFECTS



ahorapodememos PODEMOS · 3-30

#vox #jovenes #unidaspodemos #ahorapodememos #política
@carlagaleote

♪ original sound - PODEMOS



16.3K



127

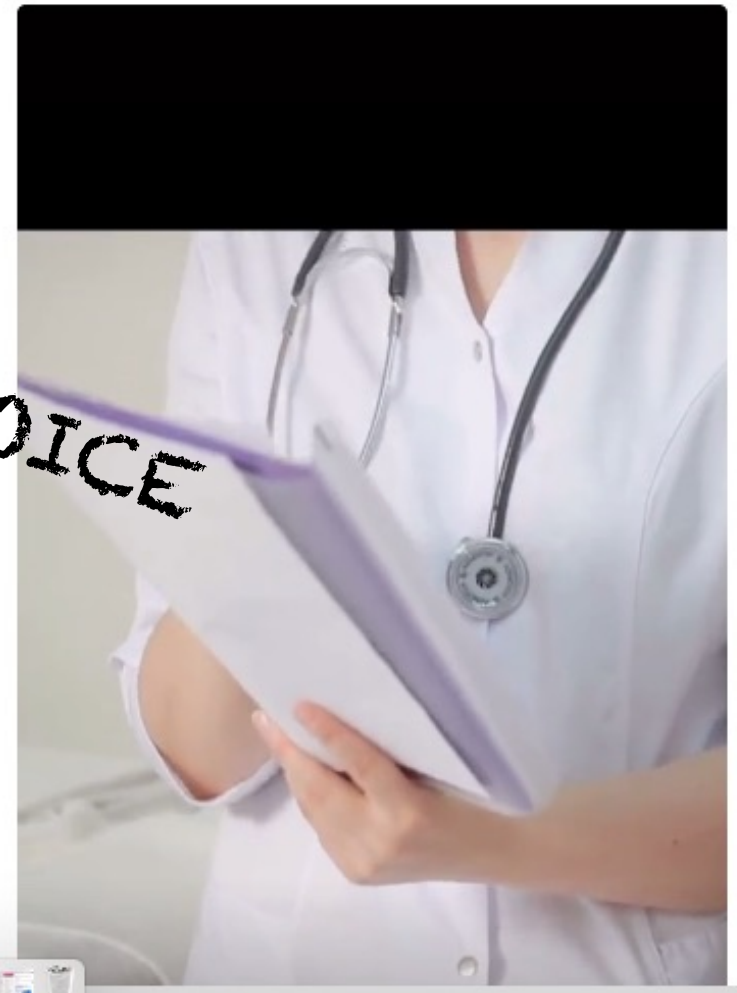


ahorapodememos

PODEMOS · 2020-10-12

¡Resumen de la semana pasada! #resumen #humor

♪ Magical (Instrumental) - BLVKSHP



In





ciudadanoscs

Ciudadanos · 2020-9-18

#amomicuerpo y Ciudadanos también. En Comunidad Valenciana Toni Cantó ha anunciado medidas para apoyar al deporte, gimnasios y centros deportivos

🎵 sonido original - Ciudadanos



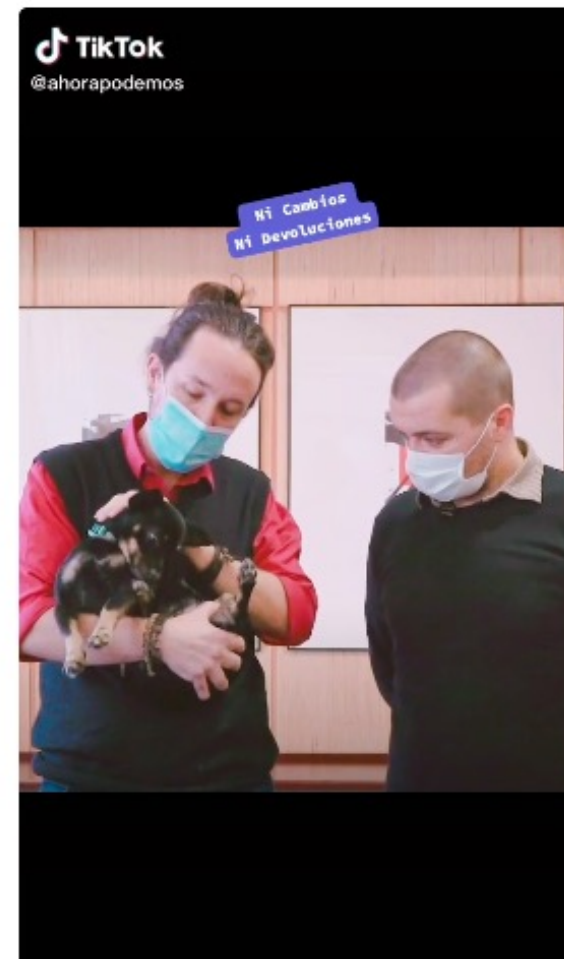
Instalación



ahorapodememos PODEMOS · 2020-12-21

No compres, ADOPTA. #NiCambiosNiDevoluciones #pabloiglesias
#podemos #unidaspodemos #presidencia

🎵 sonido original - PODEMOS



2388



159



NON POLITICA



ahorapodemos

PODEMOS · 2020-7-21

#díamundialdelperro #adoptanocompres

#noalabandonanimal #doglove #pabloiglesias

🎵 sonido original - PODEMOS



IMAGE



ahorapodememos PODEMOS · 2020-10-7

El machismo de VOX siempre queda mejor llorando en li
🤔 España 🇪🇸 es feminista ♀ #irenemontero #vox #zasca
#feminismo

🎵 Epic - AShamaluevMusic



POLITICAL
INSULTS/
TERRORISM



403K



5055



partidopopular.es Partido Popular · 2020-5-27

Álvarez de Toledo, a Iglesias: "Usted es hijo de un terrori:
#españa #coronavirus #covid19 #europe #madrid #poli
#breakingnews #cataluña

🎵 sonido original - Partido Popular





ciudadanoscs Ciudadanos · 2020-6-30

#Galicia tiene #moitoquegañar con un gobierno mejor que cuente con la #PolíticaÚtil de #Ciudadanos desde el Parlamento Gallego #12J

🎵 sonido original - Ciudadanos



CAMPAIGNING



39



3





ciudadanoscs

Ciudadanos · 4-14

🎵 sonido original - Ciudadanos



@ciudadanoscs

Debate de los idealistas.



Cs.Ciudadanos



@Ciudadanos



@ciudadanos



Ciudadanos

ciudadanos

Debate de Todo es Mentira,
no os lo perdáis.



ciudadanoscs Ciudadanos · 4-19

#RutaJcs #4M #Madrileñosporedmundo #Eligecentro

🎵 sonido original - Ciudadanos

🚩 Denunciar



TikTok
00:06/00:20



33



0



- One of the **first exploratory study** on the use of TikTok in Spain
- Political parties are using Tik Tok as a **new visual communication tool** to communicate with young voters, but **with old communication patterns**: sharing pre-existing videos, with varying levels of editing, mostly related to political issues, highlighting the ideological matters over sector-specific ones.
- The parties **have yet to adapt to the platform's own narrative codes**. Although some differences were found among Spanish Political parties: new parties (Podemos) seems to better understand TikTok main affordances.
- Future research:
 - comparative studies on the use of TikTok in other countries (Spain, Lithuania)
 - comparative studies on different use of TikTok between political parties and political leaders (personalization hypothesis)



Article

Securing the Youth Vote: A Comparative Analysis of Digital Persuasion on TikTok Among Political Actors

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Submitted: 27 October 2022 | Accepted: 5 January 2023 | Published: 16 May 2023

Abstract

In the context of “pop politics” and “politainment,” the irruption of TikTok has changed the landscape of social media and become the fastest-growing application among young people. Based on the peculiarities of the social platform’s affordances and the political personalization approach, we explore the differences between political parties and political leaders in terms of digital persuasion on TikTok in Spain and Poland. This work contributes to the scarce knowledge about the strategic use of TikTok for political purposes. It also attempts to fill the gap in the comparative research into the practical uses of TikTok in different political contexts. The study explores the three classical persuasion appeals—pathos, ethos, and logos—based on a visual, quantitative analysis of $N = 372$ videos posted on the official TikTok profiles of the main political parties and leaders from January 1st to March 31st, 2022. Differences were found in how political parties and political leaders used TikTok’s affordances as well as in the main rhetorical resource they use to persuade. We noted the use of more rational resources (logos) in the case of political parties and more emotional resources (pathos) for political leaders. Further, the rare presence of the personality in the videos of the political actors (ethos), along with their unusual privatization role, indicate that personalization on TikTok is far from being considered as part of their digital persuasion strategy.

Keywords

digital persuasion; personalization; political communication; social media; TikTok; visual framing

Issue

This article is part of the issue “Political Communication in Times of Spectacularisation: Digital Narratives, Engagement, and Politainment” edited by Salvador Gómez-García (Complutense University of Madrid), Rocio Zamora (University of Murcia), and Salomé Berrocal (University of Valladolid).

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1. Introduction

In the context of “pop politics” (Mazzoleni & Bracciale, 2019) and politainment (Berrocal et al., 2021), visual images are gaining more importance (Veneti et al., 2019); consequently, the irruption of TikTok embodies a new challenge for political contexts (Medina-Serrano et al., 2020). This short-video-based social network had an exponential growth in popularity during the global lockdown that took place in 2020, reaching two billion downloads and 800 million monthly active users worldwide by

the end of 2020 and 205 million downloads in the second quarter of 2021 (Statista, 2023a).

The increasing importance of political spectacularization has led to alternative forms of political participation for audiences who were previously almost impossible to reach. Having first used Instagram and Snapchat, political actors are currently turning their attention to TikTok as the most relevant social network for communicating with younger people (Hortelano, 2022; “Internetowa ofensywa,” 2022). In fact, 43% of TikTok’s global audience is between 18 and 24 years old (Kemp, 2021).

Zamora-Medina, R., Suminas, A., & Fahmy, S. S. (2023). Securing the youth vote: A comparative analysis of digital persuasion on TikTok among political actors. Media and communication, 11(2), 218-231.



- ✓ tries to fill the lack of **comparative research** exploring practical TikTok uses in different political contexts → **comparative study** of the different strategic uses of TikTok performed in **two European countries**.
- ✓ examine how **political parties and political leaders** use TikTok for **political digital persuasion** considering the classical **Aristotle's persuasion** → how the entertainment logic and political spectacularization affect how political parties communicate on this platform.
 - *ethos (credibility of the speaker)*
 - *pathos (appealing to the emotions of the audiences)*
 - *logos (establishing a rational basis for an argument)*

RQ1: Do political parties and political leaders significantly differ in using TikTok affordances?

RQ2: Are there significant differences between Spain and Poland in using TikTok affordances by (a) political parties and (b) political leaders?

H1: Political parties and political leaders are not fully exploiting TikTok functionalities to create a more effective persuasive strategy.

RQ3: Do political parties and political leaders significantly differ in personalization in their use of TikTok?

RQ4: Are there significant differences between Spanish and Polish political parties and individual political party members in personalization in their use of TikTok by (a) political parties and (b) political leaders?

H2: Political leaders significantly use more personalized communication than political parties in their use of TikTok.

RQ5: Do political parties and political leaders significantly differ in using persuasion appeals on TikTok?

RQ6: Are there significant differences between Spain and Poland in using persuasion appeals on TikTok?

H3: Political leaders use ethos significantly more than pathos and logos on TikTok.

- Quantitative content analysis of N= 372 Tik Tok short videos
- Main political parties and main political leaders from each official Tik Tok profile from two different countries: Spain and Poland.
 - Spain (N = 214, with 174 videos from political parties and 40 from political leaders)
 - Poland (N =158, with 63 videos from political parties and 95 from political leaders).
- Data collection was retrieved from the 1st of January 2022 till 31st April 2022 (3 months).
- Mainly visual content (textual content of each video was also consider)

Table 1. Sample distribution of videos among political actors in Spain and Poland.

Total sample (N = 372)	Political leaders	No. of videos	Political parties	No. of videos
Spain (N = 214)	@gabrielrufian	7	@partidopular	114
	@irenemontero_	8*	@vox_espana	7*
	@ierrejon	4*	@ahorapodemos	28*
	@ivanedlm	5	@ciudadanoscs	16
	@sandrage76	16	@_psoe	9*
Poland (N = 158)	@borysbudka	5	@platforma.obywatelska	6
	@rbiedron	18*	@__lewica	8
	@zandberg	5	@konfederacjawin	49
	@magdabiejat	3		
	@beata_maciejewska	24		
	@krzysztofsmiszek	6*		
	@arturdziambor	8		
	@konradberkowicz	8		
	@michal_urbaniak	18		
	Total	135	Total	237

Note: * = verified accounts.

Variables

A) ENGAGEMENT VARIABLES

- V4. Views Number
- V5. Likes Number
- V6. Comment Number
- V7. Shares Number

B) FORMAT VARIABLES (USE OF MAIN TIKTOK AFFORDANCES)

- V8 .Production technique (from videostyle coding book) and Schellewald, A. (2021).
 - 1.Video
 - 2.Political ad style
 - 3.Still photo
 - 4.Interactive TikTok style (Challenges, competition, duets)
 - 5. Other
- V9. Format/ type of post (from videostyle coding book)
 - 1.Information diffusion (spreading information)
 - 2. Self-promotion (image management)
 - 3. Deliberation/discussion (asking for people's opinions or responding to questions)
 - 4: Opposition focused (Critic to other parties including blaming other political actors)
 - 5: Mobilization (post containing explicit requests for action).
 - 6. Humouristic video/dramatourgy
- V10. Music
 - 0: without
 - 1: with music
- V11. Music functionality (Medina-Serrano, 2020)
 - 1.the music serves as part of a dance routine, a lip-synching battle, or as the backdrop for a comedy skit
 - 2. the music functions as a story builder and can be used to deliver a specific message
 - 3. no music
- V12. Text in image
 - 0- without
 - 1.-with text
- V13. Text description (caption)
 - 0- without
 - 1.-with text caption
- V14 . Sticker effects
 - 0- without
 - 1.-with sticker
- V15. visual effects
 - 0- without
 - 1.-with special effects
- V16. Hashtag
 - 0- without
 - 1.-with hashtags

C) CONTENT VARIABLES

- V17. Type of content
 - 0: non political/personal (e.g., family, sports, physical activity, pets, leisure activity)
 - 1: political
- V18.A Main issue:
 - 1. gender issues
 - 2. health/covid
 - 3. education
 - 4. economy (employment, social inequalities etc)
 - 5. independency/territorial policy (e.g., Brexit)
 - 6. environment
 - 7. EU related issues
 - 8. political corruption
 - 9. racism
 - 10. Immigration/refugee crisis
 - 11. Crime
 - 12. campaigning
 - 13. ideological issues
 - 14. International relations
 - 15. Ukraina war
 - 16. Others.
- V18B. Main actor on the post
 - 1: Political leader alone
 - 2. Other politicians
 - 3. Celebrities
 - 4. Citizens
 - 5. Other professional or state actors (doctors, army)
 - 6. Political leader plus other people
 - 7. None of the above
- V19 .-Tone of visual
 - 1. Positive emotional (stimulation through emotions)
 - 2. Negative emotional (political stimulation) ataque, denuncia...
 - 3. Neutral
 - 4. Not applicable
- V20. Elements of *ethos* technique dominant
 - 1.celebrity/authority/credible figures
 - 2. testimonials (person in the street excluding celebrity)
 - 3. other
 - 4. not applicable
- V21. Elements of *pathos* technique dominant
 - 1. Inspiration & Hope
 - 2. Sadness
 - 3. Sympathy & Pity
 - 4. Courage & Strength
 - 5. Hatred
 - 6. Love
 - 7. Other
 - 8. not applicable
- V22.-Elements of *logos* technique dominant
 - 1. statistics
 - 2. recorded evidence
 - 3. historical data or facts
 - 4. studies, surveys or academic papers
 - 5. other
 - 6. not applicable
- V23.- Dominant persuasion technique
 - 1. ethos: celebrity (selling the persona)
 - 2. logos: knowledge
 - 3. pathos: emotional
 - 4. not applicable

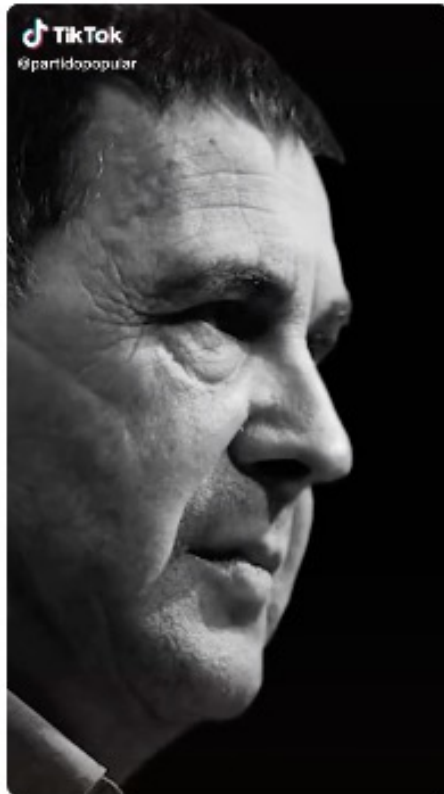


partidopopular Partido Popular · 2-16

Siguiendo

✖ Ayer el partido de **#sanchez** votó con **#Bildu**, por 5ª vez, en contra de prohibir los homenajes y beneficios a **#etarras** no arrepentidos. **#españa** **#hoy**

🎵 sonido original - Partido Popular



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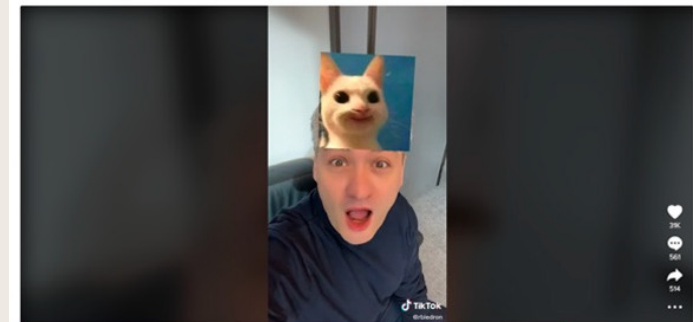


25



13

example of visual effect

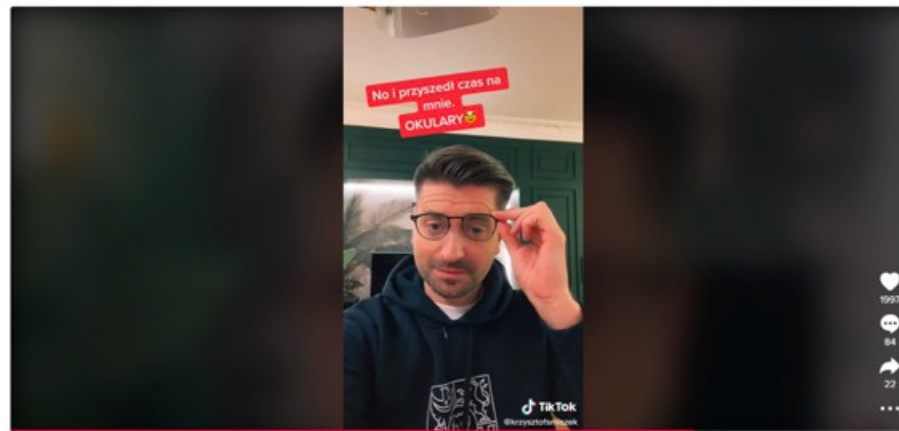


Co za ušmícht A vy jakim kotem jesteš? **#dialekty** **#di** **#fy** **#trending** **#cat** **#cats** **#tiktok** **#biedron** **#kewica** **#politician**

🎵 original sound - rlo

rbiedron Robert Biedron · 14

Follow



I jak Wam się podoba? OKULARY?? Ja?]

Up by Olty murs. - ❤️ Havy



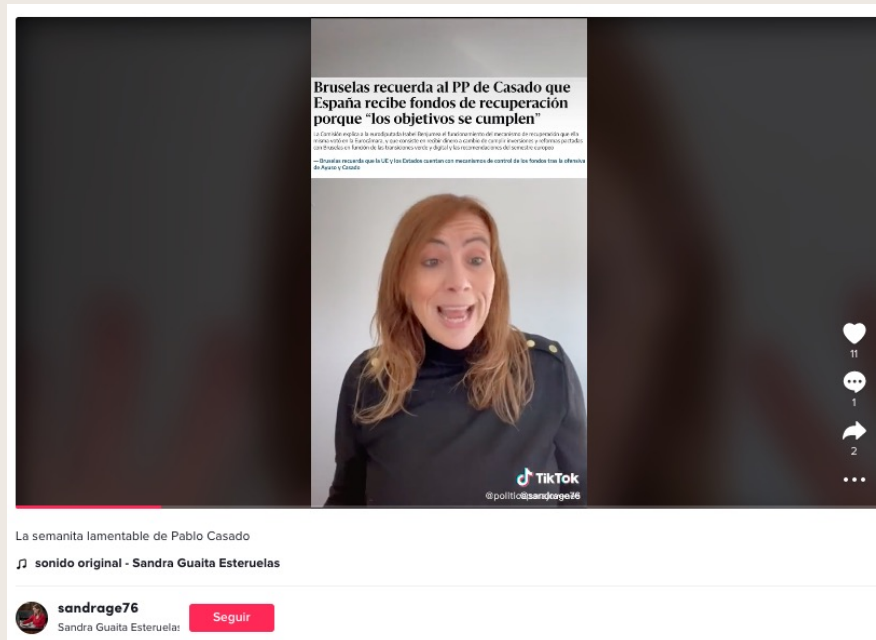
krzysztofsmisze

Krzysztof Śmiszek · 146

Follow

example of non-political content

Figure 2. Example of non-political content on TikTok. Note: In this video, the Lewica politician Krzysztof Śmiszek is seen trying on new glasses with the caption, “Well, my time has come. Glasses.” Source: Smiszek (2022).



Source: @sandrage76. January 29, 2022.

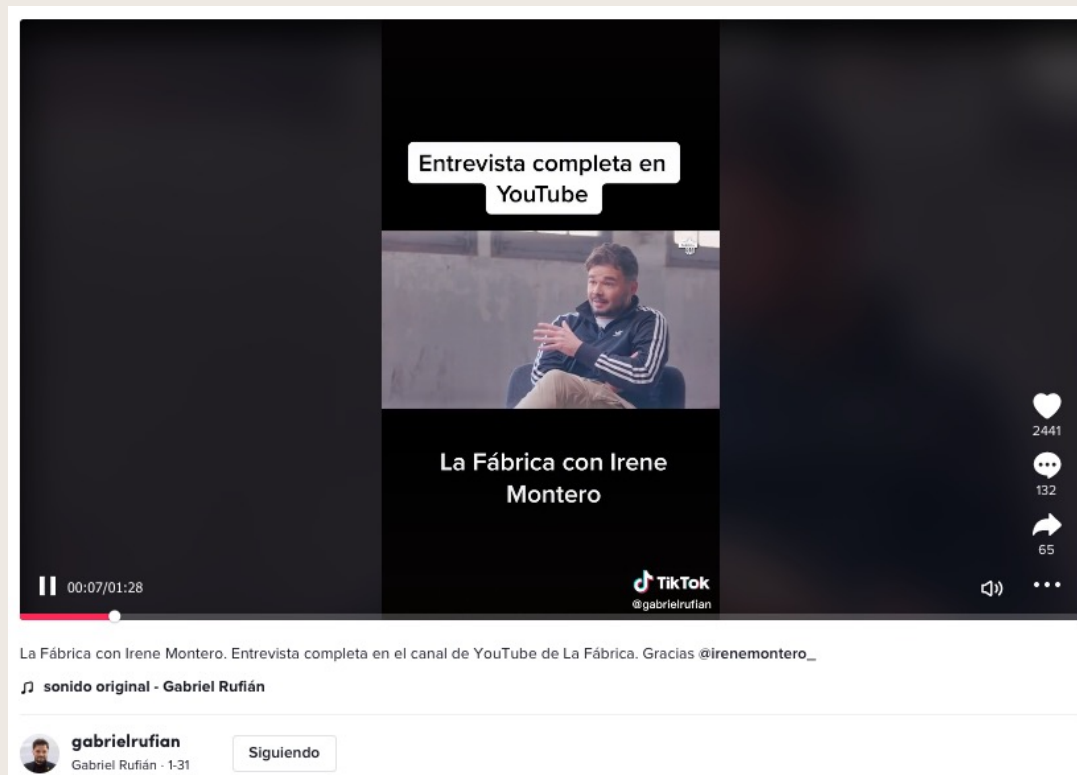
https://www.tiktok.com/@sandrage76/video/7058630056884718853?is_from_webapp=v1&item_id=7058630056884718853&web_id=6932023002969490949

persuasion based on logos



Source: @ciudadanoscs. January 17, 2022.

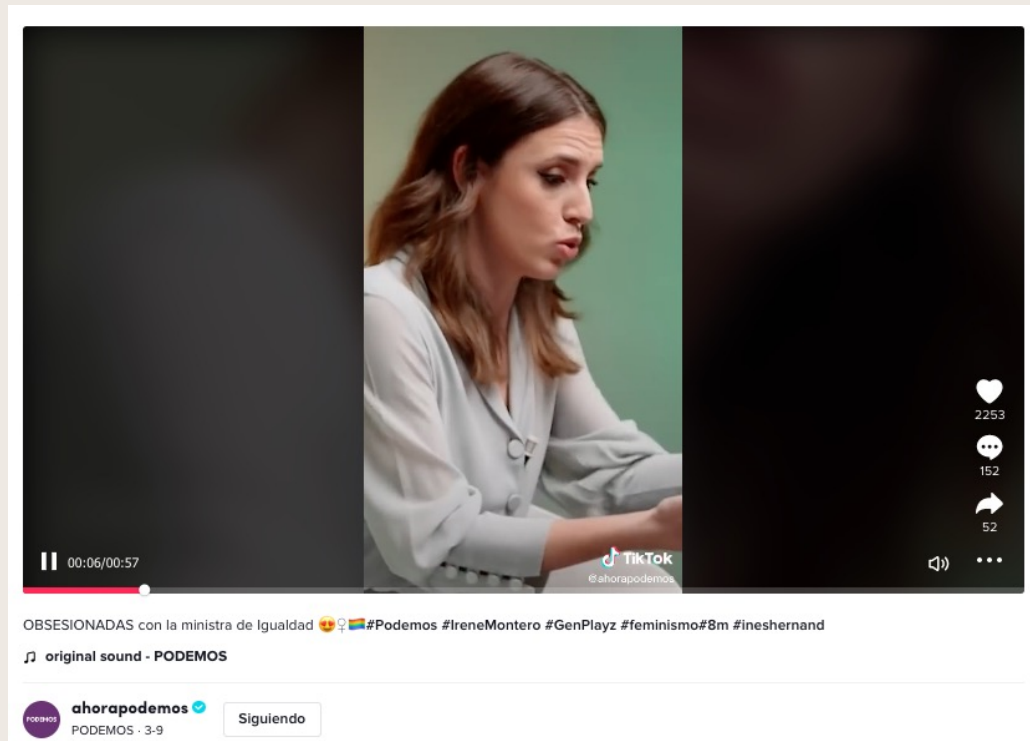
https://www.tiktok.com/@ciudadanoscs/video/7054105626733006085?is_from_webapp=v1&item_id=7054105626733006085&web_id=6932023002969490949



*persuasion based on
pathos*

Source: @gabrielrufian. January 31, 2022.

https://www.tiktok.com/@gabrielrufian/video/7059377371182337286?is_from_webapp=v1&item_id=7059377371182337286&web_id=6932023002969490949



persuasion based on ethos

Source: @ahorapodemos. March 9, 2022.

https://www.tiktok.com/@ahorapodemos/video/7073165439769038085?is_from_webapp=v1&item_id=7073165439769038085&web_id=6932023002969490949

dominante persuasion technique * party vs leader

Chi square 7.02 p= .03

Tabla cruzada

			party vs leader		Total
			political party	political leader	
dominante persuasion technique	ethos: selling the persona	Recuento	34	1	35
		% dentro de party vs leader	19,5%	2,5%	16,4%
	logos: knowledge	Recuento	64	19	83
		% dentro de party vs leader	36,8%	47,5%	38,8%
	pahtos: emotional	Recuento	76	20	96
		% dentro de party vs leader	43,7%	50,0%	44,9%
Total	Recuento		174	40	214
	% dentro de party vs leader		100,0%	100,0%	100,0%

- **Limited Use of TikTok's Full Potential:** Political actors in Spain and Poland primarily use traditional communication styles on TikTok, underutilizing the platform's interactive and creative affordances.
- **Leaders vs. Parties:** Political leaders gain more visibility (views and likes) than parties. **Leaders use the platform more for self-promotion and image management**, while parties often use it to ridicule opponents.
- **Low Interactivity and Creativity:** Most videos lack TikTok-specific elements like music and interactive genres, showing limited creativity and engagement strategies.
- **Minimal Personalization:** While **some personalization** is present, especially from leaders, it **does not extend to privatization** or humanizing content. Political messages dominate over personal or emotional storytelling.
- **Differences in Persuasion Techniques:** Parties use more rational (logos) appeals like press clippings and evidence. Leaders use more emotional (pathos) appeals, with positive emotions (hope, inspiration) in Poland and negative criticism in Spain. Ethos (credibility/personal image) is weakly represented in both countries.



**DIVISIONS IN MOTION:
Visual Affective Polarization on TikTok During the 2024 European Parliament
Elections**

Divisiones en movimiento: Polarización afectiva visual en TikTok durante las elecciones al Parlamento Europeo de 2024

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KEYWORDS

Visual polarization
Affective polarization
Radical and far-right
parties
TikTok
Politainment
Populism
Political communication

ABSTRACT

Visual polarization is a key element of digital political communication, reinforcing group identity and deepening affective divisions. During the 2024 European elections, radical and far-right candidates used TikTok to modernize their image and promote polarizing, anti-establishment narratives. An analysis of N = 190 videos posted by seven candidates reveals a preference for emotionally charged, simplified content while avoiding interactive features. This strategy fostered in-group cohesion, heightened ideological divides, and increased the risk of misinformation, limiting substantive debate and mobilization. These findings highlight the role of visual rhetoric in shaping contemporary political discourse and its impact on polarization in digital environments.

PALABRAS CLAVE

Polarización visual
Polarización afectiva
Partidos de extrema derecha
TikTok
Espectacularización política
Populismo
Comunicación política

RESUMEN

La polarización visual es un elemento clave de la comunicación política digital, que refuerza la identidad grupal y profundiza las divisiones afectivas. Durante las Elecciones al Parlamento Europeo de 2024, candidatos de derecha radical y extrema derecha utilizaron TikTok para modernizar su imagen y difundir narrativas polarizadoras y anti-establishment. El análisis de N = 190 videos de siete candidatos muestra una preferencia por los contenidos simplificados y de alto impacto emocional, con escaso margen para la interactividad. Esta estrategia fortaleció la cohesión identitaria, amplificó las divisiones ideológicas y aumentó el riesgo de desinformación, limitando el debate sustantivo y la movilización. Los hallazgos subrayan el impacto de la retórica visual en la polarización digital.

Recibido: XX/XX/XXXX
Aceptado: XX/XX/XXXX

Pérez-Díaz, P.L, Zamora-Medina, R. & Pérez-Escolar, M.(2025). Divisions in Motion: Visual Affective Polarization on TikTok During the 2024 European Parliament Elections. VISUAL REVIEW International Visual Culture Review (accepted for publication in 2025)



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VISUAL AFFECTIVE POLARIZATION ON SOCIAL MEDIA

- Social media **has intensified affective polarization**, shifting focus from ideology to emotional hostility (Huddy, Mason, & Aarøe, 2015; Iyengar, Sood, & Lelkes, 2012).
- Political parties increasingly view **opponents with negative emotions** and hostility while strengthening emotional bonds with their followers. This **fosters group identity** ("us" vs. "them") where the opposition is framed as a threat (Rebollo-Bueno & Ferreira, 2023; Joo & Steinert-Threlkeld, 2022; Yarchi et al., 2021; Knudsen, 2021).
- **Visual-oriented platforms (YouTube, Instagram, TikTok)** play an increasing role in election campaigns for image management, campaign messaging, and voter mobilization (Gamir-Ríos, Cano-Orón, & Lava-Santos, 2022; Filimonov, Russmann, & Svensson, 2016).
- Research on **TikTok's role** in visual affective polarization is **still emerging** but suggests strong engagement with radical content. Studies reveal how radical and far-right groups mobilize audiences through visual content (Hohner et al., 2024; González-Aguilar et al., 2023; Kim et al., 2024).

VISUAL AFFECTIVE POLARIZATION ON SOCIAL MEDIA

We should distinguish the corpus of visual data being analyzed (Mukerjee & Shen, 2025):

- ELITE POLARIZATION → analysis of photos and videos published by media outlets, political pundits and official party accounts on social media platforms to disseminate polarized view points (strategic communication)
- MASS POLARIZATION → visual content generated by ordinary users, thereby excluding posts from “elite” accounts (spontaneous & grassroots expressions of public sentiments)



The 2024 European elections provide a unique opportunity to assess the effective use of TikTok by European political actors from radical and far-right parties.

RQ1: To what extent did European radical-right candidates employ TikTok's affordances—technical, content-based, and persuasive—to mobilize their voters?

The literature identifies two primary approaches political actors use on TikTok.

-bold strategies aimed at engaging young audiences by leveraging TikTok's unique features within a politainment context (Bonansinga, 2024; Classen et al., 2024; Widholm et al., 2024).

-a more conventional approach, where political actions align with the formality and seriousness of traditional parties (Cervi et al., 2023; López-Cañellas, 2022; Zamora-Medina et al., 2023).

→Radical-right actors are anticipated to derive significant benefits from TikTok's affordances, utilizing humor, memes, and emotionally resonant content to simplify complex ideologies, making their messages more shareable and fostering echo chambers (H1).









RQ2: What kinds of visual affective polarization strategies were most effective in engaging voters?

Previous studies demonstrate that populist actors create **emotional narratives** to strengthen national identity while amplifying negative sentiments toward opponents (Iyengar et al., 2012). TikTok plays a central role in driving affective polarization **by reinforcing group identity and manipulating emotions through its content** (Steinert-Threlkeld et al., 2022; Knudsen, 2021; Yarchi et al., 2021). Nationalist and protest-oriented content, employing persuasive visual elements, effectively attracts external audiences (Hohner et al., 2024). Additionally, the use of hate speech and the identification of “enemies” of the people further intensify polarization (González-Aguilar et al., 2023).

→ *Based on this evidence, it is hypothesized (H2) that radical and far-right candidates will employ emotional narratives, incorporating negative references to opponents and ideological symbols, to mobilize support.*

- ✓ A quantitative content analysis was conducted.
- ✓ Selected sample: candidates from radical and far-right parties in the 2024 European Parliament elections with significant parliamentary relevance or projected visibility.
(excluded: fewer than three seats in the 2019 European Parliament elections; those without an official TikTok profile or just never updated their TikTok account)
- ✓ **Final sample: 7 political leaders** (5 lead candidates + 2 candidates that did not secure seats in the 2019 elections, but polling data predicted their parties would gain significant relevance and visibility in 2024).
- ✓ **Time period:** all TikTok videos (N = 190 videos) shared by the selected candidates between May 25 and June 9, 2024.

Table 1. Sample distribution of TikTok videos by European radical and far-right political candidates

	European candidate	Political party	Country	TikTok profile	TikTok followers	Number of videos
	Giorgia Meloni	<i>Fratelli d'Italia</i>	Italy	@giorgiameloni_ufficiale	1.6M	20
	Jordan Bardella	<i>Rassemblement National</i>	France	@jordanbardella	1.3M	30
	Alvise Pérez	<i>Se Acabó La Fiesta</i>	Spain	@alviseperez	165K	13
	Viktor Orbán	<i>Fidesz-Magyar Polgári Szövetség</i>	Hungary	@viktor_a_tiktokon	176K	22
	Jorge Buxadé	<i>VOX</i>	Spain	@jorgebuxade	78K	34
	Harald Vilimsky	<i>Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs</i>	Austria	@haraldvilimsky	4K	16
	Tom Vandendriessche	<i>Vlaams Belang</i>	Belgium	@tomvandendriessche	4K	55

Source: Authors' own elaboration.

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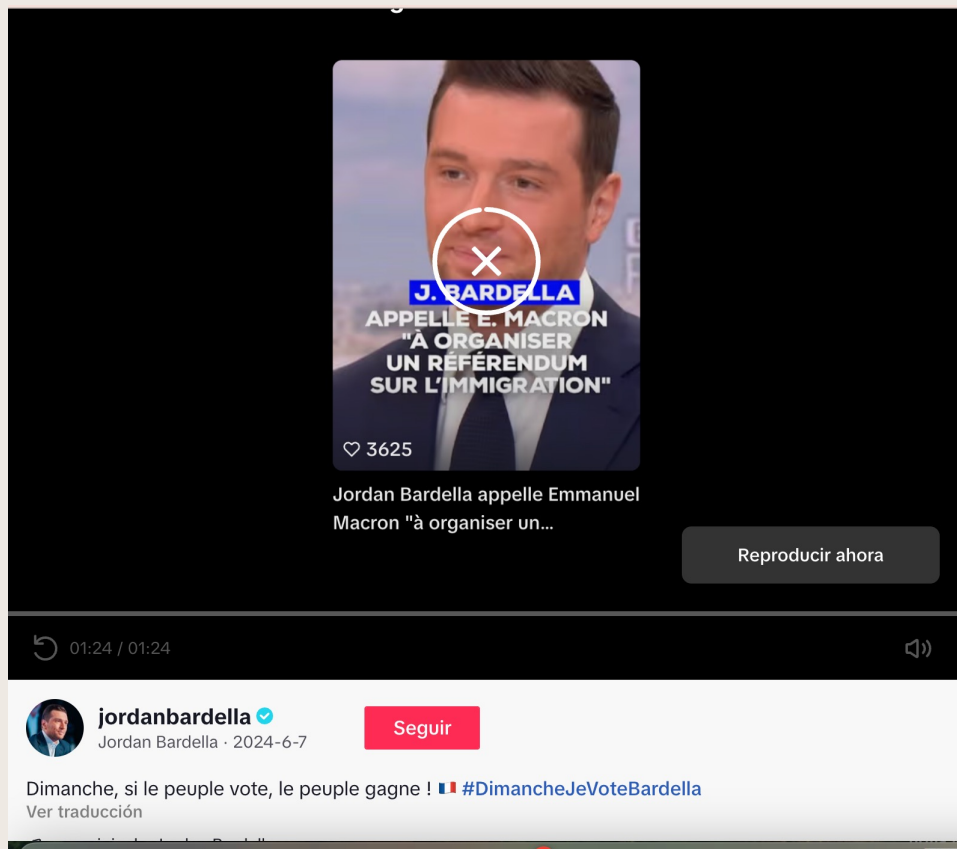
Annexes

Annex 1. Coding sheet.	
Descriptive Variables	
V0 - Number of posts	
V1 - Date DD/MM/YYYY	
V2 - TikTok profile	
1. Giorgia Meloni (<i>Forza Italia</i>)	
2. Jordan Bardella (<i>Rassemblement National</i>)	
3. Alviše Pérez (<i>Se Acabó La Fiesta</i>)	
4. Viktor Orbán (<i>Fidesz-Magyar Polgári Szövetség</i>)	
5. Jorge Buxadé (<i>VOX</i>)	
6. Harald Vilimsky (<i>Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs</i>)	
7. Tom Vandendriessche (<i>Vlaams Belang</i>)	
V3 - Number of likes	
V4 - Number of views	
V5 - Number of comments	
V6 - Number of shares	
Technical Variables	
V7 - Type of video	
1. Video (simple)	
2. Duet	
3. Challenge	
V8 - Format	
1. Single video	
2. Video + effect	
3. Video + music	
4. Video + text	
5. Video + effect + music	
6. Video + effect + text	
7. Video + text + music	
8. Video + effect + text + music	
V9 - Music	
0. Without music	
1. With music	
V10 - Music functionality	
1. The music serves as part of a dance routine, a lip-sync battle, or as the backdrop for a comedy skit	
2. The music functions as a story builder and is used to deliver a specific message	
3. No music	

V11 - Source	
1. Own-exclusive	
2. Own-adapted	
3. External-media	
4. External-users	
V12 - Multimodal linguistic elements	
V12.1 Emojis/GIFs	
(0. No, 1. Yes)	
V12.2 Hashtags	
(0. No, 1. Yes)	
V12.3 Surveys	
(0. No, 1. Yes)	
V12.4 Mentions (@#)	
(0. No, 1. Yes)	
V13 - Type of post	
1. Information diffusion (spreading information)	
2. Self-promotion (image management)	
3. Deliberation/discussion (asking for people's opinions or responding to questions)	
4. Opposition-focused (criticism of other parties, including blaming other political actors)	
5. Mobilization (posts containing explicit requests for action)	
6. Humorous video/dramaturgy	
Content Variables	
V14 - Who appears in the image?	
1. Candidate/leader alone	
2. Candidate/leader with a small group	
3. Candidate/leader with a large crowd	
4. Party members	
5. Citizens	
6. Media (journalists)	
7. Environment/background	
8. Family/friends (inner circle)	
9. Other politicians	
10. Not applicable	
V15 - Context in which they appear	
1. Indeterminate	
2. Public space (e.g., on the street)	
3. Media space	
4. Political/institutional space (e.g., party headquarters, rally)	
5. Private space	
6. Not applicable	
V16 - Activity of the main subject	
1. Speaking	
2. Walking	
3. Greeting	
4. Posing	
5. Gesturing	
6. Not applicable	
V17 - Type of content	
1. Political	
2. Non-political	
Persuasion Variables	
V18 - Predominant rhetorical strategy	
1. <i>Ethos</i> (credibility, speaker-centered): Focus on the politician as a leader and the construction of their leadership	
2. <i>Logos</i> (reasoning, evidence-based): Emphasis on knowledge, facts, and objective data	
3. <i>Pathos</i> (emotion-driven): Appeal to followers' emotions (e.g., sadness, hatred, hope)	

4. Not applicable	
V19 - Tone of the publication	
1. Positive	
2. Negative	
3. Neutral	
Affective Polarization Variables	
V20 - Affective polarization	
V20.1. Defiant attitude toward institutions (e.g., European Union, courts of justice)	
(0. No, 1. Yes)	
V20.2. Presence of military, religious, revolutionary, or patriotic symbols	
(0. No, 1. Yes)	
V20.3. Use of stereotypes in published content	
(0. No, 1. Yes)	
V20.4. References to violence or struggle in the content	
(0. No, 1. Yes)	
V20.5. Display of party's ideological symbols (e.g., logo, slogan)	
(0. No, 1. Yes)	
V20.6. Use of inclusive visual language (e.g., "us vs. them," "our people," "our homeland," nativism, references to homeland inhabitants or nationality)	
(0. No, 1. Yes)	
V20.7. Dominance of emotional appeal in published content	
(0. No, 1. Yes)	
V20.8. Identification of a non-political enemy (e.g., media, NGOs)	
(0. No, 1. Yes)	
V20.9. Call for social or political mobilization	
(0. No, 1. Yes)	
V20.10. Negative references to opposition groups or political leaders (including those from other countries; negative campaigning)	
(0. No, 1. Yes)	

Source: Authors' own elaboration based on Marcos-García et al. (in press) and Morejón-Llamas (2023).



<https://www.tiktok.com/@jordanbardella/video/7377787352468524320>



<https://www.tiktok.com/@jorgebuxade/video/7377048959631553>

- **Partial Confirmation of Hypotheses (H1 & H2):**

H1: European populist far-right candidates **partially leveraged TikTok's affordances**, especially emotionally resonant, shareable content, but underutilized its participatory features.

H2: Emotional narratives, **especially affective polarization and ideological symbols**, were widely used, supporting the idea that emotional appeal drives engagement.

- **Strategic but Conservative Use of TikTok:**

Strategic adaptation of TikTok by European far-right populists, **balancing emotional engagement with careful control over content and image**:

-->Candidates **preferred simple, visually engaging formats** (e.g., music, text, effects) to gain attention. But they **avoided interactive and participatory tools** (e.g., duets, challenges, polls), likely to retain message control.

-Emphasis on **self-promotion and opposition**, aiming to humanize candidates and **enhance ethos** (credibility). Also frequent use of **emotional appeals (pathos)**, fostering in-group identity and polarization.

- **Dual Strategy of Emotional Tone:** positive tones were used to build leadership narratives and relatability, while negative tones were used to reinforced perceptions of crisis and opposition, amplifying polarizing discourse.
- **Engagement Patterns:** Posts with **humor and drama generated the highest engagement**, while deliberative or mobilizing content had low interaction, confirming TikTok's nature as a spectacle-driven platform.

Main Conclusions

1. Traditional Communication Patterns Dominate:

Despite TikTok's unique affordances, political actors generally use the platform in a traditional and conservative way—repurposing existing content, prioritizing political messaging over personalization, and avoiding interactive tools like duets or polls.

2. Leaders Outperform Parties in Engagement:

Political leaders gain more traction than parties, using TikTok more effectively for self-promotion and emotional storytelling. Leaders focus on image management and tend to employ emotional (pathos) appeals, while parties stick to rational (logos) appeals and opponent attacks.

3. Emotional Appeal and Spectacle Drive Engagement:

All three studies confirm that emotional content, especially content with humor, drama, or ideological symbolism, is more engaging than informative or deliberative posts. This aligns with TikTok's spectacle-driven nature, where posts that evoke affective polarization or entertainment outperform mobilization or informational efforts.

4. Incomplete Adaptation to TikTok's Native Culture:

Most political actors—especially traditional parties—have not fully adapted to TikTok's visual and interactive language.

