

LA INFLUENCIA DE LA COMUNICACIÓN POLÍTICA EN REDES SOCIALES: UN ESTUDIO SOBRE EL IMPACTO DE TIK TOK EN LA OBRA PÚBLICA

THE INFLUENCE OF POLITICAL COMMUNICATION ON SOCIAL NETWORKS: A STUDY ON THE IMPACT OF TIK TOK ON PUBLIC WORKS

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Fecha de recepción: 12-10-2023 / Fecha de aceptación: 22-10-2023 / Fecha de publicación: 01-11-2023

RESUMEN

En la actualidad, la comunicación política a través de las redes sociales se ha erigido como un elemento crucial para que los líderes políticos puedan conectar con un público más amplio y, particularmente, con los segmentos poblacionales más jóvenes. En este contexto, la plataforma digital TikTok ha emergido como una alternativa novedosa y cada vez más relevante para la difusión de mensajes políticos. El presente estudio se propone analizar de manera exhaustiva la influencia que ha tenido el uso de TikTok por parte de los candidatos presidenciales ecuatorianos durante las elecciones de 2021, con el objetivo de comprender cómo esta red social puede incidir en la percepción, preferencias y patrones de voto de los electores. La metodología de esta indagación adoptó un enfoque cualitativo, fundamentado en un riguroso análisis de bibliografías enfocadas en contenido de los videos publicados por los principales aspirantes a la presidencia en la plataforma TikTok, complementado con una encuesta aplicada a ciudadanos para evaluar su nivel de exposición, interacción y reacción ante este tipo de material político. Los resultados ponen de manifiesto que los candidatos políticos recurrieron a TikTok como una estrategia de comunicación para alcanzar a un electorado más joven, empleando formatos dinámicos y atractivos, como tendencias, memes y narrativas. Si bien una proporción significativa de los encuestados expresó haber modificado su opinión a raíz de este contenido, su impacto directo en las decisiones de voto no resultó ser determinante. El estudio concluye que, si bien TikTok se ha consolidado como una herramienta relevante para la comunicación política, es necesario abordar su utilización con cautela y responsabilidad, a fin de garantizar la transparencia, el respeto y la veracidad en el discurso político en el entorno digital.

Palabras clave Ecuador; comunicación política, política, redes sociales, TikTok

ABSTRACT

Currently, political communication through social networks has emerged as a crucial element for political leaders to connect with a wider audience and, particularly, with the younger segments of the population. In this context, the digital platform TikTok has emerged as a novel and increasingly relevant alternative for the dissemination of political messages. This study aims to comprehensively analyze the influence of the use of TikTok by Ecuadorian presidential candidates during the 2021 elections, with the objective of understanding how this social network can influence the perception, preferences and voting patterns of voters. The methodology of this research adopted a qualitative approach, based on a rigorous analysis of bibliographies focused on the content of the videos published by the main presidential candidates on the TikTok platform, complemented with a survey applied to citizens to evaluate their level of exposure, interaction and reaction to this type of political material. The results show that political candidates used

* English translation of the original article published in Ecuacientífica, Vol. 1, No. 2, pp. 63-76.

TikTok as a communication strategy to reach a younger electorate, employing dynamic and engaging formats such as trends, memes and narratives. Although a significant proportion of respondents expressed having changed their opinion as a result of this content, its direct impact on voting decisions was not decisive. The study concludes that, although TikTok has established itself as a relevant tool for political communication, it is necessary to approach its use with caution and responsibility, in order to ensure transparency, respect and truthfulness in political discourse in the digital environment.

Keywords Ecuador; political communication, politics, social networks, TikTok

INTRODUCTION

Political communication is a fundamental discipline that not only articulates the discourse of leaders and parties, but also generates spaces for debate, dialogue and conversations that are essential for the functioning of a democracy. This practice manifests itself both at the beginning of a political leader's exercise and during electoral campaigns, becoming a key tool for influencing public opinion (1). In this context, political communication is not limited to informing, but seeks to persuade and mobilize citizens around certain topics and agendas.

It is noteworthy that political communication is an interactive process that involves the transmission of information between politicians, media and publics (voters); that is why it can be determined that political communication has become a highly relevant axis for the dissemination of the opinions, proposals and initiatives of political leaders, extending its influence beyond an electoral campaign.

Starting from these theoretical bases, and agreeing with (5), when he indicates that the works and actions of the rulers must be transmitted to society, in order to be able to receive feedback with the responses expressed by the different political parties, unions, academia, among other entities, whether for their acceptance, denial or total rejection. Therefore, politicians have made use of various media and strategies, with the objective that their communication convinces the electorate, and to persuade it on any point of view.

The participation of the media, and the use of new media, has allowed political information to be widely disseminated, contributing to the formation of public opinion (2); it was observed that, with television, political communication expanded, and that this continues and takes on relevance with new formats through the Internet.

It can be assured that political communication needs the media for its dissemination, and the public uses the media as a system of democracy, from a communicative perspective, as these are the ones that serve it the information, and that in turn serve society the data to make political decisions (3).

The Internet and social networks have created a new way of communicating, and this is not alien to the political field. Movements and their politicians must employ "new strategies and approaches," as Moguer observed in 2015 (4). Therefore, it can be said that "Government and politics are intertwined with the effective use of the media because of their enormous capacity to shape public opinion" (6).

However, the landscape of political communication has undergone an unprecedented transformation in the digital age. The migration from traditional dissemination channels, such as television and the press, to emerging social network platforms has reconfigured the way in which political messages are transmitted.

Today, networks such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram have been widely studied, but the rise of TikTok as a political communication tool presents a new challenge and a unique opportunity. Incorporated in

** English translation of the original article published in Ecuacientifica, Vol. 1, No. 2, pp. 63-76.*



September 2016, which in recent years has grown in popularity, reaching more than 800 million active users per month worldwide (7).

This digital platform allowed new content alternatives, which are not only for entertainment and leisure, but rather for “something more than that and has gone from being simply a platform with superficial content to messages with a political background.” This platform, known for its dynamic and creative format, has allowed political messages to reach younger audiences, facilitating the creation of viral content that can significantly impact public perception, consolidating itself as a novel and highly effective means for political actors to project their proposals, ideologies and image before the electorate, with a great reach to the new generations (8).

The findings of previous academic research evidence that the strategic use of social networks, such as TikTok, can exert a determining influence on the perceptions, preferences and voting patterns of voters, particularly among the younger population segments (8).

This is because these digital platforms allow political candidates to transmit their messages in a more dynamic, interactive manner, aligned with the interests, information consumption habits and communicational codes of users, especially the youngest; it should be noted that it is not guaranteed that the content that is managed is completely organized and fulfills the objective of generating a responsible public opinion among social network users.

In the context of the Ecuadorian presidential elections of 2021, an intensive and unprecedented use of the TikTok application was observed by the main aspirants to the presidential seat, who sought to take advantage of the potential of this social network to connect with a younger electorate and tune in with their concerns, preferences and aspirations. In addition to sharing information in real time, accompanied by attractive visual and narrative elements, which allows political leaders to present their management in a more accessible and close manner (7). This phenomenon raises questions about the true impact that the use of TikTok had on the electoral results and on the perception of the citizenry about the different candidates and their proposals.

In this sense, the present study aims to comprehensively analyze the influence of political communication through TikTok in the context of the Ecuadorian presidential elections of 2021, in order to understand how this digital platform can influence the perception, preferences and voting patterns of voters. To this end, a content analysis of the videos published by the main candidates on TikTok will be carried out, as well as nearby investigations that conducted a survey of the citizenry will be used to evaluate their level of exposure, interaction and reaction to this type of political content on the social network.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Research method

This study adopted a qualitative approach, based on a bibliographic review that carried out a rigorous content analysis of the videos published by the presidential candidates on the TikTok platform during the Ecuadorian elections of 2021. This research technique allowed examining in a systematic and exhaustive manner the use of this social network as a political communication tool.

Population or sample

This research was made up of the totality of the scientific literature available in the main academic databases at a global level. These included recognized platforms such as Scopus, Web of Science, Google

Scholar and thesis repositories of various universities, where a total of 296 videos published by three candidates for the presidency of the Republic were examined: Guillermo Lasso, Andrés Aráuz and Xavier Hervás. The selection of these aspirants was based on their relevance and outstanding performance during the electoral contest, which made them significant case studies.

Inclusion criteria

- a) Candidates who have actively used the TikTok platform as part of their campaign strategy
- b) Candidates who have obtained outstanding performance in the elections.

Exclusion criteria

- a) Candidates who have not used TikTok as part of their political communication
- b) Candidates with marginal participation in the electoral process.

Setting

The research was developed in the context of the presidential elections of Ecuador 2021, focusing specifically on the use of the TikTok social network platform by political candidates as a communication and approach strategy to the voters.

Measurements

For data collection, various techniques were used, such as the exhaustive review of scientific articles, technical reports, guides and regulations issued by regulatory bodies. Once the relevant information was collected, an online survey directed at 182 people between 18 and 68 years of age was evidenced, with the purpose of obtaining information on the use and perception of TikTok in the political sphere. The questionnaire included closed, dichotomous and multiple-choice questions, which allowed relevant information on this study phenomenon to be collected.

Statistical analysis

The data obtained through the survey were analyzed using descriptive statistics techniques. The results are presented through graphs with the objective of understanding the influence that TikTok had on the political campaigns and the perception of users about the use of this platform by the presidential candidates.

RESULTS

In the results obtained (2), in his thesis work it is highlighted that, in a work titled "TikTok, a superficial scenario that seeks depth. Second round electoral campaign in Ecuador 2021," it was mentioned that, during 2021, in Ecuador, the social network TikTok had a boom in the political sphere, due to the fact that several candidates for the presidency of the Republic of that country opened their official account on TikTok, which was used to communicate political messages, activities carried out during the campaign period.

The candidate Xavier Hervás was one of the pioneers marking a milestone on TikTok, managing to achieve popularity among the young public. The political consultant Jorge León pointed out in an interview with a newspaper that "the use of social networks and his participation in the debates held before the elections allowed his image and discourse to stand out, considering that the voters were asking for a change in politics" (9).

For his part, Guillermo Lasso, who would become the elected president of Ecuador, initially mentioned that he had no interest in using TikTok. However, on February 25, prior to the start of the second electoral

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round, he opened his account on this social network, which in just one day added 112 thousand followers (information taken from the candidate's official account, February 25, 2021). This strategy was added to his campaign with the purpose of capturing the attention of a younger public. Lasso used this social network to strategically position his political image and create his own narrative for this community (Figure 1). Other presidential candidates, such as Arauz and Pérez, also opened accounts on TikTok (Figure 2). Their objective was not to fall behind, and to capture the attention of the younger public, seeking popularity, and that their messages become trends on social networks (11), (12).

Figure 1. Video with "red shoes" trends resource.

Source: (12)

Figure 2. Explanatory video of the proposal in the educational field.

Source: (12)

The candidates were clear about which group they were going to target. The use of TikTok therefore became a political communication strategy on the part of the candidates and political forces. Through it, the empathy of various segments of the citizenry was obtained, who until that moment had perhaps maintained a posture of disinterest or rejection towards political movements and leaders. For this, they used diverse resources, such as political infotainment (trends, storytelling, hashtag), through TikTok, which contributed to the messages and images of the political leaders reaching the users of this social network (13).

Therefore, the research carried out in the canton of La Libertad, province of Santa Elena (Ecuador), with 40 young people from 17 to 20 years old who use the social network TikTok. They were given a survey on their use of social networks and political content. The results of the surveys are shown in Tables 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 and 7 (11,12,13).

Table 1. Survey question: Do you use your TikTok account to inform yourself about political topics?

Scale	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	15	30%
No	25	70%
Total	40	100%

Source: (3)

In total, 40 people were surveyed for this study. When inquiring about the use of TikTok as a source of political information, it was found that 30% of the respondents, that is, 15 people, affirmed that they use this platform for that purpose. On the contrary, 70% of the participants, corresponding to 25 people, indicated that they do not resort to TikTok to inform themselves about political topics. These results suggest that, although a significant proportion of the sample uses TikTok as a means to stay up to date on political current affairs, the majority of the respondents do not use this social network for informational purposes in the political sphere.

Table 2. Survey question: What content do you observe on TikTok?

Scale	Frequency	Percentage
Entertainment	28	70%
Politics	5	12%
News	2	5%
Others	5	13%
Total	40	100%

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Source: (3)

When analyzing the predominant type of content on TikTok, it was found that 70% of the responses corresponded to entertainment content, which indicates that the platform is used mainly for recreational purposes by users. In contrast, both political and news content occupied very low percentages, with 12% and 5% respectively, which suggests that the respondents do not resort to TikTok as a main source of information on these topics. Finally, the "others" category represented 13% of the responses, which evidences the existence of a variety of contents present on the platform that do not fit the main categories.

Table 3. Survey question: Why do you observe political content on TikTok?

Scale	Frequency	Percentage
It entertains you	38	95%
It summarizes political information in seconds	1	2%
For the dissemination of contrasted political news	1	3%
Total	40	100%

Source: (3)

When inquiring about the main reason why users watch political content on TikTok, it was found that 95% of the responses indicated that the main reason was entertainment. This suggests that, although there is an interest in political topics, the main motivation of the respondents when consuming this type of content on the platform is enjoyment and distraction, rather than the search for contrasted information. In fact, only a small percentage (3%) of the participants mentioned the search for verified political news as the reason for watching this type of content on TikTok.

Table 4. Survey question: Do you follow or have you seen the profiles of Guillermo Lasso or Andrés Arauz, former presidential candidates in 2021?

Scale	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	15	37%
No	25	63%
Total	40	100%

Source: (3)

It stands out that, of a total of 40 respondents, 37% (15 people) affirmed that they do follow or have seen these profiles, while 63% (25 people) indicated that they do not.

Table 5. Survey question: Do you think your opinion changed with any publication you saw on their profiles?

Scale	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	21	52%
No	19	48%
Total	40	100%

Source: (3)

The table presented shows that 52% of the respondents affirmed that their opinion had changed, which suggests that social networks have a significant impact on the formation of opinions in this particular group. On the other hand, 48% of the respondents indicated that their opinions were not affected, demonstrating that, although social networks are influential, not all users are susceptible to opinion change through this medium.

Table 6. Survey question: Was your popular election vote influenced by what was published on TikTok?

Scale	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	9	22%
No	31	78%
Total	40	100%

Source: (3)

Evidencing that 78% affirmed that their vote was not influenced by the publications on TikTok, which suggests that, for the majority, the content of this platform was not a determining factor in their electoral decision. However, 22% of the respondents indicated that they were influenced by what they saw on TikTok, revealing that a considerable group of people consider that the content of this social network had an impact on their choice.

To complement the research, Table 7 shows the political communication strategies of the presidential candidates Guillermo Lasso and Andrés Arauz on the social network TikTok.

Table 7. Types of resources for interaction with TikTok content

Category	Guillermo Lasso @guillermolasso	Andrés Arauz @ecuarauz
Memes	13	3
Trends	12	17
Storytelling	4	3
Publication without resource	10	20
Total	39	43

Source: (3)

Where the results of the content analysis of the publications of the presidential candidates Andrés Arauz and Guillermo Lasso are highlighted, revealing some interesting patterns. On the one hand, Andrés Arauz surpassed Guillermo Lasso in the total number of publications, with 43 posts versus the 39 of his opponent, which suggests greater activity and presence on this social network on the part of Arauz. Likewise, Arauz stood out in the categories of "Trends" and "Publications without resource," obtaining significantly higher numbers in these areas, which could indicate a communication strategy more focused on current topics and on the dissemination of direct messages.

On the other hand, Guillermo Lasso had a greater presence in the "Memes" category, despite having a lower total number of publications, which could signal a more informal strategy or one directed at a younger public. Regarding the "Storytelling" category, both candidates obtained relatively low results, which suggests that neither of them prioritized the narration of stories in their TikTok publications (13).

However, when inquiring about the influence that the political content disseminated on TikTok could have had on the voting decisions of the respondents, it was found that 44% were not influenced, 28% were influenced and 28% considered that they may have been influenced. These findings evidence that, although TikTok was used as a political communication tool, its impact on the final decision of the voters was not determining (13), (14), (15).

Finally, 80% of the participants considered that the political contents disseminated in digital media should be subject to greater regulation, while 20% opined that it was not necessary. Likewise, 90% of the respondents perceived that on some occasions the political contents on social networks showed lack of respect, rumors or attempts to discredit the opponents, which could affect the quality of the public debate (14), (15).

DISCUSSION

The findings of this research make it clear that political communication through the social network platform TikTok has exerted a significant impact in the context of the Ecuadorian presidential elections of 2021. As evidenced in the results, the main aspirants to the presidency, such as Guillermo Lasso, Andrés Arauz and Xavier Hervás, adopted political communication strategies through this social network with the purpose of reaching a younger electorate and tuning in with their interests and preferences.

In consonance with what was stated by (16) and (17), political communication in the digital environment has established itself as a fundamental tool for influencing public opinion and mobilizing citizens around certain agendas and proposals. In this sense, the use of TikTok by Ecuadorian political candidates reflects the need to adapt to the new formats and communication platforms, as pointed out by (18), who highlights the importance of employing “new strategies and approaches” in the field of political communication.

The results of the survey carried out in this study reveal that a significant proportion of the young respondents (30%) use TikTok as a source of political information, which is consistent with what was stated by (19) and (20), who underscore the potential of social networks to influence the perceptions and preferences of voters, especially among the younger population segments.

However, it is important to highlight that, although the political content on TikTok managed to capture the attention of users, the main motivation for its consumption was entertainment, rather than the search for verified political information. This coincides with what was stated by (21), who point out that the use of TikTok by political candidates, although it allows presenting their management in a more accessible and close manner, does not guarantee that the generated content fulfills the objective of fostering a responsible public opinion.

Likewise, the results of the research indicate that, although 52% of the respondents affirmed that their opinion changed as a result of the publications on TikTok, only 22% considered that their final vote was influenced by the political content disseminated on this social network. This suggests that, although TikTok can exert a certain influence on the formation of opinions, its direct impact on voting decisions was not determining, which contrasts with what was stated by (22), (25), on the potential of social networks to influence the voting patterns of voters.

Finally, the results reveal a concern among the respondents about the need for greater regulation of political content in digital media, as well as the perception that on occasions this type of content lacks respect and promotes disinformation. This aligns with what was stated by various authors (23), (24), regarding the importance of guaranteeing the quality and truthfulness of political communication, in order to strengthen public debate and informed decision-making by the citizenry.

It should be noted that, although the findings of this research reveal the importance of political communication on emerging platforms such as TikTok, they also make clear the need to approach the use of these digital tools with caution and responsibility, in order to avoid the propagation of contents that may distort the perception of the voters or undermine the quality of political discourse. In this sense, it is fundamental that political actors, the media and the competent authorities work in a coordinated manner to establish guidelines and regulation mechanisms that allow guaranteeing transparency, respect and truthfulness in political communication through social networks.

CONCLUSIONS

Once the research carried out is finished, the following is concluded:

Political communication has changed from its content to the use of new media to communicate its message. The study examines how the candidates Andrés Arauz and Guillermo Lasso entered the social network of TikTok in order to reach a new public and attract the attention of young people to increase their reach and popularity. The political communication tactics of TikTok focused more on infotainment.

The visual material included storytelling tools, trends and memes, which on occasions did not disclose the campaign proposals, but were used to discredit the management of the other candidates through humor. Many audiovisual products exhibited trend, creativity, brevity and a "soft" message in their publications.

The research sought to discover the benefits of using political communication strategies on TikTok. The benefits include an increase in popularity, the expansion of audiences, the speed of the content, the implementation of new narratives and the achievement of a popular political discourse in digital media. One of the most significant advantages is involving young people in political matters.

Political leaders use social networks as a new communication trend that cannot be achieved with traditional media, such as immediate interaction, response to users and the creation of communities. This form of communication allows the political leader to interact directly with the audience and "humanizes" him.

Political communication must be organized effectively and the strategies that are implemented must fulfill the purpose of communicating the message. To increase the participation of young people who actively use social networks, it is necessary to adapt to the new digital communication media and formats. Therefore, social media such as TikTok help disseminate political content to attract the attention of digital communities.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We mainly thank the "Escuela Superior Politécnica de Chimborazo" for all the opportunities that exist in it, since through the research carried out we can learn a little more about everything incredible that exists inside and outside the country. To engineer María Belén Bravo Ávalos, for the help and the pertinent explanation for the realization of the scientific article. And more importantly to our parents, because they never leave us alone and are always supporting us so that we never give up.

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** English translation of the original article published in Ecuacientífica, Vol. 1, No. 2, pp. 63-76.*



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