TikTok and the new language of political communication: the case of Podemos

TikTok y el nuevo lenguaje de comunicación política: el caso de Podemos

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ABSTRACT: Political parties struggle to reconnect to Young people by using social networks. Acknowledging that 2020 has been the year of TikTok, most Spanish political parties have joined this social network: Podemos, with 191.400 followers and 3.1 million likes, is the most followed political party on this platform. Using multimodal content analysis, this paper aims at analyzing how the party is using this social network, and for which purposes, placing the attention on how Podemos has adapted to TikTok specificities in terms of both language and technical affordances. Results show that while the party perfectly adapts to TikTok's specific language and technical affordances (special effects, etc.), instead of focusing on entertainment, the platform's main genre, it uses TikTok as a showcase for political activities, failing in favoring a renovating relationship with users. However, politics is represented through the *game frame*, that is to say, dramatized as a battlefield between Good and Evil, which strengthens the populist dichotomous vision of the world, endorsing emotional response. In this sense, it is possible to conclude that, although Podemos mainly displays political content, this content falls into the category of politainment. Considering that present trends in usage rates suggest that the short-video format

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is the future of social media, we might expect an increase in politainmement content.

Keywords: TikTok, Political Communication, Young people, Social networks, Podemos, Technopopulism.

RESUMEN: Los partidos políticos luchan por conectar con los jovenes a través del uso de las redes sociales. 2020 ha sido el año de TikTok y, por esta razón, la mayoría de los partidos politicos españoles ha querido estar presente. Podemos, con 191.400 seguidores y 3,1 millones de *me gusta*, es la formación política que más destaca. A partir del análisis de contenido multimodal, este artículo analiza la manera en que Podemos utiliza esta red social, con qué finalidad y cómo se ha adaptado a sus técnicas y lenguaje. Podemos se ha acoplado perfectamente al argot de TikTok y a todas sus especificidades técnicas (efectos especiales, etc.), si bien los resultados muestran que en lugar de centrarse en el entretenimiento – razón principal de la plataforma–, utiliza TikTok como escaparate de sus actividades políticas, dejando de lado la verdadera forma de relación entre los usuarios. Sin embargo, la política se representa a través del *game frame*, es decir, de la dramatización en el campo de batalla entre el bien y el mal, dicotomía que refuerza la visión populista del mundo mediante una respuesta básicamente emocional. A pesar de que el contenido del Podemos en esta red social es sobre todo político, lo cierto es que ese contenido entraría en la categoría de *politainment* (entretenimiento político). Teniendo en cuenta que las tendencias actuales sugieren que el formato del vídeo corto es el futuro de las redes sociales, se espera que haya un aumento claro del *politainment* en TikTok.

Palabras clave: TikTok, Comunicación política, Jóvenes, Redes Sociales, Podemos, Tecnopopulismo.

1. INTRODUCCIÓN

Since the turn of the new Millennium, both scholars and politicians alike have been concerned about the disconnection between citizens and politics (Norris, 2011; Lawless and Fox, 2015). In particular, attention has often focused on young people, whose levels of electoral and party engagement tend to be lower than that of the population in general, and indeed of previous youth generations (Collin, 2015; Foa et alt., 2020).

This apparent disconnection would be incomprehensible without considering the emergence of new technologies and the consequent reconstruction of the public space (Bennett and Pfetsch, 2018), in which new forms of political participation have emerged (Gil de Zúñiga, Ardèvol-Abreu and Casero-Ripollés, 2021).

Thus, although recognizing that youth satisfaction with democracy is declining (Foa et alt., 2020), recent studies argue that young people are not as apathetic nor disengaged as believed (Kitanova, 2020), rather they have turned to alternative forms of political engagement (Moeller et. alt, 2014; Pruitt, 2017), especially through social networks (Ekström and Sveningsson, 2019).

In other words, when it comes to younger generations, as Rainsford stresses out, "it seems as if the problem of youth political participation is less a matter of whether they participate, and more a matter of where they participate" (2017: 2).

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On the other hand, since 2016, different scholars have noted a sort of democratic reawakening (Crouch, 2016) mainly traceable in young people's support for populist parties (Foa and Mounk, 2019), such as Podemos in Spain.

Both political communications on social media and the *elective affinity* (Gerbaudo, 2018) between populist movements and social networks are well studied The Spanish case seems to confirm this trend: Podemos is considered to be both the most active party in most social networks (Casero-Ripollés, Sintes-Olivella and Franch, 2017) and the preferred party by young people (Deseriis and Vittori, 2019).

However, as new platforms –characterized by new affordances (Bucher and Helmond, 2018) and specific languages (Marín, 2020)– are constantly appearing, political actors must be able to adapt to them and their environment (Bossetta, 2018).

In this regard, there is no doubt that 2020 has been the year of TikTok (Anderson, 2020).

This social network, already well known for its dances and frivolous trends, is emerging as an adaptive social media, that can be appropriated and navigated in different ways (Schellewald, 2021), and, as such, it can be an opportunity for political communication (Medina Serrano, Papakyriakopoulos and Hegelich, 2020).

In Spain most political parties have joined this social network: according to Cervi and Marin (2021) PP is the first party to adopt TikTok, followed by all the other main parties, however Podemos is the party that uses the app the most, and most constantly, followed by Ciudadanos, PP, Vox, and PSOE, that has only shared one post.

Furthermore, Podemos, with 191.400 followers and 3.1 million likes, is the most followed political party on TikTok.

Accordingly, this paper aims at analyzing how the party is using this social network, and for which purposes, placing the attention on how Podemos has adapted to TikTok specificities both in terms of language and technical affordances.

2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

2.1. GENERATION Z, TECHNOLOGY AND POLITICS

Although there is no absolute consensus about the precise boundaries of Generation Z, most literature considers that it is composed of individuals born between the years 1996 and 2010 (Dimock, 2019). Their most important characteristic is that they are the first generation who has never known a world without the Internet (Quintana, 2016). Their lives are molded by the Internet, which has been converted into a natural part of their lives (Vilanova and Ortega, 2017).

Surrounded by complex visual imagery and portable technologies, this generation is the most exposed to boredom, or, to say it better, they get bored more easily and in a shorter time (Gómez de Travesedo-Rojas and Gil Ramírez, 2020). As a consequence, their consumption of information has changed: they can carry on various media activities simultaneously thanks to their multitasking skills (Casero-Ripollés, 2012; Culver and Grizzle, 2017) and informative contents have been transformed into portable, personalized, and participatory pieces (Herrero-Diz et al., 2019).

A recent study (IAB, 2020) has confirmed that one in two young people in Spain uses the Internet as the primary source of information, and four out of ten youngsters never use the radio or the printed press as a source of information.

As for youngsters' political interests, the percentage of young Spanish people aged 18 to 24 who voted in the General Elections held in Spain in April 2019 is below the average of the population (Fernández de Castro et alt., 2020). Nonetheless, the most

recent Injuve study (2021) shows that young people are increasingly interested in politics in Spain: 37% declare that they are somehow or very interested in politics, and in another study (Tejedor et alt, 2021) 89% of young respondents identify politics as the top topic in their informative diet.

However, around one in three young people (35%) do not feel close to any party (Injuve, 2021), and the gap is greater when it comes to parties' support.

As Figure 1 shows, the two opposite populist parties, Vox and Podemos, gather the majority of their supporters among young people, while the most established parties seem to appeal more to adult audiences.
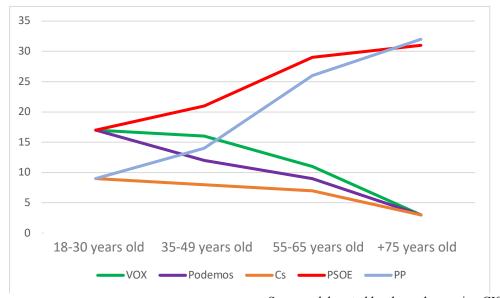
Figure 1: Party support per age range

Source: elaborated by the authors using CIS data

2.2. PODEMOS: THE TECHOPOPULIST PARTY

The most accepted definition of populism is a *thin* ideology (Mudde and Kaltwasser, 2017) that juxtaposes *the People* and the *corrupt* élite (Mudde, 2004).

Populist parties' use of social networks is regarded as one of the main keys to the current populist success. Social media's disintermediation allows these parties to circumvent the often hostile journalistic gatekeeping (Groshek and Engelbert, 2013), providing them the chance to frame mainstream media as part of the corrupted *elite*. Further on, social media's attention economy, favoring simple content (Klinger and Svensson, 2015) and emotional communication (Papacharissi, 2015) that runs counter to the key traits of establishment politics, such as formality and moderation (Gerbaudo, 2018), which perfectly matches populists' discursive dynamics, made of emphasis on emotional elements (Hopster, 2020) and a simplified dichotomous vision of the world (Enli and Rosenberg, 2018).

According to different authors (Bickerton and Invernizzi Accetti, 2018; Deseriis & Vittori, 2019), Podemos' usage of new technologies is so central that its very same existence cannot be understood without comprehending its interaction with technology, especially social media. In this sense, the party can be considered as a new brand of technopopulism (Bickerton and Invernizzi Accetti, 2018), understood as "a discursive formation or a materialized ideology that is predicated upon the belief that the government

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of the people, by the people, for the people is achievable by means of networked information technologies" (Deseriis, 2017: 446).

Founded in January 2014, scholars have identified the party as "one of the first and most successful cases of a new political party stemming from a protest movement" (Casero-Ripollés, Feenstra and Tormey, 2016: 379). Following and capitalizing on the momentum of the social media-driven 15-M Movement (Micó and Casero-Ripollés, 2014), Podemos has perfectly combined online and traditional offline activism, to channel the energy of anti-austerity protesters into a conventional party (Hughes, 2011) witnessing exponential membership growth (Van Biezen and Poguntke, 2014) and making its way to government.

Unlike conventional political parties, which use communication as an instrumental element, Podemos situates communication at the core of its political strategy from the beginning, making it into an integral part of the political process.

Two days after its unexpected results in the 2014 European elections, Podemos became the most followed Spanish party on Twitter and Pablo Iglesias revealed himself as one of Europe's most successful politicians on the same platform (Gómez and Ramiro, 2019).

Specific literature points out how Podemos has been and still is, the most active political parties in all social networks (López-Meri, Marcos-García and Casero-Ripollés, 2017), and its level of engagement is significantly higher than those of traditional mainstream parties (Selva-Ruiz and Caro-Castaño, 2017; Turnbull-Dugarte, 2019).

Furthermore, other studies (Cervi and Roca, 2017a, 2017b, 2018) have stressed out that, while other parties tend to appeal to the logic of persuasion, explicitly calling for votes, Podemos use social networks mostly to mobilize their supporters.

As Deseriis and Vittori (2019) note, the party does not simply endorse techno-politics, but they substantially enhance digital participation with new tools by constructing its own platforms and technologies, through which thousands of members can "do politics" by proposing, debating, and voting on party policies (Ardanuy Pizarro and Labuske 2015: 98–99), resulting in a hybrid party structure that displays features of digital networks and social movements and becoming a *transmedia party* (Casero-Ripollés, Feenstra and Tormey, 2016).

2.3. TIKTOK

TikTok is currently the most downloaded app worldwide and the third (after WhatsApp and Messenger) in Spain, where the app has been downloaded 14 million times in 2020 (Omnicore, 2020). Of the 8.8 million regular users in Spain, a third are minors (Stokel-Walker, 2020).

According to most observers (Chen et alt., 2021), the reason behind this rapid success is that TikTok seems to have perfectly understood what Generation Zers want.

The platform allows anyone with a smartphone to create three- to 60-second-long videos that loop when finished. The app offers a wide range of options for customizing and combining these videos, including video taken with the user's smartphone, photos uploaded from the Web, emojis, and other text superimposed on the video, together with a wide selection of easy.-to-use special effects.

In this sense, TikTok is the first social media platform to combine different affordances creating a unique way of conveying and consuming information.

Although it is hard to define what the app is actually about, the most popular TikTok genres are Duets and Challenges (Yang, Zhao and Ma, 2019). Duets are a core part of the Tik Tok experience: users can take another person's video and add themselves

performing the same action, scene or choreography. Challenges are often community-created trends –even if they can also take the form of sponsored hashtags–, in which many Tik Tok users will make videos attempting to do the same action/dance/trick.

Probably, however, TikTok's most important feature is its distinctive use of artificial intelligence, which analyzes users' interests and preferences through their interactions with the content, rather than based on connection networks. The tikTok algorithm provides a personalized information flow through the *For You* page, a feed of videos that are recommended to users based on their activity on the app. So, while most social media are geared towards relationships, TikTok's *For You Page* varies between showing the user extremely popular tiktoks and tiktoks with only a handful of views, potentially providing every user the chance to become viral (Cervi, 2021).

3. METHOD

Although some scholar might argue that all forms of communications are inherently multimodal (Jewitt, 2009), there is no doubt that social media, combining different modes of communication (video, audio, text, images, emoticons, etc.) in one, create one multimodal coherent, integral, connected resource for meaning-making (Adami, 2014).

Accordingly, in order to understand TikTok's meaning-making dynamic, it is necessary to take a multimodal approach, able to integrate different perspectives (Bezemer and Kress, 2017).

In particular, it is seminal to assume an affordance-based approach taking into account the mix of cultural and technological understandings of TikTok's affordances and how users create content while interacting with those affordances, using specific vernacular linguistic and audio-visual tools to display their communicative strategies.

Accordingly, following Serafini and Reid's (2019) suggestions, this paper implements a multimodal content analysis, combining quantitative and qualitative elements.

Thus, to display Podemos' TikTok usage and adaptation, the first 100 posts of the party on the platform have been selected.

The unit of analysis is represented by posts, defined as both the video content and the accompanying caption provided by the party (but excluding the content of comments).

Unlike other social media, like Twitter and YouTube, TikTok does not provide any official API to collect data; so data have been manually collected by the authors.

The analysis is based on a coding sheet, based of categories, constructed taking inspiration from previous works and original categories, molded around specific TikTok's affordances.

The first part (see Table 1) is dedicated to specific TikTok's affordances and aims at understanding the party's ability to exploit all the technical possibilities and effects offered by the platform in creating their videos and to assess the understanding and adaptation to TikTok's main genres.

Besides, the sources of the videos are taken into consideration, distinguishing among original content created by the party specifically for TikTok or content coming from other social media, media (content derived from media extracts, such as interviews, media appearances, etc.), or content from other users (when a party shares content from other TikTokers).

The second part is dedicated to the videos focusing on their main locations, actors, and main actions displayed.

The content is further differentiated based on the main topics: Political, Personal, and Entertainment.

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Under political content, we have coded all the explicitly political videos; personal content collects videos related to the humanization of politicians, that is to say, what Metz, Kruikemeier, and Lecheler (2020) define private personalization, showing politicians private life (families, hobbies) or their life outside their political role; under *Entertainment*, videos that have no relations with politics and are displayed just for *fun* (dances, jokes, etc.), have been collected.

Both personal and entertainment content appear to be particularly fitting TikTok's specific affordances, in which most of the videos are home-made and representing people in their private environment just *having some fun* (Kennedy, 2020).

Furthermore, in order to deepen the understanding of the party's political strategy, the political content, following and adapting the typologies previously used by, among others, Aalberg, Strömbäck and de Vreese (2012), and Alonso-Muñoz; Casero-Ripollés (2018), has been subdivided, identifying two mainframes: *issue frame* and *game frame*.

Posts focusing on political issues, and on specific issue positions (Dekavalla, 2016), have been coded as *issue frame*; posts that center around the tactics or strategy of politics, representing the political arena as a power-game, as a battle, have been coded as *game frame*.

Within the *game frame* we have also coded the frequency of messages geared towards praising the party's results and those geared towards attacking the adversaries.

Texts of the captions have been analyzed from a morphosyntactic and lexico-semantic perspective. Following Roman Jakobson's (1960) classic typology we have coded texts according to their main functions: a) Informative, which role is to refer and denote (Zecchetto, 2002); b) Expressive, aiming at provoking an emotion, a feeling in the receiver (Zecchetto, 2002), and c) Appellative, which transmits a message for the receiver to act when affected (Zecchetto, 2002), that is, serving as an incentive to incite reaction (Castruita, 2010).

After analyzing the language and style, captions have been categorized according to the main emotions they express using the most well-known classification of emotions, proposed by the psychologist Ekman (1992), who identifies six basic emotions: *anger*, *fear*, *sadness*, *enjoyment*, *disgust* and *surprise*.

Finally, we have analyzed the use of *Emoticons*, also called *emojis* (Yus, 2014), defined as the "set of icons and clipart, widely used in digital communication, to channel much of the expressiveness in written digital interaction" (Cantamutto and Vela Delfa, 2020: 121). The analysis shows whether they are used as support, contextualization (Gallardo Paúls, 2014), to reinforce statements, or to change the intention of a text (Sampietro, 2016, 2019).

Finally, we have looked into the overall function of each post to disclose what kind of interaction they favor.

To do so, the three levels of interaction proposed by Lilleker and Vedel (2013) have been used. Accordingly, where users are passive spectators, posts displaying unilateral communication, have been coded as *Information/Promotion*; posts in which parties ask for people's opinions, stimulating dialogue, have been coded as *Deliberation/Discussion*; and posts containing explicit requests for action to be taken by users, including suggestions to like, share or follow the party's content, opportunities to attend an event or to create their own content, has been coded as *Mobilization*.

All inter-coder reliability test results met the kappa = .80 standard set by Krippendorff (2006).

Table 1: Analytical categories

GENRE						
Video		Duet		Challenge		
FORMAT						
Only video	Video with Effects	Video with Music	Video and Text	Video with Effects and Music	Video with effects and text	Video with effects, text, and music
SOURCE						
Party		Media		Users		
Original	Other SN					
LOCATIONS						
Political		Public		Private		
MAIN ACTORS						
Leader		Other politicians	Competitors/ Adversaries	Common people	Celebrities	
MAIN ACTIONS						
Speak		Dance		Sing		Other
CONTENT						
Political		Personal		Entertainment		
Game frame	Issue frame					
Praising						
Attacking						
TEXT						
Morphosyntactic analysis						
Informative		Expressive		Appellative		
Lexico-semantic analysis: language and Style						
EMOTIONS						
Anger	Fear	Sadness	Enjoyment	Disgust	Surprise	
EMOTICONS						
Support/Reinforce		Contextualize		Change		
TYPE OF INTERACTION						
Information and promotion		Deliberation and discussion		Participation and mobilization		

Source: elaborated by the authors

4. RESULTS

As previously mentioned, in order to understand the level of adaptation to a platform's specific affordances, the first elements to observe are formats and genres.

Accordingly, from a format perspective, almost all the posts (95%) published by Podemos show a high level of understanding and mastering of the creative tools that the platform offers: music, texts, emoticons, and special effects. However, when it comes to specific TikTok genres, Podemos publishes only one Duet with a user and one Challenge.

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Accordingly, although the party fully exploits TikTok's affordances from a technical perspective, by using and combining music, special effects, etc. it does not seem to adapt to the platform's main genres.

By looking at the sources, it is possible to observe that 50% of its entries are composed of extracts of parliamentary interventions at the Congress, Senate, or specific committees, followed by fragments of politicians' interviews in the media. Videos explicitly created for TikTok only come in the third position, followed by the distribution of content proceeding from other media and the sharing of content from other users.

In this regard, TikTok seems to be, first of all, an occasion to showcase political activities.

Analyzing the videos, and specifically their locations, this trend is confirmed: an overwhelming majority, 74%, are recorded in *political places* (mainly the Congress and the Senate) followed by public spaces (streets or open-air locations). The only private places shown are offices and the party's headquarters.

As for the main actors, most of the videos broadcast elected party members exercising their political activities: 30% of the videos focus on the party leader, Pablo Iglesias, and 29 % by Irene Montero, leading party member and current Minister of Equality, that together make up more than half of the total videos. Interestingly, contrary to TikTok's trends in which Duets with celebrities are very popular, no celebrity appears in the video and common people hardly ever appear (9,50%).

On the other hand, political actors other than party members are mainly represented by political competitors, especially Vox, being its leader, Santiago Abascal, the most recurrent, strengthening the characteristic dichotomous vision of politics dividing *us* vs *them* and identifying an enemy.

Furthermore, since, as seen, that most of the videos show political actors giving political speeches or doing political activities within the political arena, it is no surprise that an overwhelming majority of the content broadcasted on the platform is political.

As Figure 2 displays, political content counts for 85% of the posts, followed by 10% of pure entertainment content and only 5% of personal content.
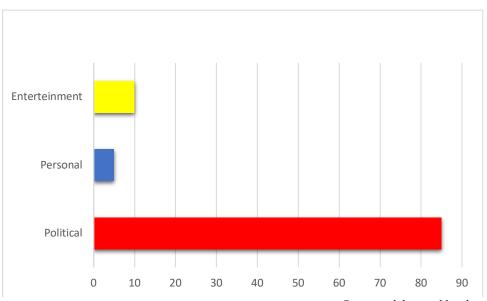
Figure 2: Content distribution

Source: elaborated by the authors

Thus, albeit most of the video represent political actors, the display of their personal life is very limited. That allows us to state that, although the importance given to the leader, Pablo Iglesias, and to the Minister of Equality, Irene Montero, shows some level of personalization, it is mainly *professional personalization* (Metz, Kruikemeier and Lecheler, 2020), disclosing qualities and individual activities related to the official office, not *private personalization*, that is to say intimate information about the private persona (Metz, Kruikemeier and Lecheler, 2020).

As per the entertainment videos, although they represent a little minority, it is important to note that among the most liked post we find a video of Pablo Iglesias twerking.

These findings may lead to suggest that this strictly political use of TikTok, mostly made of extract from political speeches, runs counter to the main feature of populist discourse, emotion, and polarization. However, observing the mainframes it is possible to notice that politics is largely (77%) represented through the *game frame*. Politics, in other words, is dramatized as a polarized battlefield, strengthening the emotional side of the narrative.

Issue-based content not only represents just 33% of the content, but it concentrates during the first months of Covid-19 pandemics and is basically composed of public health suggestions.

The display of the *Game frame*, is equally distributed between posts that praise the party, counting 60%, and posts attacking competitors (mostly targetting Vox).

Thus, although politics is the primary topic, this clear intention to dramatize politics, representing it as the ultimate fight between Good and evil, thus enhancing emotional response, somehow reconcile with TikTok's entertainment-based affordances.
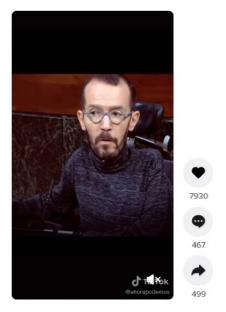
This clear intention, in addition, is also traceable in the textual analysis of the captions.

Although most of the captions accompanying Podemos posts are mostly constructed as affirmative sentences, according to Jacobson's typology, their main function is Expressive (82%) since the purpose is to provoke emotions in the user (Amado and Tarullo, 2015).

The expressive function is especially evident in the divisive representation of adversaries. Some examples: *VOX, por fin, es Franco* (VOX, finally, is Franco) or *Así se le tapa la boca al machismo de la derecha* (This is how you shout rightwing macho's mouth), *A los matones de VOX les sostenemos la mirada* (we look Vox's bullies straight in their eyes):

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Image 1. Podemos post: *A los matones de VOX les sostenemos la mirada*

Source: TikTok

The Appellative function is retrieved in 14% of the captions. In this case, it is important to distinguish between the appeal to discussion (asking for opinions or feedback), that only represents 5% of the analyzed captions, and the appeal to participation of mobilization, in which the receiver is asked to do something, mainly ¡ sharing contents.

Informative captions are limited to 3%.

Since, as seen, the main function of the captions is to generate an emotional reaction, following Ekman (1992), the six main emotions have been codified.

As Figure 3 shows, the most recurrent emotion retrieved in 62% of the posts is enjoyment, followed by anger (20%).

Again, this emotional display on the one hand seems to be very coherent with TikTok's main function, entertainment, on the other perfectly matches the populist dichotomous vision of politics, and the world.

Figure 3: Main emotions

On another level, Podemos' linguistic choices show a perfect understanding both of TikTok's vernacular style and the target audience.

From a morphosyntactic plane ellipsis, a characteristic of *internet language* permeates most of the analyzed inputs (up to 43%): incomplete sentences ignoring subjects, predicates formed without verbs, and, sometimes, lacking complements that should give meaning to the sentence prevail. This style is intended, once again, to construct more persuasive than informative messages.

Each caption is accompanied by one or more hashtags: 16% of the entries are only made with this type of term associated with indexing.

From a lexico-semantic perspective, both the hashtags selection and the captions show mastering of the technical language typical of social networks, such as the recurrent use of specific words such as *like*, and young people's slang.

Particularly interesting is the use of the expression *zasca*, referring to the cutting response, disappointment, or derision towards a person or group, that has become both a recurrent word and a recurrent attitude in social networks.

Another specific characteristic of social media language is the use of emoticons. Emoticons are present in most posts, although 37% of the posts show no emoticons.

As previously explained the use of emoticons can be functional to reinforcing a concept, contextualizing it, or even help completely change the meaning of a written statement.

As shown in figure 4, most of the emoticons fall into the first category, with 19% of them being the hearth or the hearth-shaped-face, which indicates *love* or *extreme liking* for what is written before or after sentences, phrases, or words, together with the *strength*, *power* that counts 8%.

The other emoticons are mainly used to contextualize, such as in the case *strength or courage*, *woman* or the LGTBI+ flag.
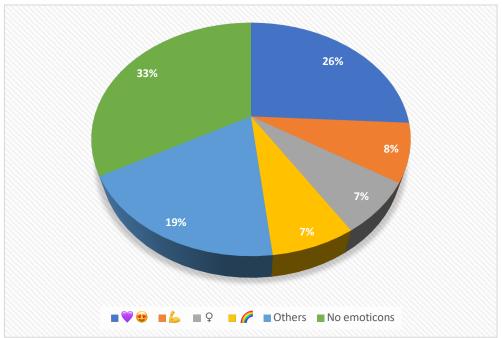
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Figure 4: Emoticons

Source: elaborated by the authors

Only to a lesser extent, in 2% of the cases, emoticons are used to chance or semantic meaning of a message.

However, it is particularly interesting to stress out how this is frequently used to frame adversaries. In particular when mentioning Vox party, the *o* letter is substituted by the *vomit or disgust* emoticon.
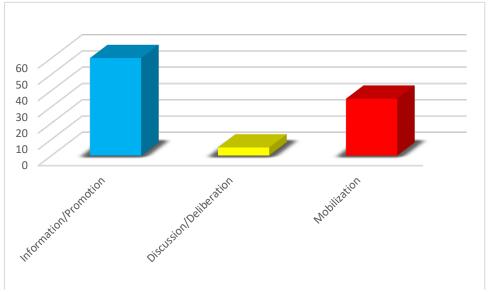

Finally, in order to understand the interaction proposal contained in the posts, we have assessed them using the three levels of interaction proposed by Lilleker and Vedel (2013).

As Figure 5 shows, the majority of Podemos' posts (60%) fall into the category of information/promotion, that is to say, they do not favor any kind of interaction; 35% of the posts calls for mobilization and, interestingly, only 5% of the messages are dedicated to deliberation or discussion.

Thus, we can conclude that TikTok is mainly used by the party for promoting political activities and to mobilize possible voters, but the platform is not perceived nor used as a tool to stimulate dialogue.

Figure 5: Interaction

5. CONCLUSIONS

Currently, Podemos is part of a coalition Government, so it cannot be considered a challenger party anymore; however, on the one hand, the party's intense use of TikTok confirm findings of other studies (Selva-Ruiz and Caro-Castaño, 2017; Turnbull-Dugarte, 2019), somehow corroborating both the broader thesis of the *elective affinity* (Gerbaudo, 2018) between social media and populist parties and the technopopulist characteristic of the party.

In particular, the analysis of Podemos' usage of TikTok allows us to conclude that while the party seems to have perfectly understood the platform both in terms of technical affordances and specific language, the party's communication strategy does not fully adapt to TikTok's specific genres.

On the one hand, as seen, most of the posts display high usage of all the special effects and the linguistic choices perfectly match both the platform-specific vernacular language and young people's language. On the other, Podemos mostly displays political videos (especially extract from Parliamentary interventions) rather than engaging with specific TikTok genres, such as Duets and Challenge.

In the same vein, most of the content is political, giving very little space to personal and entertainment content, so popular on the platform.

Moreover, most of the posts are uniquely promotional: when interacting with users is promoted, it is mainly done for visibility purposes (likes or shares) and the active trigger of dialogue is hardly ever the focus of Podemos' posts.

To sum up, the platform is mostly used as a showcase for political activities.

In this sense, our findings align with previous studies confirming that, in general, the party does not seem to be taking full advantage of the opportunities that social networks offer to establish a renovated interaction with citizens (Miquel-Segarra, López-Meri, Viounnikoff-Benet, 2020), mostly using them as unidirectional channels of promotion (García Ortega and Zugasti Azagra, 2018). In particular, our results seem to confirm the finding of other studies specifically devoted to the study of Podemos' behavior in other platforms (Suau-Gomila , Pont-Sorribes, 2019; Suau-Gomila, 2020),

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showing that, albeit being the most active political party on social media, Podemos fails to promote dialogue.

Nonetheless, the qualitative analysis of both videos and captions, allows to stress out that, even if most of the content is political, politics is represented through the *game frame* (Dekavalla, 2016), that is to say as a battlefield, favoring emotional response, that not only strengthen the populist dichotomous vision of the world but also can be considered as politainment, therefore, successfully fitting TikTok's entertainment mission.

By dramatizing politics as the ultimate fight between Good and Evil, the party creates politainment content, understood as the inclusions of the styles, narratives, and staging of the world of spectacle and entertainment, characterized by high emotional levels, in the communicative repertoires (Berrocal-Gonzalo, Martín-Jiménez, Gil-Torres, 2017).

These findings, therefore, also contain several original contributions that are applicable beyond Podemos and beyond Spain, thereby increasing the knowledge of the functions TikTok may provide politicians to communicate.

Acknowledging that, although our results show that the party is still not fully implementing all the affordances of the platform, using TikTok almost uniquely to talk about politics, politainment is the most recurrent genre, and, considering that present trends in usage rates suggest that the short-video format is the future of social media (Literat and Kligler-Vilenchik, 2019; Guinaudeau, Vottax, and Munger, 2020), we might expect an increase in politainmement.

This aspect should be verified through further studies. In the same vein, aware of the limitation of a case study, future researches should compare both different and similar parties' communicative strategies and adaptation to TikTok's affordances and genres to discover common patterns. Furthermore, future researchers should turn their attention to the users' side, looking at comments and other types of interaction, since this platform is based on user-generated content.

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