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The political irruption of short video: Is TikTok a new window for Spanish parties?

Abstract

This paper analyses the use of TikTok by the main Spanish parties. The article studies the intensity of use of the short video social network by the accounts of the Partido Popular, Vox, Podemos and Ciudadanos, their narratives and themes, and the views obtained based on them. The research applies a content analysis to the videos published by these groups from account creation until the end of 2020, a period in which the PSOE had no presence. The corpus amounts to 182 units of analysis. The results show that the partisan use of TikTok is still in its infancy and that its intensive use is limited to newly emerging parties, with more favourable results for the most polarised groupings. Moreover, the parties do not adapt to the platform's own narrative codes, without this influencing the impact of their publications; the thematic diversity does have an impact, however. In general, the ideological orientation of the videos is greater than the sectoral orientation, in line with the polarisation in which Western democracies are immersed.

Keywords
Political communication, social networks, social media, short videos, TikTok, Spain, political parties.

1. Introduction

For several years, political communication has been immersed in a fourth phase of its development (Roemmele & Gibson, 2020) as a result of the growing influence of the internet and technological advances associated with it in the public sphere. This new age derives from the progressive adaptation of citizens and political actors to the fluid and changing logics of the hybrid communications system described by Chadwick (2013) in which traditional and digital media coexist. Social networks are already the main channel for electoral campaigns along with television (Esser & Pfetsch, 2020) and have become both a fundamental source of information for many citizens (Gil de Zúñiga, Weeks & Ardèvol-Abreu, 2017) and the central node of political communication (Vaccari & Valeriani, 2016). This has meant a redefining of the creation, distribution and consumption patterns of the messages by the agents involved (Casero-Ripollés, 2018).

Twitter and, to a lesser extent, Facebook and YouTube, have been the focus of research in political communications on social networks for the last decade (Tucker *et al.*, 2018), as was the blogosphere before that. However, citizen participation in new media is dynamic and ever changing (Kumar, Zafarani & Liu, 2011; Marcelino, 2015), as is, in parallel, that of political parties. In this sense, the generalisation of internet access through smartphones and the improvement in mobile connections' data transfer speeds (Shutsko, 2020; Yang, Zhao & Ma,

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2019) have facilitated the popularisation of different applications aimed at sharing short videos in recent years, where the media (Vázquez-Herrero, Negreira-Rey & López-García, 2020) and political parties and leaders (Cervi & Marín-Lladó, 2021) are beginning to have a presence.

These audiovisual pieces are characterised by their short duration, which is particularly appropriate in the current fragmented consumption scenario (Yang, Zhao & Ma, 2019), their generally zero production cost, the low level of digital literacy required for their creation, and their content that is highly likely to be rebroadcast (Kaye, Chen & Zeng, 2021; Wang, Gu & Wang, 2019). This blurs the traditional barriers between producers and consumers of audiovisual content (Kaye, Chen & Zeng, 2021) and allows the platforms that promote them to store a large amount of user-generated content (UGC) rather than professionally-generated content (PGC) (Chen *et al.*, 2019).

These applications have proliferated mainly in China (Kaye, Chen & Zeng, 2021), but have also been present in Western countries through the now defunct Vine, Lasso and Musical.ly, and continue to be present through Byte and Snapchat or Instagram's *Stories* (Anderson, 2020; Lu & Lu, 2019; Shutsko, 2020; Wang, 2020). However, the most popular short video sharing social network is a pair of parallel platforms, Douyin & TikTok, targeting the Chinese and international markets respectively, which allow videos up to three minutes long to be posted a viewed where music and visual effects play a key role.

The Douyin-TikTok pair has become one of the fastest growing mobile internet applications in recent years (Chen *et al.*, 2019). This increase was particularly significant during the COVID-19 pandemic, when many users –especially young people– resorted to it as an "escape valve from confinement" (Ballesteros-Herencia, 2020, p. 171). Its relevance is such that some authors consider that it has gone from being a virtual entertainment community to an integrated platform in the process of acquiring an infrastructural character in a very short time (Zhang, 2020).

With 987 million downloads and an increase of 37% over the previous year, TikTok was the most popular app in 2020 on both Google Play and Apple's App Store, ahead of even WhatsApp (Sensor Tower, 2021). IAB Spain's 2020 Social Networking Study, based on 1,142 surveys of people aged between 16 and 65, indicated that it is the network that experienced the greatest growth in usage in Spain over the last year (from 3% to 16%). Moreover, with 82 minutes of average daily exposure by its users, the platform already registers a higher usage intensity than fully consolidated networks such as Instagram (79 minutes), Facebook (67) or Twitter (56) (IAB Spain, 2020). This situation has led some researchers to warn about its addictive nature (Shutsko, 2020; Wang, 2020; Zhao, 2021).

However, research on TikTok is "still in its infancy" (Zulli & Zulli, 2020, p. 4) and is still minor in our field of study, although some authors have pointed out its potential to develop "a new form of political communication" (Medina Serrano, Papakyriakopoulos & Hegelich, 2020, p. 264). Indeed, Mazzoleni and Vaccari (2020) already briefly mention the platform in their recent review of the last twenty years of the discipline and its future challenges.

1.1. *Functionalities, operation and themes*

ByteDance –a Chinese-owned and operated technology company that had been operating Douyin since September 2016– launched TikTok as its international version in 2017 and a year later merged it with the recently acquired Musical.ly, which was focused on creating and broadcasting short lip-sync videos to music. TikTok inherited its user base and has since become a parallel platform to Douyin, as it is operated by the same entity and offers virtually the same features, albeit differing in its infrastructure, management and target market (Kaye, Chen & Zeng, 2021).

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The interface of both applications allows three types of audiovisual content to be created from the user-producer's point of view: videos of up to 15 seconds, videos of up to 60 seconds, videos of up to 3 minutes and videos created from the photographic montage of several images. In the first three cases, users can generate the content from a video recorded on the spot through the application itself or from other videos stored on their mobile device. Videos recorded on the spot can be complemented with the following elements: direct sound, music, visual effects, slowing down or speeding up, face beautification and filters. Videos created from pre-existing videos or image compositing can be complemented –in addition to the aforementioned possibilities– with audio tracks recorded by the user, image flipping and inserting text overlays and stickers.

Users can follow others and receive notifications whenever someone in their network posts a video. However, video consumption is based primarily on an algorithmic recommendation system, the results of which are reflected in the "For you" feed, which is the application's login screen. The way it works is simple: the same video is played on a loop until the user scrolls past it with their finger, at which point another platform-recommended video begins to play. TikTok thus differs from Facebook and Twitter, whose home screens display mostly content generated by the user's own network of contacts; and although its feed resembles Instagram's "Discover" option, consumption is almost entirely focused on it, which in practice constitutes a space that most users never leave (Vijay & Gekker, 2021).

The videos can be accompanied by a text description in which, as with other social networks, including hashtags plays an important role, as they function both to represent the most popular topics at any given time –that can be viewed in the "Trends" tab– and to navigate through them, as well as to tag the content and make it easier to search for. If the very functional architecture of short video platforms already serves as a guide for their creation, TikTok circumscribes creativity in an even greater way through its trending pages and hashtag filters, which predispose users to replicate the most popular formats (Kaye, Chen & Zeng, 2021), in turn encouraging the creation of mimetic content (Zulli & Zulli, 2020). In this sense, TikTok contains narrative codes generated by its own community of users, among which, in addition to dancing and lip-syncing to music or other types of audio track, can associate the hands or faces of the protagonists in the videos with emojis, point to overprinted texts, the substitution/distortion of the protagonist's voice, etc. stand out.

The application allows five layers of interaction: 1) the viewing itself, which has a direct influence on the videos that the algorithm recommends to users; 2) the action of "liking"; 3) sharing via Twitter, Facebook, WhatsApp, email or SMS, which facilitates the propagation of videos through other platforms; 4) writing of replies; and, as a further step to the options offered by other social networks, 5) generating new pieces from existing ones. This fifth level of interaction is possible through three options: a) recording a new video with the sound of a previous one; b) recording a new video in which fragments of another video are inserted ("paste" option); and c) recording a duo, which in itself constitutes a type of audiovisual narration native to the tool consisting of recording a reaction to a video that will later be played together with the first one using a split-screen method. The options to comment, paste and generate a duo can be restricted by the author of the original video.

In a review of patents related to Douyin's recommendation algorithm, Zhao (2021) notes five basic principles: 1) classification of content through distributed tags in a multi-level, hierarchical, tree diagram; 2) categorisation of users' interests and behaviour, as well as a prediction of their identity –sex, age, location, occupation, etc.; 3) the efficient distribution of videos among users through a continuous learning matching strategy that positions them according to their attributes –genre, topic, popularity– and not just their content; 4) the search for maximum resonance by dividing large groups of users with similar characteristics into different sized and randomly composed repositories, so that new content is distributed first to the smallest group and only those that perform best in terms of views, likes, shares,

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etc. are passed on to the next and so on; and 5) the decentralisation of content, as the application dilutes the importance of personal connection and facilitates connection between all its members.

As a logical consequence of how the algorithm works, the most popular videos are also the ones that get the most views, likes, comments, and shares. In a study based on data from more than 260,000 posts, Chen *et al.* (2019) found that 18.6% of the most popular videos accounted for 80.5% of the views, with the majority of videos getting very few views compared to the most popular. Regarding the relationship between the different interaction metrics, they detect a high correlation coefficient between the number of views and the number of likes, but much lower among the others.

According to Shutsko's (2020) analysis of 1,000 publications broadcast in Germany, the most frequent videos are comedy and jokes (32.4%), musical performances (13.7%), tutorials (8.9%), dancing (8.8%), animals (8%), personal relationships (7.5%) and beauty (7.1%). The same study revealed an almost direct relationship between the most frequent topics and the most viewed. In turn, the content analysis applied by Suárez-Álvarez and García-Jiménez (2021) to 447 videos of 12 teenage tiktokers in Spain and Great Britain concludes that the most frequent videos are selfies –informal and unscripted productions in which the protagonist shows themselves in an authentic way–, above choreography and music videos, and videos with humorous content.

Other than posts that show people dancing, those that are perceived to be most attractive by users are those that convey positive emotions, pro-social behaviours and knowledge, with the effect of music in garnering interest being noteworthy (Lu & Lu, 2019). This is in line with another survey (Lu, Lu & Liu, 2020) that indicated that the most valued videos are those that convey "positive energy" and advocate pro-social behaviours, followed by music, knowledge sharing, cooking, life tips, tourism, dance and beauty; in contrast, humour videos were of interest to only 11.2% of respondents and news videos to 1.9%.

TikTok's main potential contribution to the political sphere derives both from its form of use and its architecture: unlike Twitter and Facebook, users not only exchange links to news stories and express their opinions on them and through comments, but also become creators of original content; moreover, they do so in a more interactive way than on YouTube and Instagram (Medina Serrano, Papakyriakopoulos & Hegelich, 2020).

1.2. *Political communications on TikTok*

Research on TikTok has so far mainly been limited to the aforementioned research on the functionalities, operation and most frequent topics, as well as the motivations of its users (Bucknell Bossen & Kottasz, 2020; Lu & Lu, 2019; Lu, Lu & Liu, 2020; Omar & Dequan, 2020; Wang, Gu & Wang, 2019), especially teenagers. More recently, the platform study has also addressed its use in raising awareness among young people of the need to take preventive measures against the COVID-19 pandemic (Basch, Hillyer & Jaime, 2020; Basch *et al.*, 2021; Zhu *et al.*, 2020); the trends that emerged and narratives employed during lockdown (Ballesteros Herencia, 2020; Olivares García & Méndez Majuelos, 2020); its adaptation to digital journalistic media (Sidorenko-Bautista, Herranz de la Casa & Cantero de Julián, 2020; Vázquez-Herrero, Negreira-Rey & López-García, 2020); different aspects related to medicine and health but not linked to the pandemic (Herrick, Hallward & Duncan, 2020; Sánchez-Castillo & Mercado-Sáez, 2021; Villa Ruiz *et al.*, 2021; Zheng, Mulligan & Scott, 2021; Zheng *et al.*, 2021); and its role as a transmitter of misinformation (Alonso-López, Sidorenko-Bautista & Giacomelli, 2021). However, despite the need for work on political communications on social networks to go beyond the analysis of Twitter (Casero-Ripollés, 2018), studies on the political use of TikTok are scarce, probably because the presence of political topics in the videos is still an exception (Shutsko, 2020) and the lack of interest that videos on current affairs garner in the community (Lu, Lu & Liu, 2020).

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Literat and Kligler-Vilenchik (2019) observed that Musical.ly–TikTok's predecessor in Western markets–had diversified to the point of serving as a vehicle for youth political expression in the 2016 US presidential election campaign.

In their content analysis of 196 publications by far-right groups in the United States, Weimann and Masri (2020) revealed TikTok's inability to prevent the dissemination of fascist, racist, anti-Semitic, xenophobic and homophobic videos.

Based on the study of the emotions, interactions and content of 5,946 original and duo partisan videos posted by US accounts, Medina Serrano, Papakyriakopoulos and Hegelich (2020) observed that users show similar emotions regardless of their ideological affiliation, with a predominance of happiness and surprise over anger and sadness; they also participate, in general, in the same thematic discussions. However, Republicans generate more content and their videos have, on average, more likes, comments, and shares. Moreover, unlike Democrats, they express themselves mainly in intra-party debates.

Vijay and Gekker (2021) analysed the influence of platform architecture on the political communication that takes place on the platform. Based on the discourse analysis of 3,494 videos that defended the veto on women of menstruating age entering the Hindu tempo of Sabarimala, which is de facto in force despite having been declared discriminatory by the Supreme Court of India, their research found that the platform provides an opportunity for extremist organisations to expand their limited electoral bases through playful practices. Moreover, unlike on other social media, they found that competing narratives use differentiated hashtags, which prevents debate and encourages polarisation.

Finally, Cervi and Marín-Lladó (2021) carried out a content analysis of 172 political videos published in Spain and concluded that political parties do not fully exploit the platform's possibilities and tend to use it as a one-sided promotional tool. The results of their research also revealed that the publications that achieve the highest engagement are those that favour interaction and are oriented towards political entertainment.

2. Objectives and research questions

As with the works referred to in section 1.2, this research deals with political communications on TikTok, but unlike most of them, it takes partisan use as its study aim. The general goal is to analyse the use of this social network by the five national Spanish parties and with their own parliamentary group in the Lower House of Parliament: PSOE, PP, Vox, Podemos and Ciudadanos. The specific goals are: 1) to evaluate their intensity of use and the interactions obtained; 2) to describe the adaptation of their videos to the platform's own narrative practices and to determine the views recorded as a function of this; and 3) to examine the issues raised in the publications and to observe the views they achieve.

For this purpose, our analysis is based on the following research questions:

RQ1. How do Spanish political parties use TikTok in terms of update frequency and what results do they achieve in terms of number of followers, views, likes, comments, and shares?

RQ2. Which narrative strategies do they employ in their videos and how many views do they achieve as a result?

RQ3. Which topics do they develop in their posts and how many views does each one get?

The virtual absence of academic literature on the partisan use of TikTok gives this study an exploratory nature that makes it difficult to establish hypotheses. However, our study is part of the abundant research tradition on parties' use of social networks, particularly Twitter due to the greater accessibility of its data. Previous reviews have found the microblogging network to be more likely used by opposition candidates and those with a longer track record than by those parties in government or more recently formed (Jungherr, 2016). In terms of virality, the publications of more recent parties have traditionally obtained a greater impact

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in Spain (Alonso-Muñoz, Marcos-García & Casero-Ripollés, 2016; Suau-Gomila, Pont-Sorribes & Pedraza-Jiménez, 2020).

Likewise, previous studies point to emerging parties such as Podemos and Ciudadanos being the first to achieve transmedia status due to their use of conventional media and their appropriate adaptation to the logic of new media (Casero-Ripollés, Feenstra & Tormey, 2016; Suau-Gomila, Pont-Sorribes & Pedraza-Jiménez, 2020). Other researchers defend the hypothesis of equalisation in the professionalisation of political communication between majority and minority parties, although also with a greater adaptation of minority parties to the logics of social media (Steffan & Venema, 2020).

In the case of Twitter, previous studies agree that politicians use this social network to mainly disseminate information about their activity or about current affairs generated from their party spheres or from the media (Jungherr, 2016), with the intention of mobilising their supporters (Kreiss, 2016) or to modulate the journalistic coverage they receive (Parmelee, 2014). Indeed, in the 2015 General Election, opposition parties –particularly the emerging parties– focused their agendas on campaign issues and political issues, which were more ideological (López-García, 2016). In the 2016 General Election, all of them prioritised the game framing, aimed at persuasion and mobilisation, also to a greater extent by the emerging parties (Alonso-Muñoz & Casero Ripollés, 2018). This is part of the polarisation context in which many Western democracies are immersed and which implies the primacy of ideological issues (Iyengar, Sood & Lelkes, 2012) over sectoral ones, as well as the dissemination of populist messages (Engesser *et al.*, 2017).

3. Methodology

3.1. *Corpus and timeframe*

The research applies a quantitative analysis (RQ1) and content analysis (RQ2 and RQ3) to the 182 publications disseminated from the time of their creation until 31 December 2020 by the official TikTok accounts of the Partido Popular (@partidopopular), Vox (@vox_espana), Podemos (@ahorapodemos) and Ciudadanos (@ciudadanos_cs). The profiles analysed correspond to the national parties with their own parliamentary group in the 14th Legislature of the Lower House of Parliament. The exclusion of the PSOE is due to its lack of participation on the platform, in which it nevertheless had two accounts reserved (@psoe and @psoecef), as reported by its communications team (C. Ochoa, personal communication, 10 November 2020).

The official nature of the accounts was determined by the presence of links to them on the parties' websites (Vox) or by the combination of the express mention of these accounts in the parties' profiles on other social networks and the participation of their leaders in them (Podemos and Ciudadanos, although in this case it was a channel formally attributed to their Youth Wing). In the case of the Partido Popular (PP), confirmation was required from its social media manager (I. López, personal communication, 10 November 2020), as there was another account that claimed this status (@partidopopular.es).

The links to the videos, accompanying texts and the figures associated with their impact were obtained on 1 January 2021. The corpus originally amounted to 189 publications, but when the videos were viewed and coded in February 2021, seven of them were no longer available on the platform and have been excluded from the analysis.

3.2. *Variables and operationalisation*

To answer RQ1, the quantitative analysis compared: 1) the activity of the candidates' accounts, which takes into consideration the weekly frequency of updates in the period analysed (which in the case of the PP is limited to the time it was actively present, as it ceased its activity on 3/3/2020); 2) the notoriety of its videos, which observes the views achieved during the entire period; and 3) the interaction generated by the publications, which contemplates the average

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number of likes, shares, and comments obtained by the publications, as well as the corresponding rates in relation to the views, also referring to the entire period.

Regarding RQ2, the content analysis considered the adaptation of the videos to the narrative codes commonly used on the platform (v1): a) duos; b) use of own codes (videos specially recorded for the platform); and c) different narratives (reuse of pre-existing videos or production of new ones without the incorporation of own codes).

As for RQ3, the content analysis was used to evaluate, on a Likert scale (1-5), the assignment of the videos to the macro-categories proposed by Mazzoleni (2010) based on Patterson for the classification of political messages in electoral campaigns: political issues (v2), policy issues (v3), campaign issues (v4) and personal issues (v5). In our adaptation, and bearing in mind that the period analysed does not correspond to that of an electoral campaign, we have considered political issues to be general ideological issues; policy issues, specific sectoral proposals or criticisms; campaign issues, the promotion of the party, the dissemination of the agenda of events and public acts, and calls for mobilisation or participation; and personal issues, public anecdotes about leaders, curiosities about them, non-sectoral personal confrontations and allusions to their abilities, attributes or previous careers. With some variations, this categorisation has already been used in various studies on the partisan use of Twitter in Spain (López-García *et al.,* 2015; López-García, 2016). Finally, also in response to RQ3, the specific topic of each video (v6) was classified based on a catalogue of 18 issues detailed in the presentation of results.

Contingency analysis and Pearson's correlation coefficient as a measure of linear dependence between two quantitative random variables Rx–y were used to determine their degree of relationship (–1 to +1). The statistical process was carried out using SPSS (v.12.IBM). Since the variables defining the thematic strategies were assessed using a Likert scale (1–5), to avoid a possible bias due to subjectivity in the coding, it was considered appropriate to subject these variables to an inter-rater reliability process using Cohen's Kappa and the calculation of a percentage of agreement between variables (McDonald, Schoenebeck & Forte, 2019; Lombard, Snyder-Duch & Bracken, 2002). Two external coders who had not participated in the initial coding examined a randomly selected 50% of the total units of analysis. After the inter-rater process, the political issues variable was found to have an agreement index of 0.88 and a Cohen's Kappa index of 0.798; policy issues 0.86 and 0.802; campaign issues 0.82 and 0.778; personal issues 0.80 and 0.783. All results are higher than the criteria established in exploratory research at 0.60 and above (Neuendorf, 2002; Krippendorff, 1990; Riffe *et al.*, 2019).

4. Results

4.1. *The activity and interaction obtained*

The party analysed that first started its activity on TikTok was the PP, which published its first video on 28/3/2019, followed by Podemos on 28/1/2020, Vox on 13/2/2020 and Ciudadanos on 18/3/2020. Podemos, Vox and Ciudadanos continued to publish after 31/12/2020, the last day of the period analysed. The PP, on the other hand, had ceased its activity on 3/3/2020, the date it published its final video of 2020, and did not resume until May 2021.

In response to RQ1, the quantitative analysis of the activity carried out by the four parties shows a very unequal frequency of updates. As shown in Table 1, the party with the highest frequency of publication was Podemos (2.1 videos per week), followed by Ciudadanos (1.3), the PP (0.4) and Vox (0.2).

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Table 1: Activity and virality on TikTok.

	PP	Vox	Podemos	C's
Account	@partidopopular	@vox_espana	@ahorapodemos	@ciudadanoscs
Start of the activity	28/3/19	13/2/20	28/1/20	18/3/20
Published videos	19	9	101	53
Weekly update frequency	0.4*	0.2	2.1	1.3
Views	36,435	2,162,200	21,229,900	350,282
Views/video	1,918	240,244	210,197	6,609
Likes	1,256	132,500	2,679,927	18,564
Likes/video	66	14,722	26,534	350
Likes/view	3.45%	6.13%	12.62%	5.30%
Shares	201	21,462	116,192	1,995
Shares/video	11	2,385	1,150	38
Shares/view	0.55%	0.99%	0.55%	0.57%
Comments	100	15,143	78,878	1,133
Comments/video	5	1,683	781	21
Comments/view	0.27%	0.70%	0.37%	0.32%

* In the case of PP, the weekly update frequency has been calculated counting only the weeks elapsed from the date of creation of the account until 3/3/2020, the date it published its final video of 2020.

Source: Own elaboration.

The party with the highest number of views was also Podemos (21,229,900), in line with its high level of activity, followed by Vox (2,162,200), the least active, Ciudadanos (350,282) and, finally, the PP (36,435). However, the videos published by Vox obtained a higher average number of views than those of the other parties: 240,244 views per video, compared to 210,197 for Podemos, 6,609 for Ciudadanos and 1,918 for the PP.

Podemos led in absolute terms in the other interactivity metrics and was the party whose videos accumulated the most likes (2,679,927), shares (116,192) and comments (78,878), again in line with its high frequency of updates and followed in all cases by Vox (132,500, 21,462 and 15,143, respectively), despite its status as the least active party. Although Podemos obtained a higher average number of likes per video than Vox (26,534 vs. 14,722) and a higher rate of likes per view (12.62% vs. 6.13%), this party registered a higher average number of shares and comments per video than Podemos (2,385 vs. 1,150 and 1,683 vs. 781, respectively), as well as a higher rate of shares and comments per view (0.99% vs. 0.55% and 0.7% vs. 0.37%, respectively). In comparison, the average interactions obtained by the videos of the PP and Ciudadanos were residual in terms of both likes and shares and comments.

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4.2. *Narrative codes and their impact*

In terms of the narrative code and to answer RQ2, there was a predominance of publications of audiovisual pieces that had not been produced specifically for TikTok (see Table 2), with 17 million views, demonstrating the use of TikTok as a platform or repository for publishing videos taken from other platforms with different narratives and characteristics (N=126; 69.2%). Content created to be advertised exclusively on TikTok, with 7.4 million views, and which meet the characteristics of this social network account for a third (N=55; 30.2%). Finally, the narrative form of interaction by means of a duo has only been observed on one occasion (N=1; 0.6%) with only 66,000 views. This shows that there is no significant dependence between political parties and the narrative codes used, assuming that there is no specific narrative about a given political party.

Table 2: Narrative codes used by parties on TikTok.

	Duo	TikTok's own codes	Different narratives	*p*
Partido Popular	0	6(31.5) 6k	13(68.4) 30k	0.936
Podemos	1(0.5) 66k	34(33.6) 6.1m	66(65.3) 15m	0.334
Vox	0	3(33.3) 700k	6(66.6) 1.4m	0.955
Ciudadanos	0	12(22.6) 79k	41(77.3) 270k	0.280
Total	1(0.5) 66k	55(30.2) 6.8m	126(69.3) 16.7m	

N; (%); Views: k(thousands) m (millions).

Source: Own elaboration.

From the data obtained in Table 2, we discover the average visualisation obtained by each narrative and political party. Thus, the Partido Popular reaches an average of 1,000 in TikTok's own narrative codes and 2,300 in different narratives. In the same order, Podemos had 179,000 and 227,000 respectively. Vox obtained 233,000 in both TikTok's own narrative codes and in different narratives. Finally, Ciudadanos, saw 6,500 and 6,600. Based on this data, Vox had the highest averages in its publications using TikTok's own codes and narratives as well as in narratives other than TikTok. In general, videos using their own narratives obtained an average of 123,000 and those using different narratives 132,000, which shows the lack of relationship between the adoption of the platform's own narrative codes and the viralisation of content by obtaining views.

4.3. *Themes, their ascription and their impact*

Regarding the perception of the main topic of the video edited on TikTok (RQ3), a bivariate analysis (Table 3) reveals a clear polarisation with respect to the perception and the political spectrum of the different parties analysed. The Partido Popular shows a significant correlation in three issues, *political issues* r(182)=-0.254, *p*<0.001, in *policy issues* r(182)=-0.143, *p*<0.005, *campaign* r(182)=-0.491, *p*<0.000 and finally *personal issues* r(182)=-0.205, *p*<0.005. With respect to Ciudadanos, a high correlation is also evident in the four dimensions, *political issues* r(182)=-0.295, *p*<0.000, *policy issues* r(182)=-0.084, *p*<0.005, *campaign* r(182)=0.181, *p*<0.014 and *personal* r(182)=-0.050, *p*<0.004 (see Table 1). With respect to Podemos, no significance is found for its main themes, *p*<0.068, *p*<0.722, *p*<0.144 and *p*<0.045 respectively. The behaviour of Vox is similar, *p*<0.495, *p*<0.637, *p*<0.388 and *p*<0.354. The highest mean obtained for each issue corresponds to *personal issues* for the Partido Popular (*M*=3.21; *SD*=1.47) and *political issues* for the other parties, Podemos (*M*=3.17; *SD*=1.83), Vox (*M*=3.78; *SD*=1.71) and Ciudadanos (*M*=3.85; *SD*=1.56).

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Table 3: Degree of perception of thematic ascription of TikTok publications by party.

	Political	*Policy*	*Campaign*	*Personal*
PP	0.254**	0.143*	-0.491**	-0.205**
M(SD)	1.00 (0.00)	1.21 (0.918)	3.21(1.47)	1.95(1.35)
Podemos	0.136	-0.027	0.109	0.143
M(SD)	3.17 (1.83)	2.45(1.46)	1.90(1.36)	1.38(1.03)
Vox	-0.051	0.035	0.046	0.068
M(SD)	3.78(1.71)	2.11(1.69)	2.44(1.42)	1.56(0.882)
Ciudadanos	-0.295**	-0.084*	0.181*	-0.050*
M(SD)	3.85(1.56)	2.68(1.62)	1.08(0.549)	1.53(1.28)

* p<0.05, ** p<0.01.

Source: Own elaboration.

With regard to the issues (T1 to T18) addressed by the different parties –Table 4– the right-wing parties, Partido Popular and Vox, have a greater impact on the promotion of their parties. However, Vox does not show a significant correlation $p<0.674$, which does occur in the other accounts analysed, indicating that the extreme right-wing party has a defined agenda on TikTok, although with a very limited number of publications. Podemos, on the other hand, focuses decisively on equality, diversity and social rights policies, perhaps due to the large number of posts on TikTok in which the Minister for Equality, Irene Montero, is the main protagonist. Ciudadanos focuses on issues of nationalism and Catalonia's place in the Spanish state.

Table 4: Themes of TikTok posts by party.

	PP	Podemos	Vox	C's
(T1) Party promotion.	14(74.8)	7(6.9)	4(44.4)	2(3.7)
(T2) Equality policies.		22(21.7)	1(11)	
(T3) Social rights and health. Welfare state vs. liberalism.		16(15.8)	1(11)	9(16.9)
(T4) Nationalism, separatism. Centralism-plurinationalism.				13(24.5)
(T5) Diversity: homophobia vs. LGBTI policies and rights.		13(12.8)		
(T6) Non-sectoral personal confrontations. Capacities, attributes, characterisations, experience.		9(8.9)	1(11)	2(3.7)
(T7) Totalitarianism/populism vs. democracy.		8(7.9)	1(11)	2(3.7)
(T8) Public anecdotes, curiosities.	4(21)	5(4.9)		1(1.8)
(T9) Justice and democratic quality (corruption, transparency, public salaries).		2(1.9)		8(15)
(T10) Polarisation vs. consensus.		2(1.9)		5(9.4)
(T11) Economy, finance (including taxation) and economic sectors (agriculture, industry, construction, trade, tourism).		1(0.9)		4(7.5)
(T12) Labour, employment, pensions.		5(4.9)		
(T13) Detailed balance sheets of government action.		4(3.9)		
(T14) Environment and animal welfare.		3(2.9)		1(1.8)
(T15) Patriotism vs. anti-patriotism, monarchism vs. republicanism.		2(1.9)	1(11)	1(1.8)
(T16) International politics and the European Union. Globalism.	1(5.2)			2(3.7)
(T17) Diversity: racism vs. migrants and multiculturalism.		1(0.9)		2(3.7)
(T18) Education, culture, science and sport.		1(0.9)		1(1.8)
Total (N / %)	19(10.4)	101(55.4)	9(4.9)	53(29)
Bilateral significance X^2	p<0.000	p<0.000	p<0.674	p<0.000

Source: Own elaboration.

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Table 5 shows the total and average views for each of the 18 topics published. Equality policies (T1), and diversity, homophobia and LGBTI rights (T5) predominate. The least covered topics are those focusing on international politics and the European Union from a global perspective (T16), as well as those dedicated to education, culture, science and sport (T18). The average number of views for each of the topics covered is also revealed. Podemos has a higher average for topics related to equality policies 55,000 and LGBTI rights 51,000. Vox obtained the highest average of 133,000 in its publications also related to the promotion of its party. Ciudadanos has an average of 1,900 for public rights, democratic quality and denouncing corruption.

Table 5: Views reached by the parties on TikTok according to the themes developed.

	PP	Podemos	Vox	C's	Total (Average)
T1	31k (1.6k)	772k (7.6k)	1.2m (133k)	4k (75)	2m (74k)
T2		5.6m (55k)	176k (19k)		5.8m (251k)
T3		2.8m (27k)	400k (44k)	18k (339)	3.2m (123k)
T4				56k (1k)	56k (4.3k)
T5		5.2m (51k)			5.2m (400k)
T6		1.4m (13k)	54k (6k)	10k (188)	1.5m (122k)
T7		1.3m (12k)	102k (11k)	3k (56)	1.4m (127k)
T8	3k (15.7k)	1.8m (17k)		7k (132)	1.8m (181k)
T9		122k (1.2k)		105k (1.9k)	228k (22.7k)
T10		236k (2.3k)		16k (301)	253k (36k)
T11		96k (950)		8k (150)	104k (20.8k)
T12		256k (2.5k)			256k (51k)
T13		513k (5k)			513k (128k)
T14		214k (2.1k)		1.5k (28)	215k (53.8k)
T15		295k (2.9k)	192k (21k)	2.8k (52)	490k (122k)
T16	1k (52.6k)			11k (207)	12k (4k)
T17		213k (2.1k)		107k (2k)	320k (106.6k)
T18		118k (1.1k)		2.6k (49)	120k (60k)
Total	36.4k	21m	2.1m	350k	

Source: Own elaboration.

5. Discussion and conclusions

This paper has analysed the use of TikTok by the main Spanish political parties by describing the activity developed and the interaction obtained from the date their accounts were created until 31/12/2020. It has also studied the narrative codes used and the themes present in their publications, as well as the relationship between both aspects and the views achieved by their videos.

The PSOE's lack of active presence and the PP's cessation of activity show that, in the national political sphere, TikTok is a platform used almost exclusively by the most recently created parties in the period analysed. However, these parties opted for different publication strategies: Podemos' update frequency was almost twice that of Ciudadanos and ten times that of Vox. Although in line with its greater activity, Podemos led in views and other interactivity metrics in absolute terms. The videos published by Vox obtained, on average, more views than those of other parties and also higher interaction rates. Despite all this, the lack of activity by the traditional parties prevents us from establishing a parallel with the greater virality of the publications by emerging parties on Twitter (Alonso-Muñoz, Marcos-García & Casero-Ripollés, 2016; Suau-Gomila, Pont-Sorribes & Pedraza-Jiménez, 2020). On the other hand, the high number of views obtained on average by Vox and Podemos contradicts the lack of interest in current affairs observed so far by studies on the motivations for using TikTok (Lu, Lu & Liu, 2020). In turn, the higher average virality of Vox's videos is in

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line with that observed in other countries (Vijay & Gekker, 2021; Weimann & Masri, 2020) on the popularity of far-right oriented videos.

The intensity of use by recently created parties is only partially in line with the transmedia nature attributed to them in other studies focusing on Twitter (Casero-Ripollés, Feenstra & Tormey, 2016; Suau-Gomila, Pont-Sorribes & Pedraza-Jiménez, 2020), as their active presence was not accompanied by the use of narrative codes specific to the platform, whose use was a minority, in contrast to what this type of party does on other social networks (Steffan & Venema, 2020). As opposed to the results of the available categorisations of the most frequent videos (Shutsko, 2020) or existing surveys on the videos perceived as most attractive (Lu & Lu, 2019) or best rated (Lu, Lu & Liu, 2020), which generally prioritise comedy, music, positive emotions, Spanish parties focused on the dissemination of pre-existing videos, with varying levels of editing, mostly corresponding to news topics, one of the types of videos that in itself generates less interest among users (Lu, Lu & Liu, 2020). However, the similar average number of views obtained by videos that adapt to their own narratives and those that do not show that, at least for the time being, parties can take advantage of this social network to disseminate their messages without having to adapt to its logic.

On the other hand, with respect to the thematic strategies of the videos, while the parties who develop discursive lines in their publications that can be more easily classified into the classic categories of *political/policy/campaign/personal issues* (Mazzoleni, 2010) –PP and Ciudadanos– they obtain a lower average number of views per video. Those that opt for publications with more diversified themes –Vox and Podemos– obtain a higher average impact. Except for the PP, the videos analysed were closer to the category of political issues, which is in line with the primacy of ideological issues over sectoral ones, typical of the polarisation in which Western democracies are immersed (Iyengar, Sood & Lelkes, 2012).

In terms of specific topics, while the PP and Vox devoted most of their videos to party promotion, Podemos focused on equality and LGBTI rights, and Ciudadanos on territorial policy and democratic quality. The most viewed topics were, on average and in this order, those related to LGBTI rights, equality, curiosities and anecdotes, government action balance sheets, opposition between totalitarianism and democracy, non-sectoral personal confrontations, and patriotism.

In short, the partisan use of TikTok is still in its infancy and its use for political communications is limited to parties that have emerged in recent years. Podemos and Ciudadanos are the most active, but Vox and Podemos, the most polarised, are those that get the most views and interactions. The parties have not yet adapted to the platform's own narrative codes, but this does not affect the impact of the publications, although the thematic diversity of the publications does. In general, the ideological orientation of the videos is in the majority.

The main limitations of this study stem from its exploratory nature, which has limited the consultation of previous literature, and the embryonic state of the political use of TikTok in Spain, which may cause the conclusions to be unstable. Future research should study the development of the partisan use of this network; the role of citizens as producers of political content on it, as Medina Serrano *et al.* (2020) have already done in the United States; and its use in the dissemination of discursive strategies and populist styles by the population, following the studies carried out by Weimann and Masri (2020) in the United States and by Vijay and Gekker (2021) in India, but also by political parties, as has already been done extensively by numerous researchers on other social networks (Engesser *et al.*, 2017).

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