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Female political influencers in Argentina and Spain: Otherness in digital political scenarios

Аннотация. В статье анализируются особенности стиля коммуникации женщин-политиков в TikTok. Исходная предпосылка исследования состоит в том, что по причине своей гендерной принадлежности они представляют инаковость в цифровых политических сценариях. Эмпирическую базу исследования составила коммуникация в TikTok четырех женщин-политиков из Испании и четырех из Аргентины. Применен метод контент-анализа. Общая выборка составила 400 единиц анализа, взятых из совокупности публикаций, сделанных в TikTok восемью женщинами-политиками из Аргентины и Испании. Проанализировано по 50 видеороликов, опубликованных каждым из политических инфлюенсеров в контексте национальных избирательных кампаний в обеих странах. В случае с испанскими женщинами-политиками в выборку вошли видеоролики, опубликованные до 23 июля 2023 г. включительно (т. е. до даты всеобщих выборов в Испании), в случае с аргентинскими женщинами-политиками — видеоролики, опубликованные до 13 августа 2023 г. включительно (т. е. до даты проведения одновременных открытых первичных выборов (PASO) в Аргентине). Результаты позволили авторам выявить предпочтения анализируемых политиков в отношении типов создаваемых видеороликов, классифицировать типы передаваемых ими эмоций, основной контент, который они распространяют, а также степень персонализации их видеороликов.

Ключевые слова: политические инфлюенсеры, инаковость, коммуникативные стили, TikTok, цифровая политическая коммуникация

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FEMALE POLITICAL INFLUENCERS IN ARGENTINA AND SPAIN: OTHERNESS IN DIGITAL POLITICAL SCENARIOS

Abstract. This paper analyzes the communication of female political influencers on TikTok, based on the assumption that, due to their gender, they represent otherness on social media. The characteristics of their communication styles, the performance on TikTok of four female political influencers from Spain and four from Argentina were explored. This is a cross-sectional, descriptive, exploratory research. The content analysis method was applied to the selected publications. The total sample is made up of 400 units of analysis, drawn from the universe of publications made on TikTok by eight female political influencers from Argentina and Spain. Fifty videos were analyzed for each influencer selected, in the context of national-level electoral campaigns in both countries. In the case of the Spanish women, the data collection period consisted of fifty videos published by each of them before 23 July 2023 inclusive, the date of the general elections in Spain. With reference to the Argentinian women, 50 videos published by them before and including 13 August 2023, the date of the PASO (Simultaneous Open Primary Elections) in Argentina, were collected. The results allowed us to identify their preferences in the types of videos they produce, classify the types of emotions they communicate, the main contents they choose to disseminate, as well as the degree of personalization that characterizes their clips.

Keywords: political influencers, otherness, communication styles, TikTok, digital political communication

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Introduction

Communication by female political influencers on the digital platform TikTok represents the object of interest of the study discussed in this article. It is necessary to make explicit three basic assumptions underlying the design of our research [Gouldner 1970]. The first of them is that we start from the observation that political communication in general, and digital political communication in particular, are areas that require the incorporation of the gender perspective [García Beaudoux 2017; García Beaudoux et al. 2018; 2020; Norris 1997]. The second underlying assumption is that we stipulate that female digital political influencers constitute an exclusive and different category from professional journalists, from people who dedicate themselves to politics professionally, and from people who act as "cyber-activists" [De Ugarte 2007], "digital activists" [Trere et al. 2021] or "militant Internet users" [Slimovich 2012; 2022]. The third underlying assumption is that due to their gender, female political influencers represent otherness on social media: male and female digital political participation is perceived differently, women tend to face more repercussions and hostility [Håkansson 2023], and also to be perceived as guests in someone else's house [García Beaudoux 2017].

Political influencers

The role of political influencers in contemporary political communication has been the subject of several studies which have demonstrated their growing importance in this field. Riedl et al. [2021] have concluded that social networks have been positively influenced by political influencers, with contributions to education and political engagement being particularly beneficial. However, there are also negative aspects, including the potential for radical political ideology or conspiracy discourses to be disseminated virally. Casero-Ripollés [2020] posits that the principal function of these digital political figures is to attempt to shape the configuration of the public agenda and public opinion through the exercise of technologically mediated personal influence. The phenomenon of influencers who begin to produce political content once they are already known for other issues has been documented [Suuronen et al. 2022]. Their impact on the political behavior of their followers is significant. Conversely, research has demonstrated that political influencers who align themselves with right-wing ideologies can incite their followers to embrace more radical ideologies [Lewis 2018]. Additionally, studies have indicated that political influencers can influence digital activism [Slimovich 2022] and foster greater political engagement among younger demographics [Schmuck et al. 2022].

This paper proposes that there are three fundamental characteristics that define a political influencer. Firstly, they must have a significant following on a digital platform. Secondly, they must demonstrate the capacity to advocate for a particular position. Thirdly, they must not be a professional journalist or politician.

Women as otherness

According to Simone de Beauvoir [1949], the concept of otherness refers to the fact that those who have the most political power are also those who control the representation that exists in our societies about the different social groups that make it up. The author argues that women's social identity has been constructed in the context of a patriarchal system by men in the service of their own interests, where men represent the absolute and women, on the contrary, are defined in relation to them and constitute 'the other'. This otherness, moreover, is not neutral: it implies a hierarchization of difference.

Gender is not only a primary symbolic referent that divides the world into men and women, but also classifies and hierarchizes this difference, subordinating the feminine [Ortner 1974]. It is a generic ordering of the social world that naturalizes male domination [Bourdieu 1996]. Asakura [2004] affirms that in myths, for example, it is possible to observe symbolic codes around which meanings are constructed, social practices are articulated, and explanations are generated that have great power for social cohesion. The author points out that in all creation myths women are in the background: Eve was created from one of Adam's ribs, and was also created in function of him, to accompany him.

Gender is not biological; on the contrary, it is a social construction based on sexual differences [García Beaudoux 2017]. In this binary system, not only is a descriptive and prescriptive difference between 'female' and 'male' established, but this difference also implies a hierarchy. Women are constructed as different from men, and in our culture the differentiation is not general or neutral, but in terms of a superior or inferior, because we live in a culture where every difference is hierarchized [Fernández 1993: 112]. Otherness is, from a pluralist position, that which is considered different [Torres León 2023]. The feminine has been read from a position of otherness, in terms of what is constructed by patriarchy:

> ...feminine otherness located in a place of inferiority, especially from the constitution of what I will call the nominating group that marks and constructs a sign that indicates inferiority, in this case anchored in genital difference, the foundation of the architecture of sexual bodies, invented for the group marked as subaltern [Cano Evangelina 2016: 50].

Since the beginning of politics, women have occupied the place of otherness. For centuries, political decision-making spaces were a territory exclusively occupied by men. It was not until 1893 that New Zealand, followed already in the 20th century by Australia in 1902, Finland in 1906 and Norway in 1907, led the recognition of women's right to vote. Although there are many countries in the world in which women can currently exercise the right to choose and be elected, politics continues to be an unequal scenario for women. According to the *Map of women in politics* prepared by UIP and UN Women (2023), women constitute only 11.3% of Heads of State and 9.8% of Heads of Government of the nations of the planet, they occupy only 26.5% of parliamentary seats, and less than one minister in four is a woman, given that women hold only 22.8% of ministerial portfolios. Similarly, women face barriers in the form of glass ceilings within po-

litical parties [García Beaudoux 2017]. According to data from the Latin American Political Reform Observatory (2022), only 15.4% of political parties in Latin America are led by a woman, while they make up half of their membership. These scenarios, characterized by inequality, which place women in the place of otherness, are also manifested for women who dedicate themselves to communicating politics. Although on digital platforms like TikTok female people have more followers, produce more content, generate greater engagement and follow more accounts, male users are the ones who dominate the scene, being the ones who obtain more followers, likes and comments when compared to female users [Kennedy 2020; García-Marin, Salvat-Martinrey 2022].

Politics on TikTok

Since the beginning of the mass media politics has been mediated [Verón 2001; 2013]. Mediatization refers to the relationship between the transformation of media and communication, and culture and society [Hepp 2020]. Currently, political communication involves a process of deep mediatization [Hepp 2022]. In other words, society and human practices are increasingly transformed by the ubiquity of the media, taking into account digital spaces and the cross-media nature of mediatization. Deep mediatization is then an advanced stage of mediatization in which all elements of our social world are intricately related to the media and its infrastructures [Couldry, Hepp 2013: 7].

From a critical perspective, it has been investigated how media platforms are technocultural constructions and socio-economic structures [Van Dijck 2016]. In this sense, the online and offline worlds are connected, and new forms of culture are generated, while social networks such as TikTok exploit users' information.

In this framework of deep mediatization, which has been accentuated by the coronavirus pandemic, the TikTok social network has become a privileged space for the construction of leadership in recent years. Storytelling is a crucial tool for leadership development, and TikTok has entered the media scene based on different audiovisual rules and showing new possibilities of storytelling [Sánchez Castillo 2021].

Similarly, TikTok allows leaders to create new dynamics of interaction with their audiences, as it deepens the phenomenon of 'politainment' and info-entertainment [Zamora-Medina et al. 2023; Acosta 2022]. For this reason, it is particularly successful in addressing young people [Zamora-Medina et al. 2023; Omar, Dequan 2022; Ariza et al. 2022].

In the TikTok accounts of political leaders, playful, fictional and entertainment content coexist [Slimovich 2025] with more traditional propaganda content [Gómez de Travesedo et al. 2023]. Young audiences also find appealing the fact that every Internet user can produce their own content from their own account.

The above is evidence of aspects of the platform that have been studied. However, when it comes to studying the content that users produce, there are still vast areas to explore.

In this study, we sought to answer the following question: What are the communication styles employed by political influencers as a means of presenting themselves as the other in the context of electoral campaigns in Argentina and Spain? This article presents our findings in response to this question.

In alignment with the research question, four specific objectives were identified for investigation: to ascertain the types of videos female influencers prefer to produce for TikTok, the types of emotions and content they are inclined to communicate, and the extent to which they personalize the clips they share. Below we present the results of a research that analyzes the communication profiles of Spanish and Argentine female influencers' policies on TikTok in relation to those objectives.

Method, sample, procedure and definition of variables

The general objective of the research is to investigate the characteristics of the communication styles of female influencers' policies on TikTok. We define the concept of "communication style" following Steimberg (2013), who sees it as a way of doing media. In this way, we understand it as the set of recurring attributes that political influencers use in interactions with their followers. Our research design is transversal, descriptive and exploratory. The method used is content analysis.

The universe from which the sample was drawn are the publications made on TikTok by eight female political influencers, four from Argentina and four from Spain. The sample is of an incidental type; it presents a total of 400 units of analysis formed as follows: fifty videos published by each of the selected female political influencers.

The choice of Argentina and Spain is predicated on the fact that in both countries elections were held concurrently to elect the highest authority of the executive power during the same months. In other words, it is the political context that allows for a comparison between these two countries.

The eight female political influencers whose videos constitute the sample under analysis were selected according to the following criteria: firstly, that they are not journalists or in political positions; secondly, that their publications are predominantly about public and political issues; thirdly, that they have an active profile on the TikTok platform; fourthly, that they have a minimum of 15 000 followers; fifthly, that their name is verifiable; sixthly, that their image appears in their publications; and finally, that their nationality is Spanish or Argentine.

This study is exploratory in nature and descriptive in scope. As it is based on incidental sampling, the results obtained are not representative in scope and therefore limited in their generalizability.

The measurement was carried out in the context of national electoral campaigns in the two countries. In the case of the Spanish subsample, the fifty videos published prior to July 23, 2023 were analyzed, as that was the day of the elections in Spain. Regarding the Argentine subsample, the fifty videos published prior to August 13, 2023 inclusive, the day on which the PASO took place in Argentina (Mandatory Simultaneous Open Primary elections), were considered.

Political influencers analyzed

Political influencers were analyzed[1] according to the type of positioning they adopt through videos. This analysis was developed in previous works [Slimovich 2022] and is based on the following classification: 'Internet users who support a political force, idea, candidate or party', 'Internet users who oppose a political force, idea, candidate or party', and 'citizen Internet users' who generate socio-political content but do not express their support or opposition.

- Luciana Ofman (Argentina), 205 500 followers. She establishes her identity as an 'Internet user who is opposed to Kirchnerism'. In other words, she presents herself as an Internet user who is critical of the governments of Cristina Fernández de Kirchner (2007–2015) and Alberto Fernández (2019–2023), as well as of the presidential candidacy of Sergio Massa for the Frente de Todos.
- Micaela Baraibar (Argentina), 58 000 followers. She self-identifies as a member of the Kirchnerist group La Cámpora. In this manner, she establishes her identity as an 'Internet user and follower of Kirchnerism'.
- Valentina Scaglia (Argentina), 42 900 followers. She participates with her videos with a political stance adhering to the presidential candidacy of libertarian Javier Milei. Her political content positions her as an 'Internet follower of Milei'.
- Zarina Hormachea (Argentina), 66 500 followers. She participates with her videos with a political stance adhering to the presidential candidacy of Patricia Bullrich, a member of the centre-right party, Juntos por el Cambio. She is thus an 'Internet user adherent to Juntos por el Cambio'.
- Carla Galeote (Spain), 396 300 followers. She is an outspoken opponent of the radical right-wing political party VOX. She is an Internet user who is in opposition to the political party VOX.
- Ana Salazar (Spain), 17 100 followers. She does not explicitly endorse any particular party or candidate. She presents herself as a 'citizen Internet user'.
- Lucia de Castro (Spain), 54 200 followers. She adopts a position of opposition to right-wing political parties in Spain. She is an Internet user who is opposed to the Spanish right-wing political movement.
- Miriam Jimenez Lastra (Spain), 35 300 followers. She takes a critical stance regarding the capitalist system.

As mentioned in the introduction, four specific objectives guided the research, namely:

O1. Explore influencers' preferences in the types of videos produced on TikTok;
O2. Classify the types of emotions they communicate on TikTok;

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[1] The number of followers was monitored in August 2023.

O3. Explore the content they choose to communicate on TikTok;

O4. Explore the degree of personalization in your TikTok clips.

Below are the conceptual and operational definitions and stipulations of the variables and indicators related to the four objectives.

Variable 1. Type of video used. This variable refers to the type of format of the videos published by female political influencers on TikTok. They were classified according to five possible categories: filmed in the territory, filmed in a media outlet, filmed in the influencer's home, filmed on another video and filmed on top of comments.

Variable 2. Type of emotion communicated. The emotions communicated in each clip were classified under one of twelve categories: joy, sadness, love, fear, anger, disgust, calm, guilt, shame, pride, hope, optimism.

Variable 3. Contents. The contents refer to the topics that are included in the videos. They were classified under one of seven categories: comments about the participation of electoral candidates in public situations or in the media; promotion of the management of an electoral candidate or a political leader; humanization of the influencer when she shares aspects of her personal life in the videos; participation of the influencer in the media; publications that challenge citizens; meetings with other influencers; and references to the social, political or electoral scenario.

Variable 4. Personalization. This is a bivalent variable. The contents that refer to personal attributes were classified under the label of personalization, and it was considered that there is no personalization when the contents refer to external situations or events.

Results

The main results are presented below, organized according to the objectives.
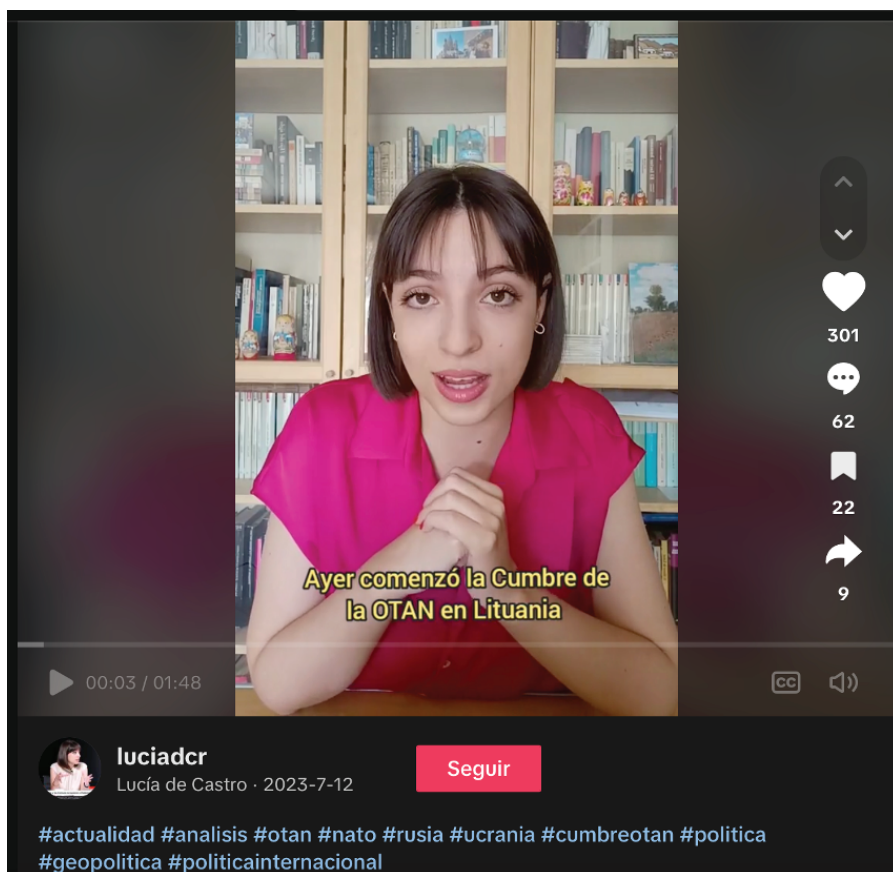
Table 1

Preferences in the types of videos influencers produce on TikTok

		Frequency	Percentage	Valid percentage
Valid	1. Video recorded in the territory	50	12.5	12.5
	2. Video recorded in media	27	6.7	6.7
	3. Video recorded at home	253	63.1	63.1
	4. Video recorded about comments and in response to them	9	2.2	2.2
	5. Video where the *influencer* is recorded on top of another video	43	10.7	10.7
	6. Others	19	4.7	4.7
	Total	401	100.0	100.0

It is observed that 63.1% of the videos shared by political influencers on Tik-Tok fit the format of recordings made in their own homes, showing various spaces such as their desks, living rooms and even kitchens (see table 1). This type of visual content seeks to convey a feeling of spontaneity and everyday life. Therefore, the type of video that humanizes the political influencer prevails. Although they sometimes used other video formats, these were used much less frequently, in the best cases barely exceeding 10%. Thus, approximately 12.5% corresponds to clips recorded in various locations, 10.7% consists of videos in which the influencer is recorded superimposed on other content taken from social networks, 6.7% consists of recordings made in the media, and only 2.2% refers to a very common type of format on TikTok for other types of users, which involves "videos recorded in response to comments and in reaction to them." This highlights that when it comes to political influence, the most used formats do not necessarily coincide with those most used for mere entertainment purposes.

Video of political influencer at home
Source: video posted on @luciadcr on 12 July 2023. https://www.tiktok.com/@luciadcr/video/7254887368870645018

Types of emotions communicate by the influencers on TikTok

		Frequency	Percentage	Valid percentage
Valid	1. Happiness	44	11.0	30.8
	2. Sadness	1	0.2	0.7
	3. Love	3	0.7	2.1
	4. Anger/anger	55	13.7	38.5
	5. Disgust/disgust	3	0.7	2.1
	6. Calm	1	0.2	0.7
	7. Shame	9	2.2	6.3
	8. Hope	13	3.2	9.1
	8. Optimism	3	0.7	2.1
	9. Gratitude	1	0.2	0.7
	10. Pride	6	1.5	4.2
	11. Other	4	1.0	2.8
	Total	143	35.7	100.0
Lost	System	258	64.3	
Total		401	100.0	

The two emotions that were expressed most regularly, in practically identical proportions, are anger (38.5%) and joy (30.8%) (see table 2). This results in a balance between positive and negative emotions in emotional communication in general. As shown in table 3, 50.7% of the emotions transmitted were positive in nature, while 49.3% were negative emotions.

Table 3

Positive and negative emotions

		Frequency	Percentage	Valid percentage
Valid	Positive	69	17.2	50.7
	Negative	67	16.7	49.3
	Total	136	33.9	100.0
Lost	System	265	66.1	
Total		401	100.0	

Content the influencers choose to communicate on TikTok

		Frequency	Percentage	Valid percentage
Valid	1. Comment on the participation of candidates in public situations or in the media	55	13.7	13.8
	2. Promote the management of a candidate or political leader	37	9.2	9.3
	3. Humanization (personal, everyday life situations, friends, family)	51	12.7	12.8
	4. Participation of the *influencer* in the media	8	2.0	2.0
	5. Interpellation to citizens	1	0.2	0.3
	6. Meeting with other political *influencers*	2	0.5	0.5
	7. References to the social, political and / or electoral context	246	61.3	61.5
	Total	400	99.8	100.0
Lost	System	1	0.2	
Total		401	100.0	

The vast majority, that is, 61.5% of the publications, are related to general content linked to the social and political context (see table 4). This shows that the content of political influencers is closely linked to the sociopolitical events of each country. To illustrate, in the video uploaded by @LuliOfman on 11 January 2023, the Argentine president's participation in an inauguration, where he was met with disapproval, is described[2]. Or in the case of the video posted by @anasalazar on 16 January 2023 in which she is seen describing the polls for the elections in the Spanish region of Castilla y León[3].

Other types of content were found in the videos to a lesser extent. For example, 13.8% of the clips addressed the participation of candidates in public events or in the media, which made it possible to observe the connection between the influencers and the politicians they support or criticize. Likewise, 12.8% of the videos presented content intended to humanize the influencer, showing aspects of her personal and daily life, interactions with friends and family, that are not directly related to political or social issues.

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[2] URL: https://www.tiktok.com/@luliofman/video/7187502475857972485.
[3] UL: https://www.tiktok.com/@ana_salazzar/video/7053917672785874182.
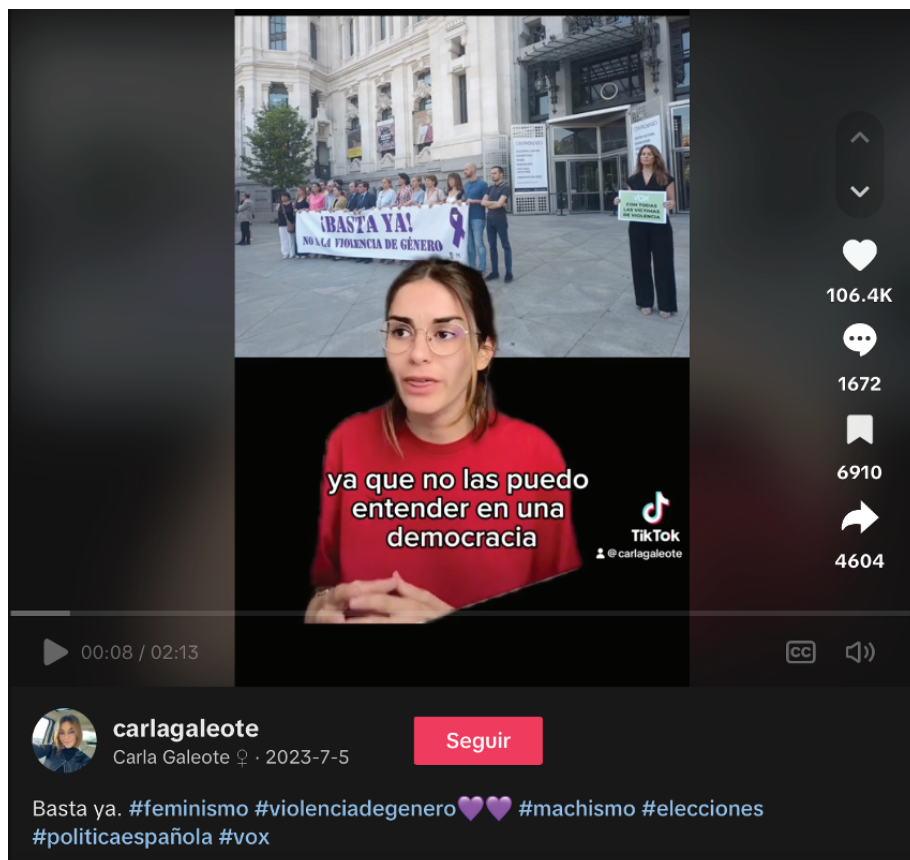
Video of political influencer expressing anger
*Source: video posted on @carlagaleote on 5 July 2023.*
*https://www.tiktok.com/@carlagaleote/video/7252315980162977050?is_from_*
webapp=1&sender_device=pc&web_id=7138437096687666694

Degree of personalization in TikTok clips

		Frequency	Percentage	Valid percentage
Valid	1. Yes (personal attributes)	180	44.9	44.9
	2. No (situations or events)	221	55.1	55.1
	Total	401	100.0	100.0

Table 5 shows that the contents that refer to situations and events are predominant compared to those that mention the personal attributes of the influencers or politicians, although the discrepancy does not reach statistical significance (55.1% versus 44.9%).
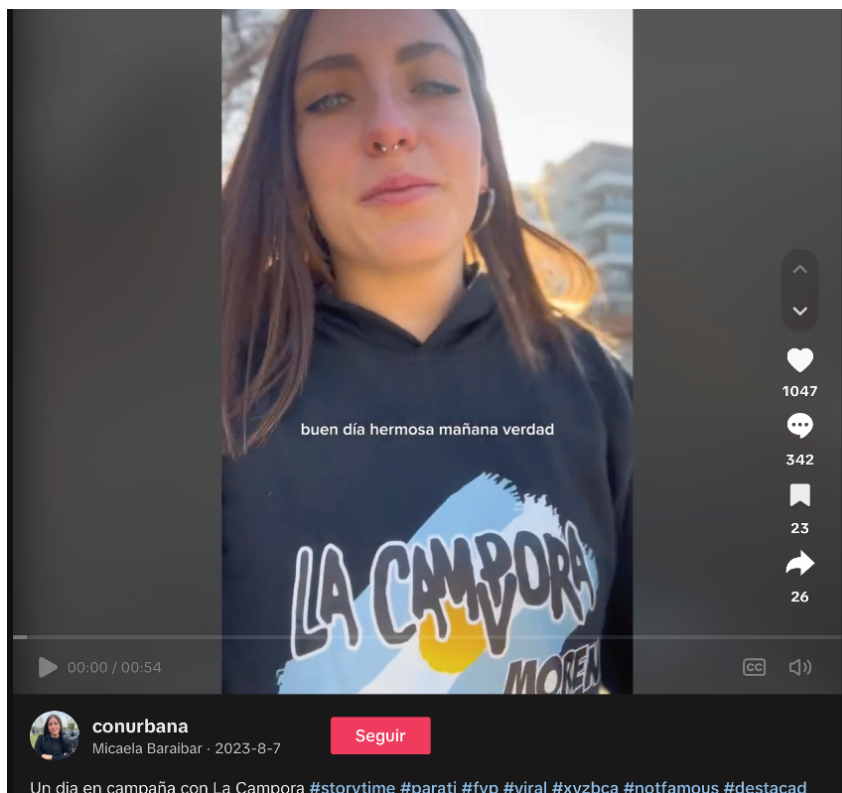
Video of political influencer expressing joy
Source: video posted on @conurbana on 7 August 2023
https://www.tiktok.com/@conurbana/video/7264546728739638534

Final thoughts

For this work we start from the assumption that female political influencers constitute a different and exclusive category, and that due to their gender condition, they represent otherness on social media. In this sense, we aim to reconstruct the communication styles of digital political otherness, understanding that the contents they produce on social networks impact the political-media and digital agenda.

Based on the results obtained, invariants were found in the communication styles of the sample made up of the political influencers analyzed.

First of all, it stands out that, compared to other types of videos, influencers tend to use videos recorded in their own homes by far. This style contributes to creating a feeling of proximity and intimacy in the relationship that the audience establishes with them. Furthermore, in line with this, almost 45% of the videos they publish are characterized by personalization, since they share their own thoughts, emotions and experiences directly when addressing certain facts, situations or public, social and political events.

When we explore the scope of conveyed emotions, we see an equal distribution between the communication of positive emotions, such as joy, which fit well with the playful nature of TikTok, and the communication of negative emotions, such as anger, which can serve as a motivating resource. It is relevant to highlight that none of the influencers used fear as a communication strategy.

Regarding the content, and considering that the measurement was carried out during the electoral campaign period in both Argentina and Spain, a predominance of content related to social and political issues stands out compared to other types of content. Far from the logic of politainment, the type of content published by women influencers differs from the hegemonic communication practices documented in current academic literature. Their communication styles are characterized by the preparation and publication of political content, which is in complete contrast to the mainstream of TikTok publications. Unlike the communication of the female influencers in our study sample, the political discourse of political parties and influencers on TikTok has adapted its rhetoric to a form of entertainment, favouring viralization over reflection [Berdón Prieto et al. 2023]. TikTok is also a platform where politics is represented through the game frame, favoring emotional responses, and the publication of content that falls into the category of politainment [Cervi et al. 2021]. In contrast to the content published by female influencers, it has been found that most of the political content on this platform displays an entertainment dimension and that, in general, in the political arena TikTok is used almost exclusively for politainment [Cervi et al. 2023].

Finally, when analyzing the presence of clips in which Argentine and Spanish political influencers comment on the participation of candidates in various types of situations and events, as well as promoting or criticizing their ideas, a connection is observed between the content they publish and the political speeches of the leaders whom they support or reject.

APPENDIX
Profiles of the influencers

Name and surname	User on TikTok	Nationality	Number of followers on TikTok	Link to profile
Luciana Ofman	@luliofman	Argentina	205000	https://www.tiktok.com/@luliofman?is_from_webapp=1&sender_device=pc
Micaela Baraibar	@conurbana	Argentina	58000	https://www.tiktok.com/@conurbana?_t=8eb8ASSS9GY&_r=1
Valentina Scaglia	@politik_conceptos_falopa	Argentina	42900	https://www.tiktok.com/@politik_conceptos_falopa?_t=8eb8tXmANUM&_r=1
Zarina Hormachea	@zariradicheta	Argentina	66500	https://www.tiktok.com/@zariradicheta?_t=8ecEqsBp9ld&_r=1

Name and surname	User on TikTok	Nationality	Number of followers on TikTok	Link to profile
Carla Galeote	@carlagaleote	Spain	396300	https://www.tiktok.com/@carlagaleote?_t=8eb8LHyFTHB&_r=1
Ana Salazar	@ana_salazzar	Spain	17100	https://www.tiktok.com/@ana_salazzar?_t=8eb8Sjr1uAI&_r=1
Lucia de Castro	@luciadcr	Spain	54200	https://www.tiktok.com/@luciadcr?_t=8eJhLysUXaQ&_r=1
Miriam Jimenez Lastra	@miriamjlas	Spain	35300	https://www.tiktok.com/@miriamjlas?_t=8eJhRnKnDWv&_r=1

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