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VISUAL NARATIVE ON TIKTOK:
Analysis of the Impact on Engagement Based on the Tone of Scientific News Published by Media in Spain and Chile

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KEYWORDS

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ABSTRACT

This study focuses on analysing how four television media in Spain and Chile have adopted TikTok as a tool to disseminate scientific content. Through an analysis of the publications made in 2023, the visual narratives used are explored, classifying the publications according to their tone and style, and thus relating public interaction to the type of message. The results obtained preliminarily suggest that tone influences engagement rates with users; however, other elements such as format or the context of the information cannot be overlooked.

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1. Introduction

In the era of digitalisation and connectivity, social networks and novel content platforms are effecting a transformation in both our modes of communication and long-established consumption habits (Martínez Pastor et al., 2013). Social media platforms such as TikTok, Instagram and YouTube have become the primary sources of information for young people, a phenomenon attributable to their emphasis on audiovisual content. It is important to emphasise that video consumption is one of the primary activities that young people engage in on the internet, driven by the desire to create new forms of communication, express their identity, nurture social relationships, and derive enjoyment (Livingstone, 2009; Blanco and Palomo, 2021).

This change is not only modifying consumption trends but also displacing the "leadership" of traditional media in favour of influencers or content creators (Newman et al., 2024). In this context, as more and more new actors emerge – social networks, search engines or aggregators – audiences are becoming more critical and moderating their interest in information (Negredo and Vara-Miguel, 2023). Consequently, media entities have been compelled to adapt their practices to align with these platforms and the demands of captivating digital content, with the objective of maximising their reach and impact (Salaverria, 2024). It is noteworthy that the adoption of emerging social networks was further catalysed by the advent of the COVD-19 pandemic. During this period of crisis, the media underscored the imperative for agile and effective scientific communication to combat the dissemination of misinformation (Martin Neira et al., 2023a).

Consequently, media outlets, including television, commenced the integration of diverse strategies into their science and health reporting methodologies. These strategies encompass the utilisation of the predominant audiovisual narratives on TikTok to appeal to these demographics, in addition to the execution of the role of fact-checking entities (García-Marín, 2022; Martin-Neira et al., 2023b).

The present study focuses on broadcasters as its subjects of enquiry, exploring their adoption and utilisation of the TikTok platform. The study finds that broadcasters have recognised the app's capacity to attract younger demographics and are currently exploring its potential to combine the production of conventional consumer content with the modern, fast-paced and engaging content demanded by the network (Chobanyan and Nikolskaya, 2021). Recent research, including that of Micaletto-Belda (2024), has underscored that the most prevalent formats on TikTok encompass those encompassing scientific concepts, such as tutorials, experiments, and curiosities. Additionally, the author has emphasized that content related to natural or exact sciences garners a greater level of attention.

In light of the aforementioned points, it is intriguing to delve into the role of television stations with a presence on TikTok. This investigation will facilitate the identification of the scientific content that is encompassed, the adaptation of such content to the platform's audiovisual structures, and the levels of interaction that correspond to the subject matter. A previous study on Ibero-American television news programmes revealed that the news programmes were limited to reproducing the same scientific content from television on the platform TikTok, without using the tools or language of the platform itself (Martin Neira et al., 2023b).

This prompts further inquiries into the shift in the consumption of scientific information and its influence on the need to capture the attention of new audiences on TikTok. It also prompts inquiries into the manner in which broadcasters are approaching the focus of their content on these novel communication channels. In this context, engagement plays a fundamental role. Prior studies (He et al., 2020) have demonstrated that user engagement varies completely depending on whether they comply with the characteristics and topics of digital platforms. The literature suggests that the creation of quality content, the use of trackable background music, the incorporation of beautification features, and the deployment of reminders of past videos are among the strategies recommended in the social network (Martin Neira et al., 2023a; Omar and Dequan, 2020).

From an audience perspective, Zozaya-Durazo et al. (2024) identified that the most valued attributes pertain to creativity, imagination, and, most notably, the perception that short videos waste less time. When these factors are considered in conjunction with the growing prevalence of high-speed internet and the prevalence of self-editing trends, it becomes evident that TikTok has become an exponentially popular phenomenon for all age demographics (Dias & Duarte, 2022; Newman et al., 2024).

Despite the extensive research conducted by academia on the primary characteristics of social networks such as TikTok for the purpose of measuring and analysing their impact and success, these factors alone do not encapsulate the entirety of the relevant elements when assessing the engagement of a publication. In recent years, both on social networks and on various other platforms, the tone of digital news has been a prominent focus, with positive, negative and neutral tones being highlighted as significant factors in capturing the attention of audiences and, consequently, generating a greater number of interactions.

1.1. The Impact of Message Tone on Information Consumption

In the context of social networks, the manner in which news is presented has been shown to exert a significant influence on the relationship established with the audience. This is particularly evident in the case of short videos (Oltra et al., 2025; Vázquez-Herrero et al., 2022). Consequently, research has identified the importance of the tone of news content in facilitating effective communication and information exchange on these platforms. Research has demonstrated the significance of the tone of news, conceptualised as the positive, negative, and neutral emotional evaluation of the news content (Parameswaran and Nguyen, 2023; Rozado et al., 2022). This tone influences the interactions individuals establish with the content (Al-Rawi, 2020; Choi et al., 2021; Prameswari, 2024; Zhang et al., 2024a) as well as in its viralisation (Brady et al., 2017; Li et al., 2021; Ling et al., 2022).

News stories have been shown to possess different emotional loads, which are based on those initially established by Ekman (1999) and which have been extended by other authors in response to the digital context (Aldous et al., 2022; Gao et al., 2024; Surabhi et al., 2022). News that is classified as positive is associated with emotions such as happiness, trust and surprise (Fernandes-de-Oliveira et al., 2023; Oh et al., 2024). In contrast, negative emotions are associated with anger, disgust and fear (Cárdenas-Mata and Veytia-Bucheli, 2023). Furthermore, it has been posited that the information content may not be dominated by any of these emotions, or that both positive and negative emotions may be equivalent (Hasell, 2020; Zunino, 2016).

Research has demonstrated that the sentimental and emotional characteristics of news content have a significant impact on news engagement (Omar et al., 2024). Negative ratings have been found to be associated with higher consumption and interaction rates in comparison to those exhibiting more optimistic perspectives (Bernabe-Loranca et al., 2021; Robertson et al., 2023; Zhang et al., 2024b).

In the context of news content on TikTok, it is evident that sentimental valuation is one of the factors influencing news engagement, along with other characteristics of the format (Lai, 2022) that shape user activity on the platform. In this regard, videos that present topics with a negative tone have garnered more audience engagement, as evidenced by higher numbers of 'Likes' and 'Comments', in comparison to those that approach it from a positive viewpoint (Boatman et al., 2022; Cheng and Li, 2024; Wang and Li, 2024). However, it should be noted that the significance of these indicators of interaction may be contingent on the sentiments expressed in videos addressing specific issues (Parameswaran & Nguyen, 2023).

1.2. Objectives and Research Questions

The objective of this study is to examine how television media are adapting scientific news for dissemination on TikTok, with a particular focus on analysing whether the tone of these publications influences the level of interaction registered with users. To this end, an exploratory content analysis was conducted on the two television news profiles with the highest number of followers on TikTok, both in Chile and Spain, according to data collected in December 2024. The following research objectives were set:

- OI.1. To identify the main scientific topics addressed by television media on TikTok.
- OI.2. To analyse the adaptation of scientific and audiovisual content by television media on TikTok.
- OI.3. To examine the relationship between the tone of scientific publications and the levels of interaction generated on TikTok

In addition, in order to fulfil the aforementioned objectives, the study was based on the following research questions:

- RQ.1. What narrative and visual strategies do television media use to adapt science news on TikTok?
- RQ.2. Is there a tendency for certain media to publish science content on TikTok with a positive or negative slant?
- RQ.3. How does the tone of science publications (positive, negative or neutral) influence interaction metrics such as likes and comments?

2. Design and Methods

The present study analysed the network due to its current global reach, which positions it as the platform with the greatest increase in audiences consuming news, especially younger audiences (Newman et al., 2024). After choosing the TikTok profiles, all the data for the year 2023 was extracted using the commercial platform Export Comments, accounting for 6517 publications. The content that was categorised as scientific publications was then filtered, i.e. pieces whose main theme focused on the exposition and explanation of knowledge related to health sciences, natural sciences, technology and humanities (Martin-Neira, 2022).

Furthermore, it was specified that only publications which provide extended information backed by verifiable sources, whether documentary or testimonial, should be considered, avoiding formats that are limited to the use of images with minimal editorial intervention, without voice-over or for exclusively viral or commercial purposes. Exclusion criteria were established to include: i) publications in which the focus of the analysis does not fall on scientific communication and responds to current or contingency criteria and ii) publications that could not be fully evaluated due to technical problems, such as audio or image failures, derived from copyright restrictions. Following the application of the inclusion and exclusion criteria, a total sample of 263 publications was obtained, which are broken down in Table 1 together with the characteristics of the profiles analysed.

Table 1. Description of TV profiles and content analysed

TikTok Profiles	Followers	Total Publications (2023)	Scientific Publications Analysed (2023)
@informativost5 (Spain)	3.1 million	n = 2119	
@rtvenoticias (Spain)	1.7 million	n = 1393	45
@meganoticias.cl (Chile)	3.4 million	n = 1958	87
@teletrece (Chile)	823.6 thousand	n = 1047	44

Source: Own elaboration, 2025.

In order to conduct this exploration, the content analysis methodology was employed, utilising a checklist (Table 2) that was developed for this specific purpose. This checklist encompasses not only a record of the primary interaction metrics, such as likes and comments, but also facilitates the review of the content types published, the narratives employed, and the adaptation of these posts to the linguistic nuances of the TikTok platform. In addition, the elements that enable the determination of the tone of a publication as positive, negative or neutral, or the presence of sentiment, in conjunction with the specific focus inherent in this indicator, facilitate the establishment of relationships and the identification of the engagement that this approach engenders (Martin-Neira et al., 2023b; Rozado et al., 2022; Trillo-Domínguez et al., 2024). As stated by Lai and To (2015), as well as Zhu et al., (2020), content analysis in social networks is a widely used method that allows us to discover the characteristics of certain topics that have not been explored in depth.

Table 2. Analysis *checklist*

Indicator	Descriptor	Coding
General information	Link	Url
	Date	DD/MM/YYYY
	Medium	Informativost5 (1), RTVEnoticias (2), Meganoticias (3), Teletrece (4)
	Country	Spain (1), Chile (2)
	Content and subject matter	Natural Sciences or Earth Sciences (1), Astronomy (2), Climate Change (3), Social Sciences or Humanities (4), Medical Sciences (5), Technology or Engineering (6), Other (7)
Publication Features and Engagement	*Likes*	0 to 10 (1), 11 to 30 (2), 31 to 50 (3), 51 to 100 (4), 101 to 200 (5), 201 to 300 (6), 301 to 400 (7), 401 to 500 (8), 501 to 1,000 (9), 1,001 to 5,000 (10), 5,001 to 10,000 (11), 10,001 and + (12)
	Comments	0 to 10 (1), 11 to 30 (2), 31 to 50 (3), 51 to 100 (4), 101 to 200 (5), 201 to 300 (6), 301 to 400 (7), 401 to 500 (8), 501 and + (9)
	Duration	00:01 to 00:30 (1), 00:31 to 01:00 (2), 01:01 to 01:30 (3), 01:31 to 02:00 (4), 02:01 to 03:00 (5), 03:01 and + (6)
TikTok's own Audiovisual Features and Elements	Replication of content broadcast on traditional television	Yes (1), No (2)
	Videos with fast editing, quick cuts and visuals	Nil (1), Low (2), Medium (3), High (4)
	Short videos with visual impact	Nil (1), Low (2), Medium (3), High (4)
	Creative in images and voice-over: Use gifs, text or animations in the video	Nil (1), Low (2), Medium (3), High (4)
	Uses protagonist	Nil (1), Low (2), Medium (3), High (4)
Tone (Approach to the news item)	General tone	Positive (1), Negative (2), Neutral (3)
	Specific focus	Medical Advances (1), Technological Innovation (2), Space Exploration and Astronomy (3), Ecology and Sustainability (4), Environmental Disasters (5), Public Health Problems (6), Technological Risks (7), Ethical Controversies in Science (8), Neutral (9)

Source: Own elaboration, based on Rozado et al., (2022); Martin-Neira et al., (2023b); Trillo-Domínguez et al., (2024).

The coding was developed by specialists in the field of journalism, science communication and digital platforms, with extensive experience in content analysis of TikTok. Certain descriptors were evaluated using a coding scale from 1 to 4, with the purpose of establishing a hierarchical classification that would reflect the level of manifestation of each attribute (Meneses and Rodríguez, 2011, p. 24).The quantitative data were processed using the statistical software SPSS and represented using figures. This methodological approach enabled the identification of patterns of convergence and divergence among the examined profiles.

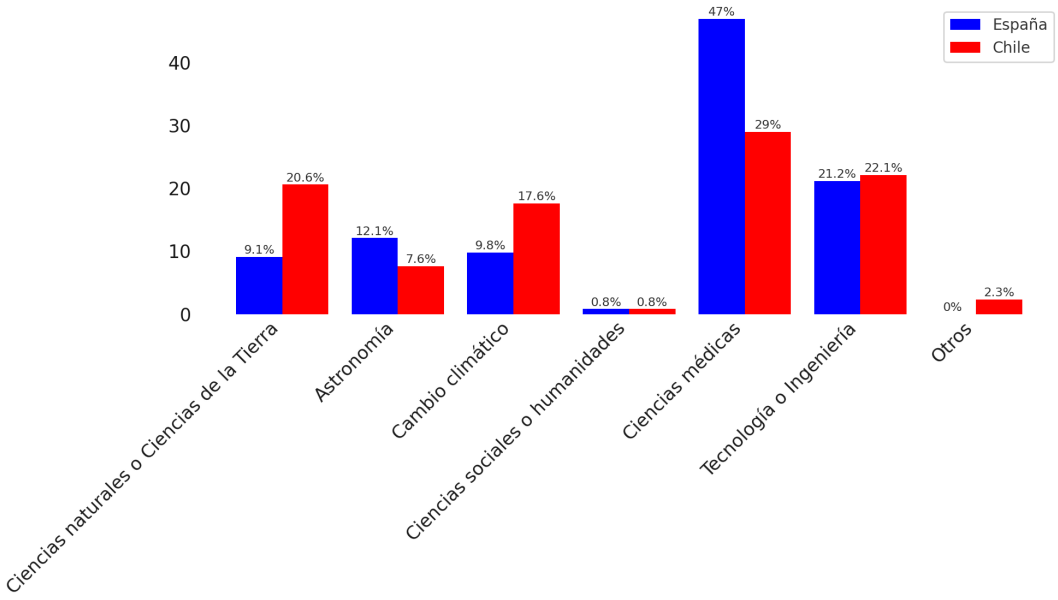
3. Results

In order to facilitate the comparison of the results obtained in this section, the variables were grouped according to the country of origin of each media outlet. This approach enabled a general comparison to be made between the Spanish and Chilean media, with 132 entries for Informativot5 and RTVEnoticias (Spain) and 131 publications for Meganoticias and Teletrece (Chile) being evaluated.

3.1. Engagement Results and Visual Narratives

The topics most frequently discussed by the media in these countries are directly related to aspects of medical science and technology. In both countries, these are the most widely disseminated contents. It should be noted that social sciences and humanities have a very low coverage, reaching only 0.8%. Figure 1 gives an overview of what has been achieved in 2023 at the scientific level.

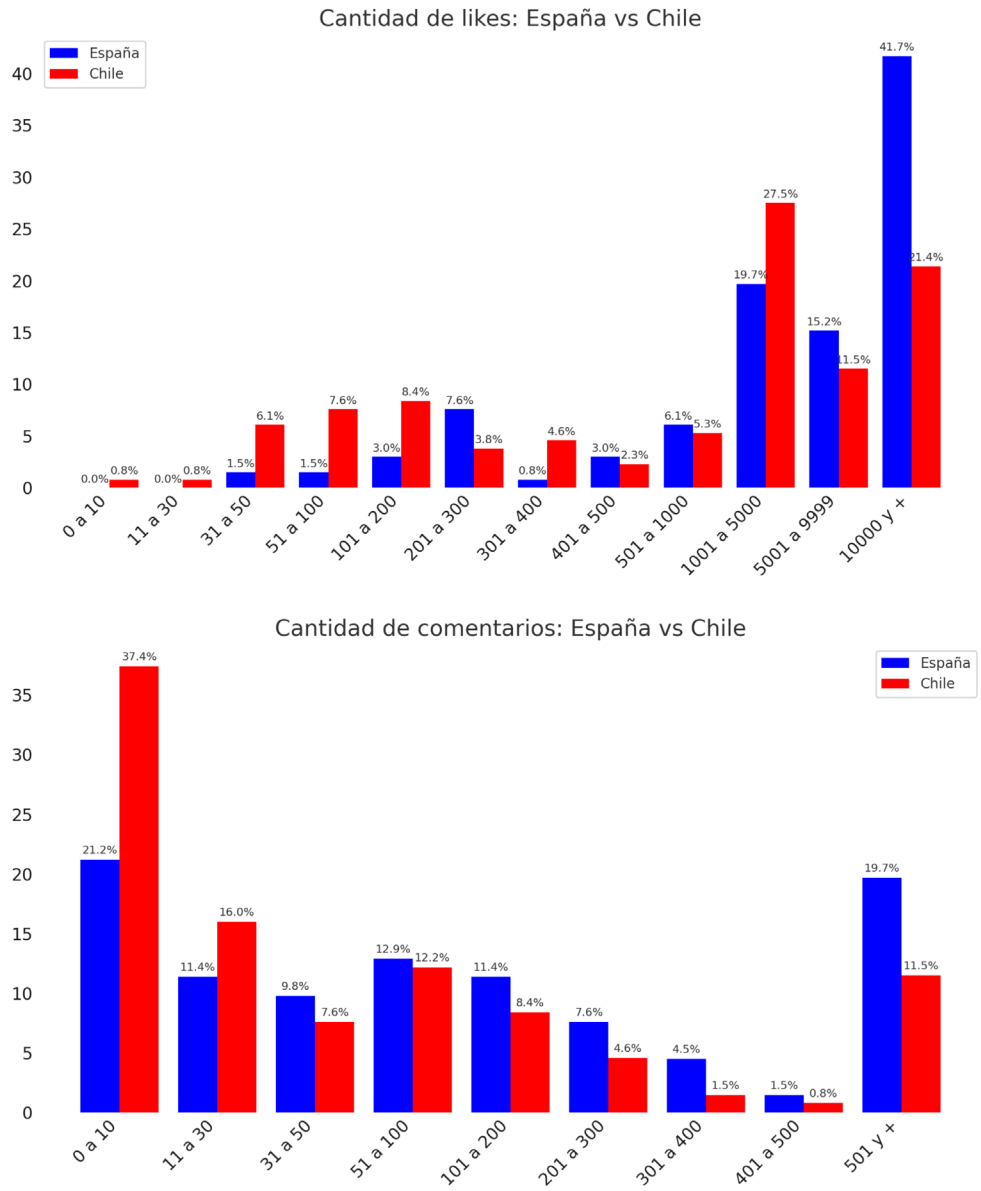
Figure 1. Comparison between Spain and Chile in developed issues



Source: Own elaboration, 2025.

The general analysis of likes and comments shows that Spanish publications tend to have a higher number of likes. In fact, more than 41% of all posts have more than 10,000 likes. In Chile, the highest frequency is in the "1,001 to 5,000" likes range, reaching 27.5%. As for comments, it is interesting to note that in Chile, over 37% of the posts are in the "0 to 10" comments range, a situation that is seen in only 21% of the posts in Spain. Figure 2 shows the full details in both categories.

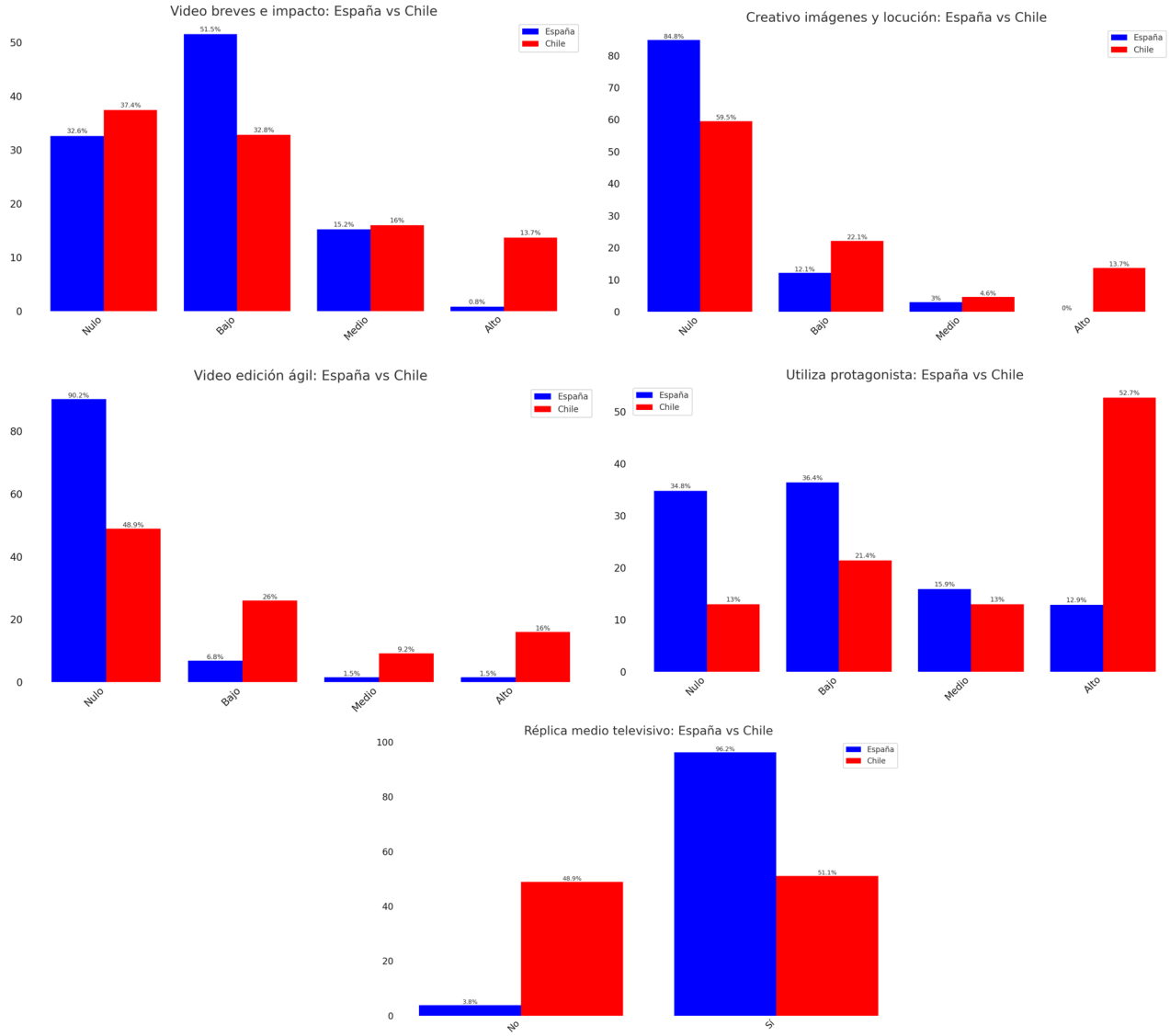
Figure 2. Comparison Spain and Chile in number of *likes* and comments



Source: Own elaboration, 2025.

Regarding the aspects related to the visual narratives and differentiating elements of the TikTok platform (Figure 3), it can be seen that the Spanish indices are around the low and zero levels for most of the attributes. This is particularly evident in the Spanish profiles, as the editing and creativity of the audiovisual product is low, fuelled by the fact that their content is usually not native to the platform. The situation tends to be a little more balanced when looking at the Chilean TV channels, since although they also have low or zero rates, the fact that they have practically 49% of original videos makes it possible to experiment with more editing, creativity with images and the use of a protagonist in the productions.

Figure 3. Comparison Spain and Chile in visual aspects and TikTok language



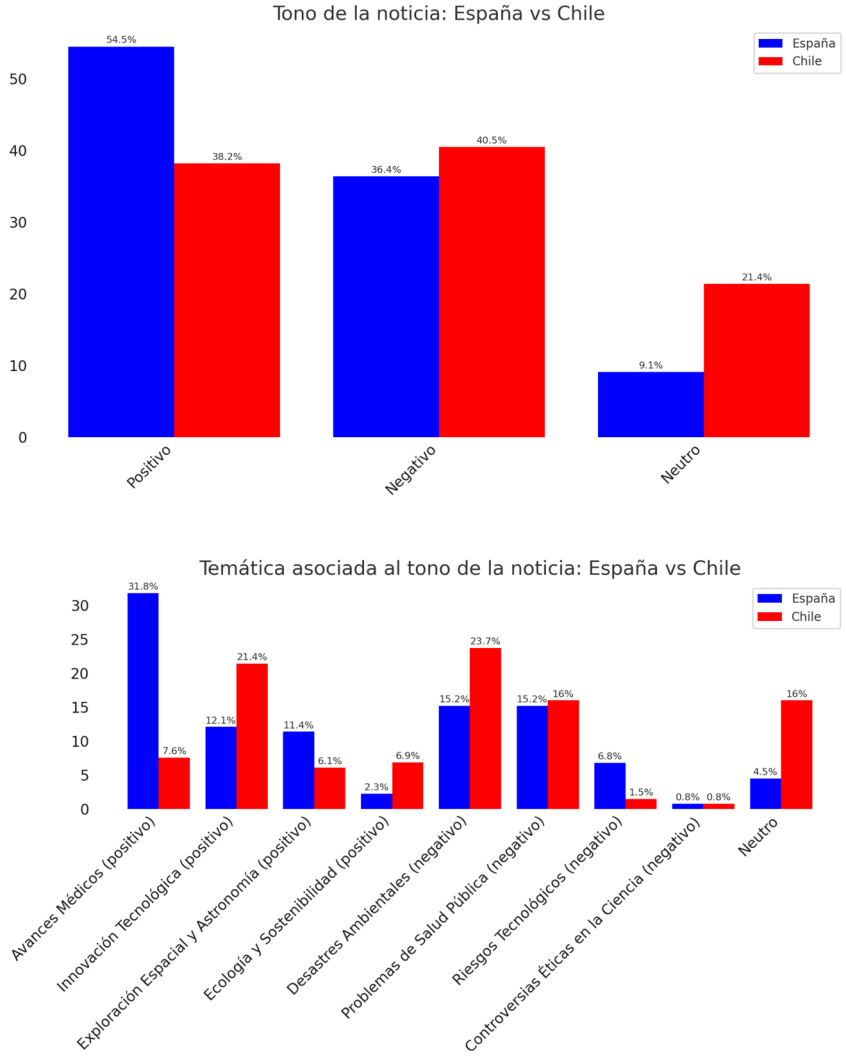
Source: Own elaboration, 2025.

3.2. Results Related to the Tone of the News and its Relation to Engagement

One of the main objectives of this work was to find out whether the information that these media outlets publish on TikTok tends to have a positive or negative tone, in order to be able to relate it to the acceptance that this content has among users, by measuring the number of comments and likes. In general, it was found that almost 55% of the news coming from Spain tends to be more positive, in contrast to Chile, where only 38% can be attributed to this tendency.

A more specific analysis of the topics covered in the publications shows that in Spain, news about medical advances dominates the positive approach, accounting for 31.8% of the sample. On the other hand, in Chile, the highest proportion of publications with a positive tone is related to technological innovations, reaching 21.4%. As for the content with a negative approach, in both Spain and Chile, news related to natural disasters make up the majority, with 15.2% and 23.7% respectively. Figure 4 provides a more detailed view of the results obtained and shows a notable presence of publications classified as neutral. These entries are characterised by the absence of a positive or negative tone, limiting themselves to a descriptive presentation of the facts with no clear emphasis.

Figure 4. Comparison between Spain and Chile in terms of news tone



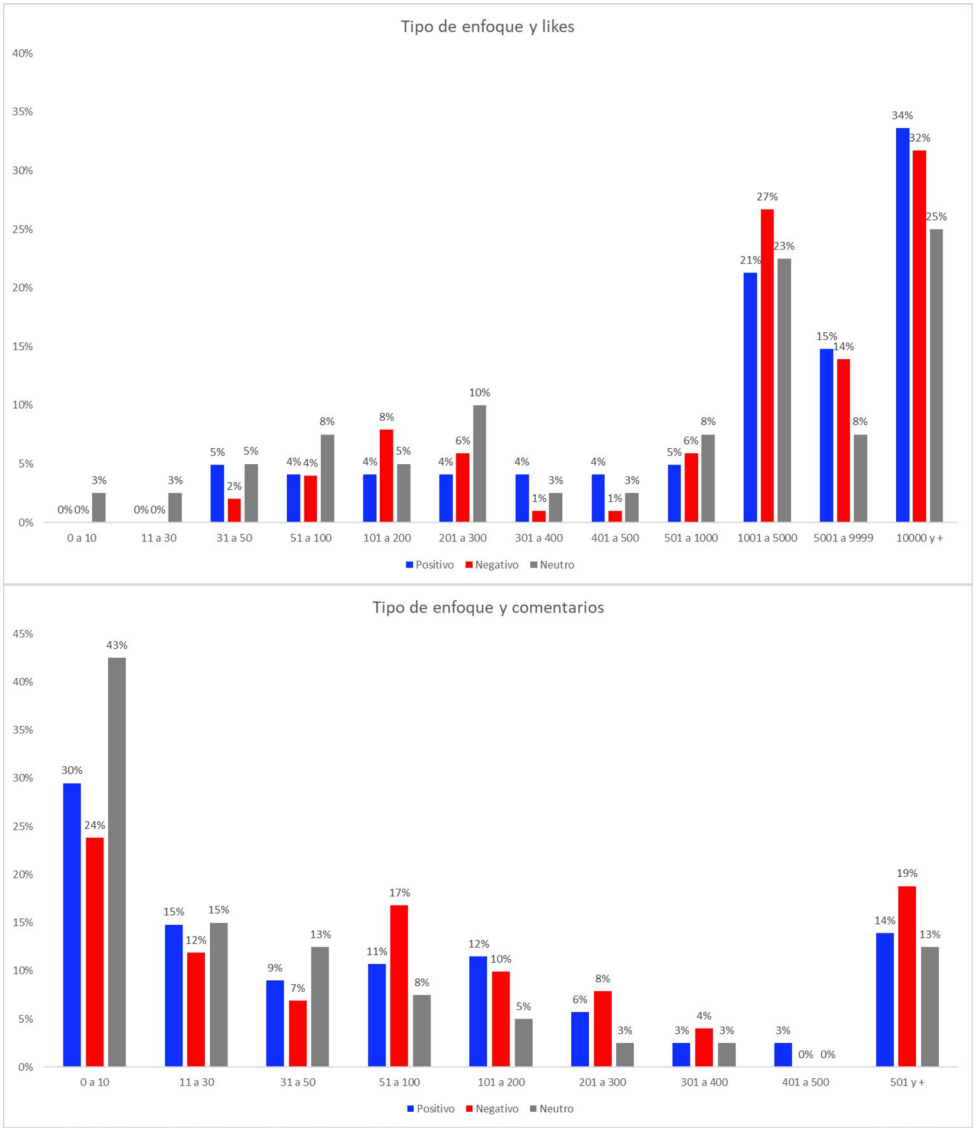
Source: Own elaboration, 2025.

Looking at the relationship between engagement and the tone of the message across the entire sample, posts with a positive tone tend to be concentrated in the higher levels of Approach Likes, and there may be a greater public receptivity to this type of content on platforms such as TikTok. For example, 34% of posts with a positive approach are in the 10,000 likes or more range, followed by 21% in the 1,001 to 5,000 likes range.

Although negative content also achieves high levels of engagement in terms of likes, its share is slightly lower than positive content. This could be due to differences in the audience's emotional perception or interest. In contrast, neutral content that lacks a clear emotional tone attracts less attention and has a more even distribution of counterpart likes, reflecting interactions that are consistent with the lower levels of likes.

In terms of comments, negative posts stand out for generating interaction across all ranks, with 19% concentrated at the highest level (over 501 comments). This suggests that negative content can drive audience engagement by evoking strong emotions. Posts with positive sentiment also achieve high levels of comments but are more concentrated in the lower and middle tiers (30% in the 0-10 comments tier and 15% in the 11-30 comments tier). On the other hand, neutral posts have the lowest interaction capacity, with 43% of posts in the lowest range (Figure 5).

Figure 5. Comparison of number of likes and Comments in terms of the approach (tone) of the news item



Source: Own elaboration, 2025.

4. Discussion and Conclusions

On 19 January 2025, the global digital ecosystem witnessed an unprecedented event: the TikTok platform announced the suspension of its operations in the United States, due to legislation prohibiting it from operating in that territory. This had a significant impact, affecting hundreds of thousands of accounts belonging to content creators, institutions and commercial companies that depended on this network for their communication and economic activities (Gardel, 2025). Although the measure was reversed after a few hours, it demonstrated the importance of this social network to the global community and the use that is made of it, not only as an entertainment application, but also as a platform for disseminating information to millions of users.

In a context characterised by a sustained decline in information consumption through traditional media (Newman et al., 2024) and the growing phenomenon of the digital exodus, in which many users opt to abandon the production and consumption of content on platforms such as X (Agius, 2024), TikTok is emerging as a widespread communication alternative. Known for its predominantly creative, light-hearted and entertainment-oriented approach (Cheng and Li, 2024), this social network has established itself as an attractive space, particularly for the dissemination of scientific content, offering new opportunities for interaction and outreach to diverse audiences.

The analysis presented here positions this platform as an innovative network for scientific communication and as conducive to audience interaction. The results obtained allow us to tentatively conclude that tone of voice influences user engagement rates.

In relation to RQ.1, the main narratives and audiovisual languages used by broadcasters to adapt science news on TikTok were identified. The results show that, in general, they do not take full advantage of the creative tools offered by the platform for scientific dissemination. Previous studies (Martin-Neira et al., 2023b; Vázquez-Herrero et al., 2021) have shown that TV channels tend to reuse content originally broadcast in their news programmes, without making meaningful or innovative adaptations for digital audiences. This results in the prevalence of monotonous videos that lack creativity in both the use of images and sound. Although outstanding cases have been identified, especially in the Chilean profile, what Costa-Sánchez et al. (2015) call "replicating journalism" persists, that is, the publication of practically identical news content on different platforms, without taking into account the specificities of the users and the characteristics of each medium. This is reflected, for example, in the fact that practically 97% of the Spanish sample are publications that reproduce exactly what appeared on television, without further adaptation to the language of the application or the inclusion of post-production elements. Thus, video editing, the use of visual elements such as GIFs or stickers, the presence of a protagonist to guide the content and the use of voice-overs are not aspects that the profiles analysed tend to use.

RQ.2 investigated whether news profiles on TikTok tend to prioritise a positive or negative tone in their posts on science topics. The results show significant differences between the national contexts analysed. In Spain, media outlets tend to use a more positive tone, especially when dealing with issues related to medical progress. This finding is in line with previous research highlighting how health content is one of the preferred topics in TikTok (Kong et al., 2021; Micaletto-Belda, 2024). In contrast, in Chile, scientific publications tend to take a more negative approach, with a strong preference for information related to environmental disasters. In this context, climate change is often presented in a catastrophic way, emphasising the consequences and impacts of these events (Nieto-Sandoval and Ferré-Pavia, 2023; Sun et al., 2024), rather than solutions or explanations that allow us to understand what is happening.

Regarding RQ.3, which investigated the relationship between the tone of scientific publications and interaction metrics, one element is clear and is explained by Lai (2022) in his study on the influence of emotions on TikTok consumption. The emotions generated by a piece of content play a fundamental role in how a person processes and responds to information.

The results confirm that content with a negative tone tends to generate a higher number of comments on social networks (Schöne et al., 2023), and audiovisual content presented with a negative approach has more audience participation through likes and comments than those presented with a positive approach (Cheng and Li, 2024; Wang and Li, 2024). Several studies have shown that negative information tends to be prioritised over positive information in the media, a trend that is on the rise, especially in the digital context, and this tends to generate more traffic on their platforms (Bruun Overgaard, 2023; Flores-Leiva, 2024; Linares 2022). It has also been shown that a publication containing words or phrases that can be attributed to something negative, such as fear or anger, increases the consumption rate of the audience (Robertson et al., 2023).

This research highlights the importance of understanding whether science topics and news tones influence engagement on a network such as TikTok. Although the results show a significant trend towards more likes for positive news and more comments for negative news, there is a need to further explore how audiences respond to different news approaches, especially in the context of science outreach, taking into account other factors.

It is important to recognise that, at a general level, the metric success of a publication should not be narrowly focused. A variety of factors should be considered when audiences express their opinion or attachment to particular content, suggesting that interaction, whether positive or negative, results from a complex combination of elements. Previous studies have suggested that the visual component, integrated with s distinctive TikTok language', along with the types of videos and the platform's own algorithmic and collaborative features, play a crucial role in generating successful posts (Cheng and Li, 2024; Martin-Neira et al., 2023a; Velarde-Camaqui et al., 2024), which raises the need to explore other elements that may be determinants of interaction, such as the time of broadcast, the contextual circumstances that may influence users' perception of a topic, the protagonists of the video, or the visual

quality of the posts. This has direct implications for communication teams, information centres and science communicators. It would allow them to optimise their efforts in presenting publications and maximising their impact on the social network.

However, it is not only the format in which information is reproduced that needs to be considered. It is essential to prioritise the quality of publications, ensuring the use of verified data, the consultation of verifiable sources and the representation of different scientific perspectives, in order to provide a complete and rigorous view of the scientific realities of each context.

Regarding the limitations of this work, it is important to recognise that a larger sample, including different television channels from other Ibero-American countries in addition to Spain and Chile, could provide more generalisable and robust results on the relationships identified, thus allowing for correlations that could allow for the identification of statistically significant associations. Although this analysis has focused on two countries that share certain similarities in their communication channels, it is not appropriate to extrapolate these results to the Spanish-speaking world as a whole, and they may not even be representative of the totality of the dynamics present in Spain and Chile.

Another important limitation lies in the difficulty of classifying certain content into strictly positive or negative categories, which led them to be placed in the neutral category. This fact highlights the need to rethink and broaden the definitions of the categories of analysis, allowing for greater flexibility in classification and a more nuanced understanding of content that could generate positive or negative perceptions.

For future research, it would be relevant to include the analysis of cultural differences between the countries studied. For example, audiences in Spain and Chile may have different perceptions of the tone of science news, as what may be interpreted as positive in one cultural context may not be perceived in the same way in another. For example, it would be interesting to know why the media in Spain tend to have a positive tone, given that most of the information comes directly from television. Is it the content created for television that has a greater tendency towards constructive journalism and, because it is reproduced, is this reproduced in the social network?

There is also a need to refine the concepts associated with engagement. In this study, the metrics analysed were limited to 'likes' and comments, but it would be relevant to consider additional variables such as the time spent watching videos, the number of times posts are shared or saved, and other interactions that reflect the real impact of the messages.

Despite these limitations, this study represents a valuable first approach to analysing how science news approaches and topics influence interaction on a platform like TikTok. The findings not only open up new questions but also raise challenges about how to optimise the use of language and the characteristics of this social network to maximise the reach and impact of science content.

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