



## TRUMP'S PERFORMATIVITY ON INSTAGRAM

### A Study of the Strategies Utilised to Construct Identities, Representations and Legitimacies During the US Election Campaign

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#### KEYWORDS

*Performativity*  
*Instagram*  
*Digital strategies*  
*Political marketing*  
*Electoral campaigns*  
*Political identities*  
*Political representations*

#### ABSTRACT

*In a context determined by the frameworks of action of the discursive power of political actors constituted by technology, performativity transcends dichotomous schemas to understand power relations. The present study sets out to ascertain the efficacy of the strategies employed by Trump on Instagram during the election campaign in the creation of identities, representations and legitimacies. The results of the content analysis demonstrate how the establishment of a particular political identity ultimately serves as the articulation of legitimised social power, thereby transforming the symbol into an icon, a myth and, in the final analysis, into effective power.*

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## 1. Introduction

The concept of performativity, in itself, is a capacity that is professed and maintained around a set of concrete expressions that, in their implicit interest, through the actions represented, seek to transform reality or the immediate environment in which they occur and happen. In the case of Donald Trump, presidential candidate for the 2024 US presidential elections, this is already evident in his distinctive, almost instinctive and natural presence. Having been sufficiently shaped in his role and dimension as a political actor, having been recognised, in his particular ways and expressions, as having an innate ability to influence, through the creation of a political identity offered to his followers and voters, he acts as a true harbinger and claim to a characteristic but striking political leadership. Significantly, the present study aims to delve into the forms and strategies that make action and performative representation a particular way of achieving legitimacy and effective power. However, the issue remains an intricate component of a multifaceted social phenomenon, which, from a cultural and political vantage point, offers insights into its own implications. Consequently, it is inextricably linked to a social representative process through which each actor, be they individual or collective, endeavours to articulate and exchange their own meanings with others. Those meanings, in turn, are subject to acceptance and legitimisation, whether conscious or unconscious.

The present object of study has been constituted through the recognition of the actions and performative elements that are recognised and concur in the figure of Donald Trump. These elements have contributed to the definition not only of identity, but also of collective representations and legitimacies through a set of symbols, codes, narratives and stagings that, in the paradigmatic case of the social network Instagram, have been instrumental in shaping the social power that was effectively resolved in the results obtained by the Republican candidate in his re-election when he won the electoral victory in the sixtieth US presidential elections.

### 1.1. A Cross-Border, Multidisciplinary Concept

We are dealing with a transversal concept that, due to its particular representative character, has been able to exchange and transcend the authentic and specific fields of sociology, social psychology and theatrical dramaturgy, among others.

In sociological terms, performativity is identified with the current of what is known as symbolic interactionism, which recognises the vital importance of social interaction, the function of which is anchored in the process that allows the formation of human behaviours that occur in interaction with others, involving the orientation of these behaviours and the management of certain situations (Blumer, 1992). As Mead (1972) points out, there are two possible forms of social interaction in society, which he calls the "conversation of gestures" and the "use of symbols". Both features are perceived in the performative nature of the social actions that our object of study encompasses. To such an extent that, within the epistemological limits established by the former, it is precisely this interaction that cannot but be seen as a meaningful display of gestures and, through them, a response to the corresponding meanings.

It is therefore registered how the symbol, meaning and interaction are significant elements that operate from the very theory of symbolic interactionism, coinciding with those of performativity, resolving that the purely electoral social context is opportunely persisted as a transcendental issue and, therefore, relevant beyond the conceptual and anecdotal (Benzies & Allen, 2001).

Thus, symbolic interactionism argues that although individuals act socially according to the expectations or manifestations of other actors, this interaction is itself a communicative process based on verbal and non-verbal codes and languages. This process involves discourses, gestures, routines, symbols and cultural meanings. In this sense, by bringing these elements into play, a diversity of attitudes is recognised, thanks to the representation of the roles assumed, which imply the assumption of certain attitudes with regard to the patterns of action and behaviour corresponding to the different circumstances, such as those that can be seen in one's own daily practice.

Although, by extension, performativity has explored its meanings and interpretations within the semantic field of theatrical dramaturgy, it has also considered its political implications, which in turn have been sufficiently clarified by the contributions of contemporary theorists such as Jeffrey Alexander (2017) and Michael Saward (2017), among others.

It is clear, therefore, that if performativity succeeds in bringing together the use of theatrical elements in its supposed quest to establish a relationship with individuals with the intention of wanting to produce a significant effect. As Puga (2024) states, applied to the political sphere: "the concept refers to the scenic dimension that accompanies almost all political actions, from the speeches of candidates to the exercise of a government position" (p. 1).

It has been shown that dramaturgy is a deliberate and planned link, capable of establishing sufficient and necessary connections to elicit a rational and emotional response or reaction from the audience. Therefore, when performativity becomes a channel of expression in such situations, it not only integrates the story or the position of the actors, but also transcends the staging, the script, the gestures and the strategy itself, promoting emotion, identification or understanding and adherence to a message before the audience (Saward, 2017).

### **1.2. Political Performativity: Between Action and Decision**

There is no denying the contribution of performativity in terms of the closed theatrical representation and the power that the stage gives it, and that it has historically given the audience a sea of possibilities every time it has been experienced. From ancient times, the Greeks saw how the theatre responded to considerations that already included the influences and consequences of power.

As a useful concept, however, its application in the exercise of politics is limited by the premise that "whoever does politics needs, in more than one moment, a good performance" (Puga, 2024 p. 2). Thus, it is in this acknowledged inference of action that the politician, through performativity, seeks to maintain, especially in the context of the electoral campaign, a careful staging conditioned not only by physical appearance, speech, voice, slogan or gesture that identifies them, but also in terms of emotions and prototypical narratives that each presidential candidate is capable of constructing (Wilches et al., 2023).

This is why the teams of advisers and strategists decide to include it, since it allows them to create and transform audiences in order to achieve their greatest communicative effectiveness in terms of the response or reaction that they are able to provoke in them (Ostiguy et al., 2021). In this respect, there are sufficient reasons to affirm, in line with Alexander (2017), that 'power is above all performative' (p. 250).

This power has manifested itself in so many examples throughout history, because it has been memorable for the visual dimension, the symbolic content and the impact that the performative action occupies and produces (Puga, 2024), alluding, in its adaptation and integration, to a series of elements - actors, scenarios, symbols, languages and narratives - that, imbued with the character of representation with which "symbolic politics" is presupposed, operates, which, invested with the character of representation with which "symbolic politics" is assumed, operate socially and culturally in the sphere of an electoral campaign, making it, precisely, a central and decisive factor for the concentration of power (Camezzana & López, 2017; Contreras Alcántara, 2012; Camezzana & López, 2012).

In this transfer, which makes it possible to move the action to a political decision, it is therefore the political actors who are forced and confronted with the performances in order to achieve the democratic struggle for power, which, as Alexander (2017) suggests, means having to: "recasting the audience with the speaker, connecting members of civil society through a successful performance". He concludes that: "Those who seek power need to be elected, but they will not get the votes they need if they cannot make their performances work" (p.146).

This is what allows political performativity to be considered, in a different order of things, as an effective guarantee resource for mobilisation, assuming the theories of social mobilisation that consider it as a precedent in terms of the conformation of certain "repertoires" which, in the end, are a key slogan as elements of support - by including rituals, marches, chants, pantomimes, posters, slogans, etc. - that work in the diffusion of a common message. - which work on the diffusion of a claim that ends up being shared with others, trying to make an impression on the public in order to reach the sum of followers around the cause being promoted. which work on the diffusion of a claim that ends up being shared with others, trying to make an impression on the public in order to reach the sum of followers around the cause being promoted (Orellana Águila, 2021; Oyarce Pizarro, 2021; Schechner, 2005; Tilly, 1986). In the last two decades, in the context of social networks, performativity has been extended in terms of its influence.

In any exercise of mobilisation and power - such as a presidential election - performance, as a legitimate representative action, is subject, as Butler (2004) argues, to a series of cultural, symbolic and even ritual elements that seek to offer and guarantee meaning to the society towards which it is directed and directed. An intended effect attributed to it is the arousal and exaltation of emotions that contribute to the creation of a sense of identity and a feeling of belonging to the cause, the discourse, as well as to the political party itself and to the person or candidate in question (Albo & Sánchez, 2021; González & Sánchez, 2017).

In this way, 'when used well, it becomes a recommendable resource that both strengthens the image of political actors and gives meaning to popular demands' (Puga, 2024: 3). In any case, the analysis of political performativity allows us to understand the success of those who make use of it, even if it is recognised by others as a manifest capacity through which political expressions themselves end up becoming actions and concrete decisions that end up transforming reality and the environment (Han, 2014).

### **1.3. The Performative Experience on Instagram**

Instagram is a performative sphere from which to profess power in its political manifestation as a social and cultural construction that has positioned itself strongly in the context of an electoral campaign such as the US 2024 election, and which constitutes a significant experience for this very character and consideration.

As social networks have become a fundamental strategic tool for campaign teams, in the particular case of Instagram it is perceived in a more urgent and particular way. For this reason, it is one of the most influential networks used by political actors in recent times, as it has been de facto incorporated into their respective communication and political marketing strategies (Lipschultz, 2022; Pineda et al., 2020; Sánchez & De Aguilera, 2023).

Among other reasons, this network, precisely because of its own characteristics, is able to capture and value, in its specificity, the performative value of the image in terms of its permanent visual and iconic charge, which is derived as the basis of its functioning and of the interactions and exchanges that take place. It thus allows the arrangement and activation of repertoires, collective representations and even the ordering of themes and frames in order to gain legitimacy among supporters and voters, thanks to its use as a strategic platform for political communication and as a means of performative action, to which it responds by unleashing its effects through the image (Tirado & Doménech, 2021; Towner & Lego, 2018).

In short, it is a constitutive tool for the effective exercise of political communication by candidates, as confirmed by numerous studies, given the influence of the image as a derivation and expression in itself of the performative action itself (Moreno, 2022; Olof, 2023; Selva & Caro, 2017). Therefore, it has been demonstrated how the personalisation of the political actor is resolved, the ritual iconicity of his image giving way to phenomena such as the mythification and humanisation of his political profile, as well as the stereotyping itself or the distribution of the representations and repertoires that he accumulates (Farkas & Bene, 2021; Quevedo & Portalés Oliva, 2017).

This determines that its use is also shaped by the performative experience, as this social network in itself favours the personalisation and viralisation of the candidate's political image as a social and cultural construction (Bimber, 2014).

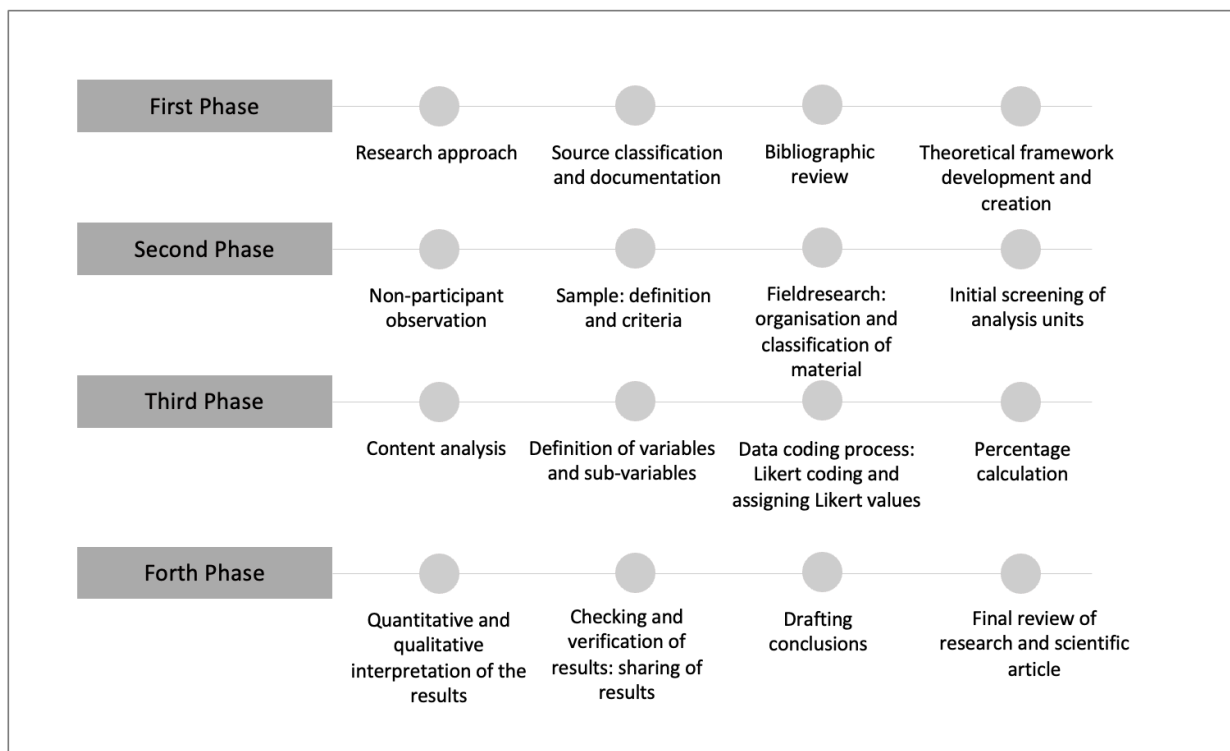
Beyond its paradigmatic nature, the importance that performativity acquires as a strategic ally is a response to the irrefutable desire to achieve the experimentation of the symbolic image that digital platforms such as this allow and contextualise. Which, finally, as Del Rey Morató (2007) suggests, shows that we have already moved from a "teledemocracy" to a consolidated "cyberdemocracy", as evidenced by the media and strategic resources that are acquiring a central role in today's electoral political communication campaigns.

## **2. Methodology**

The research adopts a two-dimensional methodology incorporating two distinctly different approaches: qualitative and quantitative. The study is structured around four phases of analysis, specifying the use of the following research techniques: Non-Participant Observation (NPO) and Content Analysis (CA), employed in the initial phase, focused on a systematic review of the extant literature on performativity, its forms and its power relations. This served as a starting point to lay the fundamental foundations of

the study. The final phase corresponds to the interpretation and drafting of the results, which are recorded in the conclusions section.

**Figure 1.** Phases of the research and main techniques.



Source: own elaboration, 2025.

### 2.1. Phases of the Investigation and Main Techniques

In the initial phase, the research approach was defined, encompassing the establishment of its objectives and primary methodologies. Concurrently, the decision was made to integrate the subject of study within a robust theoretical framework, thereby ensuring the research's foundation and support. To this end, a comprehensive bibliographic review was conducted, encompassing a diverse array of primary and secondary sources. This approach was necessitated by the acknowledged multidisciplinary character of the subject.

A subsequent phase demanded the practical implementation of ONP, which facilitated the establishment and in-depth exploration of the research phenomenon determined through direct verifications of the phenomenon, utilising its exploratory possibilities on the performative action of Donald Trump through his social network on Instagram. This approach is deemed opportune, as it is a technique in itself that is of interest precisely because it is: "the most systematised and logical form for the visual and verifiable recording of what we want to know (...) capable of capturing as objectively as possible what happens in the real world in order to describe it, analyse it or explain it scientifically" (Campos Covarrubia et al., 2011, p. 48). This technique has thus enabled the utilisation of all possible senses, the investigated reality in an empirical and theoretical way, to understand it from the initial viewing of the corresponding units of analysis. In a third stage, a content analysis was carried out on the 127 publications (n=127) distributed by the candidate on Instagram during the study period. The time frame encompasses October and November 2024, a period coinciding with the US presidential election campaign, a time of significant effort and communicative interest from the perspective of digital political communication. To this end, the relevant variables of analysis were established in accordance with the methodological proposal of Alexander (2017). The specific elements of performativity were identified with the aim of recognising the number of ways and means employed by Trump in his efforts to secure his position as a candidate and/or political leader. These strategies are developed in a context of



electoral competition in the digital sphere, which served as an instrument for the construction of identities, representations and legitimacy

These variables, 5 in total, have been shaped and integrated by the different elements of performativity whose active resource maintains its impact on the effective power for those who seek to obtain legitimacy through them, having established the following for the intended analysis: (V1) Actors, (V2) Staging: staging, (V3) Iconicity: means of symbolic production, (V4) Collective representations, (V5) Audience: engagement or expression of social power.

Consequently, these have constituted a series of sub-variables (SubV), thereby determining a total of 20, as illustrated in the following Figure 2. This figure contains the file designed for the recording and coding of data based on these variables and sub-variables. In turn, these have centralised and structured the analysis carried out.

**Figure 2.** Data recording and coding sheet. Analysis variables and sub-variables.

<b>(V1)- ACTORS</b>		<b>(V2)- STAGING</b>		<b>(V3)- ICONICITY: MEANS OF SYMBOLIC PRODUCTION</b>	
<b>(SubV1)-A</b> A Leading actor in a leading role	<b>(SubV1)-B</b> Complementary supporting actor	<b>(SubV2)-A</b> A Formal ritualist	<b>(SubV2)-B</b> Informal ritualist	<b>(SubV3)-A</b> Campaign slogans and emblems	<b>(SubV3)-B</b> Personal symbols
<b>(SubV1)-C</b> Leading actor	<b>(SubV1)-D</b> Accompanied actor (cultural/social actor, voters, collectives and organisations)	<b>(SubV2)-C</b> Theatrical and/or dramatised	<b>(SubV3)-D</b> Circumstantial planned	<b>(SubV3)-C</b> National or patriotic symbols	<b>(SubV3)-D</b> Iconic gestures
<b>(V4)- COLLECTIVE REPRESENTATIONS: NARRATIVES</b>			<b>(V5)- AUDIENCE ENGAGEMENT</b>		
<b>(SubV4)-A</b> Narrative and/or nostalgic rhetoric	<b>(SubV4)-B</b> Narrative and/or defensive rhetoric	<b>(SubV4)-C</b> Narrative and/or instrumental rhetoric	<b>(SubV5)-A</b> Likes	<b>(SubV5)-B</b> Comments	<b>(SubV5)-C</b> Share
<b>(SubV4)-D</b> Utilitarian rhetorical narrative		<b>(SubV4)-E</b> Opposing narrative and/or rhetoric			

**(V):** Variable **(SubV):** Subvariable

Source: own elaboration following Alexander (2017), 2025

Accordingly, elements of social performance, as classified by Alexander (2017, pp. 122-123), whose descriptions are based on the following processes and meanings, are recorded in such a way: (V1) Actors: individual, group or organisation that manifest themselves in different ways; (V2) Staging: component that allows the movements made by the actors to be organised in time and space together with other ritual and/or dramatised elements - voice tone, lighting, etc.; (V3) Iconicity and means of symbolic production: they contribute to communicating the representations by requiring the actor to use real material elements that are conveniently predefined so that the message can be projected - stage, lighting, etc. (V3) Iconicity and means of symbolic production: they contribute to communicate the representations by requiring the actor to use real material elements, conveniently predefined, so that the message can be projected - scenery, props, symbols, gestures, slogans, etc. (V4) Collective representations: they refer to the languages and narratives used by the actors, words and phrases, which articulate a set of collective representations that refer to the symbolic references of each speech act; (V5) Audience: element that allows or prevents the effective projection of meanings and their acceptance through the legitimisation that it grants them, conceptually assuming in the specific context of social networks the engagement as an articulated social power by which they are constructed and exchanged from such interactions. This content analysis is based on the assertion that: "each performance is determined by the elements described above, empirically, but taken together they determine and measure whether and how the performance takes place, together testing the degree to

which its outcome is successful or unsuccessful" (Alexander, 2017, p. 69). This model allows for a more precise and deeper understanding of the nature of each factor and their interrelationships.

Consequently, for each performative variable, distinct sub-variables have been operationalised, employing an interval scale in each instance to ensure enhanced precision in the analysis of the data. The coding process has been informed by the reproducibility and applicability of the Likert measurement scale, which, in this context, encompasses the following values: 1 (Not at all), 2 (Very little), 3 (Neither much nor little), 4 (Quite a lot), 5 (A lot). The introduction of an intermediate value not only provided greater empirical consistency to the data recorded, but also, given the possibilities of the instrument used, ensured their reliability and validity. Once the data from the analysis had been recorded and verified, their percentages were calculated to accurately reflect the recurrent presence of performative elements in Donald Trump's Instagram profile. These elements constitute a performative campaign strategy that not only strengthens his image as a presidential candidate through the construction of a defined symbolic identity but also allows him to articulate and give meaning to collective representations associated with his political profile.

Conversely, it is imperative to delineate the calculations established for the content analysis, with regard to the acquisition of their percentage value, as operationalised and defined on the basis of the mean of the 127 publications constituting the respective units of analysis. This is attributable to their multivariate and cumulative behaviour, which precludes their expression through alternative means.

Finally, it is also worth mentioning that the research has focused its final course on the actual practice of various quantitative and qualitative interpretations of the data that have led to the drawing and drafting of the conclusions that will be presented in the corresponding section.

## 2.2. Sample

The sample under consideration consists of a total of 127 publications (n=127) extracted from the public profile (@realdonaldtrump). The different units of analysis can be consulted in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Description of the sample and the corresponding units of analysis.

Photographs	Carousel	Videos
(31) Poster with advertisement	(24) Carousel of images	(11) Vertical videos
(14) Poster with photograph		(38) Horizontal videos
(9) Individual photography		

Source: own elaboration, 2025.

The selection of the sample was determined by the following criteria: 1) the publications in question were required to correspond exclusively to the period of the electoral campaign between 21 October and 5 November 2024; 2) they were to be characterised by and representative of performativity, given the characteristic value of the image in this social network; 3) that they were public in order to be able to contrast the validity and scope of the results obtained; and 4) to ensure the representativeness of the same according to the full extent of the study period determined, as this character also ensures the consistency of the analyses carried out.

## 3. Objectives and Hypotheses

The general objective and the main research hypothesis as well as the secondary objectives are defined below.

### 3.1. General Objective

The primary objective of this study is to examine Trump's utilisation of Instagram as a medium to ascertain the efficacy of his performative strategies in shaping identities, representations and legitimacy during the election campaign.

The central hypothesis of this study is that the performative character that distinguishes his identity as an actor and political candidate has transcended to others by having aroused and aroused interest in his representations derived from his own performative actions. These actions have been exponentially validated and effective through a social network that gives the image and representation a significant value, having been able to encourage and promote identities, representations and legitimacy that have had an impact, at least indirectly, on voters and the vote.

### 3.2. Specific Objectives

The following aspects are of particular relevance:

SO 1: Analyse the digital strategies related to Trump's performativity on Instagram that are fundamental to his identity and determination as a political candidate.

SO 2: To explore how through performative actions on Instagram the political actor has managed to construct concrete identities, representations and legitimisations.

SO 3: To investigate the effects of influence that performativity and Instagram have had, jointly, to "favour" the consolidation of an effective power, that of Trump, derived from such a phenomenon.

SO 4: To ascertain whether Trump's scenic, symbolic and visual strategies on Instagram have constituted effective and decisive performative elements for the electorate during the US election campaign.

## 4. Analysis and Results

In accordance with the methodology described, and in consideration of the research objectives defined, the main results achieved in its development are hereby presented.

### 4.1. Quantitative Analysis and Results

The data obtained, following conversion to a Likert scale, indicates a predominance of the identity and representation of Donald Trump as the primary actor and/or protagonist within the (V1) Actors category. This is characterised by a total of 21 publications associated with such a profile, positioned intermediate (value 3) on the scale, neither excessively nor insufficiently represented. Conversely, as a secondary and/or complementary actor, his position is residual, with only 3 publications, signifying that his representation in this sense, within the scale, is low (value 2).

The accompanied actor register is perceived as the one with the highest reach and representation, with 61 posts. When observed in conjunction with supporters, voters, collectives, organisations, or other leaders, the value of 5 (a lot) is obtained on his Instagram profile @realdonaldtrump.

The percentage distribution of the sub-variables is thus comprised of 16% as the main actor, 3% as a secondary actor, 8.6% as the solitary actor, and 48% as an accompaniment.

**Table 2.** Variable 1 - Actors.

(V1)	Number of publications	Likert Scale Value
Leading actor in a leading role	21	3
Complementary supporting actor	3	2
actor	11	2
actor	61	5

Source: own elaboration, 2025.

In relation to staging (V2), it has been determined that the majority of publications exhibit a performative pattern of formal rituality, with a total of 95 publications identified. The republican candidate is thus depicted on the basis of identities and specific characteristic representations of the expression of formal power, achieving a value of 5 (a substantial amount). However, it should be noted



that these are closely related to theatricalisation and dramatisation as an iconic value of his identity and symbolic political representation. The candidate is present in this way in the images of political rallies, as these are the main events of his campaign, in whose representations he appears as such on a number of occasions (value 4), registering 60 publications in which he is perceived from such a performative association.

As demonstrated in the subsequent table, the informal ritualistic staging, comprising only 5 of the publications evaluated, in conjunction with the planned circumstantial staging (13), both sub-variables correlated with each other and referring to images derived from familiar performative actions or reflecting popular scenes or everyday life, are residual (value 2: not very much) and/or indistinct (value 3: neither little) and/or indistinct (value 3: neither much nor little) in comparison with the previous categories; which accredits and demonstrates the perfectly deliberate and planned nature of the performativity that is intuited as a strategy and efficient value in the construction of his identity as a political candidate and as a representational resource capable of achieving the desired legitimacy.

With respect to the percentage calculation of these sub-variables, the following results have been defined for V2: 74% corresponds to formal rituality, 47.25% is linked to the theatricality of the performative actions used by the Republican candidate in the US elections of 2024, 10.2% is related to planned circumstantial actions and, finally, 3.9% corresponds to informal rituality.

**Table 3.** Variable 2 - Staging.

<b>(V2)</b>	<b>Number of</b>	<b>Likert Scale Value</b>
Formal ritualist	95	5
Informal ritualist	5	2
Theatrical and/or dramatised	60	4
Circumstantial planned	13	3

Source: own elaboration, 2025.

According to V3, the performative iconicity derived from the means of symbolic production used by Trump during the electoral campaign is evident in the raising and bringing together of collective sensibilities and representations based on emblems, personal and patriotic symbols, spaces and gestures reproduced in his public profile. The very context of what the "electoral contest and/or battle" itself represents and means, is recorded in the excessively exponential use of both emblems and campaign slogans (value 5: a lot), with these being widely represented in 120 publications, as well as the performative use of patriotic symbols, recorded in 121. In conjunction with the distinguished personal symbolic symbols, which are perceived and represented in a broad value, with a score of 4 (quite a lot) on the Likert scale, thus ensuring a prominent presence in 84 of the units. However, in 53 of the units, the candidate's iconic gestures are neither excessive nor insufficient, but rather occupy the median range of 3 on the scale of measurement employed, thereby facilitating a comprehensive understanding of the interplay among these components and the other elements. This observation underscores the dynamics of their interplay. The iconicity between the forged personality of the political figure projected through them and the signifier of the meanings that their respective uses are intended to infringe in their specific function of collective appropriation, which end up being shared out among the electorate due, in turn, to the performative referential character that such iconicities have.

A detailed analysis of the campaign publications revealed that 94% contained campaign emblems and slogans, 66% featured the candidate's personal symbols, 95.2% incorporated national and patriotic symbols, and 41.7% included gestures that were indicative of the person being represented, thereby expressing both an identity and a concrete political representation.

**Table 4.** Variable 3 - Iconicity: means of symbolic production.

<b>(V3) Iconicity: means of symbolic production</b>	<b>Number of</b>	<b>Likert Scale Value</b>
Campaign slogans and emblems	120	5
Personal symbols	84	4
National or patriotic symbols	121	5
Iconic gestures	53	3

Source: own elaboration, 2025.

With regard to V4, which is another of the sub-variables that admits and combines the most sub-variables, the various collective representations reveal through the narratives explored those nostalgic narratives, in references to the American historical past, are contained in 94 publications, requiring a maximum rating of 5 points (a lot) determined by the measurement scale used. This is evident, for example, in the specific representation of the main campaign message: "Make America Great Again", which, intermingled with other representative rhetoric, has articulated various narratives, with instrumental narratives also being abundant in use (value 5: a lot) in 91 publications. They are followed by defensive narratives with a score of 4 on the measurement scale, indicating a high degree of employability. Intermediate values (score 3: neither a lot nor a little) include utilitarian narratives, recognised in 21 publications, and narratives against the opponent, which have reached the register of 39 publications.

In this sense, the following percentage distribution of use has been confirmed for V4: 74% nostalgic narratives, 54% defensive, 7.1% instrumental, 30.7% against the opponent and 16.5% utilitarian.

**Table 5.** Variable 4 - Collective representations: narratives.

<b>(V4) Collective representations:</b>	<b>Number of</b>	<b>Scale Value</b>
Narrative and/or nostalgic rhetoric	94	5
Narrative and/or defensive rhetoric	54	4
Narrative and/or instrumental rhetoric	91	5
Utilitarian rhetorical narrative	21	3
Opposing narrative and/or rhetoric	39	3

Source: own elaboration, 2025.

With regard to V5, the high level of engagement exhibited by the candidate during the electoral campaign is of significance, as evidenced by the noteworthy publications, which amassed a total of 52,169,250 interactions. This calculation was derived using the following formula: (amount of interactions/number of followers) x 100. The average reach of the 127 publications was then calculated over the two-week campaign period. The resultant average engagement figure was 12.07%, which serves to demonstrate the candidate's social influence within the network. This figure is noteworthy not only for its own high level of engagement and performative strategies, but also for the relevance of the content to the followers of the account holder. It is further evidence, moreover, of the considerable rate of virality of the publications, although this figure is limited by the impossibility of accessing certain inherent metrics of the account that Donald Trump himself maintains active on the social network. The following table shows the coded data.

**Table 6.** Variable 5 - Audience: *engagement* (social power).

Likes	Comments	Share
44.094.900	5.744.466	2.329.884

Source: own elaboration, 2025.

## 4.2. Qualitative Analysis and Results

The following section details the qualitative results that have facilitated the identification of the set of performative elements recognised among the strategies employed by the candidate in his @realdonaldtrump profile, on the basis of the characteristic formats of the network.

### 4.2.1. Signage

It is notable that the individual publications, specifically the election propaganda posters published on the candidate's Instagram account, exhibited a distinctive design pattern. This pattern, from a performative perspective, incorporated the colours of the American flag and the name of each state, centred within the composition. A total of 31 posters were published over the 15 consecutive days of the campaign. The final poster reused the same arrangement, incorporating the central performative slogan that had become synonymous with the campaign: "Make America Great Again".

These posters were analysed based on the principles of performativity, and it was found that they incorporated salient features that contributed to the construction of a specific political identity. By appropriating the most iconic elements of the American nation, such as the colours of its flag, these posters appealed to the collective symbolism of the American nation.

A significant proportion of the publications that contain election posters accompanied by a photographic image (14 out of the total number observed) concentrate on the personality of the political leader. In these, Donald Trump is represented as the main actor or accompanied, while maintaining a formal ritual presence that is propagandistically viewed from the performative sphere.

**Figure 3.** Election propaganda posters



Source: Instagram: @realdonaldtrump, 2025.

Consequently, as is evident, both posters demonstrate the staging and dramatisation that is reproduced in them, seeking to elicit social support through the iconicity and representativeness of the image itself. This is based on the contexts to which they refer, namely his attempted assassination attempt in one case and the references to the past elections, which he considered an electoral fraud in the other.

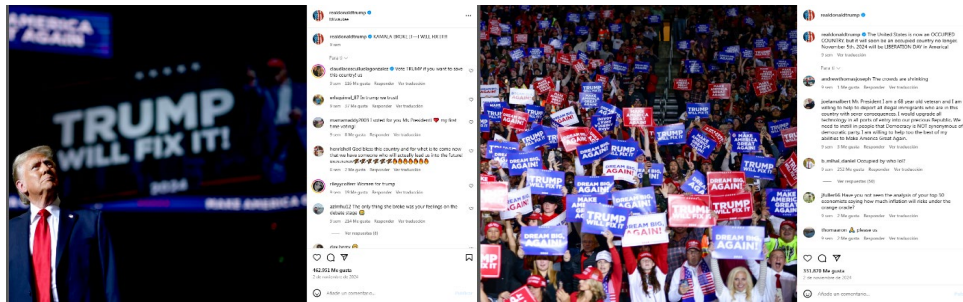
### 4.2.2. Individual Photographs

Individual publications have been observed to register iconic representations, as well as highly performative ones. Generally, it has been demonstrated that they visually resolve highly theatricalised scenes through the various images analysed, which stimulate and place the focus on Trump's symbolic

identity, not only as a solitary leader but also as a leader who is perfectly accompanied and able to arouse and gather the necessary support, surrounded by sympathisers, to achieve legitimacy at the ballot box.

In these publications, a recurrent pattern has been observed, wherein successive images, encompassing close-ups and a cinematic style, are employed to create a dynamic visual narrative. Additionally, these publications often feature prominent displays of the politician's supporters and entertainers. In both cases, these visual and performative forms are designed to stimulate a range of bases, including iconic attribution of meanings, messages, emblems and gestures. These forms are intended to strategically value and signify the significance of identity and representativeness in determining electoral outcomes.

Figure 4. Individual photographs.



Source: Instagram: @realdonaldtrump, 2025.

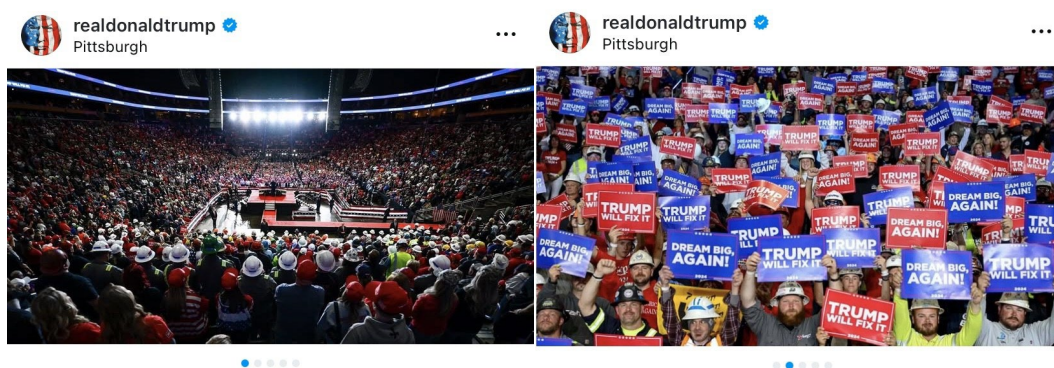
#### 4.2.3. Carousels

Carousels have been utilised to provide specific reports on the substantial political rallies that occurred during the development of the campaign, following a highly defined pattern, also with regard to these publications in the candidate's public profile.

It has become evident that the construction of a meticulously designed mise-en-scène, characterised by theatricality and planned arrangement, along with a distinguished formal ritualistic component, serves to reinforce the image of the candidate as a competent political leader. The candidate is presented as a "saviour" from whose representation he projects and exhibits himself, with the aim of convincing the public of his political aspirations and legitimising the iconicity and patriotic symbolism of his image through such public appearances and exhibitions.

A total of 26 publications of this nature have been documented, underscoring the emphasis on theatricality through the collective representativeness of the forms and expressions contained and manifested, on the other hand, in images of stadiums filled with spectators and supporters displaying posters with messages. These images capture the audience's reactions and emotions, which are then used and incorporated into the performative strategy as instruments of propagation of such collective identities and representations. This is a strategy that makes use of the structural and functional elements of social performance, as Alexander acknowledges.

Figure 5. Carousel of images from a political rally in Pittsburgh.



Source: Instagram: @realdonaldtrump, 2025.



#### 4.2.4. Videos

As a propitious support for performativity, they are one of the most widely used resources, so much so that the characteristic gestures of the candidate are manifested through them, as well as witnessing the arrangement of a more informal and spontaneous theatrical ritual or staging. In this sense, the candidate is represented in the most popularised forms and identities, allowing these formats to distribute representations that reproduce iconic scenes of concrete situations, such as driving a lorry, walking with his iconic red Republican colour or meeting the North American Cuban in a circumstantially planned meeting that evokes everyday habits.

This is without forgetting the function that these types of media fulfil, from a performative point of view, as a means of attack against the rival or opponent. The aforementioned advertisements, when considered collectively, appear to adhere to a similar structural paradigm. A notable illustration of this phenomenon can be observed in the instance published on the 2nd of November, wherein his direct political rival, the Democratic candidate Kamala Harris, makes an appearance during a political rally. This appearance is characterised by a discernible opposition in narrative identity, wherein she is depicted with an unfavourable image, situated within the contentious framework of a scene depicting immigrants illegally crossing borders. The scene is accentuated by a cold filter and disturbing music and is notable for its omission of symbolic elements associated with national and patriotic sentiment.

### 5. Conclusions

The manifest use of the widely recognised incorporation and integration of the performative elements in the specific political communication strategies on Instagram developed by the Republican candidate, Donald Trump, in a highly significant and efficient way during the electoral campaign registered on this same digital platform, through the profile that he kept constantly active and updated in accordance with these investigated actions.

On the basis of the results obtained, the main hypothesis is confirmed. The analysis of the performative elements employed by the candidate reveals not only a natural and instinctive manifestation of performativity in his profile, but also the construction of a distinct and characteristic political identity, serving as a foundation for his leadership. On the one hand, he has achieved the distribution of collective social representations and the distribution of these between his supporters and the potential electorate, including specific segments: young voters, the Latino population, among others. These segments have, in turn, influenced the forms and expressions as well as the repertoires created by these performative components and functions. These have, in turn, conferred a confirmed legitimacy on his political project and his personality as a candidate. This substantial social support, derived from these actions, enabled him to obtain highly representative and even differentiating electoral results with respect to his political rival.

Thus, with respect to the variables studied and the multiplicity of the sub-variables investigated, the elements of performativity are clearly resolved in a contained and concrete manner, which, thanks to these, have made him the bearer of the very identities. These elements, in turn, have contributed to the creation of a distinct set of collective representations and a form of social legitimacy that have been brought to bear by the politician in question. This underscores the notion that performance constitutes a singularly effective form of power, manifesting and projecting itself from these senses and meanings.

The quantitative results and the qualitative interpretations derived from the content analysis have both served to underscore his prominent position as a political actor, characterised by his protagonist profile, yet also his capacity to gather assets and support. Furthermore, his public exhibitions are characterised by meticulously crafted theatrics and formal rituals, which underscore his political persona, utilising rhetoric that is nostalgic, instrumental, and defensive, thereby reinforcing his positions through the medium of the narratives that these rituals disseminate among his supporters and potential voters.

This commitment is exemplified by the Republican candidate's strategic incorporation of iconic elements into his digital image strategies on Instagram, particularly the utilisation of symbolic elements associated with his personal identity, national symbols, and public representativeness. These elements, in conjunction with the spaces, scenarios, and gestures employed, serve to underscore the efficacy of iconicity in shaping the political actions and decisions of voters. Conversely, it can be posited that his



performance is, in another sense, a latent expression of social power, as evidenced by the high and overabundant engagement, as revealed by the interaction data presented.

Undoubtedly, his performativity is resolved as an instinct and also as a condition of his personality as a political actor, a candidate for re-election in the US elections of 2024, who knew how to make of it a strategic representative model. Furthermore, he strategically employed performativity to construct a political identity and social representations, both of which are crucial for attaining and asserting public legitimacy.

In essence, this underscores the notion that performativity is a manifestation of power, as posited by Alexander (2017). Consequently, it can be argued that Trump exemplifies this characteristic manifestation of power. This is evidenced by the president's adeptness at converting performativity into a consummate exercise of legitimised social power, a feat which has enabled him, as demonstrated by the findings of our research, to transform the symbol into an icon, the icon into a myth, and the myth into effective power, consecrated by such mechanisms and representations.

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