



VISUAL POLITICS IN THE DIGITAL AGE: The Impact of Instagram Formats on Influencer-Driven Political Participation

MAITANE PALACIOS LÓPEZ ¹
maitanepalacioslopez@gmail.com

FERNANDO BONETE VIZCAÍNO ²
fbonete@nebrija.es

¹ Universidad San Pablo-CEU, CEU Universities, España

² Universidad Nebrija, España

KEYWORDS

Influencers
Social media
Engagement
Political participation
Digital content
Opinion leaders
Visual formats

ABSTRACT

In the process of Instagram's consolidation as a visual platform, political influencers are emerging as new agents in the creation of political content. Based on the study of 625 posts from 25 prominent political influencers in Spain, this research analyses how interaction metrics influence the formats of Reels and Posts, exceeding benchmark average (Sehl & Mikolajczyk, 2024). The choice of format not only shapes the type of visual political content disseminated but also influences the consumption and political participation practices of young audiences, highlighting the importance of interaction metrics in the success of digital content.

Received: 08/ 04 / 2025

Accepted: 05/ 07 / 2025

1. Introduction

The large audience ratios, with personal accounts comparable in reach to traditional mass media, as well as the role played in the fusion of information and entertainment have made social networks an essential object of study for research in the field of communication.

In this context, Instagram is particularly relevant due to its eminently visual nature and its capacity to generate accessible and attractive content. According to Marcelino Mercedes and de la Morena Taboada (2014), this platform is valued for its simplicity and its orientation towards personal graphic creation, which facilitates the identification of users with specific trends and narratives (González-Carrión & Aguaded, 2020). This phenomenon, known as "*Instagramism*", consists of redefining and reinterpreting everyday reality through carefully edited images, which respond more to a preconceived aesthetic ideal than to an authentic representation of everyday life (Barrio Romera, 2018).

In the specific field of political communication, which is the focus of this study, Instagram has introduced a new communicative paradigm that differs significantly from other platforms such as Twitter, characterised by a predominantly textual discourse. Politics on Instagram is materialised through images, videos and visual narratives that appeal to emotions and simplify messages, which reinforces their persuasive impact (Wilson & Sherrell, 1993; Myers, 1995).

In this environment, *influencers* emerge as prominent figures who dedicate their professional activity to content creation, fostering digital communities and exercising an opinion leader role (Casaló et al., 2020; de Veirman et al., 2017). In Spain, 49% of users follow influencer profiles, with Instagram being the predominant platform with 71% of followers in this area (IAB, 2024). Berners-Lee & Fischetti (2000) proposed dividing users into two categories: those who generate content and those who consume it, interacting with profiles and communities tailored to specific interests and audiences. However, this line is blurring, further democratising content creation and offering any user the possibility of becoming a sporadic content creator. A good example of this is precisely the data on *influencers* in Spain, with one of the highest percentage ratios in Europe among active *influencers* on Instagram -almost 80,000 creators (Kolsquare, 2024)-. This trend has prompted political *influencers* to adopt audiovisual formats that maximise interaction and identification with their audience, such as on-camera commentary and the strategic use of visual content (Mosseri, 2022; Santos, 2022).

More specifically, political *influencers* represent an emerging phenomenon that combines social activism and political communication. Although in many cases their political activity is anecdotal or secondary, they are beginning to be recognised as key actors in the promotion of social causes and citizen mobilisation (Dekoninck & Schmuck, 2022; Riedl et al., 2021; Suuronen et al., 2022). In Spain, Munoz (2021) introduces the notion of "*influencer-activists*" as an evolution of cyberactivism, highlighting their ability to engage young people in political discussions and encourage their civic participation. This role is framed by the Gateway Hypothesis, which puts forward that online participation can act as a catalyst for offline engagement, providing users with an accessible environment in which to develop civic skills before transferring them to more demanding contexts (Conroy et al., 2012; Kim et al., 2017). This hypothesis is supported by studies showing that following political content creators increases digital participation, which, in turn, predicts greater engagement in the real world (Dekoninck & Schmuck, 2022).

Following *influencers* and participating in their political discussion spaces on social media can itself be considered an act of political participation. This activity not only involves the consumption of information - the quality of which has already been called into question (Palacios-López et al., 2023)-, but can also influence users' orientation on political issues and, ultimately, influence their voting behaviour. Recent examples, such as the case of Alvisé Pérez in Spain, illustrate that influencers can have a real impact on politics by mobilising their followers and attracting media attention on controversial issues. Similarly, figures such as Carla Galeote have managed to turn their platforms into spaces for political debate, broadening the participation of their followers beyond the digital environment and becoming part of a party (Palacios-López y Bonete Vizcaíno, 2024).

The impact of these *influencers* is particularly significant among 18-24 year olds, the most active demographic on social media (Palacios-López et al., 2025). Their influence not only promotes the dissemination of political information, but also shapes the perception of politics as accessible and relevant, facilitating a less cynical and more participatory approach (Cheng et al., 2023; Schmuck et al.,

2022). In contrast, the over-65 generation has a marginal presence on Instagram, representing only 4% of users in Spain, reflecting a generational imbalance influenced by the audiovisual and narrative codes that dominate social networks and that are more aligned with the interests of younger generations.

In addition to redefining communicative codes, social networks have facilitated new forms of political participation that transcend traditional definitions. Theocharis and van Deth (2018) highlight the emergence of low-cost political behaviours, such as online interactions that require less effort than conventional forms of activism. While most studies have focused on the creation and dissemination of political content (Bode et al., 2014; Gil de Zúñiga et al., 2012), there is a growing need to investigate how interactions, such as 'likes' or comments, act as catalysts for greater civic participation (Conroy et al., 2012), and as gateways and catalysts for political engagement by enabling individuals to act first in less demanding environments (Kim et al., 2017).

Assuming Instagram's future trajectory involves a greater emphasis on audio-visual content (Mosseri, 2022) in its attempt to compete with TikTok (Santos, 2022), certain political *influencers* appear to embrace this format, as evidenced by their frequent use of on-camera commentary in relation to political issues. This preference for video-based communication is consistent with Wilson and Sherrell (1993), who suggest that face-to-face interaction and the use of visual media have a greater persuasive impact. Furthermore, Myers (1995) states that information presented through audio-visual media tends to be more comprehensible. Therefore, it can be argued that political influencers consciously or unconsciously adopt this format to effectively engage their audiences, employing simplification as a persuasive strategy.

In this sense, this research delves into the formats of dissemination of political content generated by these content creators, who are already the new digital opinion leaders in the field of politics, as well as their impact on *online* political participation through the different interaction metrics of Instagram.

2. Methodology and Objectives

2.1. Aims and Objectives

The general objective of this study is to identify the formats most used by *political influencers* and the interaction they generate as a new form of *online* political participation on Instagram. The specific objectives are as follows:

SO1: To identify the content strategies and formats used by political *influencers* on social networks to generate engagement and encourage the political participation of their followers.

SO2: To analyse the socio-demographic profile of the followers of political *influencers* and their behaviour in terms of participation, interaction and reaction to political content.

2.2. Methodology

A mixed methodology structured in two phases was implemented, following the guidelines proposed by Bor et al. (2023) and Pérez Curiel and Limón-Naharro (2019). This approach allows us to analyse influence profiles from a quantitative (interactions) and qualitative (thematic) perspective.

In the first phase, online political participation was assessed by quantifying interaction metrics in various categories (see Table 1). This was done using Shinebuzz *software*, developed by Samyroad, which collects data directly from Instagram's API. The initial selection of profiles was based on the work of Munoz (2021) and other authors, updated according to the definitions of Riedl et al. (2021) and Suuronen et al. (2022). The inclusion criteria established were: having more than 50,000 followers (Cotter, 2019; Influencer Marketing Hub, 2023); a proportion of less than 20% of non-authentic followers (Akyon and Kalfaoglu, 2019); an audience composed of at least 50% Spanish users; and an *engagement* rate of more than 1% (Sehl and Mikolajczyk, 2024).

The selection of the profiles was carried out between 15 April and 10 August 2022. As part of the process, the 25 most recent posts in fixed format (*Post*, *Reel* or carousel) were selected from each of the 25 accounts analysed, reaching a total sample of 625 posts (n=625), extracted on 22 May 2024.

The second phase consisted of a detailed thematic analysis of the content published by the political *influencers*, conducted manually based on a coding framework derived from framing models of political communication (Bor et al., 2023; Pérez Curiel y Limón-Naharro, 2019; Suuronen et al., 2021). The

analysis categorised the themes into subgroups such as: "National politics" (Catalan independence, ideologies, polarisation and extremism, political groups, government pacts, political figures, electoral processes, among others), "Democratic quality" (corruption, political scandals, press freedom, hoaxes, electoral fraud), "International politics" (international conflicts, European elections), "Social justice" (gender, feminism, racism, environment, LGTBQ+ rights), "Economy" (taxes, employment, housing, tourism), "Society" (events, criminality, culture, health) and "Non-political content".

Table 1. Taxonomy and metrics analysed profiles, content and audience.

Categories	Description
Influencer Profile	
Name of the profile	Name of the political influencer on Instagram.
Handle or nickname	User nickname on Instagram, which can be different from the profile name. It is the name that appears after the "@".
Profile biography	Short description about the user and/or the content offered by that profile.
Verification	Profile verification badge given by Instagram to officially designate that account as authentic and belonging to a public personality.
Gender	Male / Female / NS-NC.
Age	13-17 / 18-24 / 25-35 / 35-44 / 45-54 / 55-64 / +64 / NA/NK.
Content metrics	
Number of posts	Total content posted visible on the pull date.
Instagram format	<i>Reel / IGTV or Live / Carousel / Post</i>
Post format	Image / Video
Date of publication	Date content published
Likes	Number of likes on the content
Comments	Number of comments on content
Shares	Number of shares of the content
Saves	Number of saves of the content
Views	Number of plays of the content
Total interactions	Total Likes, Comments, Shares and Saves
Thematic	Main theme of the content: "National politics"; "Democratic quality"; "International"; "Social justice"; "Economy"; "Society" and "Non-political".
Caption	Number of characters, hashtags, mentions and <i>emojis</i> in the text field of the Instagram post.
Influencer Metrics	
Followers	Total number of followers of the influencer.
Followers tier	Influencer rankings according to follower tier.
Audience location	Top five countries and cities where the influencer's audience is located.
Gender of the audience	Male / Female / NS-NC.
Fake followers	Percentage of the influencer's audience with fake or incomplete profiles
Age of audience	13-17 / 18-24 / 25-35 / 35-44 / 45-54 / 55-64 / +64
Engagement rate	Engagement rate: sum of Likes, Comments, Shares and Saves (total interactions), divided by the number of followers of the account multiplied by 100.
Engagement tier	Ranking of profiles according to Engagement rate ranges.

Source: Own elaboration, 2025. Used in previous research as Palacios-López et al., (2023)

To ensure the reliability of the analysis, an initial test was conducted on a random sample of 239 publications (out of $n=625$). After two rounds of manual coding, an intercoder agreement of 89.5% was achieved, validated by Cohen's kappa coefficient ($\kappa=0.86$), reflecting high reliability. Although the statistical margin of error (2.96%) depended on sample size and data variability, the combination of methods ensured higher accuracy and internal validity, complemented by a more nuanced sentiment analysis (Gaspar et al., 2019). This methodological approach, validated at a 95% confidence level, is in line with best practices in content analysis and quantitative methods described by Riffe et al. (2019).

3. Results

The analysis shows that the 25 *influencers* accumulate 5,563,038 followers and devote 96.5% ($n=625$) to informative and opinionated political content linked to the prevailing public debate at any given time. The audience impacted by this content is mostly located in Spain (81%), is male (60.9%), and young;

those under 35 years of age represent 70% of the audience. In terms of *online* political participation, interaction with the content analysed reached 7,402,260 interactions, with an average of 11,843 interactions per publication. The *engagement* rate - a metric that establishes the level of interaction with the content in relation to the total audience - stands at 5.58%, which according to the estimated averages for the platform (Sehl and Mikolajczyk, 2023) is considered a high interactive conversion.

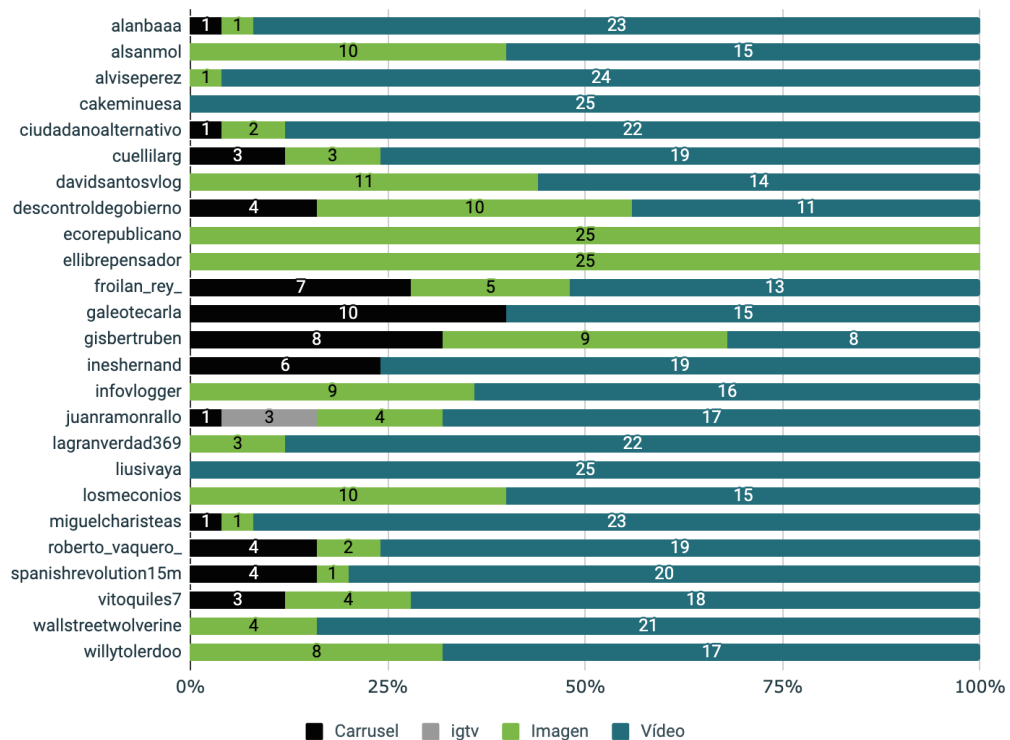
3.1. Formats

In terms of formats used, *Reels* predominate, making up 67.36% of the content with 421 *Reels* in total, while the remaining 32.16% corresponds to 201 still posts, divided into carousels (23.68%) and still images (8.48%). On the other hand, IGTVs represent just 0.48% of the content, with only 3 posts, which is evidence of the fall in popularity of this format.

The average *engagement rate* for content is 5.43% for *Posts* and 5.68% for *Reels*, a very similar rate for both formats. However, it indicates the interest that can be generated by *Posts*, a format that in general is in a slight decline, but which still has potential for political content. The reason why political content in *Post* format is maintaining high interaction rates is due to the very subject matter of the content and its narrative dynamics. The political theme has a fixed image, since the image of the *Post* is a text, a screenshot, a meme or a *tweet*, which already incorporates political content that encourages interaction, or because the content is supported by the *copy*, developing the concept and political debate in the description of the *Post*. In this sense, we find that *Posts* have an average of 403 characters, while *Reels* are limited to an average of 157 characters. In the case of IGTVs, the *engagement* rate plummets to 1.77%, highlighting the ineffectiveness of the live format for political content, in line with the general consideration that Instagram is not a performative network in *streaming* format.

However, it can be observed that *influencers* tend to combine the available Instagram formats, making extensive use of *Reels*. In any case, there are *influencer* profiles that only produce and share content in the form of *Posts* (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Distribution of content formats of political *influencers*.



Source: Own elaboration, 2024.

3.2. Interaction by Format

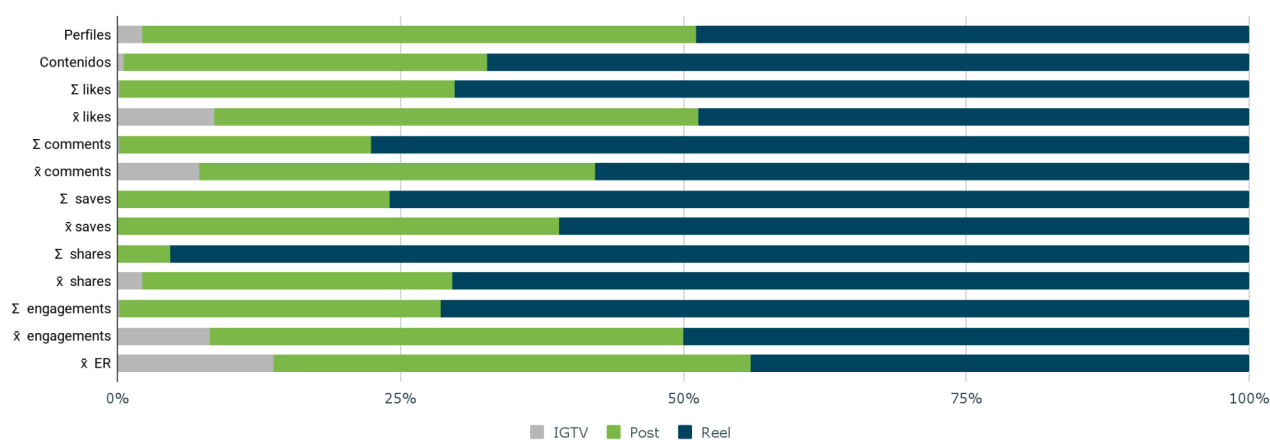
In terms of acts of digital political participation with the content of political *influencers* according to the different Instagram formats, the aforementioned predominance of *Reels* is replicated, followed by standard publications (*Posts*) and, finally, the residual presence of IGTVs (Figure 2).

Reels represent 421 posts, accounting for 71.4% of cumulative *engagement* (5,287,992 interactions). However, not only do *Reels* account for a large number of interactions in aggregate terms, but also in relative terms they register an average of 12,560 interactions per publication, the highest among the formats. Likewise, the interaction rate, which measures total interactions (*likes*, *comments*, *saves* and *shares*) in relation to the number of followers of the *influencer*, is above the average of all the content analysed, at 5.68%.

In addition, given the characteristics of the format itself, a large number of views is achieved with an average of 278,848 *views* per *Reel*, standing out as the most efficient format for viralisation and the generation of a massive reach. This data is in line with the rise of platforms based on short videos, which have redefined digital consumption towards short, dynamic and highly visual content. However, it is noteworthy that political *influencers'* *Reels* do not follow short video trends, mostly exceeding 30 seconds in length.

On the other hand, traditional *Posts*, although they represent 32.16% of the total content (201 publications), maintain a relevant role in the interaction with audiences. They accumulated 2,108,135 interactions, with an average of 10,488 per publication, and registered an *engagement rate* of 5.43%, which is very close to the level of *Reels*. The fixed posts maintain a proportion of likes (9,955), which shows that they are perceived as valuable content. The average of 193 comments per post is significant, but not as high as in other formats, which may indicate that, although carousels are effective in transmitting information, they do not generate the same level of debate or discussion as *Reels*.

Figure 2. Compilation of interaction variables according to content formats.



Format	Profiles	Content	Likes		Comments		Saves		Shares		Engagements		Engagement rate
			Σ	̄	Σ	̄	Σ	̄	Σ	̄	Σ	̄	
IGTV	1	3	5.953	1.984	180	60	0		16	16	6.133	2.044	1,77%
Post	23	201	2.001.009	9.955	58.306	292	49.073	271	9.998	200	2.108.135	10.488	5,43%
Reel	23	421	4.725.534	11.332	202.831	482	154.970	425	205.867	513	5.287.992	12.560	5,68%

Source: Own elaboration, 2024.

Of these 201 posts in *Post* format, 53 are carousels, a format that combines multiple images or videos in a single post, making it easier to present more complete or visual narratives and are distributed among 13 profiles, and achieve remarkable performance in several key metrics. With a 6.53% content *engagement rate*, carousels significantly outperform more dynamic formats such as *Reels*, indicating that this format has a strong impact on engagement relative to the size of the audience consuming it. This result suggests that carousels are especially effective for already engaged audiences who value the depth

of the content presented. One notable functionality is the option to insert and combine videos and images in carousels, which delivers 402,993 views, this format has considerable reach, but fails to match the massiveness of *Reels*.

In contrast, the IGTV format has been clearly relegated, representing only 0.48% of the total content, with only three publications analysed. This format accumulated 6,133 interactions in total, with an average of 2,044 per publication and an ER of just 1.77%, much lower than that of the other formats. This data reflects the obsolescence of IGTV, whose proposal of long live videos does not seem to fit in with the current dynamics of consumption on Instagram, marked by immediacy and fragmentation.

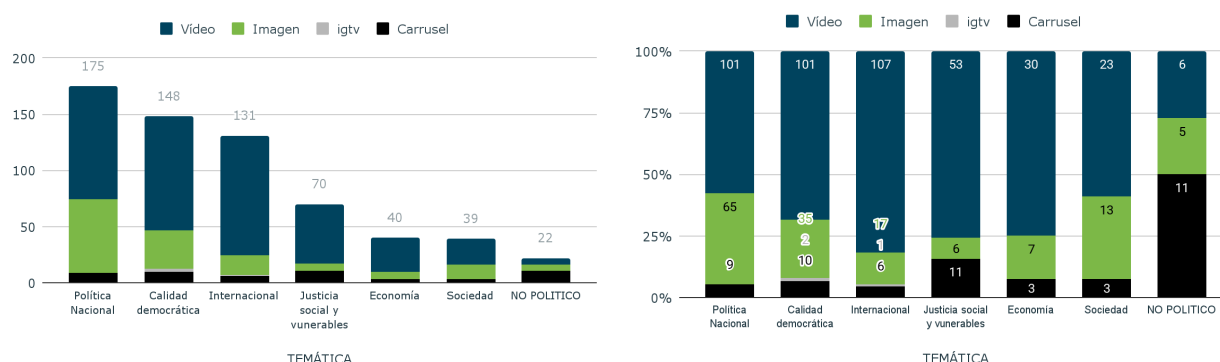
3.3. Themes

The analysis of the interaction between the content themes and the formats used (IGTV, *Posts* and *Reels*) reveals interesting patterns on how political influencers on Instagram address different topics and optimise the formats to maximise their impact (Figure 3).

In the "National Politics" theme, which accounts for the highest volume of posts (175 in total), *Reels* dominate with 101 posts and represent 59% of the content. This theme allows influencers to develop and comment on current political events, as well as to position themselves from an ideological point of view. The national political theme has a higher proportion of fixed publications than other themes, representing 36.82% of this content. This type of topic lends itself more to the creation of memes, screenshots of news items that do not require more context, or publications with strong textual support in the description (as in the case of "@ellibrepensador", whose content has an average of 2,100 characters (ellibrepensador, 2024, 21 March, 7 April). Of the 74 *posts* in "National politics", 44 belong to the sub-theme "Ideologies, polarisation and extremism", which generates interaction links in specific political details, with a less explanatory factor such as that of Ecorepublicano (2024).

Social justice and the "vulnerable" comes second in terms of total volume of publications (70). Here too, *Reels* are predominant (53 publications); this format also stands out in sub-themes such as "Racism, ethnic identity and immigration" and "Gender and feminism". This predominance is aligned with the thematic specialisation addressed in the profiles of political *influencers*, finding activist creators who align themselves with specific causes, mostly related to feminism and inclusion. This specialisation is also observed in the "Economy" theme, which includes 40 publications, 30 of which are *Reels*.

Figure 3. Distribution and proportion of content formats according to themes.



Source: Own elaboration, 2024.

There is a tendency to comment on "National politics" and "International politics", but with a considerable economic background and orientation. This is the case of profiles such as "@ciudadanoalternativo" and "@wallstreetwolverine", whose creator has a parallel account, "@vittorio", which deals in greater depth with the bases of economic neoliberalism; or the commentary on the controversy between the Argentinian president Javier Milei and the Spanish government and the statements made by the minister Óscar Puente, as well as the activity of the specialised profile of "@juanramonrallo", who functions as a disseminator of economic policy, being the *influencer* with the highest academic degree among the profiles analysed, but also the oldest, and is the only profile that has made use of IGTV.

"International politics" has the highest proportion of content on *Reels*, with 81.6%, and is used especially to cover conflicts of high global relevance such as "Russia-Ukraine" (26 posts) and "Palestine-Israel" (19 posts). In "Democratic quality" there is a balance between the formats, but the disparity in the sub-themes shows differences in format and *performance*, with more attention devoted to "Corruption and political scandals" content.

Finally, "Non-political" content represents a minority compared to the previous categories, with 22 publications in total, being the only topic in which a higher proportion of *Post* content is observed at 72.7%. In this case, *Posts* lead with 16 publications, while *Reels* are only used on 6 occasions. This suggests that, for topics not directly related to politics, *Posts* are the format of preference, due to the fact that *influencers* make use of *lifestyle* content, generally showing snippets of their private life portrayed in photographs and following the line pointed out by "*Instagramism*" (Barrio Romera, 2018).

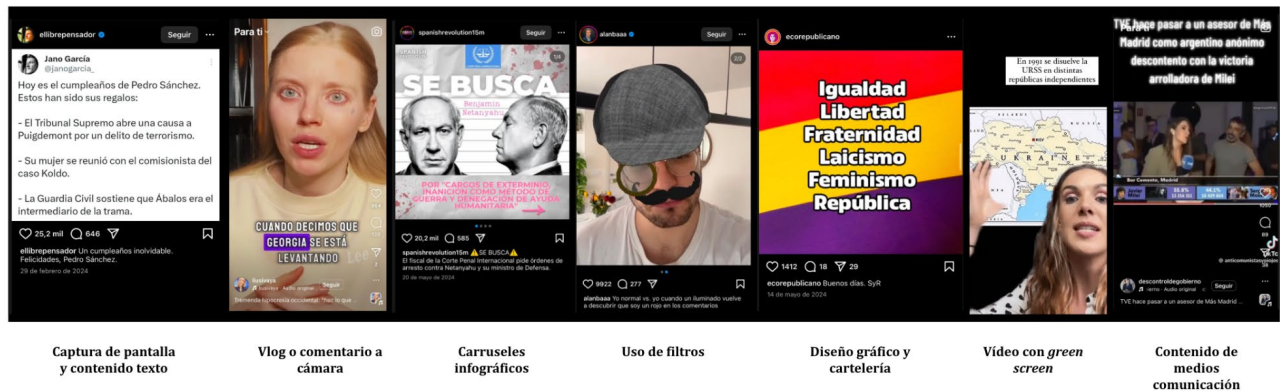
3.4. Visual Codes

In terms of content production, it is observed that 68% of the *Posts* are created and produced directly by the *influencers*, which indicates a considerable effort in the elaboration of their own material. However, 26% of the content comes from third parties, such as the media, citizens or other influencers, suggesting that a significant proportion of the content relies on external sources. In addition, 14% of mixed formats and 4% of collaborations reflect a trend towards integration and reuse of resources, but also point to a possible lack of strategic planning in original production.

The length of caption text is another relevant dimension, with a clear predominance of short texts (71%), while long texts (22%) and medium-length texts (7%) are less frequent. This pattern aligns with the dynamics of rapid consumption on Instagram, where audiences tend to prefer concise and direct messages. However, the choice of shorter texts could limit the ability of political influencers to address complex topics in depth or to contextualise their posts.

In the fixed *Post* content, one of the most prominent resources is the use of screenshots, especially of their own tweets, which constitute 36% of the content analysed. This resource shows an interconnection between platforms, where *influencers* reuse material from other social networks to maintain their presence on Instagram. Profiles such as "@elllibrepensador" make intensive use of this resource of their own tweets, as do other anonymous accounts such as "@willytolerdo" and "@losmeconios". However, this approach may suggest a dependence on other formats and a lack of originality in the creation of native content for this social network. Meanwhile, memes, which account for 48% of image content, underline the predominance of humour and a critical tone in the communication strategy of political influencers. Profiles specialising in humour are particularly prone to this use of memes, and most of them are not of their own creation.

One of the most widespread strategies in the production of content in *Reels* format is the on-camera commentary, also known as a *vlog*. This format consists of the influencer recording themselves in vertical format, commenting on a specific topic while keeping their image in a medium-short or close-up shot. The visual discourse is complemented with resources such as zoom in, which dynamises the audiovisual rhythm, and the superimposition of images, infographics or texts. The *influencer's* voice acts as the main narrative axis, being responsible for both the opening and closing of the content. This choice responds to Instagram's algorithmic bias, which prioritises and favours the viralisation of content in which the presence of the human figure is highlighted.

Figure 4. Examples of diversity of formats and visual strategies in political content on Instagram.

Source: Own elaboration, 2024.

The diversity of resources used by *influencers* reflects a deliberate strategy aimed at creating distinctive styles that favour the identification and recognition of the content. These resources include the use of recurring openings, initial 'hooks' to capture attention, dynamic montages, music, text and image overlays, special effects and banners. A particularly noteworthy element is the widespread use of subtitles, present in at least 78% of the content analysed in *Reels* format. This reflects the growing trend towards silent content consumption, in line with user practices in mobile environments. Subtitles not only improve the accessibility of content, but also act as a message enhancer. In some cases, influencers adjust the size of subtitles to emphasise specific keywords or messages, which increases their impact.

From a design point of view, subtitles meet optimal readability criteria. Bold typefaces are used, accompanied by shading or underlining to ensure their visibility on any background. Furthermore, they are placed in the second quarter of the screen, avoiding the lower part of the video, where the text of the Instagram *copy* could make it difficult to read. This detail shows a conscious planning specifically adapted to the particularities of the platform, which demonstrates a deep understanding of the user experience on Instagram.

On the other hand, a resource that is not yet observed in Spanish political *influencers*, but which is identified in profiles of other specialisations or in international *influencers*, is the "self-presentation". This resource consists of a brief introduction of the profile and its competences after capturing the viewer's interest at the beginning of the video. Its purpose is to increase the trust and credibility of the content presented. Although this practice is not common in the profiles analysed, it has been observed that the biographies of Spanish political *influencers* include concise descriptions of their activities or professions. The most frequent terms used in these descriptions are 'journalist', 'political scientist', 'writer' and, in some cases, they include humorous references.

Overall, the data reveals that the quality of content production is often low. The abundance of screenshots and the reuse of content from other platforms suggest that some political *influencers* lack a well-defined overall plan for their Instagram posts. However, there are also cases where accounts take care in the preparation and presentation of their content, demonstrating an effort to stand out in a competitive digital environment. Profiles such as "@inesheranand", "@alanbaa", "@cuellilargo", or "@carlagaleote" are the most representative examples of this content curator profile.

3.4. Profiles and Audiences

Of the 625 publications analysed, a significant 96.48% had political content, referring to information and opinion on issues linked to public debate. On the other hand, the remaining 3.52% consisted of non-informative and non-political content, which could be aimed at establishing a closer connection with users and fostering a sense of affinity with the community. From this categorisation of content we can point to a clear political intention of the content, and the intention of these influencers to position themselves as potential opinion leaders on political issues in the digital sphere.

The results show that the 25 accounts have a total of 5,563,038 followers. 81% of the users who follow political influencers have an account created and set up in Spain. 60.9% of their followers are

men and the audience is mostly young; those under 35 years of age represent 70% of the audience, with the majority group being between 25 and 35 years of age (Figure 2). A relevant fact is that 2.9% of the audience are teenagers and young people aged 13 to 17. Although they represent only 2.9% of the audience (162,767 users), it must be taken into account that they are minors who are shaping their political ideas.

4. Conclusions

With a predominantly political focus -96.5% of the content analysed- and a mostly young audience -70% under 35 years of age-, political *influencers* on Instagram are consolidating their position as key intermediaries in contemporary political communication and consolidating their activity as precursors of *online* political participation through interaction. The results obtained in this research reflect interaction figures that exceed the estimated average for this social network and indicate a high level of audience response. These metrics underline the potential of political *influencers* to generate active participation around issues central to public debate.

The audience analysed is mostly concentrated in Spain, is male and young. This data converges with previous research that points to the growing prominence of youth segments in digital communication (Marwick, 2015). However, it is particularly significant that 2.9% of followers are teenagers between 13 and 17 years old, which suggests the existence of an audience in formation that could be receiving an early influence on their political orientations, and a potential impact on the construction of future public opinion (Buckingham, 2019).

From the analysis carried out, it can be determined that there is no direct relationship between the format used and the interaction. Although there is a tendency for web algorithms to favour viralisation when there is a combination of formats, it is clear that this variable is not the only or determining factor. In political content, the subject matter, tone, topicality or emotional charge play an important role in increasing interaction, making the audiovisual format and narrative more of a facilitator.

However, the data does underline that not all formats are equally effective and mobilising. *Reels* are the dominant format in terms of reach and interaction and their engagement rate for this format stands at 5.68%, well above the considered standard platform average (Sehl and Mikolajczyk, 2023). On the other hand, fixed *Posts*, especially in the form of carousels, persist significantly in number of posts and reach a remarkable 6.53% of interaction in the case of carousels. These results reinforce the hypothesis that the static format, with a more leisurely narrative or explanatory component, continues to be effective for dense topics or those requiring more detailed argumentation.

If the carousels stand out as the most efficient format in relative terms and, as explained above, the significant number of *saves* they accumulate indicates that they are suitable for encouraging reflection and providing information that users consider useful in the long term, their relatively lower capacity for viralisation and reach compared to *Reels* suggests that they should be used in a complementary way, revealing the need to integrate both formats within a hybrid strategy that combines mass reach with thematic depth.

The low acceptance of the IGTV format among these prescribers can also be observed. This rejection can be attributed to several factors, including the demand for more time and attention from the user, a demand that contrasts with the preference of Instagram users for quick, visual and easy-to-consume content. This decline is notable when compared to the resurgence of YouTube, and the evident success of *streaming* platforms such as Twitch, a niche, in turn, for new political *influencers*. However, these platforms offer, by their nature, more suitable spaces for horizontal content of greater length, complexity and elaboration.

In this sense, it is worth noting that, just as some of the political *influencers* in the sample originate from networks such as Twitter or Youtube, there is also a migration towards Twitch, Youtube and Tiktok of profiles originating from Instagram. In fact, it is an increasingly common practice for videos on Instagram to be used as a promotional tool for other formats, such as podcasts, interviews or alternative channels, serving as an entry point to redirect the audience to other platforms with more extensive content.

The analysis of the data relating to the formats and characteristics of the content published by political *influencers* on Instagram reveals significant patterns in their communication "strategy" and in the way in which political narratives are constructed on this platform. The results show that while *influencers* play an active role in content production, their strategy seems to be marked by a tactical or

reactive rather than a strategic or planned approach, which has direct implications for the perceived professionalism and effectiveness of their posts.

The abundance of screenshots and the reuse of content from other platforms point to the need, on the part of these opinion leaders, to optimise resources when current affairs and news speed prevail, becoming the media's own loudspeakers rather than creators of their own content. Other outstanding resources are found in memes, whose humour and brevity serve to consolidate their impact (Highfield, 2016); and in subtitles, which improve accessibility and act as message enhancers. The use of legible typography, combined with design strategies such as shading and underlining, shows conscious planning adapted to the particularities of the platform. However, there is still room for incorporating strategies such as the self-presentation so often used in other areas, which could reinforce the authority and trust of political *influencers* in the eyes of their audiences (Abidin et al, 2021).

From a socio-political perspective, the fact that multiple profiles focus on specific issues (economics, social justice, international politics) indicates the existence of highly segmented 'micro-communities', whose strong interest in specific topics can generate high levels of engagement. This phenomenon coincides with the trend of audience fragmentation typical of the digital age, where users prefer specialised content that fits their ideological inclinations or specific interests (Chadwick, 2017).

In conclusion, political *influencers* on Instagram have managed to consolidate themselves as key players in digital political communication and mobilise a large number of users, transferring political participation to new digital interactions. The shift towards short video formats, such as *Reels*, reflects a change in digital consumer preferences, particularly among younger users, who represent the majority of political *influencers'* audiences. This group, which is key in shaping political opinion and behaviour, is looking for content that is accessible, visually appealing, quickly consumed, and that allows them to participate and position themselves through *liking*.

5. Acknowledgements

This research was conducted within the framework of the project "Knowledge, attitudes, and opinions of the Spanish population regarding Internet algorithms and the design of critical algorithmic literacies" (Ref. PID2022-141830B-100), funded by the Ministry of Science, Innovation and Universities.

6. References

- Abidin, C., Lee, J., Barbetta, T & Miao, WS (2021). Influencers & COVID-19: reviewing key issues in press coverage across Australia, China, Japan, & South Korea. *Media International Australia Incorporating Culture & Policy*, 178(1), 114–135. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1329878X20959838>
- Akyon, C., & Kalfaoglu, T. (2019). Detection of fake followers in Twitter using decision tree classification. 2019 27th Signal Processing and Communications Applications Conference (SIU), 1-4. <https://doi.org/10.1109/SIU.2019.8806510>
- Barrio Romera C. (2018). Reseña/Review (Manovich, Lev, "Instagram and contemporary image", California Institute for Telecommunication and Information & The Graduate Center, City University of New York (CUNY): Cultural Analytics Lab, 148 págs., 2017). *Teknokultura. Revista de Cultura Digital y Movimientos Sociales*, 15(1), 181-183. <https://doi.org/10.5209/TEKN.58488>
- Berners-Lee, T., & Fischetti, M. (2000). *Weaving the Web: The Original Design and Ultimate Destiny of the World Wide Web by Its Inventor*. Harper.
- Bode, L., Vraga, E. K., Borah, P., & Shah, D. V. (2014). A new space for political behavior: Political social networking and its democratic consequences. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 19(3), 414-429. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jcc4.12048>
- Bor, D., Lee, B. S., & Oughton, E. J. (2023). Quantifying polarization across political groups on key policy issues using sentiment analysis. arXiv.org. <https://arxiv.org/abs/2302.07775>
- Buckingham, D. (2019). *The Media Education Manifesto*. Polity Press.
- Casaló, L. V., Flavián, C., & Ibáñez-Sánchez, S. (2020). Influencers on Instagram: Antecedents and consequences of opinion leadership. *Journal of Business Research*, 117, 510-519. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2020.06.037>
- Chadwick, A. (2017). *The Hybrid Media System: Politics and Power*. Oxford University Press.
- Cheng, Z., Chen, J., Peng, R.X. y Shoenberger, H. (2023). Social media influencers talk about politics: Investigating the role of source factors and PSR in Gen-Z followers' perceived information quality, receptivity and sharing intention. *Journal of Information Technology and Politics*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19331681.2023.2173700>
- Conroy, M., Feezell, J. T., & Guerrero, M. (2012). Facebook and political engagement: A study of online political group membership and offline political engagement. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 28(5), 1535-1546. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2012.03.012>
- Cotter, K. (2019). Playing the visibility game: How digital influencers and algorithms negotiate influence on Instagram. *New Media & Society*, 21(4), 895–913. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444818815684>
- De Veirman, M., Cauberghe, V., & Hudders, L. (2017). Marketing through Instagram influencers: The impact of number of followers and product divergence on brand attitude. *International Journal of Advertising*, 36(5), 798-828. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02650487.2017.1348035>
- Dekoninck, H., & Schmuck, D. (2022). The Mobilizing Power of Influencers for Pro-Environmental Behavior Intentions and Political Participation. *Environmental Communication*, 16(4), 458–472. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17524032.2022.2027801>
- Gaspar, R., Pedro, C., Panagiotopoulos, P., & Seibt, B. (2019). Beyond positive or negative: Qualitative sentiment analysis of social media reactions to unexpected stressful events. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 56, 179-191. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2015.11.035>
- Gil de Zúñiga, H., Jung, N., & Valenzuela, S. (2012). Social media use for news and individuals' social capital, civic engagement, and political participation. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 17(3), 319-336. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1083-6101.2012.01574.x>
- Gonzalez-Carrion, E.-L., & Aguaded, I. (2020). Engagement y evolución de instagramers hispanohablantes de moda. *Revista Latina De Comunicación Social*, (77), 231–252. <https://doi.org/10.4185/RLCS-2020-1456>
- Highfield, T. (2016). *Social Media and Everyday Politics*. Polity Press.
- IAB Spain (2024). *Estudio de redes sociales 2023*. <https://iabspain.es/estudio/estudio-de-redes-sociales-2023/>
- Influencer Marketing Hub. (2023). *The state of influencer marketing 2023*. https://influencermarketinghub.com/ebooks/Influencer_Marketing_Benchmark_Report_2023.pdf

- Kim, Y., Hsu, S. H., & Gil de Zúñiga, H. (2017). Influence of social media use on discussion network heterogeneity and civic engagement: The moderating role of personality traits. *Journal of Communication*, 63(3), 498-516. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jcom.12047>
- Kim, Y., Russo, S., & Amnã, E. (2017). The longitudinal relation between online and offline political participation among youth at two different developmental stages. *New Media & Society*, 19(6), 899-917. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444815624181>
- Kolsquare. (2024). Influencer marketing in Spain 2024. *Kolsquare Blog*. <https://www.kolsquare.com/en/blog/influencer-marketing-in-spain-2024-low-prices-and-new-regulations-to-define-the-market>
- Marcelino Mercedes, G. V., & Taboada, M. (2014). Redes sociales basadas en imágenes como herramienta de comunicación museística. Museos y centros de arte Moderno y Contemporáneo de España en Pinterest e Instagram. *adComunica. Revista científica de estrategias, tendencias e innovación en comunicación*, (8), 139-168.
- Marwick, A. (2015). Instafame: Luxury selfies in the attention economy. *Public Culture*, 27(1), 137-160. <https://doi.org/10.1215/08992363-2798379>
- Mosseri, A. (2022). Building a safer Instagram for our youngest community members. *Instagram Blog*. <https://bit.ly/42voMPq>
- Munoz, M. (2021). Influencers-activistas: La evolución del ciberactivismo en España. *Revista de Comunicación Política*, 8(2), 123-145. [https://doi.org/\[DOI no disponible\]](https://doi.org/[DOI no disponible])
- Myers, D. G. (1995). *Psychology* (4.^a ed.). Worth Publishers.
- Riedl, M. J., Vorderer, P., & Klimmt, C. (2021). The role of parasocial relationships and social media use in adolescents' political engagement. *Media Psychology*, 24(5), 1-26. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15213269.2019.1650884>
- Riffe, D., Lacy, S., Watson, B., & Fico, F. (2019). *Analyzing Media Messages: Using Quantitative Content Analysis in Research* (4.^a ed.). Routledge.
- Santos, R (2022) Why does Instagram keep trying to be tiktok? VICE. [Availableat:<https://www.vice.com/en/article/y3vayk/instagram-tiktok-video-meta>].
- Schmuck, D., Hirsch, M., Stevic, A., y Matthes, J. (2022). Politics – Simply Explained? How Influencers Affect Youth's Perceived Simplification of Politics, Political Cynicism, and Political Interest. *The International Journal of Press/Politics*, 27(3), 738-762. <https://doi.org/10.1177/19401612221088987>
- Palacios López M., Bonete Vizcaíno F. y Gelado Marcos R. (2023). New agents of mass disinformation. Analysis of the publications produced by Spanish political influencers on Instagram. *Estudios sobre el Mensaje Periodístico*, 29(4), 919-932. <https://doi.org/10.5209/esmp.88576>
- Palacios López, M., & Bonete Vizcaíno, F. (2024). Influencers Políticos en Instagram: Los nuevos agentes digitales de la participación política en España. *RECERCA. Revista De Pensament I Anàlisi*, 29(2). <https://doi.org/10.6035/recerca.7657>
- Palacios-López, M., Bonete-Vizcaíno, F., & Vázquez-Barrio, T. (2025). Impacto de los influencers políticos en la configuración de la opinión pública y la participación política en Instagram. *Revista De La Asociación Española De Investigación De La Comunicación*, 12(23), raeic122303. <https://doi.org/10.24137/raeic.12.23.3>
- Pérez-Curiel, C., & Limón-Naharro, P. (2019). Influencers políticos. Un estudio de la marca personal de Donald Trump en Twitter y su impacto en los medios y usuarios. *Communication & Society*, 32(1), 57-75. <https://doi.org/10.15581/003.32.1.57-75>
- Sehl, K., & Mikolajczyk, K. (2023). How to calculate engagement rate: A complete guide for marketers. *Hootsuite Blog*. <https://bit.ly/3WEo5zH>
- Suuronen, A., Koivula, A., & Kunelius, R. (2022). Greenfluencers: The role of social media influencers in promoting environmental awareness and sustainable consumption among young adults. *Journal of Environmental Media*, 3(1), 45-67. https://doi.org/10.1386/jem_00037_1
- Theocharis, Y., & van Deth, J. W. (2018). *Political Participation in a Changing World: Conceptual and Empirical Challenges in the Study of Citizen Engagement*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203728673>

Wilson, E. J., & Sherrell, D. L. (1993). Source effects in communication and persuasion research: A meta-analysis of effect size. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 21(2), 101-112. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0092070393212001>

Webography

Ecorepublicano. [@ecorepublicano]. (2024, 21 de mayo). "Buenos días". [Publicación en Instagram]. <https://www.instagram.com/p/C7Lttb5RY10>

ellibrepensador [@ellibrepensador]. (2024, 21 de marzo). "Negacionistas de la inteligencia. El 31 de julio de 1931 José Ortega y Gasset se dirigió a los representantes de las Cortes Constituyentes para pedirles lo siguiente: «Nada de violencia en el lenguaje o en el ademán; hay, sobre todo, algo que no podemos venir a hacer aquí: ni el payaso, ni el tenor, ni el jabalí» [Publicación en Instagram]. Instagram. <https://www.instagram.com/p/C4xo8sftK50>

ellibrepensador [@ellibrepensador]. (2024, 7 de abril). *El nuevo canon de belleza: "mujeres" calvas. Este fin de semana nuestra Españita ofrecía un amplio catálogo de esperpentos. Desde la boda de Almeida retransmitida en directo por Telemadrid –lo cual demuestra lo urgente que es cerrar todas las televisiones públicas sin excepción– hasta cómo los mismos ciudadanos a los que el Napoleón madrileño impide circular por las calles por ser demasiado pobres y no tener un coche Eco-friendly acudían a aplaudirle efusivamente* [Publicación en Instagram]. Instagram. <https://www.instagram.com/p/C5dKjJMtxm9>