



FROM GETTING OUT TO VOTE: Digital Political Narratives and their Effect on Young People's Electoral Decision-making

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ABSTRACT

This research analyzes the symbolic and emotional effects of digital political narratives on youth electoral decision-making within the political-communicative ecosystem of platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, and Facebook. Using a qualitative approach with a digital hermeneutic-ethnographic design, it investigates the ways in which young people interpret viral electoral discourse and construct political meaning. The findings reveal a critical appropriation of emotional and parodic content, where voting is configured more as an act of identity than deliberation. The study shows that, although the candidates managed to capture attention, their messages did not generate sustained credibility; authentic, coherent, and emotionally genuine narratives are required.

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1. Introduction

In the age of hyperconnectivity, digital social networks have surpassed their initial role as platforms for entertainment or interpersonal communication (Van Natta et al., 2023).

Currently, they have established themselves as spaces for political socialization, where identities are negotiated, ideological positions are expressed, and electoral messages are amplified, especially among younger audiences (Bucholtz et al., 2023; Riedl et al., 2021). This phenomenon is part of a context of transformation of the public sphere, where information consumption is no longer necessarily linked to traditional media, but to algorithms that rank content according to patterns of virality and individual preferences (DuBosar et al., 2025; Palos, 2024).

Platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, Facebook, and X have profoundly altered the way users interact with politics (Fine et al., 2024). Visual narrative, brevity of content, emotional language, and hyper-personalization of the message are characteristics that define the new communicational logic. In this environment, the figure of the political sender is diluted and content is transformed into an interactive artifact, susceptible to being shared, adapted, and reinterpreted by users themselves, generating a multifaceted circulation of political discourse (Pedersen et al., 2024; Zhang et al., 2024).

This shift in communication has brought with it a new way of understanding youth political participation (McTernan, 2024). Far from institutional spaces, political engagement manifests itself in everyday gestures such as following activist accounts, sharing ideologically charged videos, or commenting on election campaign posts (Gonzalez et al., 2024; Silwal & Dayton, 2025). However, this participation does not always involve critical deliberation or solid opinion formation, but rather is shaped by emotional stimuli and identification with cultural codes and aesthetics specific to the digital ecosystem (Winseck, 2016).

Given this scenario, fundamental questions arise about the real capacity of digital political narratives to influence young people's electoral decisions (Dommert & Verovšek, 2021). Although this content is constantly available in multiple formats, its impact cannot be measured solely by its frequency of appearance or level of interaction (Wogu et al., 2019). The immediacy of information consumption, coupled with the logic of continuous scrolling, creates an environment where political messages compete with other entertainment content, viral trends, or topics of personal interest, fragmenting attention and diluting the depth of political analysis (Elishar-Malka et al., 2020; Solito & Sorrentino, 2018).

In addition, the digital ecosystem favors the dissemination of emotional, simplified, and polarizing content, which is more likely to go viral due to the algorithmic dynamics of platforms (Gamir-Ríos et al., 2022). This poses a significant challenge: discerning whether the high visibility of a political message on social media effectively translates into a persuasive influence on electoral preferences, or whether it is simply part of the informational noise that circulates in cognitively overloaded environments (Casas-Mas et al., 2024; Ituassu, 2023). Among young people, whose political attitudes are still in the process of formation, this constant exposure to contradictory, decontextualized, or manipulated messages can generate confusion, apathy, or momentary allegiances, without a solid critical foundation. Therefore, it is necessary to delve deeper into the analysis of how these digital narratives are decoded and reinterpreted by users in their political decision-making (Pavliuc, 2025; Velasco Molpeceres et al., 2025).

Academic research has thus turned its attention to the analysis of political discourse on social media, exploring aspects such as hate speech, viralization strategies, and the professionalization of digital communication (Robles et al., 2019). Phenomena such as the creation of closed ideological communities, the amplification of charismatic leadership, and the instrumental use of audiovisual formats to generate support have also been documented. However, most of these studies have focused on the senders, neglecting a deep understanding of the real effect on the receivers (Bimber, 2014; Pfetsch, 2020).

In particular, there is little empirical evidence addressing how this content impacts young people's electoral decisions, considering not only their exposure or interaction, but also its symbolic, emotional, and identity dimensions (Bachini et al., 2022). The transition from scrolling to voting is neither immediate nor linear; it is a complex process, mediated by factors such as sociocultural context, previous political experience, sense of generational belonging, and active or passive use of social media. This intermediate zone between the reception of the message and the decision to vote constitutes a gap that has yet to be fully explored (López-López et al., 2023; Schäfer, 2023).

Another significant problem facing young voters is the lack of credibility in traditional political discourse (Jitsaeng & Tuamsuk, 2022). The gap between campaign promises and concrete actions generates skepticism, especially among young people who have access to multiple sources of information and develop a critical view of electoral content. This gap between the candidate's language and the young voter's expectations weakens the symbolic connection necessary to mobilize their electoral decision (Lampoltshammer et al., 2023; Mendizábal, 2023).

The excessive use of depersonalized and technocratic discourse is also an obstacle. Candidates often adopt a communication style focused on statistics, management achievements, or attacks on their opponents, which does not necessarily respond to the real concerns of young people, such as access to employment, mental health, climate change, or higher education. This thematic disconnect reduces the emotional relevance of voting, which is perceived as a formality rather than an expression of political agency (Boulianne & Larsson, 2024; Kalluçi & Peshkopia, 2024).

Likewise, candidates' superficial use of social media has generated a new type of weariness. Although politicians are present on platforms such as TikTok or Instagram, their content does not respect the cultural codes of the digital environment, replicating formats that are forced or lacking in meaningful content. According to Boulianne & Larsson (2024), this strategy, rather than bringing people closer together, tends to reinforce the perception of media manipulation or the instrumentalization of youth language for electoral purposes (Kalluçi & Peshkopia, 2024).

In addition to this, Palos (2024) notes that the oversaturation of political information online, coupled with the presence of contradictory and polarizing discourse, generates confusion and disinterest. In a scenario where narratives are constructed to appeal to emotions rather than reasoning, young people are exposed to ephemeral stimuli that do not favor thoughtful decision-making. This contributes to many failing to establish a coherent relationship between the candidate's message and their vote, reducing the effectiveness of campaigns (Zhang et al., 2024).

Consequently, there is a clear deficit in identity representation, as much of the political discourse fails to recognize the cultural, territorial, and generational diversity of the young electorate.

When candidates ignore these differences, it reinforces feelings of exclusion or invisibility, directly affecting motivation to actively participate in electoral processes (De la Cruz et al., 2023; Ituassu, 2023).

1.1 Objectives

The overall objective of this research is to analyze the effect of digital political narratives disseminated on social media on young people's electoral decisions during election campaigns. Based on this purpose, the following specific objectives are proposed:

SO.1. Identify the types of political narratives that predominate in digital content disseminated during election campaigns.

SO.2. Analyze young people's perceptions of this political content based on their interaction on platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, and Facebook.

SO.3. Evaluate the effect of digital narratives on young people's electoral decisions, considering emotional, cognitive, and participatory dimensions.

2. Literature review

2.1 Social media and the political power of algorithms

Far from being neutral, social media operate as algorithmic architectures that actively shape exposure to political information (Kalluçi & Peshkopia, 2025; Ruiloba-Núñez & Goenaga Ruiz de Zuazu, 2024). This digital mediation selects and ranks content according to interaction patterns, which directly affects the visibility of electoral narratives. Naumovska & Dimitrovska (2022) complement this approach by warning that algorithms tend to favor emotionally charged discourse, promoting polarization rather than informed deliberation.

According to Prianto et al. (2022), contemporary political campaigns have incorporated algorithmic logic as the central axis of their communication strategies. Content is no longer designed solely from the message, but from the expected response on platforms such as TikTok and Instagram. Along these lines,

Hidayaturrahman et al. (2022) explain that the spectacularization of the political message—through viral formats, music, or humor—responds to the need to adapt rhetoric to the fragmented consumption imposed by algorithms (Caiani et al., 2022).

Crilley et al. (2020) point out that algorithmic hyper-segmentation, based on behavioral and interest data, allows for the design of highly personalized messages, which increases communicative effectiveness but reduces informational pluralism. Marland (2021) warns that this practice strengthens so-called echo chambers, where users only access views that are consistent with their beliefs.

Thus, the political function of networks becomes ambiguous: they facilitate access to information, but they also homogenize and distort it (Sánchez Medero, 2024; Syafhendry et al., 2023).

Beta & Neyazi (2022) argue that the power of the algorithm lies in its ability to condition the information environment without the user being aware of it. According to Orosa (2022), this invisibility makes it an effective political mediator, shaping the interpretation of electoral messages. In this way, the algorithm not only filters content, but also shapes ways of seeing the world, which is important when analyzing the real effects of digital campaigns on young people (De la Cruz et al., 2023; Fong & Lee, 2023).

2.2 Narrative strategies in digital campaigns

Modern digital campaigns use structured narratives with storytelling techniques to capture the attention of young voters (Bachini et al., 2022). These narratives prioritize relatable protagonists, emotional conflicts, and hopeful solutions, replacing programmatic debate with visual and identity-based narratives. Along these lines, Ituassu (2023) argues that political success on social media depends less on ideological content and more on the symbolic ability to generate immediate identification with the electorate.

According to Herrera & Frei (2023), the most commonly used resources in these campaigns include emotive images, popular music, short phrases, and colloquial language. These elements not only facilitate virality but also generate an emotional connection with users, who perceive the candidate as part of their everyday environment.

Acevedo (2025) agrees that the success of these strategies lies in translating complex postulates into symbolic forms that are easily recognizable by young digital audiences. Van Natta et al. (2023) explain that digital narratives also delimit political meanings by configuring moral dichotomies between us and them.

This dynamic is expressed in the repeated use of metaphors of struggle, reconstruction, or resistance, which reinforce an emotional rather than rational interpretive framework. Bucholtz et al. (2023) and Riedl et al. (2021) warn that such strategies, while effective in terms of reach, tend to simplify public debate and exacerbate symbolic antagonisms.

Furthermore, DuBosar et al. (2025) argue that these narratives not only mobilize electoral support, but also endow the candidate with symbolic capital that makes them an emotional reference point.

Palos (2024) complements this idea by stating that the figure of the digital leader is no longer constructed from formal power, but from the narrative that legitimizes them before their community. Thus, the symbolic impact of digital campaigns reconfigures the relationship between young voters and politics (Fine et al., 2024).

2.3 Connected youth and political interpretation processes

In the digital ecosystem, young people have become an active audience that not only consumes political content but also reinterprets it based on their everyday experience on social media.

Velasco et al. (2025) highlight that today's young people not only consume political content but also actively reinterpret messages based on their own digital experiences. This reinterpretation is mediated by the dynamics of interaction on social media, where meanings are not imposed but collectively negotiated through comments, memes, and reactions. In this way, the process of political reception among young people becomes a cultural practice where content acquires multiple meanings.

According to Hidayaturrahman et al. (2022), young people filter political information according to their emotional environment, social ties, and digital identity.

This phenomenon intensifies the tendency to validate content that reinforces their prior beliefs, creating interpretive bubbles that limit exposure to diverse viewpoints. Added to this is what

Naumovska and Dimitrovska (2022) describe as active affinity consumption, in which young users select content that reaffirms their emotions rather than their political reasoning.

For their part, Syafhendry et al. (2023) argue that digital youth do not interpret messages from a programmatic analysis logic, but rather from an emotional and aesthetic logic. In this sense, elements such as the tone of the discourse, visual language, or perceived authenticity are decisive in the appropriation of political content.

According to Orosa (2022), this appropriation generates symbolic adherence without critical mediation, favoring the emotionalization of youth politics.

Crilley et al. (2020) and Fong and Lee (2023) mention that this interpretive pattern has significant implications for election campaigns, as candidates must adapt their narratives to an audience that expects not only information, but also symbolic connection. Consequently, youth political interpretation is increasingly influenced by digital cultural codes and less by traditional ideological structures.

This reconfiguration of the link between youth and politics redefines the role of young citizens in the public sphere.

2.4 From likes to votes in youth electoral decision-making

Young people's daily interaction with social media platforms is redefining traditional mechanisms of political mobilization. Online actions—seemingly ephemeral acts such as liking or sharing a story—take on a performative dimension that goes beyond the screen and is projected onto electoral behavior (McTernan, 2024; Zhang et al., 2024).

Gonzalez et al. (2024) argue that digital interactions, such as likes and comments, are no longer simple expressions of approval, but symbolic acts that reflect a political stance. This form of participation, mediated by digital platforms, shapes young people's political experience based on emotions and symbolic allegiances rather than rational deliberation. In this context, the campaign narrative becomes the main vehicle of electoral influence (Silwal & Dayton, 2025).

Dommett and Verovšek (2021) and Winseck (2016) argue that when these narratives align with shared emotional experiences—such as social frustration, the desire for change, or generational identity—it facilitates a bond that leads to electoral choice.

This symbolic process transforms the voter into a digital believer, where the act of voting is interpreted as an extension of the emotional commitment built on social media. Elishar-Malka et al. (2020) highlight that this transition between the symbolic and the electoral occurs especially when

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Elishar-Malka et al. (2020) highlight that this transition between the symbolic and the electoral occurs especially when political content takes on forms that are recognizable to young people, such as short stories, viral aesthetics, memes, and visual metaphors. Wogu et al. (2019) warn that these narratives do not appeal to programmatic reasoning, but rather to emotional closeness to the candidate or cause, turning the act of voting into a form of symbolic validation.

Robles et al. (2019) agree that the most successful campaigns are those that generate shared experiences through storytelling, provoking identification and reinforcing a sense of digital community. Voting, then, does not arise as a result of comparing proposals, but as the narrative outcome of an emotionally compelling story. Thus, youth electoral decision-making is shaped as a response to the narrative experienced on platforms, rather than to traditional political debate (Bimber, 2014; Pfetsch, 2020).

However, advances in the analysis of youth participation on social media continue to be hampered by theoretical gaps and methodological challenges that limit a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon. As Bachini et al. (2022) warn, most studies focus on quantifiable indicators such as the number of likes, views, or shares, neglecting an in-depth analysis of the symbolic and narrative content underlying digital interactions.

This reductionist tendency prevents us from understanding the processes of meaning and the emotions that mediate between the reception of a message and political action (López-López et al., 2023; Schäfer, 2023).

Furthermore, the inherent dynamism of digital platforms introduces new research complexities. Constant changes in algorithms, the ephemeral nature of content—such as stories or live streams—and the transmedia nature of campaigns make it difficult to trace messages and their real impact. Added to this is the opacity of algorithmic systems, which condition the visibility of content without criteria that are fully accessible to researchers, thus limiting the replicability and validation of empirical findings (Jitsaeng & Tuamsuk, 2022).

Another major difficulty lies in capturing the affective and interpretive processes that occur in young users. These are not limited to rational or explicit responses, but involve emotional, aesthetic, and cultural dimensions that cannot always be captured through surveys or statistical analysis. Digital political interaction occurs through ambiguous forms—such as humor, irony, or memes—that require interpretive frameworks sensitive to the cultural codes of the youth environment (Gamir-Ríos et al., 2022; Mendizábal, 2023).

3. Methodology

This research is based on a qualitative approach, with a digital hermeneutic-ethnographic methodological design, which allowed us to analyze how young people interpret, reinterpret, and act in response to political narratives disseminated on social media (Casas-Mas et al., 2024; Velasco Molpeceres et al., 2025).

The hermeneutic approach allowed us to interpret digital discourses as cultural expressions, endowed with collective and individual meanings that young people integrate into their civic trajectories (Herrera & Frei, 2023).

Digital ethnography, for its part, facilitated the observation and analysis of real interactions on platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, and Facebook, allowing us to capture current forms of digital political participation, characterized by their ephemeral, emotional, and performative nature (Beta & Neyazi, 2022). The study was designed at a descriptive-interpretive level (Hidayaturrahman et al., 2022).

3.1. Population and sample

The population consisted of young people between the ages of 18 and 24 who were active social media users and eligible to vote. Initially, a sample population of 250 young people contacted during the pre-election period was considered; however, a final sample of 200 participants was selected when theoretical saturation and discursive redundancy were reached in the data analysis.

The sampling was non-probabilistic for convenience, considering criteria of accessibility, willingness to participate, and compliance with requirements such as age range, frequency of social media use, and exposure to digital political content. Of the 200 participants selected, 116 were women (58%) and 84 were men (42%). In terms of age range, 31% were between 18 and 20 years old (n=62), 39% between 21 and 22 years old (n=78), and 30% between 23 and 24 years old (n=60). Regarding the social network where they reported the most interaction with political content, 49% indicated TikTok (n=98), 33% Instagram (n=66), and 18% Facebook (n=36).

This sample composition allowed us to capture a significant diversity of youth digital experiences and practices associated with the consumption of political narratives. The information was collected during the pre-election period, which ensured immersion in an intensely politicized digital environment.

3.2. Categories, subcategories, and qualitative indicators

Based on the research objectives, three central categories of analysis were defined, each with subcategories and qualitative indicators. These dimensions guided the development of the semi-structured interview script and the coding of the corpus analyzed in Atlas.ti. Table 1 is presented for further interpretation.

Table 1. Qualitative axes of narrative analysis

Category	Subcategory	Qualitative indicator	Interview question
Digital political narratives	Emotional storytelling	Type of narrative presented	What political story has caught your attention lately?
	Viral aesthetics	Recurring visual formats	What visual elements (music, colors, editing) do you remember most?
	Symbolic significance	Use of symbols or metaphors	What symbols or phrases are repeated in the political content you follow?
Interpretation of political content	Cultural identification	Language, slang, or style familiar to the user	Did you identify with any content? Why?
	Ideological rejection	Detection of inconsistency or manipulation	Was there any content that made you feel repelled or distrustful?
	Humorous reappropriation	Use of irony or memes to reframe messages	Did you share or create memes about political campaigns? With what intention?
Effect on electoral decision	Emotional influence	Emotional reaction prior to voting	Did any content emotionally motivate you to vote for someone?
	Symbolic vote	Relationship between narrative and act of voting	Was your vote related to any story or message you saw?
	Digital participation	Comments, likes, sharing	Have you interacted with political posts? Why?

Note: Prepared internally based on the script and coding, 2025

Based on the information gathered, qualitative-analytical categories and components were established that demonstrate the relationship between digital political narratives, symbolic interpretation by young people, and its effect on electoral decisions. These dimensions made it possible to identify discursive, aesthetic, and affective patterns present on social media platforms.

3.3. Techniques and instruments

The data collection phase was designed using a rigorous qualitative approach, employing three complementary techniques that allowed us to capture the richness and diversity of young people's narratives around digital politics. First, 200 semi-structured interviews were conducted, guided by a script validated by experts, which were recorded and transcribed in full.

Three units of meaning were extracted from each of these interviews, reaching a total of 600 units. Second, a digital ethnography was applied to 100 viral political posts, extracted from TikTok (49%), Instagram (33%), and Facebook (18%), using a structured record sheet that allowed for the identification of visual, symbolic, and emotional elements.

In addition, the digital reflective journal technique was used with a subsample of 30 young people, who recorded a total of 210 spontaneous experiences using self-administered forms. The combination of these three qualitative techniques, together with their respective instruments, made it possible to construct a corpus composed of 910 units of meaning. Table 2 below summarizes the techniques and instruments used.

Table 2. Strategies for obtaining and systematizing the corpus

Applied technique	Instrument used	No. of units	Platform or medium
Digital ethnography	Structured content observation sheet	100 contents	TikTok, Instagram, Facebook
Semi-structured interviews	Script validated by five experts	200 interviews	Zoom, Google Meet
Digital reflective journal	Form with guided prompts (Google Forms)	210 entries	Self-administered by participants

Note: Prepared internally based on the script and coding, 2025

3.4. Ethical considerations

The study was conducted in strict compliance with the fundamental ethical principles applicable to social research. All participants were informed in a clear and understandable manner about the

objectives of the study, the procedures to be followed, and the use that would be made of the information collected, giving their informed consent before participating.

Anonymity and confidentiality of the data were guaranteed at all times, protecting the identity of the informants through an alphanumeric coding system. Likewise, the participants' right to withdraw at any stage of the process was respected, without this implying any consequences (Rodríguez-Saavedra et al., 2025). The interview script was reviewed by five experts to ensure its ethical and communicational adequacy.

4. Results

The results were derived from the hermeneutic processing of 910 units of meaning, derived from semi-structured interviews, reflective journals, and direct observation of viral content on social media. Each unit was coded, categorized, and cross-checked, allowing us to identify patterns and variations in the way young people aged 18 to 24 interact with digital political narratives. The analysis was organized according to the established objectives, prioritizing the identification of the types of predominant narratives, their perception by the participants, and their effect on the electoral decision. This structure ensures consistency between the findings and the research objective, ensuring that each result responds directly to the goals set.

4.1. *Predominant political narratives*

The analysis of the discursive units identified three types of recurring digital political narratives among young people, which structure the way they consume and reproduce political discourse on social media: emotional, critical-parodic, and propositional.

4.1.1. *Emotional narrative*

This narrative is characterized by a strong emotional charge, where the content appeals to fear, hope, or outrage. Young people recognized that these emotions impact their attention, although not always their electoral decision.

"I saw a video that made me sad. It was about a candidate who helped his community. It made me think, but I still did more research before deciding." (D07, female, 22 years old)

"Some ads made me angry, like when they use tragedies to win votes. That makes me reject them." (D15, male, 19 years old)

"What excites me doesn't always convince me, but it does make me want to know more." (D03, female, 21 years old)

These types of messages directly influence immediate attention and feed political memory, strengthening the motivations that sustain long-term participation. Intense emotions reinforce the sense of belonging and consolidate involvement in subsequent democratic debates and processes.

4.1.2. *Critical-parodic narrative*

This narrative mixes humor with political criticism. It is the most shared and commented on, especially on TikTok, where satire becomes a resource for unmasking official discourse.

"I love political memes because they show the truth that the news hides." (D11, female, 20 years old)

"Sometimes it's the only way to understand what's going on, when they explain it with humor." (D18, male, 24 years old)

"A TikToker ridiculed all the candidates and in the end it was clearer than any debate." (D09, male, 22 years old)

Political humor, by combining entertainment and denunciation, broadens the space for deliberation and encourages citizen vigilance. This narrative strengthens critical thinking, encourages participation, and demands greater consistency from representatives, generating a positive impact on the quality of political representation.

4.1.3. Proactive narrative

This is less common, but valued by young people who are more politically engaged. It is based on messages that present solutions, concrete proposals, or calls for informed voting.

"When I saw a reel explaining a candidate's actual proposals, it helped me decide." (D04, female, 23 years old)

"Not all videos do this, but some do provide useful information." (D17, male, 20 years old)

"If candidates used these clear methods more, there would be more informed votes." (D02, female, 21 years old)

"I liked that the candidate showed a detailed plan to improve public transportation; that way I could imagine how it would be implemented in my city." (D23, female, 22 years old).

"When I saw them explain the budget and timelines for an education proposal, I felt I could trust that candidate more." (D24, male, 21 years old).

This level of detail not only generates interest, but also encourages the verification and comparison of information, motivating voters to delve deeper into government plans. In this sense, the proactive narrative drives an active process of reflection that transcends passive reception and translates into a critical and informed evaluation of electoral options.

4.2. Youth perception of digital political narratives

Youth perception was marked by their interaction with three main types of digital political narratives: emotional, critical-parodic, and, to a lesser extent, propositional. While young people recognized the visual and emotional appeal of much of the content, they also expressed caution about its authenticity.

4.2.1. Emotional narratives

Most acknowledged that much political content on social media is designed to manipulate emotions and does not always reflect a real proposal.

"You can tell when a politician is just acting to get likes; there's no truth in that." (D06, female, 20 years old)

"Many influencers say they support ideas, but you know it's paid marketing." (D13, male, 22 years old)

"When messages are too perfect, they seem scripted; they're no longer convincing." (D10, female, 19 years old)

This narrative not only influences immediate reactions, but also shapes perceptions that carry over into how young people interpret political representation. Constant exposure to emotional messages influences the construction of trust or rejection toward institutions, reinforcing positions that are maintained in future electoral processes.

4.2.2. Critical-parodic narrative

Participants expressed feeling overwhelmed by the number of political messages circulating on platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, and Facebook. This excess generated a feeling of weariness, even when the messages were presented in an attractive or viral way.

"It's the same thing all day long, politicians promising, promising... and nothing changes." (D19, male, 21 years old)

"I see a political video and I know they're just looking for votes." (D08, female, 20 years old)

"I get bored when all the reels look the same, as if they were copying scripts." (D22, male, 24 years old)

This style of communication consolidates a space where young citizens exercise more active social control. By directly questioning official discourse, it strengthens public deliberation and creates pressure for political actors to respond with greater transparency and accountability.

4.2.3. Proactive narrative

Although less frequently, some participants highlighted their interest in content that explains specific proposals or promotes reflective analysis.

“When they explain the proposals directly, it helps me understand better.” (D02, female, 21 years old)

“A well-explained video about education motivated me to review that candidate's plan.” (D12, male, 23 years old)

“I don't just share out of emotion; if the content has clear ideas, I spread it.” (D09, female, 22 years old)

In several cases, interaction with proactive content generated discussions in digital and face-to-face spaces, reinforcing its potential as a catalyst for collective deliberation.

“In my group of friends, we debated the proposal to improve the public transportation system, evaluating its costs and benefits.” (D25, female, 20 years old).

This type of exchange, motivated by clear and substantiated messages, strengthens the ability of young voters to identify viable proposals and distinguish them from ambiguous promises. The proactive narrative is consolidated as a resource for the formation of an informed vote, in which consistency and evidence support the final decision, while encouraging continuous evaluation of the fulfillment of proposals and citizen oversight, reducing abstentionism and strengthening democratic participation in the long term..

4.3. Effect of narratives on young people's electoral decisions

The young people's accounts showed that digital political narratives influence their electoral decisions on three distinct levels: emotional, cognitive, and participatory. This effect was observed mainly in relation to emotional, propositional, and critical-parodic narratives.

4.3.1. Emotional narrative

On an emotional level, it was found that certain audiovisual content elicits immediate reactions but does not necessarily determine the vote; rather, it generates an affective disposition that can motivate or inhibit political interest.

“There was a video that moved me a lot, about a candidate who helped during a natural disaster, and that made me want to listen to him more.” (D14, female, 20 years old)

“When they use sad stories just to make an impact, it immediately turns me off.” (D21, male, 19 years old)

“One ad moved me, but I still didn't vote for him because in the end he didn't have any proposals.” (D03, female, 21 years old)

This emotional level, although it does not always define the vote, influences young people's willingness to get involved in democratic processes, affecting their openness to political dialogue and their future participation in instances of citizen representation.

4.3.2. Critical-parodic narrative

It had an indirect effect, helping young people identify inconsistencies and contradictions, negatively influencing their intention to vote for certain candidates.

“A meme about a candidate's contradictions made me hesitate to give him my vote.” (D13, female, 19 years old)

“I saw a TikTok where they were mocking an absurd promise and I realized how illogical it was.” (D06, male, 20 years old)

“Humor makes it easier to understand when a politician is lying.” (D11, female, 21 years old)

By highlighting inconsistencies, this narrative not only reduces support for candidates who lack transparency, but also encourages accountability and strengthens public deliberation as part of a more vigilant political culture.

4.3.3. Proactive narrative

On a cognitive level, participants indicated that digital narratives led them to compare information, verify sources, or even look up government plans before making a decision.

“I saw a reel where they compared proposals, and that really helped me think more carefully about my vote.” (D07, male, 23 years old)

“When the message is clear, it makes me want to research the candidate.” (D01, female, 18 years old)

“TikTok showed me a lot of things, but I checked the official websites to be sure.” (D16, female, 20 years old)

“I was more convinced by an urban transportation plan because they detailed where the budget would come from and how long it would take to implement.” (D29, male, 21 years old).

“When I saw that they outlined step by step how to expand access to university scholarships, I felt that it was something that could be achieved.” (D30, female, 22 years old).

In several testimonies, this type of narrative not only prompted fact-checking, but also led to concrete actions such as attending political events, participating in community forums, or sharing informational materials on their social media networks. Likewise, young people stated that a proactive narrative takes on special value when proposals include concrete explanations about their financing, timelines, and implementation. These accounts confirm that, for this age group, technical clarity and substantiation strengthen the candidate's credibility and encourage a more critical analysis before casting a vote, promoting more consistent citizen participation, monitoring of commitment fulfillment, and a reduction in youth abstentionism.

4.4. External statistical data

To reinforce the qualitative interpretation and assess whether the narrative effects transcend the subjective, the findings were compared with official data on youth participation.

According to the National Elections Board (JNE), in the 2022 regional and municipal elections, people under 30 represented 27.3% of the electoral roll, constituting one of the largest segments of the electorate. However, figures from the National Office of Electoral Processes (ONPE) and election observation reports show that, in the first round of the 2021 general elections, youth abstention was close to 30%.

This data reveals that, although the proactive narratives analyzed in this study generated motivation and a declared willingness to vote, this predisposition does not always translate into effective participation. The comparison shows a gap between the symbolic adherence identified in the interviews and actual electoral behavior, underscoring the need to articulate narrative strategies that not only mobilize emotionally, but also concretely encourage voter turnout and reduce youth absenteeism.

4.5. Interpretative cross-tabulation by gender, age range, and previous political experience

In order to address the requested intersectional analysis, the following is an interpretative cross-tabulation that combines gender, age range, and level of previous political experience in relation to the three narratives identified. This synthesis allows us to visualize how these variables modulate the participants' interpretation and reaction to digital political messages. Table 3 shows the interpretative cross tabulation by gender, age range, and previous political experience.

Table 3. Strategies for obtaining and systematizing the corpus

Gender	Age range	Narrative	Previous political experience	Interpretive summary
Female	18–20 years old	Emotional narrative	Low–Moderate	They tend to react mainly to visual stimuli and messages that generate personal identification; political interest is incipient, but some show curiosity when the message relates to their daily lives or immediate environment.
Female	18–20 years old	Critical-parodic narrative	Low	They consume ironic content on social media and share it for its humorous appeal, without a deep evaluation of proposals; laughter and satire generate more interaction than analysis.
Female	18–20 years old	Propositional narrative	Low–Moderate	They recognize the candidates' general ideas, but do not delve deeply into comparing plans; they pay attention when the proposal is presented in a brief and visually appealing manner.
Female	21–24 years old	Emotional narrative	Moderate	They respond positively to messages that combine personal closeness with references to specific topics of interest, such as employment or education; they show more willingness to compare information.
Female	21–24 years old	Critical-parodic narrative	Low–Moderate	Although they enjoy humorous content, they use it as a gateway to discuss or learn about politics, although they do not always delve deeper into the issues.
Female	21–24 years old	Propositional narrative	Moderate	They analyze and compare proposals more actively; they value clarity, feasibility, and connection to specific issues affecting their age group.
Male	18–20 years old	Emotional narrative	Low–Moderate	The connection is generated through messages of identity and belonging; some show initial interest in following the political debate, but only sporadically.
Male	18–20 years old	Critical-parodic narrative	Low	They actively participate in the dissemination of humorous content; their motivation is mainly social and entertainment-based.
Male	18–20 years old	Propositional narrative	Low–Moderate	They perceive proposals in general terms; interest increases if they are related to sports, technology, or topics close to their hobbies.
Male	21–24 years old	Emotional narrative	Moderate	They appreciate personal connection and familiar language, but also expect concrete references to youth issues, such as employment or housing.
Male	21–24 years old	Critical-parodic narrative	Low–Moderate	They use satire as a tool for political conversation, but do not always move toward an in-depth analysis of proposals.
Male	21–24 years old	Propositional narrative	Moderate	They compare proposals based on their feasibility and relevance to the economic or social context; they are more likely to follow candidates who present a coherent plan.

Source: Own elaboration, 2025

Table 3 shows that perceptions and assessments of narratives vary according to the combination of gender, age, and previous political experience. It can be seen that older women with moderate political experience are more willing to critically analyze proposals, while younger men prioritize humorous and entertaining content. Likewise, propositional narratives are more highly valued by those with a higher level of political involvement, while emotional narratives predominate among voters with incipient political interest.

4.6. Narrative coding matrix and political-electoral effects

This section summarizes the qualitative findings using a matrix that links the main digital political narratives with young people's perceptions, the predominant media, the types of reactions generated, the levels of impact, and the specific effects on electoral decisions. Table 4 is presented below.

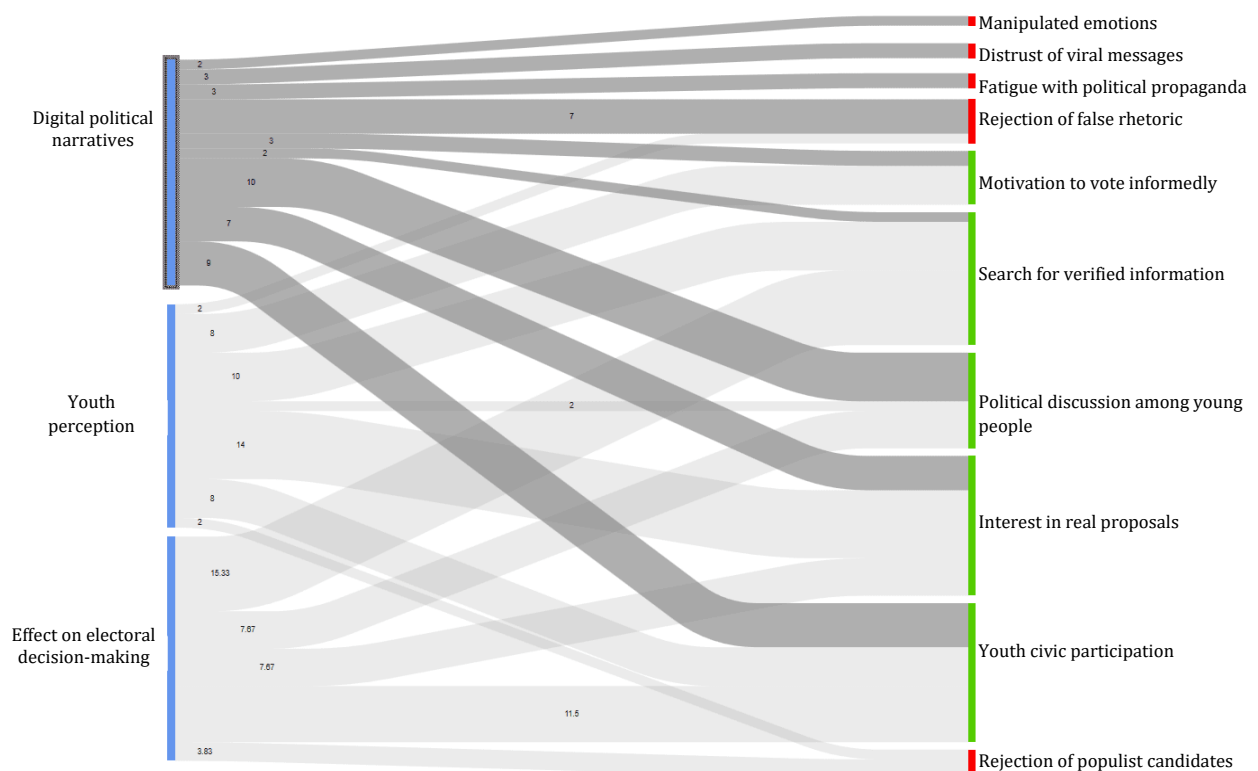
Table 4. Narrative matrix and effects on youth electoral decisions

Political narrative	Subjective perception	Medio predominante	Type of reaction	Level of impact	Electoral effect
Emotional	Intense emotions, suspicion of manipulation	TikTok, Instagram	Emotional	Emotional	Predisposition to political interest; doubts about authenticity
Critical-parodic	Saturation and criticism of official discourse	TikTok, Facebook, Reels	Humorous and critical	Cognitive and critical	Rejection of inconsistent candidates; strengthening of critical thinking
Propositional	Clarity, coherence, useful proposals	Reels, YouTube, Podcasts	Reasoned and active	Cognitive and participatory	Comparison of plans; informed voting decision

Note: Units of meaning analyzed using qualitative coding in Atlas.ti.

4.7. Perception flows and electoral impact

This section integrates the qualitative findings using a Sankey diagram, with each of the three main flows on the left corresponding to a predominant narrative: critical-parodic, propositional, and emotional, respectively. These narratives were interpreted in different ways by young people, leading to both mobilizing and critical effects on the emotional, cognitive, and participatory levels. Figure 1 below illustrates this narrative trajectory and its electoral impact on young people.

Figure 1. Sankey diagram of political narratives and their effect on young people

Note: Qualitative coding performed in Atlas.ti.

The values represented in the Sankey diagram showed consistent narrative trajectories that directly linked digital political narratives with specific electoral effects on young people.

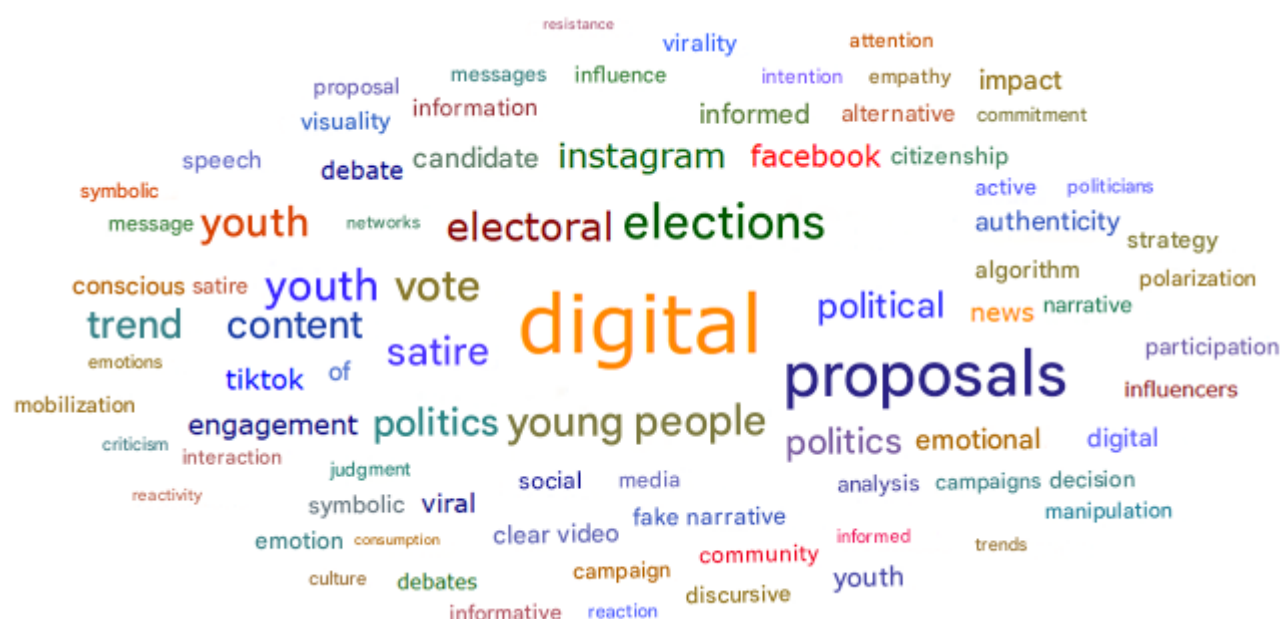
The most prominent flow (15.33) shows that proactive content, perceived as clear and coherent, drove youth civic participation. In turn, the values of 14 and 11.5 showed that the search for verified information and interest in real proposals were significant reactions to narratives interpreted as authentic. Other important flows such as 10, 9, 8, and 7.67 revealed cognitive and affective responses that strengthened critical analysis, political discussion, and a predisposition to vote based on arguments.

Thus, it was evident that young people do not act as a passive audience, but as active agents who filter, contrast, and respond symbolically to digital discourse.

4.8. Semantic cloud of youth political discourse

This section complements the qualitative analysis with a word cloud created from the 910 coded units of meaning. Figure 1 below graphically summarizes the concepts most frequently found in the analyzed corpus, highlighting the central discursive themes of youth digital political participation.

Figure 2. Word cloud on digital political narratives among young people



Note: Keywords extracted using Atlas.ti coding.

The figure visually presents the most frequently used terms in the analyzed discourses, revealing the semantic axes that structure the digital political narratives identified in the study.

The most prevalent terms are digital (128 mentions), young people (100), elections (97), proposals (85), and vote (65), which form the thematic core around which young people's perceptions of politics in virtual environments are articulated. These terms are directly associated with propositional narratives, where the emphasis on clear and viable solutions takes center stage.

Likewise, words such as emotional (14), engagement (19), content (27), TikTok (20), satire (42), informed (8), influence (6), and manipulation (4) emerge, linked to narratives such as paradoxical criticism, which combines humor and irony to question political discourse, and identity narratives, which reinforce links with specific digital communities.

These recurrences reflect how emotional, symbolic, and media elements act as catalysts for interaction, influencing both symbolic adherence and willingness to participate, although the latter, as statistical data show, does not always translate into effective electoral action.

5. Conclusions

The conclusions of the research are presented.

The study confirmed that digital narratives not only inform but also symbolically shape young people's political perceptions. From an affective, aesthetic, and emotional perspective, political discourse on social media generates an impact that transcends the explicit message, mobilizing support or rejection through symbolic mechanisms such as humor, storytelling, or spectacularization. This type of content, enhanced by algorithmic logic, transforms the political experience into a performative and emotional act, redefining the way young people interpret, evaluate, and decide their vote.

The most recurrent strategies in the digital campaigns analyzed focused on the use of visual language, humor, emotionality, and the simplification of political messages through viral formats. A clear

intention was identified to connect with the everyday experiences of young audiences, appealing to their cultural identity and the symbolic codes of platforms such as TikTok and Instagram. This narrative logic favors the appropriation of political discourse as replicable and shareable content, reinforcing the social dimension of the communicative act.

Qualitative findings revealed that young people not only consume political content, but interpret it from symbolic frameworks that combine affect, identity, and experience. Decisions to support or reject a campaign do not depend exclusively on the rational content of the message, but on how it aligns with their emotions, aspirations, and cultural codes. Visual narratives, memes, and performative interactions such as likes, shares, and comments function as keys to interpretation that give meaning to digital political participation.

While many young people do not explicitly recognize that social media influences their electoral decisions, most admit that these platforms are their main source of political information. The research shows that the repetition of messages, the constant presence of public figures in digital spaces, and narrative affinity generate a symbolic familiarity that translates into trust and political preference. In this sense, the like is not just a gesture, but a form of symbolic adherence that anticipates electoral behavior.

6. Limitations and future lines of research

The main limitation of this research is the opacity of digital algorithms and the impossibility of fully accessing the dynamics that regulate the visibility of political content.

Furthermore, as this is a qualitative study with a purposive sample, the results cannot be generalized, and the interpretive processes analyzed are conditioned by subjective factors such as emotions and sociocultural contexts.

In the future, it is suggested that hybrid methodologies be integrated that combine narrative analysis with digital tools to map interactions. It would also be valuable to include young people from rural areas or with less digital access, and to delve deeper into the role of emotionality in the appropriation of political discourse to enrich our understanding of the link between social media and electoral behavior.

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