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RESEARCH

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**POLITICAL COMMUNICATION AND SOCIAL MEDIA:  
ANALYSIS OF THE COMMUNICATION ON INSTAGRAM OF THE  
ELECTORAL CAMPAIGN FOR THE REGIONAL ELECTIONS OF  
CASTILLA Y LEÓN IN 2022**

**Comunicación política y redes sociales: Análisis de la  
Comunicación en Instagram de la Campaña Electoral de las elecciones  
autonómicas de Castilla y León en 2022**

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**ABSTRACT**

Thanks to the spectacularization of the political sphere today, social media have reached an unavoidable importance in the development of electoral campaigns. These platforms are becoming consolidated as partisan tools in what is known as political marketing. Instagram is becoming more and more established as a communication channel for political parties and leaders with their public, through strategic photo-text management. This research aims to understand the way in which the candidates for the presidency of Castilla y León with the highest number of votes use social media to build their own personal brand during the election campaign of the last elections on

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13 February. The methodology followed is content analysis, applying a standardized sheet to each of the publications on the Instagram profiles of the political leaders of the PP, PSOE, Ciudadanos, Podemos, Vox and UPL. It focuses on their Instagram profile posts, in terms of content and image and video content, revealing the differences and similarities between each party. In total, 132 publications shared between 28 January and 13 February 2022 were analyzed. The main conclusion drawn is that there is no consolidated pattern on the use of the platform for personal image. Although it is true that political formations created in recent years carry out a better strategic management of communication using the new functionalities of social media.

**Keywords:** social media, political communication, personal branding, Instagram, Castilla y León, strategic communication management, election campaign, political parties.

## RESUMEN

Gracias a la espectacularización que vive hoy en día la esfera política, las redes sociales han alcanzado una importancia inevitable en el desarrollo de campañas electorales. Estas plataformas se consolidan como herramientas políticas de lo que se conoce como marketing político. Instagram se afianza cada vez más como canal de comunicación de los partidos políticos y dirigentes con su público, a través de la gestión estratégica fotografía-texto. Esta investigación persigue comprender la manera en la que emplean los candidatos a la presidencia de Castilla y León con mayor número de votos la red social para la construcción de su propia marca personal, durante la campaña electoral de las pasadas elecciones del día 13 de febrero. La metodología seguida es el análisis de contenido, aplicando una hoja estandarizada a cada una de las publicaciones del perfil de Instagram de los líderes políticos del PP, PSOE, Ciudadanos, Podemos, Vox y UPL. Se centra en las publicaciones de sus perfiles de Instagram, en términos de contenido y de imagen y vídeos, dando a conocer las diferencias y similitudes entre cada partido. En total se analizan 132 publicaciones compartidas entre los días 28 de enero y 13 de febrero de 2022. La principal conclusión extraída es que no existe un patrón consolidado sobre el uso de la plataforma para la imagen personal. Si bien, es cierto que formaciones políticas creadas en los últimos años llevan a cabo una mejor gestión estratégica de la comunicación utilizando las nuevas funcionalidades de la red social.

**Palabras clave:** redes sociales, comunicación política, marca personal, Instagram, Castilla y León, gestión comunicativa estratégica, campaña electoral, partidos políticos.

## **Comunicação política e redes sociais: análise da comunicação no Instagram da Campanha Eleitoral das Eleições Autónomas de Castilla y León em 2022**

### RESUMO

Graças à espectacularização da esfera política actual, as redes sociais atingiram uma importância inevitável no desenvolvimento das campanhas eleitorais. Estas plataformas estão a consolidar-se como instrumentos políticos no que é conhecido

como marketing político. A Instagram está a estabelecer-se cada vez mais como um canal de comunicação dos partidos políticos e líderes com o seu público, através da gestão estratégica de fototexto. Esta pesquisa visa compreender a forma como os candidatos à presidência de Castilla y León com o maior número de votos utilizam a rede social para construir a sua própria marca pessoal durante a campanha eleitoral das últimas eleições de 13 de Fevereiro. A metodologia seguida é a análise de conteúdo, aplicando uma folha padronizada a cada uma das publicações sobre os perfis Instagram dos líderes políticos do PP, PSOE, Ciudadanos, Podemos, Vox e UPL. Centra-se nas suas publicações sobre os perfis Instagram, em termos de conteúdo e imagem e conteúdo vídeo, revelando as diferenças e semelhanças entre cada partido. No total, foram analisadas 132 publicações partilhadas entre 28 de Janeiro e 13 de Fevereiro de 2022. A principal conclusão tirada é que não existe um padrão consolidado sobre a utilização da plataforma para imagem pessoal. No entanto, é verdade que as formações políticas criadas nos últimos anos realizam uma melhor gestão estratégica da comunicação utilizando as novas funcionalidades da rede social.

**Palavras chave:** redes sociais, comunicação política, marca pessoal, Instagram, Castilla y León, gestão estratégica da comunicação, campanha eleitoral, partidos políticos.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

In a political-entertainment environment, social media has become an inexorable factor in the development of electoral campaigns. These social tools have become one of the most important ones nowadays for what is known as political marketing, where the political leader builds and manages his personal brand.

According to the Digital 2022 report, carried out by Hootsuite, the leading platform in social media management, and We Are Social, a creative agency specialized in social media, almost nine out of ten Spanish people use social media (WeAreSocial, 2022). So much so, that these social media platforms play a vital role for political parties, being their new way of reaching the population in a completely different way than they were used to. Traditional media such as television, radio or press have always determined a one-way communication where the audience could not express themselves beyond the final vote. A change has occurred in the patterns of political participation where young people, especially, seek that "extra-institutional" political participation (Chaves-Montero et al., 2017). Before Web 2.0, there was no feedback that is currently observed on these social media platforms, where the audience debates, shares and generates content, that is, there is a much closer, open and facilitating interaction between society and political leaders and parties through social average (Túñez and Sixto, 2011). Not only has the remote conception of social media in past electoral campaigns changed, where politicians believed that having a profile, without paying much attention to its update, was enough, as reflected in the results of Podemos in the 2014 European elections, whose presence on social media knew how to exploit the potential of the Twitter platform as a political tool and generating an extraordinary corporate identity as an emerging party (López-García et al., 2015). Now citizens seek in social media a space for participation, and general empowerment of the population in which they can contribute, debate, and deal with various issues that affect their lives.

Similarly, authors such as Chaves-Montero et al. (2017) go a step further with the emergence of politics 3.0 on the web 3.0, in which artificial intelligence applications facilitate not only the user's ability to search for the information they want but also present information to them based on their likes and/or preferences. This phenomenon is advantageously used to direct a message to that specific voter, as there is already a deep understanding of them.

In general, social media is used by individuals to share their day-to-day life or their interests, hobbies, and preferences with their followers. In this way, political leaders take advantage of the medium to show a closeness that they didn't have in traditional media. They not only create content about their party, their agenda, or current politics but also have the opportunity to show a more intimate or personal side that can create a more relatable image with the public. This moves away from the classic formal figure of a politician who only shows their work and presents a great advantage in producing a more personal image (Teruel-Rodríguez, 2016).

In this regard, we can talk about political personalization as a concept that integrates into our lives in such a way that we perceive political parties only through their leader, with the aim of remaining constantly in the audience's mind (Durántez-Stolle and Martínez-Sanz, 2019). Therefore, it is an electoral strategy that seeks to promote a political project through the qualities of a politician (Orejuela-Seminario, 2009). Thus, a type of political marketing has emerged that seeks to intensify the human and personal side of the leader more than the professional and institutional side, in order to give a personalized image and form to the basic aspects of the political formation. Thus, it can be observed that it is no longer the party logo that represents the formation, but the political actor who becomes its main figure. This was evidenced in the 2014 European Parliament elections, mentioned earlier, where the candidate for Podemos, Pablo Iglesias, was the party's logo.

Therefore, social media has been found to be a means of contributing to the provision of new meanings and narratives to the images that are published, tactically controlling the image of the politician to show the concept that the party itself desires. This is even more important in political communication, where there is a constant strategic management of the leader's image to convey values in line with the political formation (Tirado-García and Doménech-Fabregat, 2021). So much so that text has been relegated to a secondary role, with the image being the primary element, with special attention given to the Instagram social network, where images are more relevant than text.

Research on political communication has generally focused on Twitter and Facebook platforms, established as strong political tools due to their ability to easily transmit messages from leaders to their audience (Campos-Domínguez, 2017). However, there are increasing studies highlighting the role of Instagram as a tool used by political parties to reach their audience, especially the younger public who generally shy away from political issues (Selva-Ruiz and Caro-Castaño, 2017). It is becoming more evident, therefore, the profound transformation of Instagram as a communication channel for political parties and leaders with their audience, through the strategic management of photography-text (Tirado-García and Doménech-Fabregat, 2021).

Therefore, this study focuses on exploring the personal brand of the six political leaders who obtained the most votes in the February 13 elections to the Castilla y León General Courts. The candidates selected as a sample for the research are Alfonso Fernández Mañueco for the Popular Party, Luis Tudanca Fernández for the Spanish Socialist Workers' Party (PSOE), Juan García-Gallardo Frings for Vox, Francisco Igea Arisqueta for Ciudadanos, Pablo Fernández Santos for United We Can, and Luis Mariano Santos Reyero for UPL (Union of the Leonese People). The entire period, from the presentation of the candidacy, the electoral campaign, its subsequent reflection day, and February 13 - the day of the general election - is included in this study, which aims to understand the image managed by each of the candidates for President of Castilla y León on their Instagram accounts. This entire time frame has been chosen because it represents the most important moments in the field of political communication (Gamir-Ríos et al., 2022).

## **2. OBJECTIVES**

The present research aims to establish a general overview of how the candidates for the presidency of the Castilla y León parliament use the social media platform Instagram for the construction of their personal brand. To achieve this general objective, the following specific objectives (OE, from now on) are proposed:

- OE1: To study the level of usage and engagement generated by political leaders.
- OE2: To identify the main themes developed in their posts.
- OE3: To examine the degree of personalization and the main professional and personal attributes assigned.
- OE4: To investigate the expressive resources used in relation to the selection of spaces and the type of staging.
- OE5: To inquire about the preferred format typology used by each candidate.
- OE6: To analyze the use they make of tools such as hashtags and mentions.

## **3. METHODOLOGY**

In order to achieve the established objectives, a methodology based on quantitative-qualitative content analysis has been used, establishing analysis templates to collect the information related to the object of study in each case.

To do this, the posts of the political leaders of the aforementioned parties on the Instagram platform feed have been reviewed. The profiles studied are the following: Alfonso Fernández (@alferma11), Luis Tudanca (@luis\_tudanca), Juan García-Gallardo (@juanggfrings), Francisco Igea (@franciscoigea), Pablo Fernández (@pablo.fernandezsantos.3) and Luis Mariano Santos (@luismarianoupl). The candidates selected for this study were chosen based on the results of the 13F election, selecting the 5 political leaders with the highest number of votes: PP (378,896), PSOE (362,304), Vox (212,605), Podemos (61,290), Ciudadanos (54,186) and UPL (51,878) (El País, 2022).

The sampling unit selected in this case is the posts of the candidates on the Instagram platform during the study period, while the recording units are the categories specified in Table 2. The total sample consists of 132 posts in the time period from 01/28/ 2022, the start of the campaign, until 02/13/2022, the day of the elections, thus including the entire electoral campaign, reflection day, and election day. The distribution of the sample along with the number of followers (collected on 11/07/2022) is as follows:

**Table 1.**

*Distribution of the sample and number of followers by political leaders.*

<i>Political leader</i>	<b>No. of publications</b>	<b>No. of followers</b>
<i>Alfonso Fernández (PP)</i>	48	5706
<i>Luis Tudanca (PSOE)</i>	34	3042
<i>Pablo Fernández (Podemos)</i>	22	4407
<i>Francisco Igea (C's)</i>	9	2551
<i>Juan García-Gallardo (Vox)</i>	19	14300
<i>Luis Mariano Santos (UPL)</i>	0	457

**Source:** Author's own work.

Initially, to determine the engagement of Instagram posts, the calculation method used by Chaves-Montero and Gadea-Aiello (2017) in their study on "Use, Effectiveness, and Reach of Political Communication on Social Media" was reviewed. They calculated the engagement rate for Twitter and Facebook. Based on this, and using the formula provided by the social media analytics and planning tool, Metricool (Montells, 2021), the engagement was calculated in the following way:

**Figure 1.**

*Distribution of the sample and number of followers by political leaders.*

$$\text{Engagement en Instagram} = \frac{\text{Me Gusta} + \text{Comentarios} + \text{Guardados}}{\text{Alcance}} \times 1000$$

**Source:** Montells, 2021.

In order to carry out a complete and detailed analysis of the studied phenomenon, an ad hoc categorization model has been applied to this research. The design of the categories, according to the analysis model inspired by the structure of the journalistic 5W's (What, Who, Where, When, and Why), was carried out based on the methodology of previous works on political representation on social networks, especially on Instagram (Verón-Lassa and Pallarés-Navarro, 2017; Quevedo-Redondo and Portalés-Oliva, 2017; Selva-Ruiz and Caro-Castaño, 2017; López-Rabadán and Doménech-

Fabregat, 2018; Tirado-García and Doménech-Fabregat , 2021). To do this, a standardized analysis sheet was designed, which was completed based on the data of each sample element. It includes the following variables related to the strategic management of communication on the platform:

**Table 2:**

*Standardized analysis sheet.*

1st W. What		3rd. W. Where
<b>Main topic</b>		
Political news		<b>Image-space</b>
Ordinary political activity		Indeterminate
Media intervention		Official
Electoral campaign/image promotion		Private
Private life		Public
Others		
2nd W. Who		4th W. When
<b>Protagonist of the Image</b>	<b>Assignment of attributes</b>	<b>Staging</b>
Leader	Professionals	Institutional
Party members	Statesman	Strategic Spontaneity
Other politicians	Public manager	Pose
Citizens	Communicator	Others
Media	Leader of masses	
Impersonal (places, objects)	Protector-compassionate	<b>5th W. How</b>
Family/friends	Hero	<b>Technical aspects</b>
Others	Others	Format
	Personal	Photography
<b>Secondary actor of the image</b>	Couple/Family	Poster
There is none (solo)		
Party members	Friendships/Social life	Vídeo
Other politicians	Hobbies	<i>Reels</i>
Citizens	Others	
Media		<b>Content Aspects</b>

Family/Friends		Hashtag
Symbolic objects		Mentions
Others		

Source: Author's own work.

#### 4. RESULTS

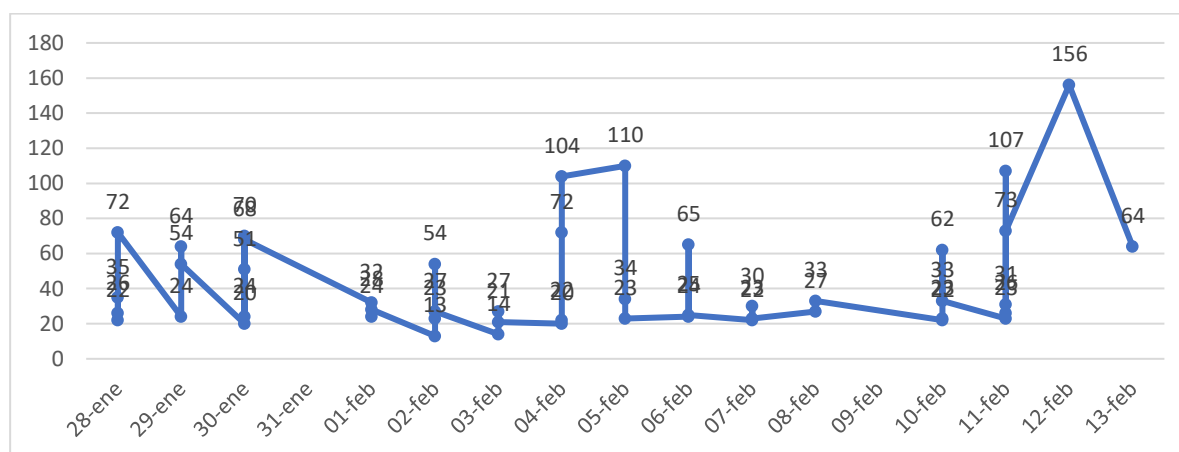
Subsequently, we present the most important results extracted from the analysis carried out on a sample of 132 posts on the official accounts of political leaders from PP, PSOE, PODEMOS, CIUDADANOS, VOX, and UPL. Firstly, we analyzed the engagement obtained by each post published by the candidates to understand the complete sequence of electoral campaigns on their main accounts, as well as the type of posts that have been the most prominent.

In the case of UPL, as previously established in Table 1, it was impossible to analyze beyond the number of followers, as they did not make any posts on their Instagram profile during the 13F electoral campaign.

In this case, Alfonso Fernández Mañueco, leader of the PP, obtained his highest engagement (n = 156) in a post uploaded on the day of reflection, in which he published a carousel of images from his private life with his family and friends enjoying themselves. On the other hand, the post with the lowest interaction (n = 13) from his followers was an explanatory video about the decrease in unemployment, where no people were present. Generally, he maintains a sequence with many ups and downs, as can be seen in Figure 2.

Figure 2.

*Distribution of engagement of the Popular Party throughout the analyzed period.*



Source: Author's own work.

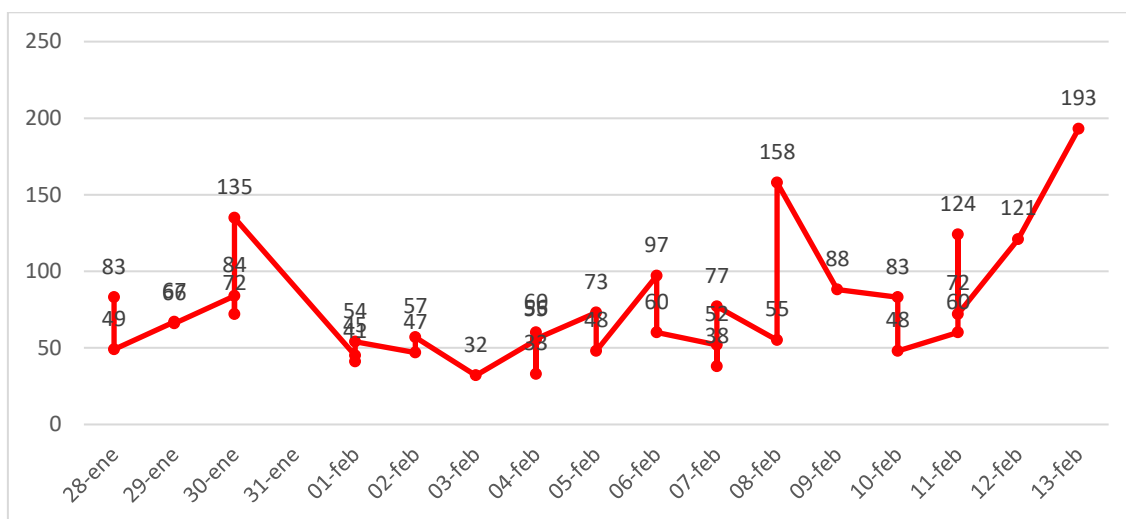
The leader of the Spanish Socialist Workers' Party, Luis Tudanca, generates higher participation (n=193) from his followers in his last post on election day, exercising his



right to vote alongside his team. Similarly, his worst engagement data from him (n = 32), with twice as many points as his rival from him, the PP, is a carousel of photos from a visit to Latem Aluminum company. As can be seen in Figure 3, there is a succession of engagement peaks from his followers.

**Figure 3.**

*Distribution of the engagement of the Spanish Socialist Workers Party during the entire period analyzed.*

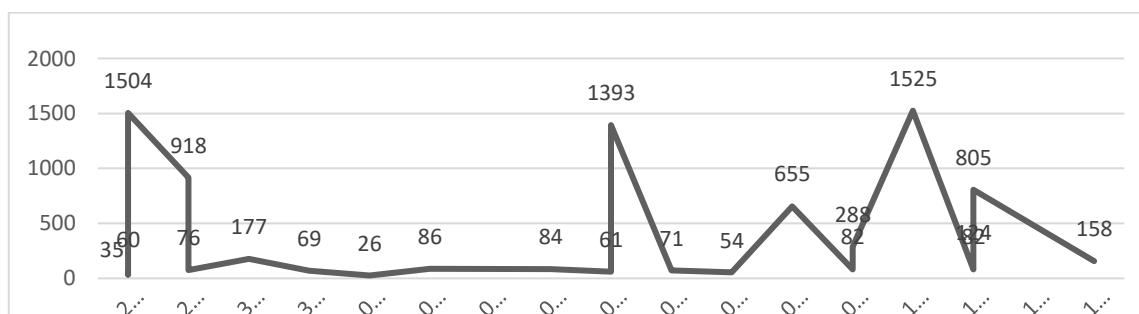


Source: Author's own work

Regarding the leader of Podemos, Pablo Fernández, he has taken a different strategy from the others when it comes to posting on his account, as he has chosen to generate content shared by other party colleagues such as Irene Montero, Pablo Echenique, or the main account of the political party Ahora Podemos, among others. Therefore, those posts, although they have had much higher participation, as can be seen in Figure 4, considering the number of followers of both content creators, the engagement has not been as high. Thus, focusing on Figure 5, it can be observed that he obtains a similar sequence to the other candidates, with his highest engagement data (n=158) on election day and his worst data (n=10) in a post shared with Irene Montero about feminism and the struggle of women in Castilla y León.

**Figure 4.**

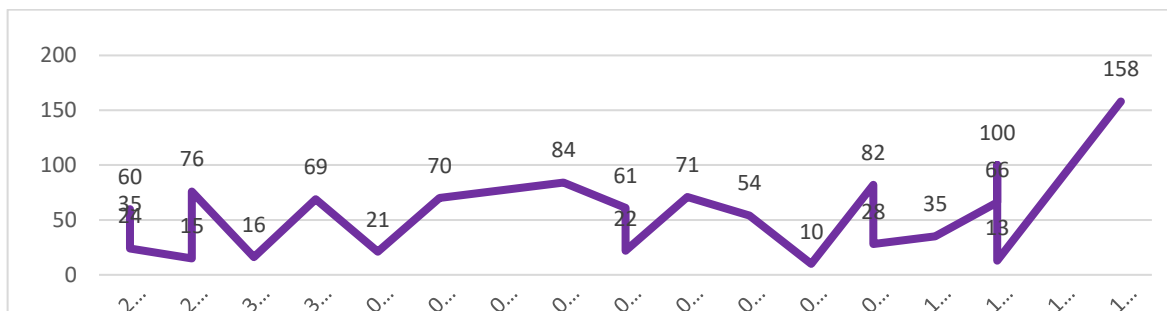
*Distribution of the engagement of Podemos throughout the period analyzed, including publications shared by other members of the political formation.*



Source: Author's own work

**Figure 5.**

*Distribution of Podemos engagement throughout the period analyzed, excluding posts shared by other members of the political party.*

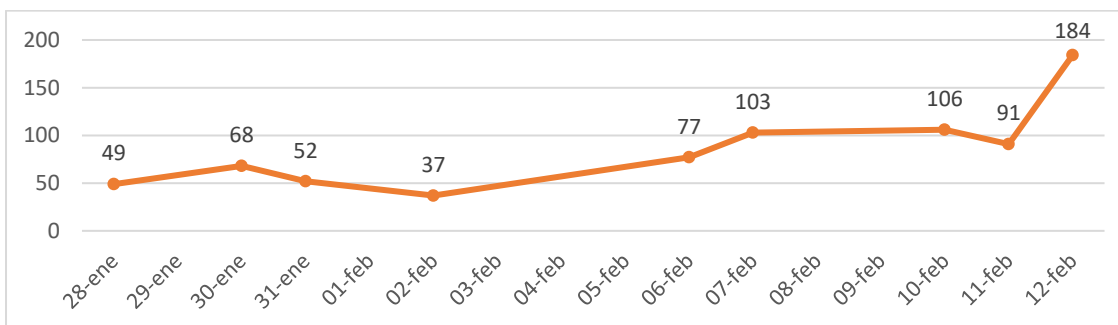


Source: Author's own work

The candidate for president in the Castilla y León regional elections for Ciudadanos, Francisco Igea, obtains a slightly different sequence compared to the others (as shown in figure 6), starting off lower and increasing as the election day approaches, which, once again, is the point with the highest engagement (n=184). On the day of reflection, he posted a carousel of photographs related to his last rally and his private life (friends and hobbies) mostly. However, the video made by several professionals such as notaries, writers, journalists, a Euro-deputy, etc. supporting his candidacy is the one that has received the least interactions (n=37) from his followers.

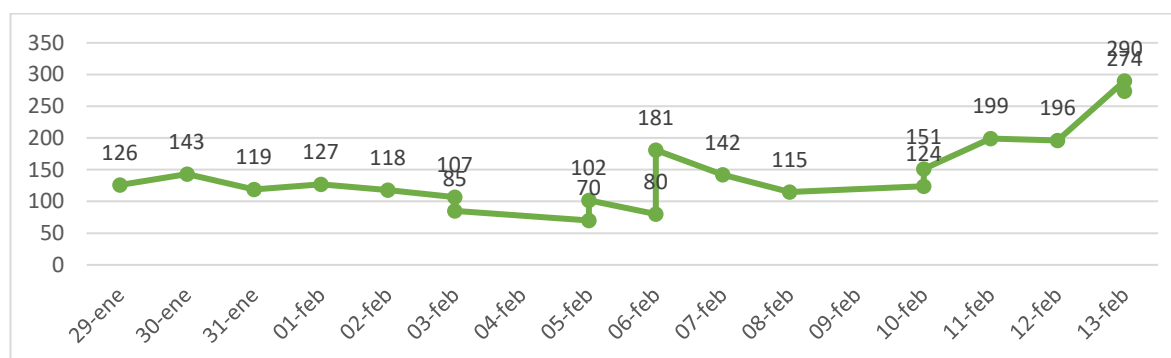
**Figure 6.**

*Distribution of Ciudadanos engagement throughout the period analyzed.*



Source: Author's own work.

Finally, in terms of engagement, Juan García-Gallardo, the leader of Vox, is the one who receives the most interactions in relation to his number of followers. As can be seen in Figure 7, as he publishes more, he obtains greater engagement, although with certain peaks. His highest point (n=290), double that of the other candidates, is obtained in the post on election day, 13F, and his post with the least interaction (n=70) is a reel based on a visit to Mercaolid, in which he supports farmers, ranchers, and distributors.

**Figure 7.***Distribution of Vox engagement throughout the period analyzed.***Source:** Author's own work.

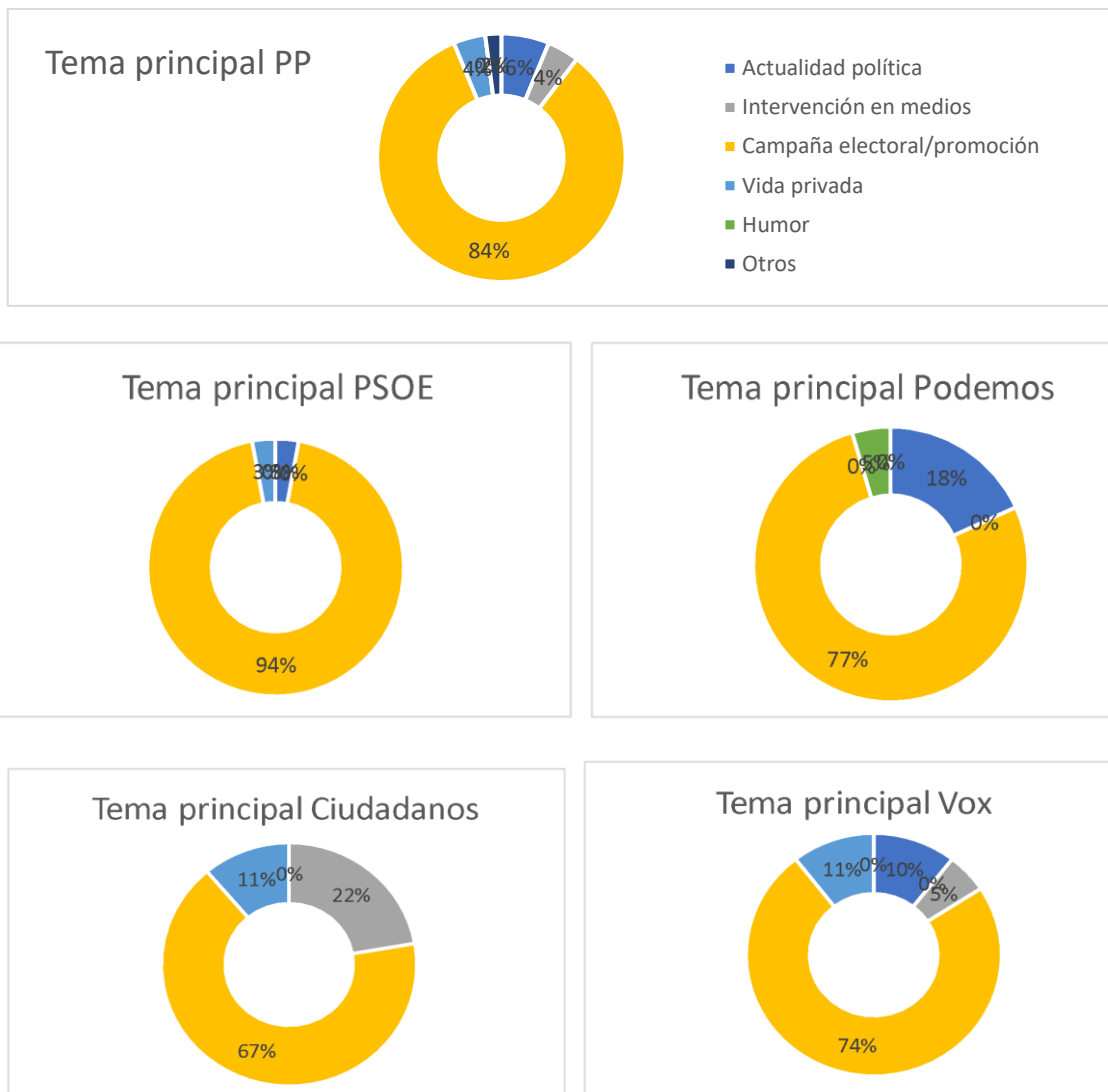
Regarding engagement, Juan García-Gallardo, the leader of Vox, receives the most interactions in relation to the number of followers he has. As shown in Figure 7, he obtains more engagement as he posts, although with certain peaks. His highest point (n=290), double that of the other candidates, is obtained in the post on the day of the vote, February 13th, and his post with the least interaction (n=70) is a reel based on a visit to Mercaolid, in which he supports farmers, ranchers, and distributors.

Therefore, if an average of the engagement received in the feed of each of the analyzed candidates is generated, the following results can be obtained, ordered from highest to lowest: 144.72 Vox, 85.28 Ciudadanos, 73.02 PSOE, 58.27 Podemos, and 42.69 PP.

Regarding the "what", it is the main topic discussed by political leaders on their Instagram accounts. Generally, they dedicate almost all of their time during the electoral campaign to promoting their party to lead the government of Castilla and León (see figures 8, 9, 10, 11, and 12), although some with more emphasis, such as PSOE and PP (94% and 84%) compared to others such as Ciudadanos, Podemos, and Vox (67%, 74%, and 77%, respectively). Intervention in the media is only published by Ciudadanos in 22% (n=2) of their posts, by Vox in 5% (n=1), and by PP in 4% of their posts (n=2). Regarding political news, the candidate who publishes the most in relation to its content is Podemos with 18% (n=4), followed by the leader of Vox with 11% (n=2). They are followed by PP with 6% (n=3) and PSOE with 3% (n=1). Private life is another topic on which all leaders generate content except for Podemos, with Ciudadanos doing so much more than the others (22%, n=2). They are followed, in similar conditions, by Vox (5%, n=1), PP (4%, n=2), and PSOE (3%, n=1). However, it is Pablo Fernández from Podemos who is the only one who publishes humorous content (5%, n=1). Finally, only Mañueco, the leader of the PP, posts a post (2%) on another topic related to Rafa Nadal.

**Figures 8, 9, 10, 11, and 12.**

*Distribution of the results on the main topic dealt with by each of the political leaders in their publications.*



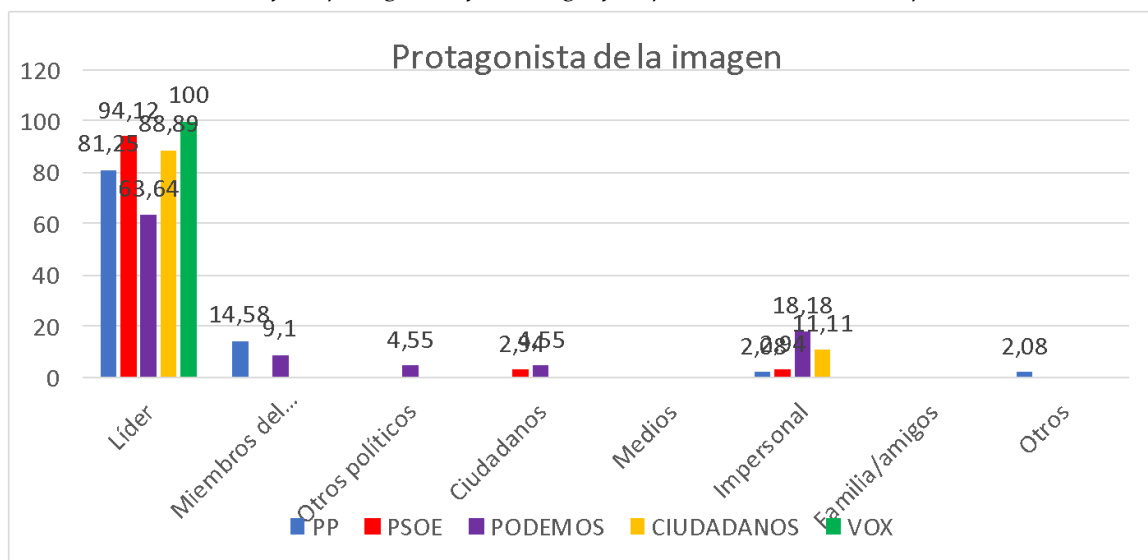
**Source:** Author's own work.

When referring to the "who" variable, three prominent sub-variables have been considered. Firstly, it has been considered important to know who the protagonist is in the candidates' posts (see Figure 13). In most cases, the party leader is the star of the account, being the case in 100% (n=19) of Vox's candidate profiles. The second place, with 94.12% (n=32) of the posts, goes to Luis Tudanca from the PSOE. In third place is Ciudadanos' Igea with 88.89% (n=8) and very closely behind is Alfonso Fernández from the PP with 81.25% (n=39). Finally, and in smaller numbers, it is Pablo Fernández from Podemos with 63.64% (n=14), who gives greater prominence to certain impersonal posts (18.18%, n=4), such as screenshots of posts that he shares on another social network. It is also noteworthy the percentage of impersonal posts generated by the Ciudadanos' leader (11.11%, n=1). On the other hand, the PP decides to give a considerable percentage of protagonism to other members of the party (14.58%, n=7), as does Podemos, to a lesser extent (9.1%, n=2). Another data to highlight is the

proportion of protagonism that citizens receive since they are the ones to whom they owe their future as governors. In this case, only Podemos and PSOE generate this type of content (4.55%, n=1, and 2.94%, n=1, respectively).

**Figure 13.**

*Distribution of the protagonist of the image of all political leaders in their publications.*

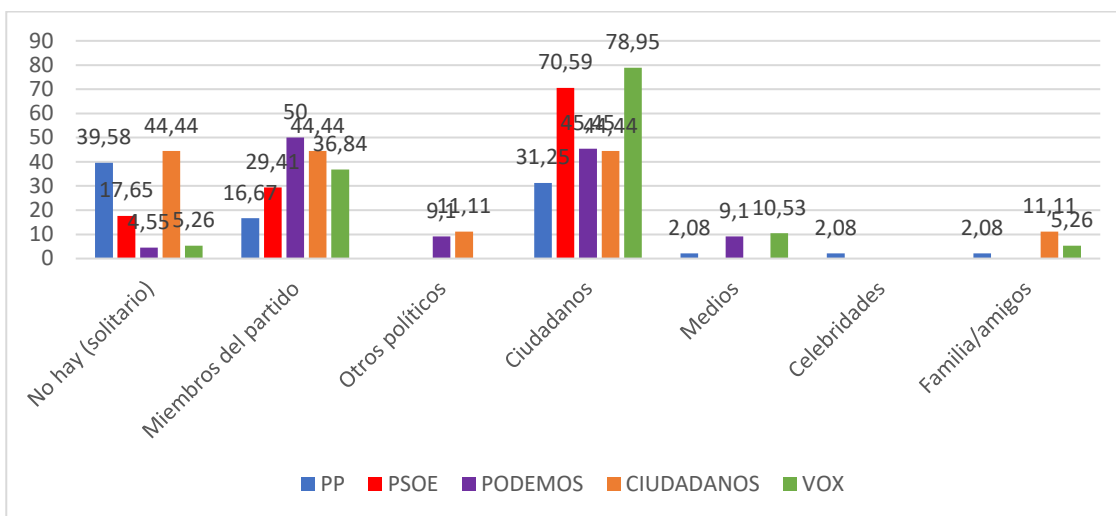


Source: Author's own work.

Regarding the secondary actors who appear in the published posts, several results can be highlighted (see Figure 14). On the one hand, it stands out that Ciudadanos and PP generate a lot of content in which they are the only actors in the publication (44.44%, n=4, and 39.58%, n=19, respectively). On the other hand, although all the leaders consider citizens as secondary actors, Vox stands out with 78.95% (n=15) and PSOE with 70.59% (n=24). Party members become other actors who appear the most in the posts of the analyzed profiles; with Podemos, Ciudadanos, and Vox giving them the most prominence as secondary actors (50%, n=11; 44.44%, n=4 and 36.84%, n=7, respectively). Only Ciudadanos and Podemos make references to other politicians (11.11%, n=1, and 9.1%, n=2). Finally, it can be observed that family and/or friends are secondary actors in a minimal part of the publications, except for PSOE and Podemos, who do not generate content about them.

**Figure 14.**

*Distribution of the secondary actor of the image of all the political leaders in their publications.*

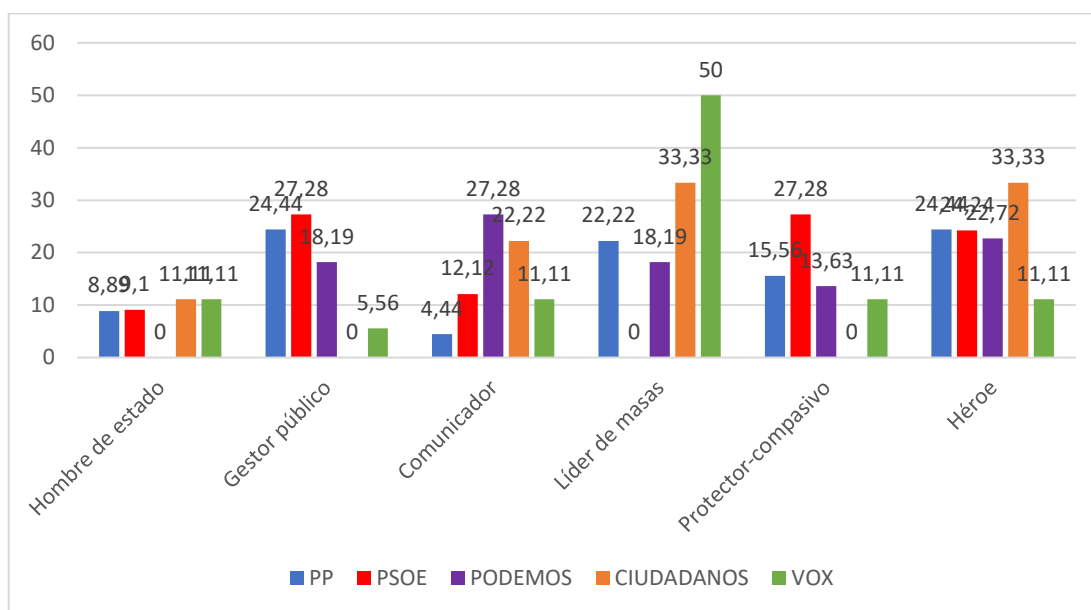


**Source:** Author's own work.

Regarding the assignment of attributes, professional and personal attributes were established. In this regard (see Figure 15), it should be noted that in the case of "statesman", political leaders appear with a similar percentage except for Podemos, which is never assigned this attribute. As "public manager", the PSOE stands out in first place (27.28%), followed by the PP (24.44%) in second place and Podemos (18.19%) in third place. Vox also does this to a small extent (5.56%), but there is no trace of Ciudadanos in this case. All candidates generate posts in which they are assigned the attribute of "communicator", with Podemos (27.28%) and Ciudadanos (22.22%) standing out. As "mass leader", there is a clear candidate far ahead of the others, Juan García-Gallardo of Vox, in 50% of his posts. He is followed by Igea (33.33%), Mañueco (22.22%), and Pablo Fernández (18.19%). It should be noted that this type of attribute was not found in the analyzed feed of the PSOE candidate, however, he stands out the most in the "protective-compassionate" attribute above his rivals with (27.28%). Finally, with regard to the "hero" attribute, all candidates have similar percentages, except for Ciudadanos with 33.33%, above the others, and Vox to a much lesser extent, with 11.11%.

**Figure 15.**

*Distribution of the professional attributes of all political leaders in their publications.*

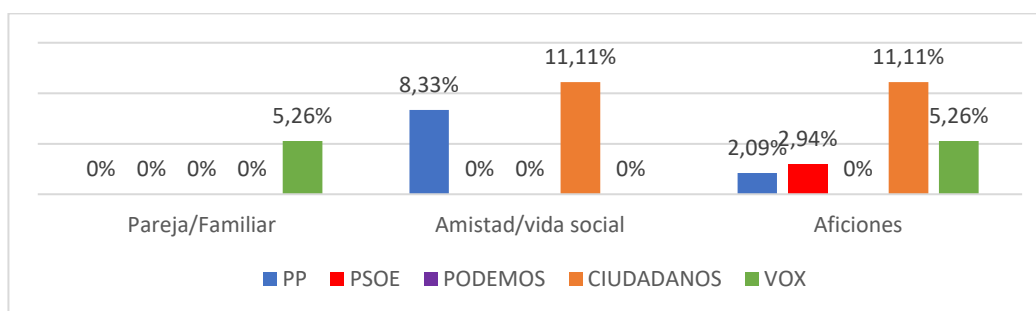


**Source:** Author's own work.

Figure 16 shows that the most prominent personal attributes are "hobbies" for all parties except Podemos. "Friendship/social life" is only attributed to Ciudadanos (11.11%) and PP (8.33%). Lastly, it is worth noting that the attribute of "partner" is only assigned to the leader of Vox (5.26%).

**Figure 16.**

*Distribution of the personal attributes of all political leaders in their publications.*



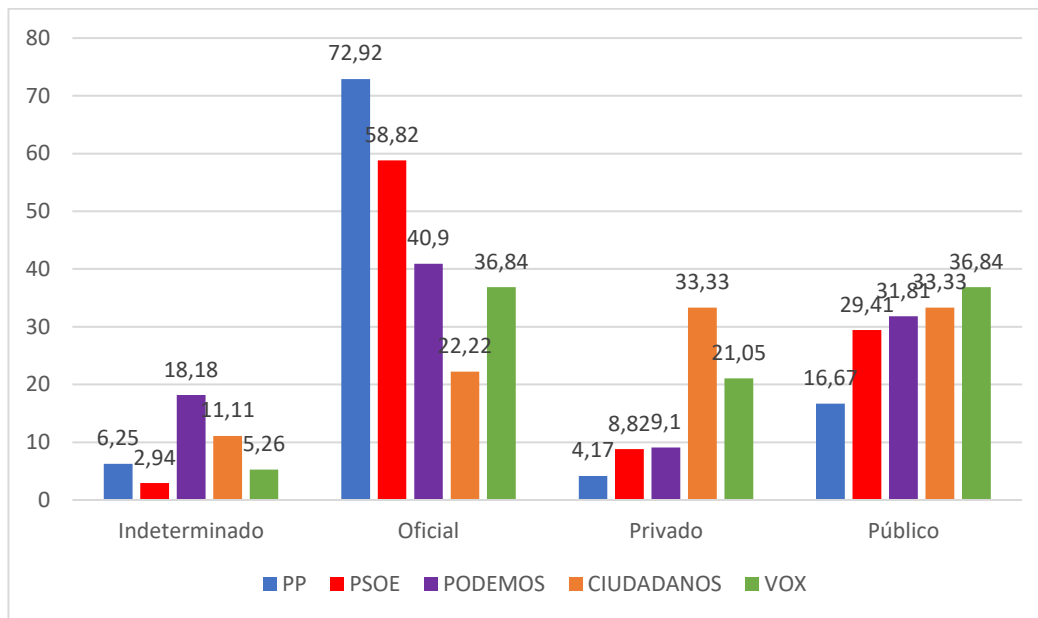
**Source:** Author's own work.

Regarding the "where" (see figure 17), there are several types of locations commonly used by the candidates for the presidency of the parliament of Castilla y León for their photos and videos. Generally, they tend to represent the scenarios of power and ideological confrontation. In this sense, official spaces such as parliaments, offices, or spaces for rallies are published by the leaders in greater proportion, especially by the PP (72.92%) and PSOE (58.82%). Public space is the second most chosen by the candidates in similar percentages. Private space is chosen mainly by Ciudadanos (33.33%) and Vox (21.05%) compared to the other candidates. It is noteworthy that in

the analyzed posts of Podemos or Ciudadanos, the space is largely undetermined (18.18% and 11.11%, respectively).

**Figure 17.**

*Distribution of the image space of all political leaders in their publications.*



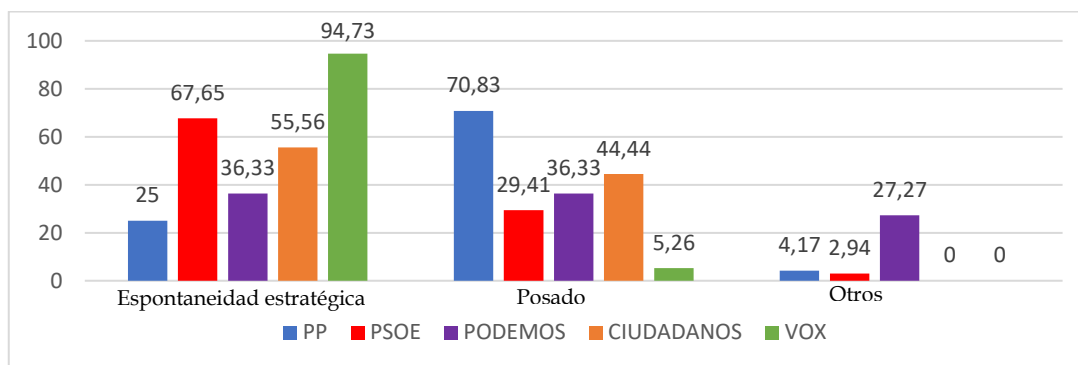
**Source:** Author's own work.

Regarding the "when", a predominant category stands out among the others, as shown in Figure 18. Thus, the most frequent style used by most candidates is "strategic spontaneity", where leaders, aware that there is a camera pointed at them, try to convey naturalness and make it seem like they are not aware of it. The exception in the use of this staging comes from Mañueco, who mostly (70.83%) uses the "posed" style, directing his gaze clearly towards the audiovisual media. The Podemos and Ciudadanos candidates are in a very similar percentage between "strategic spontaneity", with 36.33% and 55.56%, respectively, and "posed" with 36.33% and 44.44%. Another noteworthy data is the "other" percentage (27.27%) of Pablo Fernández, as he uses several posts, as mentioned earlier, with screenshots of his Twitter profile.



**Figure 18.**

*Distribution of the staging carried out by all the political leaders in their publications.*

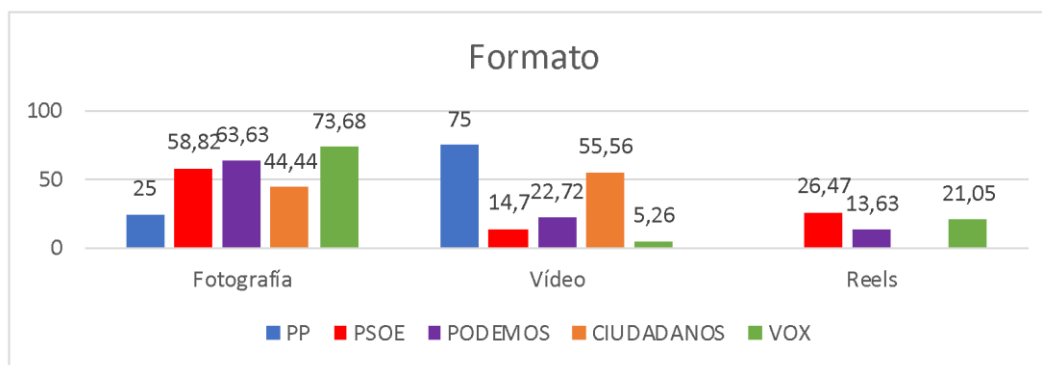


**Source:** Author's own work

Within the "how" variable, the technical aspect of the format is addressed. In this sense, as shown in Figure 19, the majority of the candidates for the presidency of Castilla y León prefer images over other types of configurations. However, PP (75%) and Ciudadanos (55.56%) mainly opt for longer video formats. Thus, they are the only two leaders who do not generate content in the form of reels, while PSOE (26.47%), Vox (21.05%), and Podemos (13.63%) dedicate a good part of their profile to creating these short videos. Additionally, there has been a majority use of photo carousels over a single image.

**Figure 19.**

*Distribution of the format used by all political leaders in their publications.*



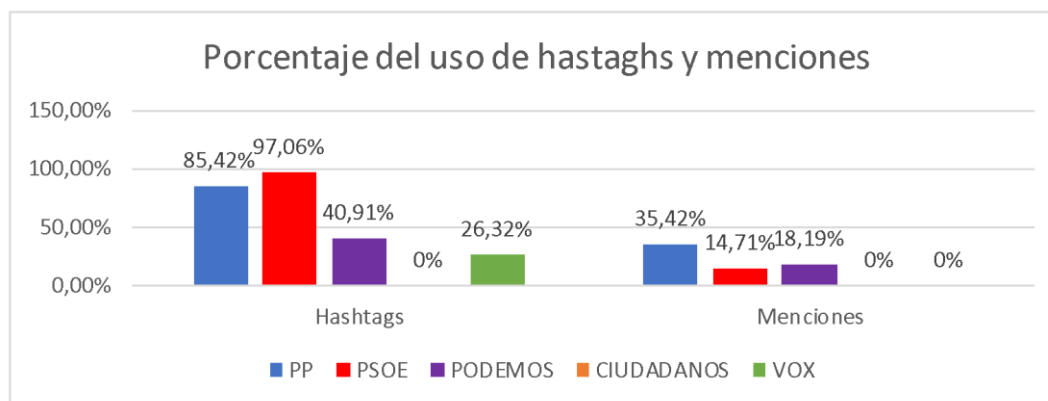
**Source:** Author's own work

Finally, regarding the use of hashtags and mentions by politicians in their posts, some significant differences can be seen among them (see Figure 20). On the one hand, the use of hashtags related to the electoral campaign slogan, provinces, or the autonomous community is almost exclusively used by PSOE (97.06%) and PP (85.42%) in almost all their posts. The leader of Podemos (40.91%) also uses hashtags, but to a lesser extent, as does Vox (26.32%), although they only use it to mention their slogan. Ciudadanos is the only candidate who does not use either mentions or hashtags. In the case of mentions, Mañueco (35.42%) stands out for his frequent use in his posts to refer to a

fellow party member and the official party account. In this sense, Pablo Fernández (18.19%) and Luis Tudanca (14.71%) also make use of this tool. It is noteworthy that the leader of Vox in Castilla y León does not mention any accounts in his posts.

**Figure 20.**

*Distribution of the use of hashtags and mentions of all political leaders in their publications.*



**Source:** Author's own work

## 5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

It can be concluded that the study has achieved the main objective of understanding how the candidates for the presidency of Castilla y León use the Instagram social network during the 13F election campaign by analyzing their posts.

Based on the results obtained, the following main conclusions have been drawn:

If we talk about the difference in followers among the candidates, it is found that Juan García-Gallardo is far ahead of the rest, tripling the number of followers of the next leader with the most followers on their Instagram profile. He is also the presidential candidate with the highest generated engagement, far above the rest. This may be due to the potential he extracts from Instagram's features, as he has been consistent in his publications, creating everything from photos and videos to the new short video format reels. Another advantage may be his age, as he is the youngest candidate presented in the elections, and given that this social network is focused on that target audience, he may benefit from it. The political leader with the least engagement is Mañueco, being the most active on his profile, however, he generates almost all of his content on videos where he is the only protagonist, speaking to the camera mainly through posed shots. On the other hand, Instagram serves as a personal album for the leaders, especially in the case of Ciudadanos and PP, where the candidates appear alone most of the time. In contrast, the others choose to give greater importance not only to themselves but also to members of their party, and above all, to citizens, as they are the ones they address. It is worth noting the case of the UPL political actor, who has not published any type of content on his profile during the election campaign.

Generally, it can be highlighted that the preference is always to expose their activities in a dynamic and updated way, in which almost all of the content generated by political leaders is related to their political agenda - rallies and concentrations carried out by their parties in the main cities of the autonomous community. The almost non-existent display of the personal life of the candidates is noteworthy, especially in the case of Pablo Fernández's account, which is solely dedicated to political content. This type of behavior is also evidenced in previous studies during other electoral processes, in which candidates also avoid showing personal activities on other social platforms such as Twitter, showing a low level of personalization (López-Meri et al., 2017; Zugasti and García, 2018). This practice could be considered a waste of the capacity that Instagram, in particular, and other social platforms, in general, have to show a much closer and more familiar profile that allows for a closer bond with the public, as Túnnez and Sixto (2011) claim, and to create greater engagement on their part, as evidenced by other previous research on Instagram (Peng, 2021) or Facebook (Bene, 2017; Metz et al., 2020). However, contrary to what Teruel-Rodríguez (2016) proposes, in these cases, a more conventional strategic management of the image is observed, in which the politician must maintain a more formal figure, as they will be the next president.

In this sense, it can be observed that the use of posts is to show that the presidential candidates of Castilla y León have been present in a certain place and, simultaneously, to promote certain personal brand attributes that do not show a great difference among the analyzed characters.

One aspect that may be directly related to the interaction of the public on the candidates' accounts is staging. Apparently, spontaneous photographs in places of power are the result of careful planning in which the leaders appear totally natural in the development of their political activity, but are fully aware that the cameras are pointing at them. This strategic spontaneity is highly sought after by Luis Tudanca and Juan García-Gallardo. The use of photographs over text reinforces their importance as primary "communication vehicles" (Ruiz and Bustos, 2016, p.121) in social media - in general, not only on Instagram - by the current political landscape; since visual communication has shown to have greater potential for influencing public opinion, capturing the attention of citizens, and using emotionality to influence voter behavior (Brader, 2005; Graber, 1996).

Finally, the inclusion of hashtags is a powerful tool that can reach new audiences and connect with them. In this case, only PSOE and PP are considered to have used them correctly, as they practically include them in all their posts. Mentions of other members of the party are not very common. However, Pablo Fernández is the only one who uses the platform's latest feature, in which a post is shared by two authors, reaching many more people since it is the followers of both who will see that content.

Broadly speaking, the results provide a general assessment of the degree to which leaders of the main political parties represented in the 13F are making use of the Instagram platform, which is generally quite improvable in certain aspects. Undoubtedly, political communication has been found in this social network, which

reaches the younger audience, an ideal place to carry out actions, as different authors highlight (Chaves-Montero et al., 2017; Selva-Ruiz and Caro-Castaño, 2017). However, various elements must be taken into account in their professionalization as a means of expression for leaders, since a consolidated pattern has not yet been shown, although, in some candidates, such as Vox's, some elements suggest a good strategic management of communication on their feed, since Instagram, as Tirado-García and Doménech-Fabregat (2021) claim, is becoming a good communication channel for political formations and their audience. This social platform has become an effective tool to focus the attention of voters (Filimonov et al., 2016), as long as political leaders use it to show political information and guidance, as argued by Parmelee and Roman (2019) after studying the reasons for followers of US political leaders' accounts on Instagram.

However, it is worth noting the representative limitation of this study, based solely on the candidates' profile posts during the election campaign and voting day. These profiles may have a different communicative format than what they generate constantly on their accounts during other times of the year. Therefore, it would be of interest for future research of this kind to know not only aspects related to the Instagram social network, especially, but also to analyze other characteristics that may occur on other social media with different functionalities, and even conduct a study that compares the strategic communication management during the election season and after the results, to check if it ceases or improves in certain aspects, if the context so requires, in order to compare results and extract representative findings in this regard.

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