

Analysis of the Digital Campaign of Daniel Noboa and Luisa González in the Second Round of the 2023 Presidential Elections

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Abstract

This research analyzes the communication strategies on TikTok of the candidates for the presidency of Ecuador, Daniel Noboa and Luisa González, during the second round of elections in 2023. The research question focused on how these strategies influenced audience visibility and engagement. The methodology used was mixed, combining qualitative and quantitative analysis. Data from TikTok posts of both candidates were collected and analyzed, evaluating metrics such as plays, comments, likes, shares and saves. The results revealed that Daniel Noboa obtained immediate visibility, reflected in high numbers of reproductions and "likes", while Luisa González stood out in the number of shared and saved posts, suggesting a content perceived as more valuable or relevant. These findings suggest the importance of adapting campaign strategies to the characteristics of each digital platform. On TikTok, it is crucial to create content that quickly captures attention and motivates meaningful interaction. Successful campaigns must balance initial visibility with lasting engagement to maximize their effectiveness in the digital environment.

Keywords: TikTok, Political Communication, Campaign Strategies, Family, Social Networks, Digital Influence.

INTRODUCTION

Communication is an increasingly important tool for democratic systems. In politics, communication solves social conflicts between different actors, including the state, political parties, the media and public opinion. Therefore, it is necessary to find a path between reality and a constructed medial reality, which means how we understand the world around us through the media and cyberspace (Mendé & Smith, 1999).

Political communication is the basis of the electoral process, which prioritizes gathering and involving the masses, so that they have a participation in a process that they do not fully understand in all its aspects based on ideological references or provided by third parties (Hidalgo & Cedeño, 2022). Important tools for influence and information have been introduced, for example, social networks, which have become essential in political communication.

Networks are the space to know, interact, share and disseminate political content. In Ecuador, this reality is no stranger to electoral campaigns; such is the case of the candidates Luisa González and Daniel Noboa, who during the second electoral round held between September and October 2023, used them as the main means to convince voters (Hidalgo & Cedeño, 2022).

This research analyzes the digital campaign of both candidates, focused on the use of the social network TikTok. An analysis is made on the use of this tool and its influence on society, taking as examples relevant cases in the politics of Ecuador and the United States.

TikTok has been chosen, as it handles entertainment, communication and self-expression issues and is growing fast (Kryniski & Pedrouzo, 2022). Its short video format, ranging from 15 seconds to 3 minutes and its recommendation algorithm spread the message in a quick and simple way, generating interest and participation in the electoral campaign process (Caamaño, 2022).

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It is important to carry out the study on this social network, since, according to El Universo (2024), it has the most followers in the country, with a growth of 19.71% between 2023 and 2024; as of January 2024, it maintained 14.26 million users. As for the popularity of TikTok López (2024) mentions:

Originally launched in China in 2016 under the name Douyin, it merged with Musically in 2018 to expand into the global market and acquire the name known in the West as TikTok. Since 2018, it has experienced significant growth globally. In 2022, it will be one of the six most downloaded and used social networks. The increase was greatly intensified due to the COVID-19 pandemic, being the social network with the highest number of users downloaded globally in March 2020. Generation Z and, to a lesser extent, millennial generation represent most of the TikTok users (p. 106).

Social Networks and Politics

Politics made a crucial leap to social networks, political parties and parliaments are the maximum expression of the public. An event that marked this beginning was the campaign of Social Democrat Barack Obama in 2008, which used cyber space and new scenarios of communication.

Martínez (2012) mentions that the Internet is the queen of political media, as Barack Obama showed. In the past, television and radio were the kings of these media. In terms of mediation and technology, the 2008 campaign for the US presidency has been the most emblematic and efficient so far, given that Obama achieved his goal, the presidency.

Candidates and political parties use social media to share information related to their campaigns, spreading their messages and mobilizing their followers. Castells (1996) in his trilogy "The Information Age", especially in the volume "The Network Society", he analyzes how communication networks and technology influence social structure and communication strategies, not all campaigns use networks in the same way, some are based on traditional strategies such as advertising and organizing public events, while others adopt more innovative strategies, such as creating viral content, using memes, among others.

El País (2004), mention that Barack Obama was not the first politician to use these new spaces on the web, but American and former Vermont governor Howard Dean pioneered the use of digital technology for political communication. During his campaign for the Democratic nomination in the 2004 presidential election, he implemented an innovative Internet-centric strategy. Its website, emails and social media became key tools for mobilizing voters and fundraising.

He was noted for connecting directly with citizens. Through his website citizens could register, donate and participate in online debates; he was one of the first to use email to communicate with his followers and keep them informed about his campaign. Barrera Agarwal and María Helena (2008), mention that "the campaign managed in a short time to establish itself, giving base to confirm that "the Internet invented Howard Dean" (p. 35), referring to the prototypes of websites that it created, where people of similar interests met, which later transformed into the formation of partisan groups. During a speech in Iowa, he went viral online and attracted media attention for his famous "Dean's Cry". Espino (2014), add though ridiculed by some, his campaign demonstrated that technology could be a powerful tool for political mobilization. Despite not winning the nomination, he left a lasting imprint on digital politics.

In Latin America, citizens are more informed by social networks, platforms such as TikTok, Facebook and WhatsApp have experienced exponential growth; according to data from Reuters Institute Digital News Report and Statista Research Department (2023), in January 2022, 71% of people in Latin America used social network, except for Haiti, where the use by the population was less than 50%. "The most popular apps in the South American country are YouTube and Facebook" (p. 3).

Unlike a decade ago, when only a small fraction of the population participated in this way, social networks are the main channels for political participation and presence on the electoral stage. In Ecuador after the global pandemic, the campaigns for the presidency of Ecuador were carried out in 2021. According to the analysis of Cusot Cerda and Palacios Arias (2021), the candidate Xavier Hervas used TikTok as a communication tool

within his campaign, reaching 16.28% of votes and positioning himself as the fourth most voted candidate, and “had an innovative and creative strategy” (p. 90).

His presence on platforms such as TikTok and Facebook allowed him to reach a young audience that is not usually interested in traditional politics. His goal was to position himself as a modern and innovative figure. Espino (2014), far from what is already known in these cyber spaces, “differentiating himself from the other candidates” (p.53).

Its content was based on informative publications that shared daily news about government proposals, interviews and campaign events, and it conducted live broadcasts to interact with supporters. Through the Internet, activists and voters become active participants in the campaign, passing on information to their closest contacts and acquaintances. According to Caldevilla Domínguez (2009), polls also indicated a significant increase in his recognition and popularity, which generated strong support on social networks.

For Wolton (2006), political communication consists in “embracing the study of the role of communication in political life; in a broad sense it integrates both the media and the polls, the political research of markets and the publicity, with special interest for the electoral periods” (p. 29). The structure of the campaigns is based on the central message, the use of traditional media (television, radio, newspapers) and digital media (social networks, websites, emails) and the creation of advertising content for different media. In recent years digital advertising has become increasingly relevant.

METHODOLOGY

This research has a mixed practical approach to understand the strategies behind the publications and the impact of the candidates for the presidency of Ecuador generated in the audience during the second round of elections in 2023. This study is exploratory and descriptive “to identify practices and strategies” (Suárez & García, 2022) of the candidates on TikTok.

Digital social media campaigns require an approach capable of capturing both qualitative and quantitative aspects, through content analysis which aims to describe meaning depending on the context (Schreier, 2014). For example, the quantitative provides data on the scope and influence of the strategies behind the posts, while the qualitative can help to understand them.

The research was carried out in three parts; first, data were collected from each of the publications with the different indicators to observe during the campaign period; second, a measurement of the collected data was made to measure the scope of the candidates' strategies; finally, a “sequenced analysis” was conducted (Sánchez, Guerrero & Silva, 2018). Two videos of the analyzed period were chosen, since they had a greater reach and influence on citizens.

In this regard, on the one hand, 95 videos posted on the TikTok of the candidates were examined, 43 issued by ADN and 52 by RC5, during the second round of elections, which began on September 24 to October 12, 2023, covering a total of 19 days of campaigning. On the other hand, the indicators within the publications (number of views, comments, shares, likes and saved) were analyzed. The research process had a specific continuity. First, a matrix was constructed with the indicators to make up the database. The TikTok publications of the two named candidates were identified, collected, organized and analyzed. For analyzing the two publications with greater reach, three types of indicators were differentiated: message, sense of the message and what is said as a result of the message, with the aim of continuing the qualitative analysis and the practices that generated influence in the audience.

Analysis Process for Data Collection

Regarding content analysis, each interaction of the candidates' publications was documented, and those with the greatest impact on the audience were examined. From the “like”, which is a participatory way of interacting with the content, which together with engagement and participation are the fundamental construct to describe the nature of the “interactions of users”/participants (Ballesteros, 2019: 217). Users are also part of the content by commenting, sharing and saving videos.

The user demonstrates with the “likes” their “thanks or agreement”, informing their liking to other users; the purpose of commenting is to “communicate their thoughts, opinions or ask questions, engaging in discussions with other users”, expressing their point of view; sharing a content is an effective way of “spreading information” to bring the content to more users and interact with friends and followers. Saving the content allows “marking news articles or publications” for the user to investigate later, and in future cases to revisit the marked page (FasterCapital, 2021). Finally, the views measure the reach of the posts by the total number of times the video was played.

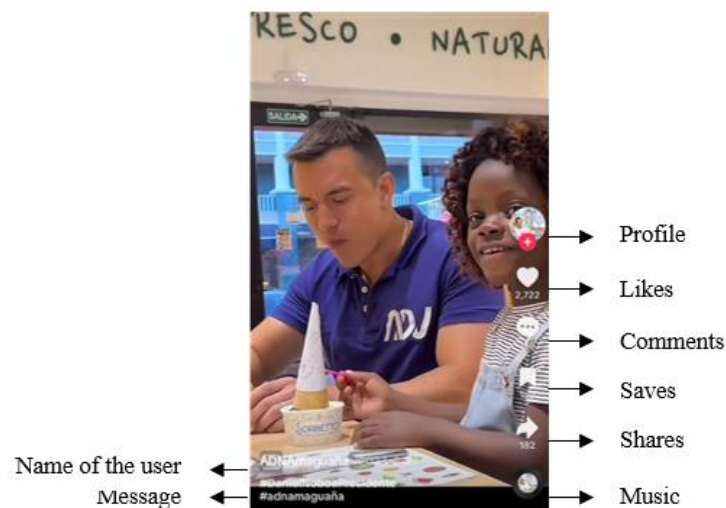
In this way, the participation of each user was observed, detailing the information that millions made in the 95 publications. As Ballesteros (2019) mentions, it is possible in the digital environment to study its manifestation through symbolic behaviors, for example, in the form of “Likes”, sharing or commenting messages

The collection, systematization and analysis of the data was carried out manually without using a secondary page, having a first-hand analysis. For data collection and chart creation, it was developed in Excel. Changes were reported in the indicators, for this reason a file was created with data recorded until May 24, 2024.

Before performing the results of the data analysis, the indicators must be analyzed on a TikTok post which can have a different duration: videos created on the platform can last up to 60 seconds, while uploaded videos can last up to 3 minutes (TikTok, 2024). The exploration of a publication on TikTok allows to make and identify a proposal of “panel analysis” in the profile of each candidate.

Five categories were identified as needed to analyze video reach: likes (❤️), comments (💬), saved (📌), shared (🔗) and message (✉️), that are part of the content analysis. On the other hand, the general indicators: creator profile, username, verified account badge, video audio are those that allow the management of the publication. All the aforementioned elements compose, in general terms, a TikTok video; from this premise, the content analysis and the impact of the strategies that each candidate had in his publications is carried out (Sánchez, Guerrero & Silva, 2018).

Figure 1 Indicators for analyzing publications



Note: Own elaboration, post taken from the account @adnamaguana, during the electoral campaign process, 2023.

RESULTS

In this section, the interactions created on TikTok by candidates Daniel Noboa and Luisa González during the 2023 election were thoroughly analyzed. It was investigated how each candidate used this platform to attract and mobilize their audience using indicators such as plays, comments, shares, likes and saves. The findings show the interaction patterns and effectiveness of campaign strategies, providing a clear view of the impact of their digital efforts on public perception.

Analysis of Indicators

A table is presented with the TikTok indicators analyzed. The figures of all the corresponding publications were added during the 19 days of electoral campaign in 2023 for a correct tabulation. In this way, the daily total of each indicator was obtained for both candidates.

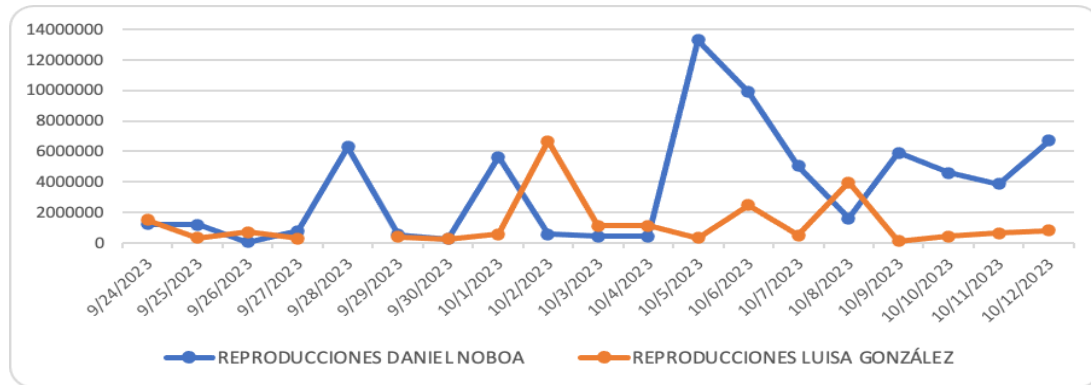
Table 1 Analysis of interactions between Daniel Noboa and Luisa González

	Daniel Noboa	Luisa González
Reproductions	68322270	22207500
Comments	117025	80021
Shared	134836	191646
Likes	4671473	1934859
Saved	147734	170676

Source: Own elaboration (2024).

Daniel Noboa outperformed Luisa González on most interaction metrics, in views (68,322,270 vs. 22,207,500), comments (117,025 vs. 80,021) and likes (4,671,473 vs. 1,934,859), indicating greater visibility and participation. However, González had more posts shared (191,646 compared to 134,836) and saved (170,676 compared to 147,734), indicating that her material was more valuable or relevant to be shared and saved. This shows that Noboa gained greater reach and immediate responses, while González managed to have her content shared and saved more frequently, demonstrating strengths in several aspects of her digital campaign strategy.

For a more detailed analysis, the indicators with the highest interaction, reproductions, comments and "likes" were taken, which have the highest peaks in the metrics. Comparison of these indicators not only provides an overview of each candidate's performance, but also allows assessing direct competence. With these data we can know the impact and strategies, at the same time, body language elements were evaluated, which were identified in two publications of both the RC5 campaign and DNA, being the most viralized in the indicator of reproductions.



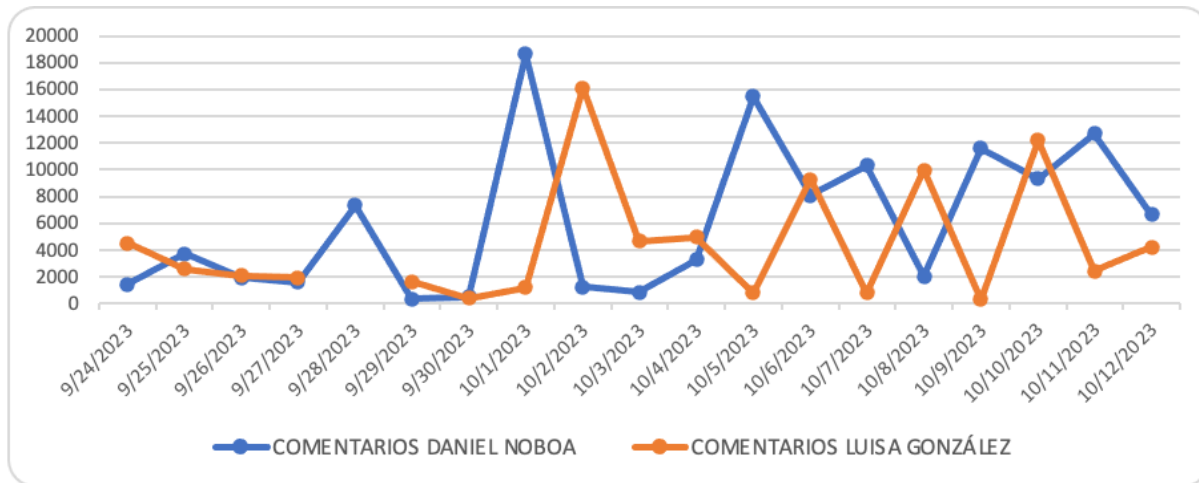
Graph 1 Plays on the TikTok platform

Source: Own development (2024).

In terms of views, it is a direct indicator of the scope of each candidate's videos. A greater number of views suggest that the videos are reaching a wider audience. According to the data, Daniel Noboa has significantly more reproductions (68,322,270) compared to Luisa González (22,207,500). This may indicate a greater popularity or effectiveness in spreading the message.

Noboa experienced several significant peaks, with a notable increase on September 28 and October 5, with more than 13 million views, reaching its peak. However, Luisa González experienced a significant increase on October 2 and continued with a relatively high and steady trend until October 8. On October 8, Noboa experienced fluctuations and a noticeable increase, reaching a peak of reproductions of about 1 million.

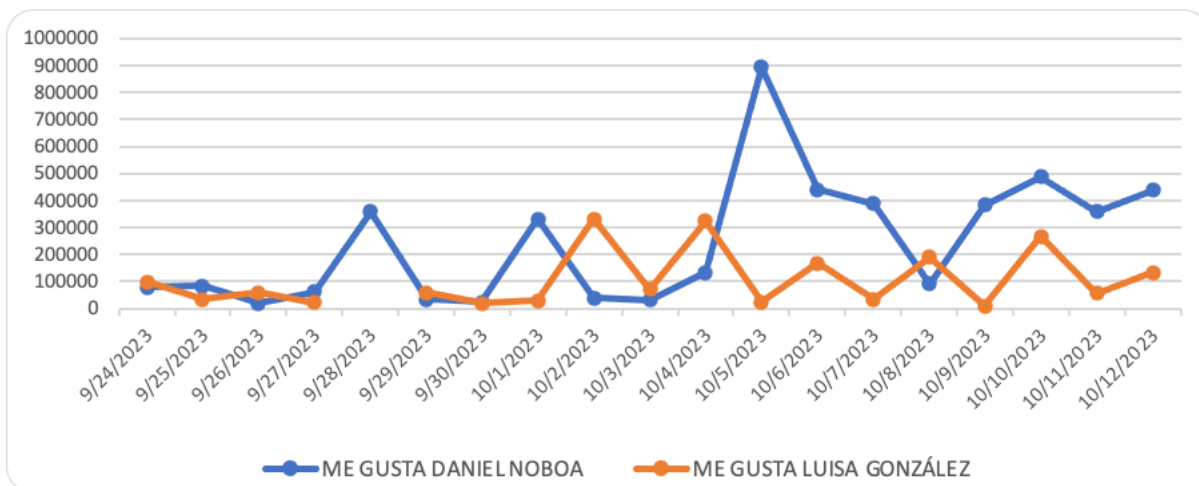
While González maintained a more consistent and regular presence, Noboa's strategy seems to be linked to specific events or viral content. There is a better understanding of both candidates' strategies by connecting these benchmarks with events important to the campaign.



Graph 2 Comments on TikTok's platform

Source: Own development (2024).

From September 24 to October 12, different trends were observed in the interactions of the TikTok publications of candidates Daniel Noboa and Luisa González. Comments on Noboa's posts showed several major spikes, standing out on October 1 with approximately 18,000 comments. On the other hand, Luisa González showed a significant increase on October 2 with about 16,000 comments, maintaining a relatively high trend with a prominent increase on October 10.



Graph 3 "Like" on the TikTok platform

Source: Own development (2024).

By comparing the likes between Daniel Noboa and Luisa González, it can be clearly inferred which of the two candidates is gaining more popularity and support on TikTok. This comparison is essential for modifying campaign strategies in real time, focusing on the type of content that generates the most positive interaction. If a video receives a large number of likes, the campaign team can create more similar content, which will increase the chances of attracting a larger number of voters.

Noboa exhibits several significant peaks, especially on September 28, October 5, and October 10, while González shows more stable behavior with a notable peak on October 2. Likes reflect the audience's acceptance

and approval of the content. Daniel Noboa also outperforms in this indicator with 4,671,473 likes compared to 1,934,859 for Luisa González, suggesting greater resonance with the audience. This suggests that Noboa's strategy was more effective in creating viral content and attracting attention at specific intervals, while González maintained a constant presence, but with less variability in the amount of “likes.”

Qualitative Content Analysis Of The Most Viral Videos

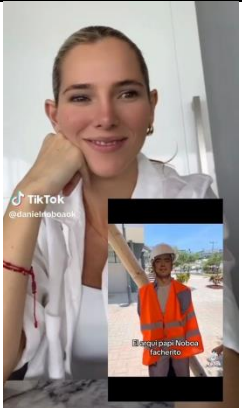
Three types of indicators were differentiated: message, sense of message and what is said as a result of the message, with the aim of continuing the qualitative analysis and practices that generated influence in the audience.

Daniel Noboa and Lavinia

The video focuses on the campaign strategy of Ecuadorian presidential candidate Daniel Noboa in 2023, which stands out for its creativity and the use of cardboard images of the candidate in public places. A central element of the video is the reaction of Noboa's wife to seeing people interacting with these images, adding a human and humorous touch to the candidate's campaign. Lavinia, in a charismatic tone, incited to perform a duo with the video, to see the number of people who performed this action.

Table 2 Lavinia reaction, 5 October 2023

Video Message Category	Video Message	Sense of Message	What is said as a result of the Message	Image
Reaction/ Opinion	Daniel Noboa's wife reacts with surprise and humor when she sees people taking a cardboard figure of her husband.	Shows the creativity and popularity of Daniel Noboa's campaign, as well as the closeness and humanity of his family.	Daniel Noboa's strategy of using cardboard images goes viral and generates discussion about his campaign.	
Campaign Strategy	The use of cardboard images by Daniel Noboa in public places as part of the visibility strategy.	It increases the visibility of the candidate and creates viral moments that can capture the attention of the media and the public.	The effectiveness and originality of the strategy is discussed, and its impact on the intention to vote is discussed.	

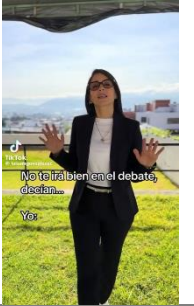
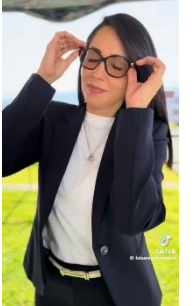
Family Image	The reaction of Daniel Noboa's wife shows a humane and accessible side of the candidate and his family.	It reflects an image of stability and family unity that can appeal to voters interested in family values.	Voters discuss the importance of having a visible family that supports him in a candidate's political life.	
Virality in Social Networks	The spontaneous and funny reaction of the wife generates shareable and viral content on social networks.	Increase reach and engagement on social platforms, engaging a broader and more diverse audience.	It comments on how political campaigns are using innovative strategies to grab attention online.	
Public Perception of the Candidate	His campaign strategy and his wife's reaction contributed to the public perception of Daniel Noboa as an innovative and close candidate.	Improve the public image of the candidate, presenting himself as accessible, creative and with strong family support.	It discusses the authenticity of the candidate and how his or her family plays a role in his or her public presentation.	

Note: Own development (2024).

Luisa González

The objective of the analysis is to determine how the video influenced González's public perception and campaign strategy. The video reached more than 1 million views and became the most viral content on her channel. The video highlights the candidate performing a dance choreography with a focus on self-expression and authenticity. It features a popular and lively song which aims to connect with the public through a message of positivity and trust.

Table 3 Luisa González, October 2, 2023.

Category	Message	Sense of message	What is said after the message	Image
Reaction/Opinion	Positive feedback, trust, many likes and shares.	The positive reaction from the public indicates that the video was well received and that the audience was inspired.	The message of self-expression and authenticity with the audience encourages greater participation in the trend.	
Campaign Strategy	Luisa emphasizes the importance of dancing as a form of self-expression and authenticity.	The choreography shows that through dance she expresses a valuable positivism.	The confidence and pleasure that can be seen in the choreography can inspire others to be more authentic and enjoy similar moments.	
Sound	The background music is a popular song by Alba María (Simple, Quiet, Breathe and I do so, like this one more) that accompanies the choreography. There is no dialog in the video.	Choosing a popular and lively song enhances the cheerful and dynamic tone of the video.	The absence of dialog focuses attention on music and dance, which may motivate others to join the dance trend on TikTok.	
Reality in Social Networks	The candidate performs a dance choreography in a domestic setting, dressed in confidence.	The action of dancing and the environment suggest a comfort and self-expression in a familiar space.	The confidence and pleasure that can be seen in the choreography can inspire others to be more authentic.	

Public Perception of the Candidate	Positive feedback, trust, many likes and shares.	Positive public reaction indicates that the video was well received and that the audience was inspired and entertained by the performance.	The message of self-expression and authenticity with the audience encourages a greater participation in the trend, according to the active interaction of the public.	
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Note: Own development (2024).

The audience supported Luisa González for her ability to convey a message of authenticity and self-expression. The video not only entertained viewers, but also inspired them to participate in the dance trend on social media, as evidenced by the numerous comments (16,100) and shares (5,907).

In the video, Luisa González performs an outdoor choreography, which demonstrates an authentic and natural reaction, her behavior and smile reflect a relaxed and positive attitude. Voters felt more connected and closer to her as a result of this reaction that humanized her image.

González gained strong support from the Citizen Revolution party, which has political legitimacy thanks to its direct connection to Rafael Correa. One of Luisa González's strategies was the use of Correa's image, which still has high approval in Ecuador, according to Dr. Maluk (2024), in his latest survey conducted January 12 to January 28, 2024, which showed that Correa still has 52.29% of acceptance (Ecuador En Directo, 2024). Because of the influence and loyalty of his fan base, Correa provided González with significant support that propelled his campaign. Unlike Noboa, González did not employ her family's image in her political approach. It is possible that this action is a means to maintain attention on her political relationship with Correa and on the continuity of his legacy

The public saw Daniel Noboa as an accessible, innovative candidate with strong family support due to his campaign strategy and his wife's spontaneous response. The virality of the content, which emphasized the authenticity of the candidate and the role of his family in his public presentation, reinforced this perception. Voters can see Lavinia as a real and accessible person, because she responds to an unexpected situation in an authentic and humorous way. By reacting positively to a creative campaign strategy, there is support and approval for innovative tactics, which may resonate well with voters who value originality and innovation. The scene generates discussion and attention on social networks and mainstream media, keeping Daniel Noboa in the minds of voters.

Daniel Noboa's family played a crucial role in his campaign strategy, generating a deeper connection with Ecuadorian voters, who strongly value family ties and traditional values in a predominantly religious society. According to INEC (2024) 91.95% of the population indicate they are religious. His wife Lavinia's visible and active participation in the campaign, noted for her charismatic reaction, humanized the candidate and presented an image of stability and family support.

Both campaigns succeeded in improving the public perception of candidates by highlighting their authenticity and connection to voters. Daniel Noboa opted for a strategy of visibility and humor that humanized his candidacy and generated viral content, while Luisa González used dance and music to convey a message of self-expression and positivity. Both approaches stood out for their innovation and effectiveness, resonating with the public and improving the public image of the candidates.

CONCLUSIONS

The main objective of this research was to analyze the strategies behind the publications and how they affected the candidates for the presidency of Ecuador, Daniel Noboa and Luisa González, in the 2023 second round of elections. TikTok was used by the DNA and RC5 movements to create strategies that allowed them to position

themselves and attract voters. These strategies included creating a variety of content, including informational videos, testimonials, humor, and political propaganda, in order to influence the perception of their audience and gain followers.

TikTok facilitated interaction as a means of speaking and participating, so participants were concerned with creating political speeches based on each other's image and personality, which led users having great interaction on posts.

The mixed methodology used in the study, which combines qualitative and quantitative analysis, allowed a more complete understanding of the influence of the candidates' communication strategies. While quantitative data provided insights into the scope and impact of the publications.

The analysis of the 95 videos posted on TikTok, 43 by DNA and 52 by RC5, during the campaign period, showed that certain types of content and messages had greater influence and reach. Indicators such as the number of views, comments, shares, likes and saves were key to measuring this impact. In addition, the study included an analysis of the publications with the greatest reach, using three types of categories: the message, the sense of the message and the reaction to the message. This methodology helped identify the practices that generated the most influence on the audience.

TikTok has proven to be a powerful tool for political communication in the digital age, allowing candidates to reach their audience effectively and significantly influence voter perception. The strategic use of their skills and continuous communication with their supporters can affect the outcome of the election and make a difference in a successful political campaign.

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