




**The impact of political candidates' TikTok campaigns on youth emotions in Ecuador's local elections**


Impacto de las campañas de TikTok de los candidatos políticos en las emociones de los jóvenes en elecciones locales del Ecuador

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ABSTRACT

Currently, social networks have emerged as essential tools for political communication, transforming the way candidates interact with young voters, involving emotions in their content. This study aims to evaluate the impact of the TikTok contents of candidates Fabricio Tinajero and Rodrigo Espín on the emotions and decisions of the young vote during the electoral campaign for the mayoralty of Latacunga 2023. The study used a descriptive approach, applying a mixed methodology. As an instrument, a survey was applied to 515 young people from Latacunga between 16 and 24 years old, using Google Forms and Excel for data analysis; the questionnaire addressed 12 questions, 8 on political communication and 4 on the influence of emotions on political behavior; in addition, a content analysis was applied to the videos with the greatest reach in visualizations of the candidates, establishing 7 categories for their development. Finally, a cross analysis of qualitative and quantitative data was carried out. The development indicates that the candidate Tinajero focuses on transparency, emphasizing his commitment to the community through clear messages about security and public works, evoking emotions of hope and confidence in young people. In contrast, candidate Espín relies on a humorous and dynamic style, using popular culture, an approachable language to attract his audience. According to the reactions and emotions of young people, they show that some prefer a serious and committed approach, and others are more attracted to a light and flashy style. Despite TikTok's influence and reach, its power over voting decisions appears to be limited, indicating that young people may be consuming content without a significant change in their emotions and thus their voting decisions.

Keywords: TikTok, emotions, youth, influence, communication, politics.**RESUMEN**

En la actualidad, las redes sociales han emergido como herramientas esenciales para la comunicación política, transformando la forma en que los candidatos interactúan con los jóvenes votantes, involucrando emociones en sus contenidos. Este estudio tiene como objetivo evaluar el impacto de los contenidos de TikTok de los candidatos Fabricio Tinajero y Rodrigo Espín en las emociones y decisiones del voto joven durante la campaña electoral para la alcaldía de Latacunga 2023. En el estudio se utilizó un enfoque descriptivo, aplicando una metodología mixta. Como instrumento se aplicó una encuesta a 515 jóvenes de Latacunga de entre 16 a 24 años, usando la herramienta Google Forms y para el análisis de datos Excel; el cuestionario abordó 12 preguntas, 8 de comunicación política y 4 de influencia de las emociones en el comportamiento político; además se aplicó el análisis de contenido, en los videos con mayor alcance en visualizaciones de los candidatos, estableciendo 7 categorías para su desarrollo. Finalmente se realizó un análisis de cruce de datos cualitativos y cuantitativos. En el desarrollo se indica que el candidato Tinajero se centra en la transparencia, enfatizando su compromiso con la comunidad a través de mensajes claros sobre seguridad y obras públicas, evocando en los jóvenes emociones de esperanza y confianza. En contraste, el candidato Espín se apoya en un estilo humorístico y dinámico, utilizando la cultura popular, un lenguaje cercano para atraer a su audiencia. De acuerdo con las reacciones y emociones de los jóvenes, muestran que algunos prefieren un enfoque serio y comprometido, y otros se sienten más atraídos por un estilo ligero y llamativo. A pesar de la influencia y el alcance de personas que tiene TikTok, su poder sobre las decisiones de voto parece ser limitado, lo que indica que los jóvenes pueden estar consumiendo contenido sin un cambio significativo en sus emociones y por ende en sus decisiones electorales.

Palabras clave: TikTok, emociones, jóvenes, influencia, comunicación, política.**ARTICLE HISTORY****Received:** 2024-12-30**Revised Version:** 2025-02-05**Accepted:** 2025-03-11**Published:** 2025-03-31**Copyright:** © 2025 by the authors**License:** CC BY-NC-ND 4.0**Document type:** Article**ARTICLE INFORMATION****Main topic:**

Social media and elections

Main practical implications:

The use of TikTok in political campaigns allows for connecting with young people, mobilizing emotions, and promoting democratic participation, transforming political communication through innovative strategies that combine entertainment, authenticity, and accessibility. This study brings originality by analyzing how TikTok emotionally influences young voters, integrating mixed methodologies to evaluate communication strategies, and highlighting its impact on democratic participation and contemporary political decisions

INTRODUCTION

In recent decades, political campaigns have faced significant challenges in the context of growing distrust towards state institutions and a generalized skepticism towards democracy (Meneses and Carpio, 2022). This distrust has fostered a general apathy towards traditional politics, especially among young people, who seek candidates who not only have experience in public office but also demonstrate authenticity and closeness in their communication.

In this scenario, the use of social networks has emerged as a crucial tool for interaction between candidates and voters, transforming the way in which political messages are communicated. Digital platforms such as TikTok have gained significant popularity among youth, due to their dynamic format and the possibility of direct interaction (Altamirano et al., 2022). Since 2022, as noted by Cerón et al. (2023) TikTok is used as a political communication channel in the Movimiento de Regeneración Nacional (Morena) party. In this study, he states that TikTok facilitates the construction and dissemination of content in technical and aesthetic parameters, using sounds, filters, editing and video recording, key in the dynamics of TikTok, generating interaction with young prosumers of the Y and Z generations. Likewise, Muso, A. (2023) states that "TikTok communication must appeal to the audience's responses to generate feedback and build user loyalty with the candidate's personal brand" (p.11). This presents a unique opportunity for candidates to connect with young voters, and its effectiveness can have a considerable impact on the emotions and perceptions of these voters.

There is, however, a gap in understanding of how social media platforms, and particularly TikTok, influence the emotions of young people during an election campaign. It is placed in the metrics of the study Orbegozo, J et al. (2024) that "Neither hyperactivity on TikTok nor the large number of followers ensure good engagement data, which could be translated in terms of digital success" (p.17). This raises critical questions: How do candidates use their TikTok profiles to connect with young voters in Latacunga? What type of content do they generate and how does this affect the emotions and perceptions of young voters? What factors contribute to the effectiveness of these strategies in generating emotional responses?

This study aims to investigate the TikTok content of Latacunga mayoral candidates during the months of January to early February 2023. It will analyze how these contents have influenced the emotions of young people, with the aim of filling the existing knowledge gap and providing a more complete understanding of the dynamics between online political communication and the emotions of young voters in a specific local context.

The research question guiding this study is: How do TikTok messages or contents of candidates during the political campaign for the mayor of Latacunga impact on the emotions of young voters? Answering this question will allow us to evaluate the relevance and effectiveness of political communication strategies in social networks, thus contributing to the understanding of the intersection between technology, emotions and political processes.

Theoretical background

Communication is an essential pillar for the functioning of democracy, allowing the interrelation between the different political actors and the citizenry. Political communication has evolved from a massive and controlled approach, characterized by the asymmetric and unidirectional transmission of information, to a more participatory and bidirectional multimedia model. According to Altamirano et al. (2022), this new model of political communication is characterized by the participation and volunteering of voters through digital platforms, which facilitates the implementation of more effective and personalized communication strategies. In the context of Latin America, the incorporation of emotions in political communication has become a common practice. Image management and emotional communication are used to persuade the audience, especially in political campaigns where emotional traits are appealed to connect with voters (Crespo et al., 2021). Left-wing parties tend to associate themselves with issues of social welfare, equal rights, and the environment, using these themes to resonate emotionally with their voters. On the other hand, right-wing parties focus on issues such as the economy, taxes and security, promoting an image of competence in these fields and using emotional communication to reinforce a sense of security in households (Damasio, 2006; Delgado, 2022). As Fernandez (2020) highlights, "Emotions play an important role in voting" (p. 172).

For many years, electoral campaigns have focused on rational and argumentative content, but nowadays, the focus has shifted to more emotional messages (Jorge-Delgado et al., 2022). The history of propaganda and its relationship with totalitarian regimes such as Nazism reflects the power of the media in shaping public opinion and controlling the masses. In postmodernity, politics is characterized by the prominence of emotions in public discourse (Marcus, 2002), suggesting that political decisions, including voting, are strongly influenced by citizens' emotions.

Emotions are complex phenomena involving physical, neurophysiological, biochemical, psychological and cultural processes. They manifest themselves as brief but intense feelings that arise abruptly in response to specific stimuli (Marina, 2006; Filliozat, 2007). In recent decades, emotions have gained relevance as tools of persuasion in Latin American political communication (Fernández, 2020). Recent studies in neuroscience have shown that emotions can have a greater weight than

reason in political decision-making, using emotions such as anger, rage and indignation to create climates of opinion favorable to change (Crespo et al., 2022).

The body synthesis theory considers that emotions are intrinsically connected to bodily activity, emerging from the interaction between the brain, the body and the environment (Damasio, 2001; Vilchi, 2007). Within this framework, research in communication and psychology has begun to focus on how emotions influence cognitive processes and communicative effectiveness (Martinez, 2012). This multidisciplinary approach, which includes communication psychology, is crucial to address contemporary challenges in researching the influence of emotions in various contexts, including educational, clinical, and social (Cudina et al., 2017; Ghazinoory et al., 2017).

Technological progress, especially the proliferation of the Internet and social networks in recent decades, has intensified the influence of emotions in political communication. Media have evolved to become catalysts of emotions, enabling the rapid dissemination of information and emotional connection through social networks (Arce-García et al., 2020). TikTok has stood out as a multifaceted platform that not only facilitates the dissemination of political advertising but also serves as a space for personal and entertainment content, capturing the attention of users through flexible and dynamic content formats (Slater, 2022). Its success lies partly in its algorithm, which adapts content according to users' tastes and preferences, although this can also foster addiction and psychological problems (González, 2022).

Despite concerns, TikTok has continued to grow exponentially; in 2021, it was the most downloaded app with 656 million downloads, surpassing Instagram by 100 million (Milenio Digital & DPA, 2022). The platform has established itself as an effective political communication tool, capable of attracting voters and mobilizing audiences (Castro & Díaz, 2021). It is important to note that TikTok not only attracts a young audience, as 63% of its users are over 25 years old (DataReportal, 2022). In Latin America, Salvadoran President Nayib Bukele, known as the "Millennium President," pioneered the use of TikTok as a political tool (Figueroa et al., 2022).

The multifaceted power of social networks has transformed political communication, creating a new scenario in modern political marketing (Baquerizo & Llor, 2022). As Boscán (2021) points out, "the politician has moved from the stage to TikTok". The popularity of this social network has prompted a detailed analysis of its role and influence in political campaigns. Contemporary political campaigns now integrate emotional qualities to attract voters, persuading through image processing and emotional messages (Crespo et al., 2021). As Sartori (2005) suggests, "The real voter ignores concrete political issues and can be swayed by images and speeches with emotional content" (cited in Fernandez, 2020, p. 167).

Today, there is a constant tension between commercial and political power for the control of the media (Becerra & Mastrini, 2011). Populist policies tend to promote regulatory frameworks that combine commercial and political forces to reorganize multimedia conglomerates, adapting messages to the interests of the regime (Valdez-López et al., 2022). Digital platforms and social networks have transformed citizen participation in the digital era, challenging the traditional roles of content producers and consumers (Aguaded et al., 2022). Given these challenges, Sabater et al. (2021) emphasize the importance of educating to form a critical citizenship, capable of unraveling and counteracting online hate speech, especially in the case of adolescents and young people, who are active users of platforms such as TikTok (Gámez-Guadix et al., 2020).

Emotions represent complex responses that integrate cognitive, physiological and behavioral aspects in response to both internal and external stimuli. These responses are inherently subjective and can significantly influence the thinking, perception and behavior of individuals. They are characterized by physiological changes, such as increased heart rate and activation of the autonomic nervous system, manifesting themselves through observable behaviors, such as facial expressions and gestures (Lopez, 2023; Sroufe, 2000).

In the last decade, disciplines such as neuroscience, marketing and psychology have focused their attention on the role of emotions in politics, a previously underexplored area. This "affective turn" is based on the premise that emotions have a significant impact on citizens' behaviors and cognitive processes (Corduneanu et al., 2019; González, B., 2019). According to these perspectives, emotions are interconnected with brain processes involving feelings, influencing reason and political decisions (Damasio, 2001). Authors such as Demertzis (2013) and Neuman et al. (2007) highlight how emotions affect attention, learning and evaluation of political activity, influencing decision making in the face of certain stimuli.

Several studies have demonstrated the importance of emotions in political speeches and images, which are fundamental in electoral campaigns (Martínez et al., 2022; Itzel et al., 2024; Oñate et al., 2022; Wilches et al., 2024). Candidates who convey positive emotions increase the probability of obtaining the voters' vote. Emotions projected into the future have a more significant impact than those related to the past. The message sender relies on three main emotions: hope (illusion), fear and anger (indignation), combining rational arguments with emotional and perceptual resources. These emotions are fundamental to generate climates of opinion favorable to change (Crespo, 2017). This research focuses on six key emotions in political activity: three positive (joy, pride and hope) and three negatives (sadness, fear and anger).

Positive emotions are associated with resilience in the face of adversity. According to Marcus et al. (2011), these

emotions lead voters to act in line with their partisan preferences or ideological affiliations. Positive thinking involves a reframing that motivates participation in constructive actions, activating the reticular system and promoting favorable outcomes. Emotions such as hope, enthusiasm, pride or joy reinforce preconceived ideas in our "political brain". In contrast, negative emotions, such as sadness, fear and anger, although believed to promote reflection on preconceived ideas, do not necessarily alter electoral predispositions (Brader, 2011) but encourage an information-seeking process with greater attention to the environment and available information (Crespo, 2022). In this sense Marcus (2002) states that "Emotions activate reason and voters are rational to the extent that they are emotional." (p. 42).

Prior to elections, voters form impressions of politicians based not only on their policies, but also on their personal characteristics (Peacock et al., 2021). Factors such as body gestures, physical appearance, stage management, and dress contribute to perceptions of political figures. These factors influence sympathy for a politician, which in turn plays a role in citizens' voting decisions beyond political stances and qualifications (Mendiburo et al., 2024; Balmas et al., 2014). The personalization of politics elicits emotional responses that influence how the public thinks and acts; anything a politician says or does can generate an emotional response, whether positive or negative, and these emotions serve as a valuable source of information (Otto, 2018).

In the digital era, social networks have become essential tools for political campaigns, facilitating direct and continuous interaction between candidates and voters. In the case of the campaign for mayor of Latacunga, Ecuador, the strategic use of these platforms allowed candidates not only to disseminate their proposals and connect with citizens, but also to influence the emotions and perceptions of young voters. The general objective of this research is, to evaluate the impact of the TikTok contents of the candidates Fabricio Tinajero and Rodrigo Espín on the emotions and decisions of the young vote during the electoral campaign for the mayoralty of Latacunga 2023. The importance of this analysis lies in understanding the mechanisms through which social networks mobilize, persuade and influence the decision making of young people, who represent a significant part of the electorate. To this end, three specific objectives are proposed:

1. Identify and categorize the content used by candidates in their TikTok publications, determining the predominant themes and resources used to connect with young audiences.
2. To analyze how the candidates' TikTok posts impacted the emotional perception of young voters, according to the respondents' emotional responses such as (hope, joy, sadness, etc..) and how these affected their electoral decision.
3. To compare how the effectiveness of the candidates' political content used on TikTok influenced young voters' decisions.

METHODOLOGY

The present research adopts a descriptive approach through a content analysis using a mixed methodology (quantitative and qualitative), to evaluate the communicational audiovisuals transmitted by TikTok and their impact on the emotions and decisions of young people. The study combines a qualitative discourse analysis with a quantitative analysis, based on surveys of young people between 16 and 24 years of age in Latacunga, considered young people according to the definition of the World Health Organization (WHO, 2015).

The objective of this study is to provide a comprehensive view of the emotional dynamics generated in the digital environment during political campaigns. The results will contribute not only to the academic fields of political communication and social sciences, but also to candidates and campaign strategists who wish to communicate effectively with young people through digital media. By highlighting the importance of the affective component in contemporary politics, this study seeks to understand how communication strategies in social networks influence the emotional and electoral perception of young people.

The mixed methodology integrates quantitative and qualitative approaches to offer a more complete understanding of the communicational phenomenon, adapting the analysis to the emotions manifested in social networks. This methodology helps to verify theories, increase the validity of the results and better understand the complexities of the phenomenon studied (Altamirano, 2022).

The research was conducted after the 2023 election campaign, covering the campaign period from January 03 to February 04, 2023.

In the first stage, the qualitative method was applied, focused on the content analysis of the political communication language in the TikTok accounts of candidates Fabricio Tinajero and Rodrigo Espín.

Data was collected from the videos published by the candidates during the electoral campaign period, from January 3 to February 4, 2023, selecting the videos with more than 10,000 thousand views. During this period, candidate Tinajero

published 43 videos, of which 7 exceeded 10,000 views and 3 of them 20,000. For his part, Espín published 57 videos, with 14 of them exceeding 10,000 views and 2 reaching 100,000.

The categorization of video content was designed based on previous study (Casero, 2015; Castro and Diaz 2021 and Suarez and Garcia; 2021), establishing six categories according to the type of content:

- Campaign: Videos showing the candidates touring the city of Latacunga and their accompaniment with the citizens. In addition, participation of citizens indicating their support for their candidate.
- Economy: Videos related to economic strengthening proposals.
- Works: Videos where the candidates indicate the needs of the city and make known the projects, they will carry out in Latacunga.
- Humor: Videos with funny content whose purpose is to entertain with their activities and proposals.
- Education: Videos in which the candidates focus on the problems and strengthening of education.
- Security: Videos where the candidates focus on the insecurity experienced by the people and offer solutions related to assaults, burglary and extortion.
- Employment: Videos focused on the unemployment situation, especially among young people, establishing proposals for young people to access the labor market.

In the second stage of the research, the data obtained through surveys related to emotions were quantified, with the objective of determining whether the contents of the campaign influenced the emotions of young people and, consequently, their voting decisions. The instrument used was a questionnaire of 12 closed questions, designed and validated by previous studies (Álvarez et al., 2022; Mendieta, 2018; Rodríguez, 2023; Quinde et al., 2023). In the questions on political communication Likert scale was used to measure the six emotions and obtain clear statistics on the impact of TikTok content on young people. A 5-point Likert scale was used to measure the degree of agreement of the respondents with the statements raised, where 1 corresponds to "Strongly disagree", 2 to "Partially disagree", 3 to "Neither agree nor disagree", 4 to "Partially agree", and 5 to "Strongly agree".

The selection of emotions represents a broad spectrum of emotional responses with significant impact in the political arena. The proposed emotions included three positive emotions: hope, pride and joy and three negative emotions: sadness, fear, anger. These emotions were selected for their relevance in the literature and their potential to influence the perception and political decisions of young voters (Gomez, 2020; Marcus, 2020; Mendiburu, 2024).

The reliability of the questionnaire was evaluated using Cronbach's Alpha coefficient, obtaining a value of 0.927, indicating excellent internal consistency.

The study sample included young people between 16 and 24 years old from Latacunga, a key demographic group in the analysis of the use of social networks during the 2023 political campaign. According to data from the National Electoral Council, 139,466 people participated in the Latacunga 2023 mayoral elections, with 31,097 voting for Tinajero and 30,185 for Espín, and 21,517 did not vote (CNE, 2023). The sample selected for the questionnaire consists of 600 youth, using stratified random sampling to ensure diversity in terms of gender, educational level and political background.

The questionnaire was administered with the informed consent of the participants. The purpose of the study and the nature of their participation were explained, guaranteeing the confidentiality of the information using pseudonyms and ensuring secure data storage. The survey included questions about exposure to political content on TikTok, the perceived impact on their opinions and voting decisions, and the effectiveness of the communication strategies used by the candidates.

To integrate the qualitative and quantitative results, a comparative analysis will be conducted using the data obtained. This integrative analysis provided a more comprehensive view of the impact of TikTok content on young people's emotions and decisions, combining the perceptions gathered in the surveys with the detailed analysis of the speeches in the candidates' videos.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

For the qualitative results, the objective is to describe the contents of the TikTok of the candidate Fabricio Tinajero, for this purpose, videos that exceed 10 thousand views were considered. Subsequently, the analysis of the number of videos and contents of the candidate is performed. As can be seen in Table 1, the candidate Tinajero, has a total of 10 videos, where he dedicated (40%) of the contents to his political campaign, followed by works (30%) and in third place to security contents.

Table 1. The number of videos according to type of content in the TikTok network of the candidate Fabricio Tinajero.

Type of content	No. of videos	Percentage
Campaign	4	40%
Works	3	30%
Economy.	1	10%
Humor	0	0%
Education	0	0%
Security	2	20%
Employment	0	0%
Total	10	100%

Note. Author's development with the research data

Tinajero in his viral videos about the campaign focuses on young people, adults and the break with traditional politicians. His focus is on the seriousness of his proposals and thus present an image unlinked to corruption and directed to the welfare of Latacunga and its people.

In the security videos, he responds to the issues that citizens need to change, showing strategic plans that will work. He uses the other candidate's proposal to show that there are proposals that can attract attention but are not reliable or logical.

In the videos where he shows which are his works, Tinajero shows scenarios of the neglected areas of Latacunga and focuses on the fulfillment of these works that were left unfulfilled by the previous mandates. Subsequently, in the economic videos he shows the projects to be carried out to improve the economic income in this way he seeks to link with tourism and generate employment.

In conclusion, it is a campaign that seeks to reach the people being emotional, transparent, indicating its commitment to the dreams of *Latacunagueños*. The candidate shows himself, direct and rational, without the need of dances or jokes, using affective and cheerful sounds, transmitting security. In the case of candidate Rodrigo Espín, as detailed in Table 2, the main themes of his videos are the electoral campaign and the use of humorous content, followed by security, works and education.

Table 2. The number of videos by type of content in the TikTok network of candidate Rodrigo Espín.

Type of content	No. of videos	Percentage
Campaign	10	62.5%
Works	1	6.25%
Economy	0	0%
Humor	3	18.75%
Education	1	6.25%
Security	1	6.25%
Employment	0	0%
Total	16	100%

Note. Author's development with the research data

The candidate Rodrigo Espín in his campaign videos shows images walking with the people, dances with young people, and involves the participation of citizens and content creators showing their support and promoting his image in young territory.

In the humorous videos the candidate Espín, dances, dramatizes, plays and lives together with the people, especially with young people. In these scenarios he shows the culture and taste of his region in a sarcastic and humorous way. The content related to citizen security showed images showing its defense plan against crime, where it offers immediate attention by the public forces.

In the videos of education and works he produces striking and reflective scenes aimed at young people, in some of these videos the candidate uses body movements and facial gestures, demonstrating his interest in the development of the new generation. According to the data presented, a more detailed analysis of the contents on the TikTok platform of the Tinajero and Espín candidates can be performed. As shown in Table 3, both candidates dedicate approximately half of their publications to the campaign category. However, Tinajero stands out in the Works category, while Espín focuses on humorous content related to his electoral campaign.

However, it is important to highlight that, despite this similarity in the general theme, there are notable differences in the way in which each of them communicates their message. On the one hand, Tinajero is characterized by being honest, charismatic and direct in showing his work plan, on the other hand Espín had a humorous approach that relies on his performances, body and facial expressions accompanied by music, being a strategy designed to capture the attention of a young audience, using rhythms and popular trends that resonate on the platform.

Table 3. Percentage of videos comparing the content of both candidates.

Type of content	Fabricio Tinajero	Rodrigo Espín
Campaign	40%	62.5%
Works	30%	6.25%
Economy	10%	0%
Humor	0%	18.75%
Education	0%	6.25%
Security	20%	6.25%
Employment	0%	0%
Total	100%	100%

Note. Author's development with the research data

Similarities can be observed in the TikTok contents of candidates Fabricio Tinajero and Rodrigo Espín, such as the lack of videos related to employment, economy and education. On the other hand, both candidates have most of their content focused on their electoral campaign with totally different styles.

A big difference is the presence of humorous content of candidate Espín and humor that candidate Tinajero did not show in any of his videos. Instead, he focused on making known what would be his works related to children and young people, considering his slogan "Latacunga within reach of our dreams", related to the growth and preparation of the new generation. Another relevant category in the production of videos is security, Tinajero focuses on the implementation of security mechanisms, such as surveillance cameras, illuminated sectors and patrols at strategic points, while Espín has humorous videos where he shows with images and body movements the immediate attention of public forces in case of emergencies.

One of the topics of distinction is the content related to the economy. Tinajero spoke about the reactivation of tourism to generate economic income in the city and thus produce jobs for young people. On the other hand, Espín focused on education projects such as providing free internet so that young students can have a better academic performance. In addition, the study of the content of the platform during the campaign allows us to analyze the way in which the candidates showed themselves on TikTok to reach the young audience. It is notorious that Tinajero's campaign was sustained with a narrative, informative and direct style, in the case of Espín it was of a dynamic, entertaining and, above all, dramatized character.

In the second part of the study, a survey of 12 multiple-choice questions was conducted, in which 515 people participated. Table 4, which shows the sociodemographic characteristics of the sample, differentiates between two categories in relation to the age of the participants. On the one hand, voters under 18, who since 2008 can vote voluntarily, also known as optional voting, as established in Article 62 of the Constitution of the Republic (2008), represent 14.1% of the informants, and on the other hand, more than 85% are young voters over 18 years of age. Regarding ethnic self-identification, the participants identified themselves mostly as mestizos (83.3%) and there was a greater participation of young men (57.6%).

Table 4. Sociodemographic characteristics of the sample

Variables	Frequency	Percentage
<i>Age</i>		
16-18	76	14.1 %
19-24	439	85.9 %
Total	515	100%
<i>Ethnicity</i>		
Mestiza	428	83.3 %
Indigenous	76	15.1%
Afrodescendant	11	1.6 %
Total	515	100%
<i>Genre</i>		
Male	296	57.6%
Female	214	41.4%
Another	5	1%

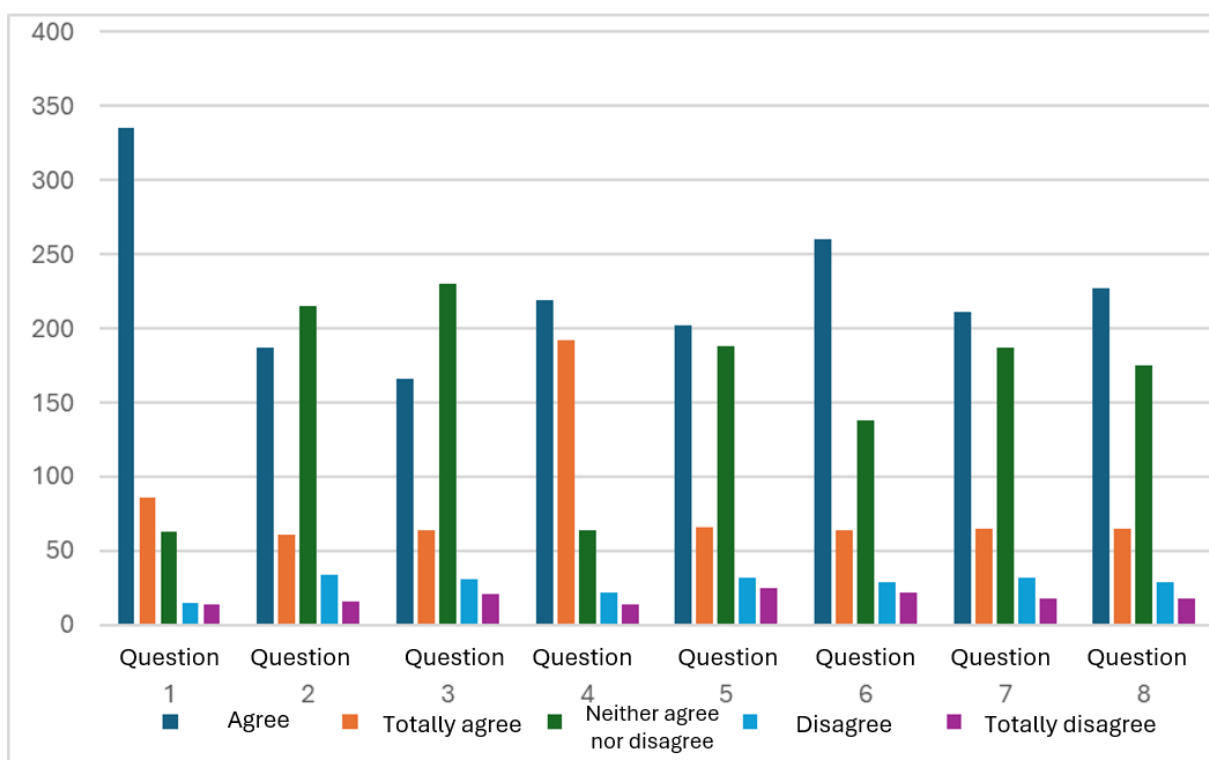
Note. Author's development with the research data

The objective of this analysis is to quantitatively interpret how respondents answered various questions related to the use of TikTok by candidates Fabricio Tinajero and Rodrigo Espín, and how those interactions influenced their emotions, voting decisions and general perceptions about the campaign. The questionnaire addressed two main areas: political communication (8 questions) and the influence of emotions on political behavior (4 questions).

The 8 questions of the questionnaire related to the perception of young people in relation to the political communication of the candidates were the following (Figure 1):

1. During the Latacunga 2023 mayoral election campaign, did you see the TikTok profiles of Fabricio Tinajero or Rodrigo Espín?
2. Was your vote influenced by what was posted on Fabricio Tinajero's or Rodrigo Espín's TikTok profiles?
3. Was your opinion modified by the candidates' TikTok postings?
4. Do you consider that the political communication strategies proposed by candidates Fabricio Tinajero and Rodrigo Espín influenced young people who consume TikTok?
5. Do you think the TikTok profiles and content of candidates Fabricio Tinajero and Rodrigo Espín influenced the results?
6. Do you agree that young people's opinions can be conditioned by the content of TikTok?
7. Do you consider that the political image of candidates Rodrigo Espín and Fabricio Tinajero in TikTok was effective in persuading and winning the vote of young people?
8. Do you think that the adaptation of contents of candidates Rodrigo Espín and Fabricio Tinajero to new virtual spaces such as TikTok, allowed their political image to consolidate?

Figure 1. Responses obtained in the questions on political communication (1-8)

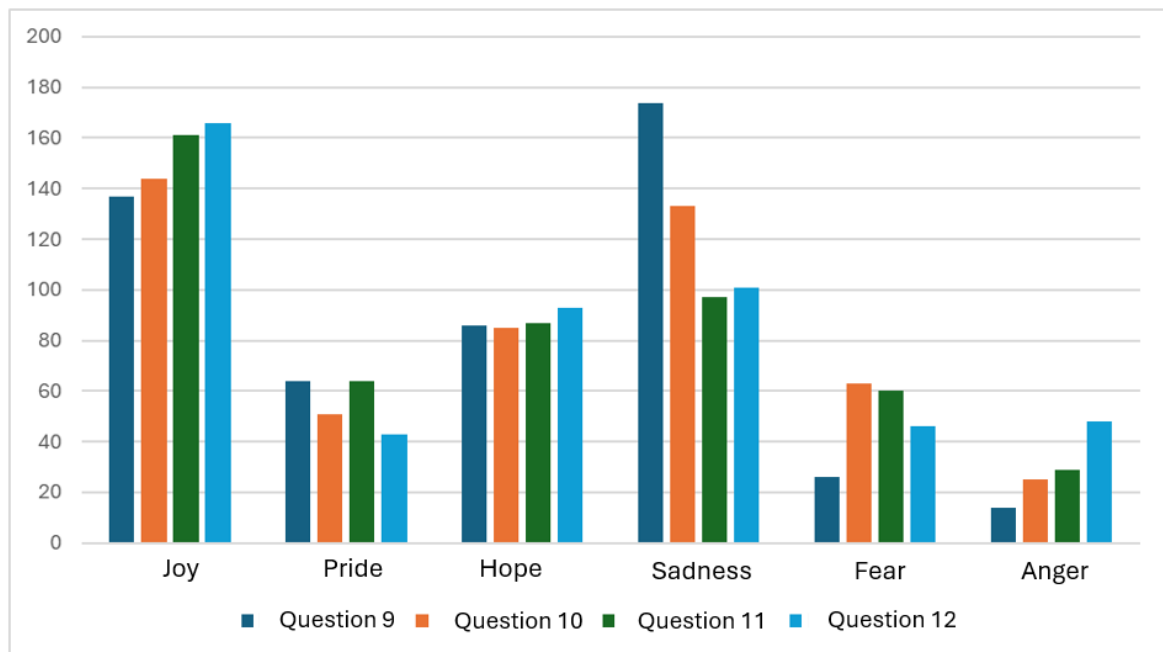


Note. Author's development with the research data

The survey questions aimed at identifying the influence of emotions on young people's political behavior were as follows:

9. If the elections had been held yesterday, how would you feel if Fabricio Tinajero had not won?
10. If the elections had been held yesterday, how would you feel if Rodrigo Espín had won?
11. How did you feel when Fabricio Tinajero won?
12. How did you feel when Rodrigo Espín lost?

Figure 2. Responses obtained in the questions on emotions (9-12)



Note. Author's development with the research data

The results presented in Graphs 1 and 2 offer a comprehensive view of how young people perceive and react to the communication strategies used in this platform. In relation to the connection with the public, the quantitative results show that 41.1% recognize TikTok as influential in their vote, the perception about its direct impact on the voting decision is moderate. In contrast, qualitative findings indicate that young people perceive that Tinajero tried to build an emotional connection through a narrative and direct approach, while Espín, on the other hand, tried to engage the audience with humor and closeness.

Regarding the thematic focus, the results show that Tinajero focused on concrete issues such as security and the economy, reflecting his seriousness, while his opponent used humor and youth culture to capture attention. This is reflected in the fact that 65.3% of respondents have seen their profiles, but Espín's humorous content seems to have a greater impact among an audience seeking entertainment.

In terms of emotions and reactions, the results indicate that young people identify joy and sadness in relation to both candidates. Fabricio Tinajero generates emotions such as sadness and hope through his serious and direct approach. By focusing on transparency and concrete proposals on public works and security, he establishes a bond of trust with young people seeking concrete improvements.

The emotion of sadness related to candidate Tinajero (34.7%) can be interpreted as a desire for his proposal to succeed, in contrast to Rodrigo Espín who uses a humorous and dynamic style, which generates emotions of joy and optimism. His use of music, dance and relatable language resonates with youth culture, making politics more accessible and fun. This approach fosters a sense of connection and closeness, where young people feel identified and attracted to his personality, the joy towards Espín (28.7%) suggests a recognition of his charisma. This aligns with the qualitative findings, where it is observed that Tinajero seeks to transmit security and commitment, in contrast to Espín's lighter and more entertaining approach.

Differences in the results on the reactions and emotions of the young audience show that while some prefer a serious and committed approach, others are more attracted to a light and entertaining style. A balance between the two approaches could maximize the emotional connection with young people, allowing them to feel both informed and motivated to participate in political processes.

The results suggest that, despite the recognition of TikTok as an influencing tool, its actual impact on voting decisions appears to be limited, indicating that young people may be consuming content without a significant change in their voting decisions.

Discussion

In this study, we analyzed the ways in which candidates Tinajero and Espín addressed voters, adopting different approaches. This difference in their communication methods can be understood from what various studies suggest about the

impact of social networks on politics and its emotions. For example, authors such as Baquerizo & Loor (2022) and Lucas (2022) confirm that the role played by social networks and digital platforms such as TikTok, continue to occupy an important position in Ecuadorian society and are considered new scenarios of political communication in the new generations. In this article, it is evident that in an increasingly digital world, where social networks become the main stage of political interaction, the ability to communicate effectively and resonantly will be crucial to capture the attention and support of the new generations.

The exploration carried out by Orbegozo, J et al. (2024) about interaction and engagement in electoral political campaigns, points out that the activity and interactivity in social networks such as TikTok does not prescribe or mobilize potential voters, but is oriented to offer entertainment in a playful and massive way, without exerting a direct persuasive influence in the political arena. As in our article, the Espín candidate seems to have a greater impact among an audience that seeks entertainment without influencing the vote. In this context, the digital platform becomes more a place for entertainment and fun than an effective instrument for political mobilization or the alteration of electoral opinions.

In the research conducted by Muso, A. (2023), in the TikTok accounts of the candidates, it is not identified that they have targeted a specific audience; most of the publications are for a general audience. On the contrary, in this research it was verified that the candidates did focus on a young audience, given that they represent a large part of the country's electorate, aiming to win their vote. Candidate Tinajero focused entirely on campaigning and publicizing his government plan, while candidate Espín tried to reach his target audience in a humorous and entertaining way, using reels and viral trends. Unlike Wilches et al., 2024 the most viewed videos of each of the candidates during the campaign period were not thematically related to the government proposal.

Postmodern political communication, as proposed by Martínez et al., (2022), is characterized by the presence of emotions. A current campaign cannot be understood without taking into consideration the emotions aroused by candidates and parties among voters. According to the data obtained in this article, the political campaigns implemented by candidates Rodrigo Espín and Fabricio Tinajero, sought to connect with the needs of the public, especially with young people, and thus achieve an emotional bond with the people, a key factor in obtaining their support. The influence on public opinion of the TikTok community proposed by Quinde et al. (2023), shows that most of the respondents highlight that there was a change in their criteria, after seeing the publications on the candidates' social network, however, 48% indicated that their criteria did not change. Likewise, 78% of them mentioned that there was no considerable influence on the popular election vote, while 22% registered that there was. In our finding, the real impact of the content of each of the candidates on voting decisions seems to be reduced, since for 58.9% it did not influence their voting decision, while for 41.1% it did. This suggests that young people may be consuming information without it significantly influencing their electoral choices.

FINAL REMARKS

The analysis of Fabricio Tinajero's and Rodrigo Espín's campaigns in TikTok highlights the crucial role that emotions play in political communication aimed at youth. Each candidate adopted a distinctive approach that not only reflects his personality, but also the expectations and desires of his target audience.

Fabricio Tinajero presented himself as a serious and committed leader, focusing his speech on transparency and the solution of concrete problems affecting the community. His ability to address issues of security and public works generated a mixture of hope and sadness among the young people. The sadness comes from the reality of the difficulties they face, while the hope is fueled by their vision of a better future. This approach invites young people to have confidence in their ability to bring about real, tangible change.

On the other hand, Rodrigo Espín uses a more humorous and dynamic style, appealing to popular culture to connect with his audience. His use of entertainment and approachability not only attracted the attention of young people but also allowed them to see themselves reflected in his campaign. The emotions of joy and optimism generated by his approach are especially effective with an audience looking for relief and fun in an often serious and overwhelming political context.

The differences in their strategies are evidence of the diversity of young audiences and their multiple ways of relating to politics. While some young people respond positively to a rational and committed discourse, others are more attracted to communication that prioritizes entertainment and cultural identification. This emotional polarization reflects a change in the way young people perceive and participate in the political arena.

In this context, it is essential that future candidates consider a hybrid approach that combines elements of seriousness and entertainment. The ability to generate a deep emotional bond with young people can not only increase their interest in the proposals but also motivate their participation in the democratic process. In an increasingly digital world, where social networks are becoming the main stage for political interaction, the ability to communicate effectively and

resonantly will be crucial to capture the attention and support of the new generations.

The main limitation of this study is that it was conducted in a local context in the city of Latacunga, which has left aside the detailed analysis of the differences between urban and rural contexts. This aspect is relevant, since the emotional impact of different candidates on young people could vary considerably depending on the social, cultural and geographic characteristics of each region. In this sense, we suggest that future studies focus on Amazonian regions and other areas with particular socio-cultural characteristics, in order to make more complete and enriching comparisons. In addition, these studies could serve as a basis for a comparative analysis with other countries in the Latin American region, which would provide a more accurate picture of the political and emotional reality experienced by young people in different national and regional contexts.

Thus, the path towards greater political participation of young people will depend on the ability of leaders to adapt and connect with them through messages that not only inform but also inspire and excite. Although at this point it would be premature to talk about obtaining youth engagement, the numbers generated by the analysis of interactions could tell us about a certain location of the pre-candidate in the minds or profiles of young people on the platform. This encourages us to continue with the line of research during the period of the official campaign and with it, to be able to contrast possible transformations of what this first approximation of the object of study showed.

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Contribution of each author to the manuscript:

Task	% of contribution of each author			
	A1	A2	A3	A4
A. theoretical and conceptual foundations and problematization:	25%	25%	25%	25%
B. data research and statistical analysis:	25%	25%	25%	25%
C. elaboration of figures and tables:	25%	25%	25%	25%
D. drafting, reviewing and writing of the text:	25%	25%	25%	25%
E. selection of bibliographical references	25%	25%	25%	25%
F. Other (please indicate)	-	-	-	-

Indication of conflict of interest:

There is no conflict of interest

Source of funding

There is no source of funding

Acknowledgments

There is no acknowledgment