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The influencer-politician narrative and his/her fandom. The case of Isabel Díaz Ayuso and the ayusers on Instagram

La narrativa del político-influencer y su fandom. El caso de Isabel Díaz Ayuso y los ayusers en Instagram

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Abstract

The influence of social media culture on political communication has led to the emergence of the influencer-politician narrative as the adaptation of the celebrity-politician to the medium. This paper analyses the communication of the politician Isabel Díaz Ayuso and her fandom (ayusers) on Instagram during a non-electoral period (June 2021-June 2022). To this end, a quantitative and qualitative content analysis was carried out on Díaz Ayuso's official profile and the five most followed fandom accounts. The results show that Díaz Ayuso uses the same advertising and commercial strategies as influencers. Also, the presence of brands and celebrities was greater than that of political representatives or information about their own government initiatives in her posts. The decision to show personal and commercial content, following the logic of the politician's humanisation, is rewarded by her followers showing more engagement towards these themes. At the same time, her fandom focuses its publications on praising Díaz Ayuso's physical attractiveness and the political attack on the left (regional and national). Thus, Díaz Ayuso and the ayusers' communication work in a complementary way on Instagram: the politician is always active and positive, in accordance with the logic of the medium and the cultural ideas associated with the female gender, while her fandom incorporates political and attacking content. This research advances knowledge about the narratives of humanisation of the politician in social media, as well as the growing importance of fandom within a context of digital permanent campaigning.

Keywords

Political communication; celebrity politics; Instagram; influencer marketing; fandom; Isabel Díaz Ayuso.

Resumen

La influencia de la cultura de los medios sociales en la comunicación política ha propiciado la aparición de la narrativa del político-influencer como la adaptación del político-estrella al medio. El trabajo analiza la comunicación de la política Isabel Díaz Ayuso y la de su fandom (ayusers) en Instagram durante un periodo no electoral (junio 2021-junio 2022). Para ello, se realizó un análisis de contenido cuantitativo y cualitativo sobre el perfil oficial de la política y las cinco cuentas ayusers con más seguidores. Los resultados muestran que Díaz Ayuso utiliza estrategias características del discurso publicitario y comercial de los influencers, encontrándose una mayor presencia de marcas y celebridades que de representantes políticos o información sobre sus iniciativas de gobierno. La decisión de mostrar contenidos personales y comerciales, siguiendo la lógica de la humanización del político, es además premiada por sus seguidores, que manifiestan más engagement hacia estas publicaciones. En paralelo, su fandom se centra en ensalzar el atractivo físico de Díaz ayuso y el ataque político a la izquierda (regional y nacional). Así, su comunicación y la de los ayusers funciona de modo complementario en Instagram: la política se muestra siempre activa y positiva, de acuerdo con la lógica del medio y los mandatos culturalmente asociados al género femenino, mientras que su fandom incorpora los contenidos políticos y de ataque. El trabajo avanza en el conocimiento sobre las narrativas de humanización del político en los medios sociales, así como en la creciente importancia del fandom en un contexto de campaña permanente.

Palabras clave

Comunicación política; celebrity politics; Instagram; influencer marketing; fandom; Isabel Díaz Ayuso.

1. Introduction

The omnipresence and centrality of social media in the lives of citizens has modified both the ways of carrying out political communication (Casero-Ripollés, 2018) and the social meaning and the way the figure of celebrity is constructed (Marwick, 2019). These two transformations are key to understanding the appearance of the influencer-politician figure (Hinck & Rasmussen, 2021; Starita & Trillò, 2022; Gandini, Ceron & Lodetti, 2022). This term reflects the transition from the narrative of the celebrity-politician to that of the influencer. Given the growing interest of politicians in communicating directly and on a large scale with citizens (Pérez-Curiel & Limón-Naharro, 2019), it seems reasonable that many take on the practices and aesthetics of influencers as the best way to adapt to the logic of the medium in the struggle for attention (Abidin, 2017). Thus, this paper uses the notion of influencer not so much because of the capacity of these figures as connectors and trend-setters (Casero-Ripollés, 2022), but because they are such popular figures that their behaviour has given rise to a new narrative genre of individual identity in social media (Caro-Castaño, 2022).

Instagram's relevance can be seen in its volume of monthly active users in 2022: more than 2 billion (24 million of them based in Spain). These figures and its eminently visual character make it a platform of great interest for politicians (Moreno-Díaz, 2022), who seek to show their most human side (Selva-Ruiz & Caro-Castaño, 2017) through photos of their daily lives, aware that images have a greater power than text to convey values and attract attention (Brands, Kruijemeier & Trilling, 2021).

One of the most relevant and influential figures in the current Spanish political context, both in the traditional media and on social media, is the President of Madrid's Partido Popular (PP) [People's Party], Isabel Díaz Ayuso (IDA) who has demonstrated having a great capacity to achieve a continuous presence in the media (Vicente-Fernández & Soria, 2023). Her popularity can be observed, for example, in the growth of her follower base on Instagram, going from having 50,658 followers in May 2020 to more than 570,000 in June 2023, becoming the Spanish female politician with most followers on this platform at present, ahead of the President of the Government, Pedro Sánchez (356,000 followers) or the President of the PP, Alberto Núñez Feijóo (110,000), and only surpassed by the national leader of VOX, Santiago Abascal (849,000). Within these social audiences, some people self-identify as fans, creating communities that contribute to maintaining and expanding the politician's presence online, something that this paper analyses by studying the five Díaz Ayuso fandom accounts with the most followers.

In short, the aim of this paper is to analyse Díaz Ayuso's communication on Instagram, as well as the way in which ayusers create content around her.

1.1 The personalisation of political communication on Instagram

The mediatisation of politics (Hjarvard, 2013) has brought with it its spectacularization (López-Rabadán & Doménech-Fabregat, 2018) and the accentuation of the personalisation of political information (Van Aelst, Sheafer & Stanyer, 2012). According to Van Aelst, Sheafer and Stanyer (2012), the dynamics of mass media coverage favoured a process of personalisation that operates in two sub-dimensions: individualisation, by relegating the party to the background in order to communicate about its leader; and privatisation, as the politician's personal characteristics and private life are reported. Following this distinction, recent studies analysing the presentation of politicians on Instagram shows a high degree of individualisation, but not privatisation (Sampietro & Sánchez-Castillo, 2020).

Privatisation has been studied as a strategy of humanisation of the politician that seeks to show him or her as an equal in a context of citizen distrust towards politics (Selva-Ruiz & Caro-Castaño, 2017). Given that social media accounts are personal platforms where the private, the intimate and the public tend to merge (Baym & Boyd, 2012), and where there is the real possibility of interaction between politician and constituency, these spaces become particularly suitable places for the showcasing the authenticity and access to the politician (Manning et al., 2017). The importance of publicly displaying a recreation of the backstage area - according to Goffman's (1999) theory of dramaturgical interaction - is that this type of content has become a heuristic process of individual authenticity in consumer society (Marshall, 1998). This belief is based on two conventions: an essentialist notion of identity that proposes that the essence of the individual is revealed in private and intimate spaces (Ekman & Widholm, 2017) and, as a consequence of the former, the sense of privileged access that is produced in the observer when consuming content from a space reserved exclusively for peers (Marwick & Boyd, 2011). In this regard, Zulli and Towner (2021) note that the backstage content on Instagram elicits a strong emotional response among followers to the implicit vulnerability of a politician publicly exposing the private aspects of their lives (2021: 4). Similarly, Parmelee, Perkins and Beasley (2022) found in their study that the two tactics that presented politicians as credible and trustworthy on Instagram were engaging in two-way conversations with their followers and employing a backstage access aesthetic. Along these lines, this paper establishes the following question: To what extent does Díaz Ayuso employ the strategies of individualisation and privatisation when presenting herself? (RQ1).

1.2 Adapting the celebrity-politician to the logic of social media

Over the last two decades there has been a process of 'celebrification' of leaders to present them publicly as celebrity-politicians (Street, 2019). This transformation is not only because the communication style and aura of celebrity has become a useful strategy for gaining symbolic capital in other fields of activity (Driessens, 2013), but also because using celebrity strategies helps politicians to be perceived as more credible among the younger electorate (Manning et al., 2017; Parmelee, Perkins & Beasley, 2022). With this process intensifying, Street (2019) looks at figures such as Trump and suggests that politicians no longer simply act like celebrities but are, in effect, celebrities (2019: 3), and the different styles used to construct and communicate this 'celebrity quality' by politicians would also create different forms of citizen engagement (2019: 6).

In addition to traditional media coverage, social media now offer politicians the possibility of communicating their messages to citizens and influencing the media agenda (Pérez-Curiel & Limón-Naharro, 2019). Likewise, the rise of these platforms has affected the production of celebrities that was historically the monopoly of the cultural industries and the mass media (Turner, 2004). The current hybrid media ecosystem (Chadwick, 2017), where content and attention are distributed and fed back between traditional and social media, has favoured the transformation of celebrity. Today, a celebrity is no longer something you are but something you do on social media (Marwick & Boyd, 2011). This is how a micro-celebrity (Senft, 2013) appears: communicative practices typical of celebrity culture but adapted by users (famous and non-famous) to the media logic of these platforms. These spaces are now used by celebrities and public figures to share a recreation of their private lives with their followers, allowing them to be perceived as more accessible and authentic (Marwick & Boyd, 2011). The following is a review of the narrative characteristics of one type of micro-celebrity: social media influencers.

1.3 The influencer narrative: Self-promotion, authenticity and simulated interaction

Social media influencers constitute a type of micro-celebrity (Khamis, Ang & Welling, 2017) that has become popular as the epitome of this type of online communicative practice. These figures are capable of attracting the attention of users on a massive scale and creating a feeling of interconnection with their followers ("perceived interconnectedness") (Abidin, 2015), as well as economically exploiting their fame (O'Meara, 2019). To this end, influencers develop continuous aspirational work (Duffy, 2017) that allows them to communicate desirable and glamorous, but also relatable and authentic lives (Marwick, 2019), thus gaining visibility and engagement among their followers (Cotter, 2019). Along these lines, a series of conventions in the strategic management of identity have been crystallised in the collective imaginary associated with Instagram, taken from the way in which influencers present themselves (Caro-Castaño, 2022). The characteristics of this cultural genre can be synthesised in three aspects:

- a. The normalization of a self-promoting discourse in which personal, commercial and political content are mixed together (Riedl et al., 2021), while at the same time employing tactics to adapt to algorithmic logic (O'Meara, 2019; Jaramillo-Dent, Contreras Pulido & Pérez Rodríguez, 2022).
- b. The use of an identity narrative focused on exposing lifestyles of the private self (Marwick, 2015) through the exposure of everyday activities and intimate spaces (Senft, 2008).
- c. The development of communicative practices that produce a sense of access, shared intimacy and belonging, such as the use of language that simulates conversation without being two-way (Zappavigna, 2015) and the strategic use of an amateur aesthetic (Abidin, 2017).

In this sense, previous studies on the presentation of politicians on social media agree that the opportunities for two-way communication on these platforms are barely explored (Pineda, Bellido-Pérez & Barragán-Romero, 2020). However, it is worth analysing whether, at the discursive level, politicians employ interaction simulation strategies that are similar to those of influencers. Thus, the following question is established: Do Díaz Ayuso's profiles and her fandom accounts employ strategies that simulate interaction? (RQ2)

1.4. The influencer-politician

To date, three research studies have been found that specifically address the communication of politicians in relation to the communication practices of influencers. Hinck and Rasmussen (2021) analysed Democratic Congresswoman Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez's use of Instagram to build relationships with her audiences (2021: 27). The authors found three strategies: backstage exposure prior to her intervention in political events; the posting from her profile of her fandom's creations regarding her figure; and speaking to her followers through Instagram Live (2021: 30). The use of these strategies allowed Ocasio-Cortez to create an image of an accessible and transparent politician who

appreciates her followers (2021: 31). On their part, Staritta and Trillò (2022) analysed the communication on Instagram of Matteo Salvini, the leader of the Italian party Lega. Their study focuses on the common practice in the communication of Salvini, the "good morning selfie", a vernacular practice of memetic character that would serve the politician to present himself as part of the community: of the people and not of the elites (2022: 2). On the other hand, Gandini, Ceron and Lodetti (2022) studied the use of video on Facebook by three southern European politicians whom they identify as populist: Luigi di Maio (M5S) and Matteo Salvini (Lega) in Italy and Pablo Iglesias (Podemos) in Spain in two general elections (2016 and 2018). The authors found that the leaders imitated promotional practices of influencers according to four dimensions:

- a. Carrying out 'hybrid' work to gain visibility in which they combine their mass media appearances with self-generated content on social media as a way to enhance their political status and credibility (2022: 5237).
- b. Communicating from informal and everyday scenarios to show themselves as authentic members of the public as opposed to elites.
- c. Algorithm gaming. The politicians analysed developed practices to improve their algorithmic position, such as, calls for concrete actions on the platform by their followers, pseudo-clickbait titles, and hooks to get users involved in discussions on everyday non-political topics, etc. (2022: 5238).
- d. Transform audiences into communities. The authors observed two types of strategy to strengthen the sense of belonging: the formation of a community opposing the rival politician, often in relation to topics of immigration and crime; and creating a positive sense of us by using the "behind the scenes" format in videos (2022: 5239).

From the studies reviewed, the following research question emerged: Can we observe this type of politician-influencer practices in Díaz Ayuso's communication on Instagram? (RQ3).

1.5. Political fandom on social media

Political marketing's focus on storytelling, as opposed to a data-driven approach in a media ecosystem that promotes immediacy and emotionality (Zulli & Towner, 2021), has contributed to transforming the relationship between politicians and the public, fostering the emergence of political fandom. The identification of the fan with the politician, as well as the creation of communities of belonging based on this affinity, where the political subject feels part of an "us" as opposed to a "them" (Mason, 2018), favours discussions on political issues to be based less on the factual and more on affective practices (Barnes, 2023: 6).

This dynamic coincides with that pointed out by Grossberg (1992) when studying how the affective sensibility of traditional fandom configured "maps of mattering": "a socially determined structure of affect which defines the things that do and can matter to those living within the map" (1992: 398). According to Grossberg, the fans think of their identity in relation to these maps and organise the world and their decisions according to them. In this sense, Lee and Moon (2021: 7) found, in their study of political fandom in South Korea, that the emotional relationship felt towards the politician was an independent predictor of both audiences' political participation and their political information-seeking behaviour. Furthermore, the authors recommend that political PR professionals develop specific engagement with fandom as a highly valuable audience of interest, especially in the face of potential reputational crises (2021: 8). When this emotional connection is established, followers will mobilise in their favour by adopting the content creation and reproduction dynamics of conventional fandom (Dean, 2017).

A relevant dimension when it comes to managing the relationship between politicians and their audiences in social media is to know which aspects awaken the connection with them. Thus, Hernández-Santaolalla and Rubio-Hernández (2017), in their study on the Twitter mobilisation strategies of Alberto Garzón's (former leader of Izquierda Unida) communication team in the 2015 and 2016 general elections, found that the use of the politician's physical attractiveness to connect with his followers was responded to by followers with the sexualisation of the candidate (2017: 846). The photogenicity and attractiveness of the politician or public representative have been confirmed as heuristics for assessing the competence and reliability of the subject (Ling, Luo, & Guoman, 2019), in line with the cognitive bias that beautiful is good or the "halo effect" (Jäckle et al., 2019). In this regard, Brands, Kruike-meier and Trilling (2021) found that female politicians receive more likes than male politicians when they are pictured because Instagram users pay more attention to how they look (2021: 2032), an attitude in line with the sexist treatment of female politicians in the media (García Beaudoux et al., 2020).

Finally, regarding the reactions of followers and the fandom, the following questions are established: What kind of posts on IDA's profile generate more engagement among her followers? (RQ4). What content and discourse do the accounts that claim to be her fandom develop around IDA? (RQ5).

1.6. Objectives

This research follows Street's (2019) proposal to study the media narratives that politicians employ in their public appearances, what communicative style they use and what reactions they incite among their followers. Thus, the general objective is to analyse the official Instagram profile of Díaz Ayuso and the five accounts with the most followers in her fandom.

From this main objective, we establish the following specific objectives:

SO1. Describe what kind of narrative and communicative strategies are implemented in the management of her public image.

SO2. Identify what type of publications incite more engagement among the profile's followers (in quantitative terms: likes and comments received).

SO3. Describe what Díaz Ayuso's fandom accounts post on Instagram.

2. Methodology

To answer the research objectives and questions, the methodology is based on content analysis from a mixed perspective – a qualitative and quantitative approach. This technique makes it possible to analyse both meanings and signifiers at the same time (Wimmer & Dominick, 1996), making it possible to describe the characteristics of messages and identify relationships between them (Riffe, Lacy & Fico, 1998), giving the research greater objectivity and distancing it from subjective interpretations (López-Noguero, 2002). Widely used in communication studies (Barranquero & Eiroa, 2017), this technique is the most suitable for analysing textual content with a considerable volume of information.

Studying political discourse in depth allows us to understand not only the message but also the intentions of the sender. The use of this technique will allow us to understand the logic of the character we are trying to communicate and to find out what content is most appreciated by his or her followers. This methodology will be used to analyse the messages and content disseminated through Díaz Ayuso's account, as well as the accounts of the *ayusers*, studying the content created by them in relation to politics.

To carry out the analysis of Díaz Ayuso's official account, as well as the fandom accounts, 16 variables were defined: in the case of IDA's publications, variables 1-10 are linked to SO1, while variables 11-13 were created to answer SO2. For fandom accounts, all 7 variables relate to SO3. For the definition of variables, the work of Selva-Ruiz and Caro-Castaño (2017) and López-Rabadán and Doménech-Fabregat (2018) was considered.

Table 1: Analysis sheet of Díaz Ayuso's posts

Variables	Categories		
1. Type of shot	Wide	Foreground	Medium
	Full	Extreme close-up	
2. Textual elements and pictograms	Not shown	Text+hashtag+emoji	Only text
	Hashtag+emoji	Text+hashtag	Only emoji
	Text+emoji	Only hashtag	
3. Topic	Topic addressed in the post		
	Isabel Díaz Ayuso	Family/friends	Party colleagues
4. Protagonists of the post	Pet	Politicians from other parties	Businesses or commercial brands
	Citizens	Impersonal (landscapes, symbolic objects, monuments...)	Media
	Celebrities	Other	
	Isabel Díaz Ayuso	Family/friends	Party colleagues
5. Secondary agents in the post	Pet	Other politicians	Businesses or commercial brands
	Citizens	Impersonal (landscapes, monuments...)	Media
	Celebrities	Other	
6. Presence of elements of political party identity	Yes	No	
7. Represented social space	Undetermined	Private	Official
	Media (award ceremony, press conferences, etc.)	Public	Other
8. Type of performance	Institutional	Artificial posing	Strategic spontaneity
	Amateur	Other	
9. Type of appeal	Rational	Emotional (positive/negative)	Undetermined
10. Editing (post-production effects)	None	Filters	Labels
	Collages	Tags	
11. Bidirectionality indicators	Yes	No	
12. Likes received	Number		
13. Comments received	Number		

Source: Own elaboration based on López-Rabadán and Doménech-Fabregat (2018) and Selva-Ruiz and Caro-Castaño (2017).

Table 2: Analysis sheet of posts from fandom accounts

Variables	Categories		
f1. Type of shot	Wide	Foreground	Medium
	Full	Extreme close-up	
f2. Textual elements and pictograms	Not presented	Text+hashtag+emoji	Only text
	Hashtag+emoji	Text+hashtag	Only emoji
	Text+emoji	Only hashtag	
f3. Topic	Topic addressed in the post		
	Isabel Díaz Ayuso	Family/friends	Party colleagues
	Pet	Other politicians	Businesses or commercial brands
f4. Protagonists of the post	Citizens	Impersonal (landscapes, symbolic objects, monuments...)	Media
		Celebrities	Other
	Isabel Díaz Ayuso	Family/friends	Party colleagues
	Pet	Other politicians	Businesses or commercial brands
	f5. Secondary agents in the post	Citizens	Impersonal (landscapes, symbolic objects, monuments...)
Celebrities			Other
Number			
f6. Likes received	Number		
f7. Comments received	Number		

Source: Own elaboration based on López-Rabadán and Doménech-Fabregat (2018) and Selva-Ruiz and Caro-Castaño (2017).

2.1. Materials

The accounts studied were the official Instagram profile of Díaz Ayuso and the five profiles with the largest number of followers that are self-defined as her fandom (the reason why they have been selected) as of 30th June 2022: @ayusers_ (68.4 thousand followers), @ayusopasion (37.8 thousand followers), @ayusomania (19.5 thousand followers), @_ayusopresidenta (13.4 thousand followers) and @todos_con_ayuso (11 thousand followers).

As for the sample selected, the entire sample universe of the posts on her profile during her first year as President of the Community of Madrid after the elections of 2021 (from 18/6/2021 to 18/6/2022) was analysed. For the study of the fandom accounts, we carried out an analysis of the last 100 posts uploaded by these profiles before 18th June 2022. In total, 555 posts were analysed.

2.2. Hypothesis

To complement the analysis of IDA's communication on Instagram, a series of hypotheses were established to determine the associations and differences that exist between the interactions (likes and comments) and the nominal or categorical variable (main topic). It should be clarified that the direct influence that the published content (thematic variable) has on the reactions of the followers (likes and comments) — this being the ultimate goal that we want to achieve here — has been considered in order to check whether the type of content influences the interactivity achieved by the posts.

The research hypotheses are as follows:

H1: An association exists between the number of likes on each post and its content.

H2: An association exists between the number of comments on each post and its content.

To test the hypotheses, the non-parametric Kruskal-Wallis test was performed, as well as a statistical analysis using the IBM SPSS software.

3. Results

3.1. Results of the analysis of the profile of Díaz Ayuso

3.1.1. Individualisation and privatisation in Isabel Díaz Ayuso's profile

Regarding individualisation, Ayuso is the protagonist of 78.5% of the posts whilst being the secondary agent in 20% of them, meaning she appears in 98.5% of the posts. The presence of corporate elements of PP is reduced to 9.8% of the total number of posts, although this limited representation may be related to the fact that a non-election period was analysed. The percentage is striking if one considers the struggle that Díaz Ayuso maintained with the national leadership of the party during the 2021-2022 biennium to call elections for the presidency of the Partido Popular in Madrid (García de Blas, 2021), something she finally achieved in May 2022 (Belver & Roces, 2022). In line with this, the appearance of other members of PP is only found in the variable "secondary agent" (9.1%), with the same percentage that businesses or commercial brands appear (figure 2). In contrast to the scarce presence of other politicians, the high percentage of celebrities (12.7%) with whom Díaz Ayuso shares the limelight is striking (figure 1), and they also represent 5.5% as secondary figures, thus accounting for 18.2% of the total.

The third figure in the spotlight is her pet (3.6%), Marlon, a dog that the politician's followers have watched grow on Instagram since his adoption as a puppy (figure 1) and which points to the notion of privatisation. This concept has been operationalised in this study by looking at who appears ("protagonist" and "secondary agents" variables) and from where they appear ("represented social space").

The social space represented shows Díaz Ayuso preferably in places where she exercises her role as a politician, whether in public spaces (47.3%) or official spaces (21.8%) such as the Autonomous Community Parliament. Alongside these spaces, 18.2% of the posts show private spaces, 3.6% take place in media scenarios (all of them being award ceremonies) and 9.1% are publications in unidentifiable spaces.

Figure 1: Posts from the official profile of Díaz Ayuso



Source: <https://www.instagram.com/p/CROfcMQq3Jv/> y <https://www.instagram.com/p/CX6i3EqNx7Z/?hl=es>

In Figure 1, there are several elements that particularly contribute to presenting Díaz Ayuso as a "normal" person, separate from her role as a politician. On the one hand, we are not only introduced to her pet, a type of content that refers to the realm of her private and everyday life, but the followers see Marlon's growth. This sense of access to her private life is also helped by the representation of a backstage space with an amateur aesthetic in which the politician appears relaxed, both in her gestures in the

photo and in her clothing. It is worth noting that both publications are among the three with the most likes in the sample, which shows the ability of these everyday images to attract attention and engage her followers. In addition, both images were coded in the non-editing category, as they seek to offer a realistic representation of politics, which is in keeping with the idea of an amateur aesthetic that presents her in a natural way, connoting the idea of access to authentic politics. Finally, the type of shots chosen insist on a closeness based on proxemic representation, with a high-angle shot that places the observer above Díaz Ayuso and a second medium shot in which the politician crouches down, adopting an informal and close pose.

3.1.2. Self-promotion, authenticity and simulated interaction

The results of the variables "type of shot", "type of performance", "editing modality", "type of appeal", "use of textual elements and pictograms" and "bidirectionality indicators" are analysed below.

In relation to the type of shot, there is a strong preference for close-up portraits of politicians, with medium shots (32.7%) and close-ups (30.9%). Behind these we find the full shot (18.2%), wide/long shot (14.5%) and extreme close-up (3.6%). There is, therefore, an interest in showing her as symbolically close, accessible. Furthermore, this type of shot takes advantage of Díaz Ayuso's photogenic nature and the physical attractiveness that her followers recognise in her, as will be seen below. The variable "type of performance" shows a predominance of strategic spontaneity (51%), followed by an amateur image (25.5%), 14.4% with a more institutional image, 5.5% with more forced posing and 3.6% of unclassifiable posts. Thus, it is possible to appreciate, firstly, the professionalism of IDA's image management on the platform, as the highest percentage corresponds to a performance that conveys a naturalness despite its strategic nature. Secondly, the performance of politics accompanies the use of spaces of representation, as a large part of the posts classified as amateur coincide with their presentation in private spaces. In this sense, the variable "editing modality" shows that 79.2% of IDA's publications do not make evident use of post-production effects, thus connecting with a type of editing that has become a trend in social media (Moran, 2022) and which proposes no or minimal editing of images to convey a sense of naturalness in the face of the abuse of filters that these platforms allow.

In relation to the type of appeal to their audiences, the use of images and text always gives priority to communicating positive emotionality (83.6%), as opposed to that based on rational arguments and data (7.3%). In terms of the use of textual elements and pictograms, an adequate adaptation to the logic of the medium and to vernacular practices can be observed. For example, Díaz Ayuso uses hashtags regularly, as they are present in 80% of the posts in different combinations: with text (65.5%); text, hashtag and emoji (12.7%); or only hashtag (1.8%). Finally, it should be noted that no direct interaction (like or comment) was found on the part of IDA's account towards her followers' comments.

3.1.3. Thematic analysis and engagement

The variable "topic" (table 3) is useful when it comes to characterising the type of narrative that Díaz Ayuso constructs on Instagram beyond the visual rhetoric employed. The most common category is the one in which the president of the Autonomous Community of Madrid is shown referring to the Community, the city or the citizens of Madrid (14.5%). More striking is the fact that the categories with the next highest content are mentions of commercial brands (12.7%) and personal publications (10.9%) as opposed to more clearly political content related to the exercise of her office: political measures of the Autonomous Community of Madrid government (5.5%), visits to other autonomous communities (5.5%) or autonomous community elections (3.6%). On the other hand, there are a number of categories describing leisure activities and cultural consumption - gastronomy (7.3%), sports (5.5%), nature (5.5%), culture (3.6%), bullfighting (3.6%), local festivals (3.6%) and leisure and concerts (1.8%) - that express a lifestyle.

Table 3: Variables and indicators for analysing Díaz Ayuso's posts

Main topic	Appearance percentage	Total likes	Total comments
1. Madrid	14.5	250,879	7,507
2. Mention of businesses or brands	12.7	434,847	11,502
3. Personal	10.9	495,036	16,221
4. Gastronomy	7.3	189,046	3,398
5. Visits to other communities	5.5	104,030	1,823

Main topic	Appearance percentage	Total likes	Total comments
6. Policy measures of the Community of Madrid's Government	5.5	114,997	2,801
7. Nature	5.5	106,704	1,815
8. Sport	5.5	187,244	3,290
9. Bullfighting	3.6	102,009	2,797
10. Local holidays	3.6	78,022	1,367
11. Autonomous Community Elections	3.6	64,015	4,626
12. Acknowledgements	3.6	110,328	2,849
13. Other	3.6	80,156	2,871
14. Culture	3.6	37,059	539
15. Political attack	1.8	15,625	501
16. Leisure and concerts	1.8	6,556	206
17. Humour	1.8	55,732	1,856
18. NGOs or Citizen Associations	1.8	18,679	504
19. Monarchy	1.8	29,095	568
20. 2023 Municipal Elections	1.8	12,142	330

Source: Own elaboration

In terms of the analysis of engagement per topic, if we differentiate between strictly political content and that linked to the influencer narrative, we see that the latter generates much more interest and engagement (2,000,000 vs. 310,809 likes and 57,290 vs. 10,081 comments respectively). Looking more closely at the relationship between likes, comments and topics, it can be seen that "Madrid" (271,697 likes and 7,507 comments), "mentions of brands" (434,847 likes and 11,502 comments) and "personal" content (495,036 likes and 16,221 comments) are the categories that arouse the most engagement. If we analyse the average number of likes, "sport" (62,414), "humour" (55,732), "acknowledgements" (55,164) and "bullfighting" (51,004) would also be added to this list of content most valued by followers.

The results also allow us to contrast the two research hypotheses proposed in this study:

H1: An association exists between the number of likes on each post and its content.

H2: An association exists between the number of comments on each post and its content.

The interaction of Instagram users was analysed using the Kruskal-Wallis test, measured by the number of likes and comments according to the topic of the content posted. As can be observed in table 4, there is a significant, positive and weak association between the number of likes on each post and the topic of said posts.

In the same way, the second hypothesis, which indicated an association between the number of comments and the subject matter, was tested. In this case, the relationship between both variables was also significant, positive and moderate. Therefore, it could be concluded that the topic of the posts influences the reactions of the followers, whether they be likes or comments.

Table 4: Analysis of the thematic-engagement relationship

Type of interaction	p-value	Chi-squared	Average
Number of likes	0.23	33.224	45,691
Number of comments	0.79	28.217	1,224

Source: Own elaboration

Furthermore, if we look at the visual rhetoric used in publications where commercial brands are mentioned, we can find the use of commercial formulas typical of celebrities and influencers. Thus, figure 2 (left) shows Díaz Ayuso congratulating Warner Park on its 20 years of existence, posing with a jacket personalised with her name and the Wonder Woman logo, one of the DC franchises with which Warner Bros. has a commercial exploitation agreement. In the image, the politician assumes the role of a celebrity or influencer at a branded promotional event, as a figure capable of attracting attention and enhancing the brand's image through visual association. In the same vein, the central figure shows IDA posing at the photocall of the presentation of the San Isidro Fair. Finally, the image on the right again shows the politician wearing a product and mentioning the brand. In this case it is the sports brand Joma, which has a line of trainers for runners featuring the names of cities, including Madrid. A characteristic of the commercial discourse of influencers, compared to that of celebrities, is that a large part of their promotions are developed in the context of their daily lives. Given that the image was taken indoors and without any element to infer that it is a planned event, it seems that Ayuso is sharing her outfit from a domestic space. The post also had a direct impact on the model's sales, leading the brand to release a new edition in response to the sudden increase in demand following the publication of the image (VVAA, 2022).

Figure 2: Posts that mention brands

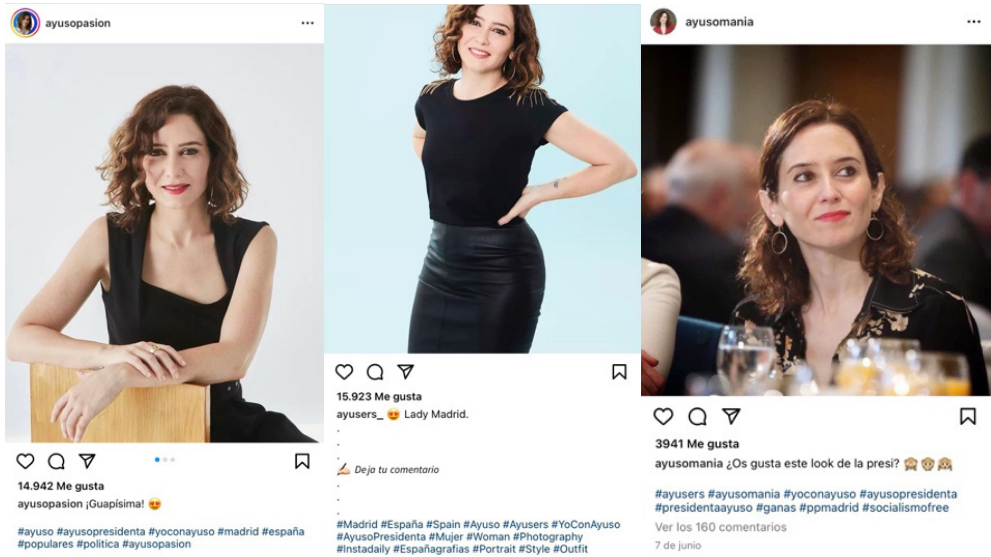


Source: <https://www.instagram.com/p/CedxifYN7Oc/?hl=es>;
<https://www.instagram.com/p/CbQJWtInMpv/?hl=es>;
<https://www.instagram.com/p/CY6ZWNyNTCh/?hl=es>

3.2. Communication of the ayusers

Some of Ayuso's followers call themselves *ayusers*, identifying themselves socially as fans, an unmistakable characteristic of fandom. The politician is the protagonist in 87.4% of their posts. The main figures with a much smaller presence were objects, places or symbols (4.4%), followed by celebrities (2.8%), citizens (1.6%), politicians from outside the PP (1.6%), PP members (1.4%) and Díaz Ayuso's pet (0.4%). Something that is immediately striking is the marked interest of the *ayusers* in praising the beauty and physical attractiveness of the politician, as can be seen in figure 3, and as shown by the fact that this is the most frequent topic with 56.7% (table 5). Consequently, there is a predominance of close-up shots (39.5%) and medium shots (38.1%), while the full shot accounts for 11.3%, wide/long shot 7.2% and extreme close-up 3.9%. The fandom thus accentuates the preference for close-up shots already seen in the official profile. The use of text tends to reinforce the framing of Díaz Ayuso's physical attractiveness, either by extolling her beauty (figure 3 - left), highlighting her style of clothes, asking for opinions about her style (figure 3 - centre) or classifying her through hashtags ("#outfit", figure 3 - right).

Figure 3: Posts by fandom accounts



Source: <https://www.instagram.com/p/CfM9cvBNit7/>;
<https://www.instagram.com/p/CfXHeEEvhTj/>;
<https://www.instagram.com/p/Cef2Q0Ju6Ow/>

The second most common topic in the fandom's posts is the political attack on left-wing parties (21.4%), a significantly higher percentage than that observed in Díaz Ayuso's profile (1.8%). Likewise, the fandom devotes more posts to the political measures of the Autonomous Community of Madrid (9%) and the Partido Popular (5.6%) than the official profile (table 5). Another notable difference is the anecdotal nature of the Madrid category among the fandom (3%), something that must be related to the fact that the accounts analysed treat Díaz Ayuso as a politician of national scope, being constantly projected as a future president of the Spanish Government by these profiles and the users who comment on them.

Table 5: Volume of follower interactions by topic on ayuser accounts

Main topic	Percentage appearance	Total likes	Total comments
1. Praising the figure, beauty or style of Díaz Ayuso	56.7	378,451	12,947
2. Political attack on left-wing parties	21.4	150,943	5,903
3. Rhetorical conversation with followers	10.2	85,078	2,523
4. Policy measures of the Madrid Regional Government	9	65,852	1,974
5. Partido Popular [People's Party]	5.6	20,626	5,229
6. Sport	5	20,626	5,229
7. Other	5	19,311	490
8. Madrid	3	5,895	98
9. Spain	2	13,825	507
10. Autonomous Community Elections	1.4	19,075	663
11. Monarchy	1.2	19,417	429
12. 2023 Municipal Elections	0.8	10,036	214

Source: Own elaboration

The third most common category was the use of conversational rhetoric with followers (10.2%) that employs direct interpellation through the imperative ("👉 Leave a comment", figure 3 - centre) or the question ("Do you like this look of the presi?", figure 3 - right). Likewise, the use of the shortening "presi" can be interpreted as a strategic use of the colloquial register (Sanmartín, 2017) to foster a sense of closeness and familiarity with the figure of Díaz Ayuso. This intention is reinforced by the use of emojis whose anthropomorphic character helps to establish contact with the interlocutor ("👉👉👉") while expressing a positive orientation towards him/her (Sampietro, 2016: 236-237) and assuming an informal character. Continuing with the analysis of the textual elements among the fandom, we see that these accounts make more frequent and intense use of hashtags than Díaz Ayuso's profile. The combination of text, hashtag and emoji was found in 66.3% of posts and text and hashtag in 21.6%, so 87.9% of posts contained these tags. In addition, a list of tags both general and specific to the fan community is always used, thus making a self-promotional use, that sometimes borders on hijacking attention away from what the post is truly about, in its concern to gain visibility (figure 3-left). Another self-promotional practice observed is the use of multimention (figure 4) as a way to directly engage influential users on the platform who could improve the algorithmic position of the post if they interacted with it.

Figure 4: Posts by the account @todos_con_Ayuso



Source: <https://www.instagram.com/p/CZXR-zQDPtX/>; https://www.instagram.com/p/CaFK6Axj4_a/

The analysis of the content published by these accounts is complemented by the study of the topics that get the most likes and comments (table 5). The praise of Díaz Ayuso's figure is not only the topic with the most posts, but also the one that generates the greatest response from the followers of these profiles (378,451 likes and 12,947 comments). Similarly, the political attack on left-wing parties is the second topic most engaged in among followers with a total of 150,943 likes and 5,903 comments. Overtly political content posted by fandom accounts elicits more comments - 13,983 comments (table 5, sum of issues 2, 4, 5, 10 and 12) than political issues posted on the official profile - 10,081 comments (table 3, sum of issues 5, 6, 11, 15 and 20). Therefore, it can be affirmed that not only do the fandom accounts devote more space to the political message than Díaz Ayuso's official profile, but also that this content generates more engagement among the followers of the ayusers' profile than among those of the politician's profile.

4. Discussion and conclusions

Below, the research questions and hypotheses are reviewed in the light of the results obtained.

In relation to the use of individualisation and privatisation strategies (Van Aelst, Sheaffer & Stanyer, 2012) for presenting herself on Instagram (RQ1), the results show that Díaz Ayuso's profile makes intensive use of both strategies. The individualisation can be seen in the absolute prominence of her figure and in the scarce presence of other politicians or references to her party. In terms of privatisation, we find a greater presence of actors, activities and spaces belonging to the personal/private sphere than in similar studies (Lalancette & Raynauld, 2019; Pineda, Bellido-Pérez & Barragán-Romero, 2022; Sampietro & Sánchez-

Castillo, 2020). A strategic use of the represented social spaces is also observed: the staged spaces (public, official and media) convey an image of Díaz Ayuso as an active politician by means of the storydoing technique (García Beaudoux, D'Adamo & Bruni, 2022: 18), while the private spaces function discursively as a backstage area, creating the sense of gaining access to the real person behind the politician. This creates an aura of authenticity, which is consistent with the findings of previous studies on Instagram (Parmelee, Perkins & Beasley, 2022; Selva-Ruiz & Caro-Castaño, 2017; Zulli & Towner, 2021).

Furthermore, the results showed that the two-way communication possibilities that Instagram allows are not used in Díaz Ayuso's profile, thus coinciding with previous studies (Pineda, Bellido-Pérez & Barragán-Romero, 2020). What we did find evidence of was the use of strategies that simulate interaction by the Madrid politician and the ayusers (RQ2). In the politician's profile, we found an unusually high volume of posts with amateurish aesthetics for an official profile. While in similar studies amateurism has been related to unprofessional or problematic styles (López-Rabadán & Domenech-Fabregat, 2018: 1023), in this study it is interpreted as a strategic decision within "calculated amateurism" (Abidin, 2017): a way of appearing accessible and authentic to her followers. This, together with the posts from private spaces, the use of close-up shots and editing that conveys naturalness, are all decisions that help to produce a sense of "shared environment" (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010), a kind of social media familiarity that arises from the feeling of having access to what the everyday lives of the people one follows are like. Díaz Ayuso also uses conversational language that encourages a sense of belonging with posts of acknowledgement/ thanks to the community. The use of this rhetoric that simulates interaction is more intense in fandom accounts, where a greater use of conversational language that simulates the bidirectionality of communication with followers is identified (Zappavigna, 2015).

In this sense, and returning to the question about the practices of the politician-influencer (RQ3), the analysis of IDA's profile shows an interest in promoting a sense of community among her followers, something typical of the relational work of influencers (Abidin, 2015; Duffy, 2017). We also see an interest in improving her visibility on the platform by adapting to the algorithm (Gandini, Ceron & Lodetti, 2022) with the continuing use of hashtags as a form of self-promotion (O'Meara, 2019; Jaramillo-Dent, Contreras Pulido & Pérez Rodríguez, 2022) and a much higher presence of celebrities than what has been found in other similar studies (Bellido-Pérez & Gordillo-Rodríguez, 2022). However, the most remarkable aspect of the results lies in the presentation of Díaz Ayuso adopting a discourse and aesthetic typical of the advertising and commercial discourse of influencers - even going so far as to star in a viral sales phenomenon with the Joma trainers. Likewise, making political attacks an anecdotal category in Díaz Ayuso's communication is a decision consistent with the positive ethos of the platform (Waterloo et al., 2018), with the communication style of influencers (Caro-Castaño, 2022; Marwick, 2015) and with the rhetoric of gender stereotypes. As highlighted by García Beaudoux (2015: 7), good leadership is culturally associated with masculine attributes (ambition, toughness, aggressiveness, etc.) while women are associated with opposite values (affection, sensitiveness, submission); so, when a female politician defies these gender mandates in her leadership, she may be penalised by her electorate. All of the above allows us to affirm that Díaz Ayuso constructs a narrative on Instagram that is closer to that of the social media influencers than to the one conceptualised to date about the politician-celebrity figure.

This way of presenting herself is highly valued by her followers (RQ4), as the posts that generate the most engagement are those with non-political content (personal and commercial), while those that deal with political issues are rated less highly. This assertion has been verified by testing the hypotheses: a significant and positive association has been demonstrated between the number of likes and the type of content (H1) and between the number of comments and the content (H2) of the posts. In the case of fandom accounts, while the praise of IDA is the topic that generates the most reactions, posts with political content also get high engagement.

As for the content and discourse developed by the ayusers accounts (RQ5), their appreciation for Díaz Ayuso's physical attractiveness stands out, as well as the development of an idealised sexual interest in her, both being classic forms of emotional attachment of the fandom to musical idols (Anderson, 2012). While the importance of the photogenic and attractiveness of public representatives in generating preference and transferring positive values has been noted in previous studies (Lalancette & Raynauld, 2019; Ling et al., 2019), the literature addressing the sexualisation of political leaders by their fans is scarce (Hernández-Santaolalla & Rubio-Hernández, 2017). The fandom's publications often use the claim of attractiveness to encourage follower participation, asking them to validate their appreciation of their physique through likes and comments. Ayusers thus insist on the psychological bias of the 'halo effect' (Ling, Luo & Guoman, 2019), reproducing a benevolent sexism (Sáez, Valor-Segura & Expósito, 2012) that connects physical attractiveness and style of dress as central elements in valuing women. On the other hand, overtly political content appears in these accounts through attacks on the left and is present in a much higher percentage than that found on IDA's profile. Thus, the communication of the ayusers works in a complementary way to Díaz Ayuso's official communication on Instagram: while she expresses a positive emotionality and focuses on showing her lifestyle and her activity as a politician;

the ayusers redistribute her more belligerent statements against the opposition in the Autonomous Community of Madrid and against the Spanish Government.

In short, Díaz Ayuso's Instagram profile constructs a narrative similar to that of influencers, as a) she strategically narrates her private life by showing everyday activities and private spaces, b) she combines commercial, personal and political content in her posts, and c) she develops practices that contribute to producing a sense of shared environment and access to the authentic self.

In this sense, this study is the first to demonstrate the politician's assumption of the influencer narrative, understood as a way of presenting identity through the constant combination of personal, commercial and political content, and which detects that commercial and personal content is what incites most engagement among Díaz Ayuso's followers. This idea deserves to be explored in future research as it could point towards a cultural change in terms of what behaviours and values citizens expect from their political representatives.

In relation to fans, the results demonstrate their functioning as political audiences of interest in the digital environment, with a behaviour that complements Díaz Ayuso's communicative strategy on Instagram. Along these lines, it would be interesting for future research to deepen our understanding of the role of fandom in the construction of the political public agenda and the formation of political preferences.

As for the limitations of the study, this study analyses a specific case and during a non-electoral period, so the extrapolation of its results should be taken with caution and considering the characteristics of each politician, their fandom's behaviour and whether or not the analysis takes place during an election period.

5. Contributions

Contributions	Authors
Research design	1, 2, 3
Documentary search	1,2, 3
Data collection	3
Critical data analysis and interpretation	1, 2
Review and approval of versions	1, 2

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