
Miscellaneous

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Institutional and political communication on TikTok: Systematic review of scientific production in Web of Science and Scopus

Abstract

After the Covid-19 pandemic, political parties and international public institutions consolidated the use of TikTok as a communication tool in order to reach a young audience, which requires dynamic formats and more flexible languages. This study aims to reflect on the characteristics of institutional and political communication research in TikTok, the suitability of its methodologies, conclusions and limitations, and its future prospects. To this end, a systematic review of the scientific literature (SLR) for the period 2018–2023 is carried out, following the standards of the PRISMA Statement (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses). After applying the inclusion and exclusion criteria to 1.186 scientific documents, 21 articles published in the Scopus and Web of Science databases were analysed. The findings indicate that Spain concentrates the highest number of publications, that the phenomenon was not studied until 2021 and that 2022 was the year of highest production. The conclusions suggest that the study of TikTok is in an incipient phase and that content analysis is the predominant methodology, although its samples are small. They also suggest that there is little bidirectionality in communication strategies, that interaction is not related to adaptation to the multimodal language of the platform and that the focus should be on studying the community rather than the messages disseminated from official profiles.

Keywords

TikTok, institucional communication, political communication, systematized bibliographic review, scientific production, Web of Science, Scopus.

1. Introduction

For several decades, political and institutional communication has been immersed in a fourth phase of its development (Roemmele & Gibson, 2020). This transformation has been primarily driven by the consolidation of the Internet as the main channel for the production and access to political content, leading to a change in the strategy of institutional communication by

political formations and administrations (López-Fernández, 2022). In this regard, it is essential to note that although political and institutional communication are different concepts, they share significant links. While the former focuses on the exchange of messages among members of the political system (Yanes Mesa, 2007, p. 359), especially between parties and the electorate, the latter aims at managing the communicative activity of an organization (Dolphin, 2001). Despite these differences, both types aim for effective communication, which aims to establish and maintain a favourable reputation in front of the various public groups to which they direct their messages (Cornelissen, 2008).

In this context, social media have played a decisive role, as they have altered the relationships between parties and citizens in the realm of political communication (Lilleker, Tenschler & Štětka, 2015; López-García, 2017). Thanks to them, parties have adopted an increasingly elaborate agenda and communicative style in their digital communication, trying to attract and mobilize their followers (Bentivegna, 2015; Enli, 2017). Specifically, they have adapted certain narrative techniques derived from mediatization to the digital context, such as visualization, simplification, or polarization (Meyen, Thieroff & Strenger, 2014). For this reason, social networks have become important platforms for the viral distribution of political images and messages (López-Rabadán, López-Meri & Doménech-Fabregat, 2016), acting as a springboard for an even more pronounced spectacularization of politics (López-Rabadán & Doménech-Fabregat, 2018). Alternatively, what Thussu (2007) called “politainment,” that is, that political communication aimed at capturing and moving the message recipients (Carrillo, 2013) and whose consequences imply the trivialization and superficial treatment of politics (Valdez-López *et al.*, 2020; Berrocal, Campos & Redondo, 2012).

Similarly, public administrations have taken advantage of the informational benefits offered by these platforms (Paniagua Rojano & Gómez Calderón, 2012; Pulido-Polo, 2022), as in the case of the Civil Guard or the National Police in Spain (Ortega Fernández & Rodríguez Hernández, 2021; Bordonado Bermejo & Jaspé Nieto, 2022), and in cultural institutions like museums (Sánchez-Amboage *et al.*, 2022; Martín Sanz, 2022).

Social networks have become both a fundamental source of information for many citizens (Gil de Zúñiga, Weeks & Ardèvol-Abreu, 2017) and the central hub of current political communication (Vaccari & Valeriani, 2016). In recent years, there has been significant growth in the use by political parties of networks such as Twitter and Facebook (Abejón, Sastre & Linares, 2012; Suau-Gomila, 2020) or Instagram (López-Rabadán & Doménech-Fabregat, 2018). However, younger generations are turning to TikTok for a form of “playful activism,” distinct from the serious tone of the previous platforms (Cervi & Marín-Lladó, 2022), a circumstance that parties have leveraged to (re)connect with them and draw them into their electorate (Cervi & Marín-Lladó 2021).

Although there is a precedent for the app in 2016 under the name Douyin, it was not until 2018 that TikTok officially came into being. This Chinese social network, created by the company Musical.ly, serves the purpose of producing and broadcasting short videos. These types of audiovisual clips are disseminated among the audience through mobile technology and encompass various themes such as entertainment, science (Micaletto-Belda, Morejón-Llamas & Martín-Ramallal, 2024), singing, or fashion, among others (Yang, Zhao & Ma, 2019).

In this escapism space (Brown, Pini & Pavlidis, 2022), the published videos loop and may contain photos, emojis, stickers, overlay texts, and music. Furthermore, as Quiroz (2020, p. 2) points out, scrolling down and the uncertainty of not knowing what will appear in the following video create significant addiction and entertainment for users. Therefore, with this strategy, TikTok aims to generate greater engagement through specific or abstract experiences tied to personalisation and emotionality (Peña-Fernández, Larrondo-Ureta & Morales-i-Gras, 2022), in a clear commitment to entertainment through video selfies, choreographies, and fun content (Suárez-Álvarez & García-Jiménez, 2021).

Since its inception, it has established itself as one of the most favoured applications among the youth (Cervi, Tejedor & Blesa, 2023). However, it was in 2020, during the lockdown, that it indeed took off (Cervi, Tejedor & Marín-Lladó, 2021), reaching 2 billion downloads and 800 million users (Omnicores, 2020). In 2023, TikTok achieved 3.5 billion downloads and had over 1.052 billion users worldwide (Statista, 2023), underscoring the success of this platform. TikTok has become the fastest-growing social network in Spain in recent years. Last year, it exceeded 5 billion views, a 109% increase compared to the previous year. Furthermore, TikTok is consolidated as the highest-rated social network (9.1/10) and is the most used by Generation Alpha (12–17 years) (IAB Spain, 2023).

Spurred by the COVID-19 pandemic, this growth led institutions and political parties to create profiles to explore new communication channels. Although TikTok officially does not allow the posting of political advertisements, the political and non-political uses cannot be entirely separated from it (Cervi & Marín-Lladó, 2021). As Nahon (2016) points out, where there are social networks, there is politics. To date, several studies have demonstrated that politics has a strong presence on TikTok (Literat & Kligler-Vilenchik, 2019; Medina-Serrano, Papakyriakopoulos & Hegelich, 2020; Morejón-Llamas, 2023). Although in Spain, there are still reservations about its use (Forja-Pena, 2022), according to Kemp (2020), it has become one of the most used social networks in electoral campaigns. Evidence of this can be found in the recent U.S. elections (Medina-Serrano *et al.*, 2020), during Narendra Modi's campaign in India (Mirchandani, 2020), or the one conducted by Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil (Cesarino, 2020). In Europe, several political leaders, such as French President Emmanuel Macron or former Italian Deputy Prime Minister Matteo Salvini, have begun to successfully use TikTok (Bianchi, 2020).

However, despite the significant communicative possibilities it offers, the app has not been without controversy, especially concerning issues related to privacy (Kang, 2019), the sexualisation of youth (Vizcaíno-Verdú & Tirocchi, 2021), hostility within its virtual community, hate speech, and discrimination (Jaramillo-Dent, Contreras-Pulido & Pérez-Rodríguez, 2022; Literat & Kligler-Vilenchik, 2021; Cuevas-Calderón, Yalán Dongo & Kanashiro, 2022), as well as limitations in addressing these issues (Vijay & Gekker, 2021). Moreover, the lax security and control have led to it becoming a space for the dissemination and promotion of sensitive, criminal, or violent content, turning it, in some cases, into a cesspool of hate (Wheatstone & O'Connor, 2020). To this issue must be added the existing reluctance about the increasingly biased access based on personal tastes and interests (Alonso-López & Sidorenko-Bautista, 2022), which encourages the formation of filter bubbles (Boeker & Urman, 2022), contributing to misinformation (Sidorenko-Bautista, Alonso-López & Giacomelli, 2021), so evident since the pandemic and Russia's invasion of Ukraine (Morejón-Llamas, Martín-Ramallal & Micaletto-Belda, 2022). It is undeniable that the democratisation of content generation through social networks means we live in a period of misinformation, information overload, and fake news (Loterio-Echeverri, Romero-Rodríguez & Pérez-Rodríguez, 2018; Magallón, 2020). Therefore, the accidental exposure of minors to such content can pose a significant risk to them (Martín-Ramallal & Ruiz-Mondaza, 2022). Lastly, the tensions generated from the battle for technological supremacy between China and Silicon Valley cannot be overlooked (Gray, 2021; Zhu, 2020), as TikTok is the first app created outside the US, a fact that has led to numerous clashes in an increasingly controversial geopolitical context (Jia & Liang, 2021).

In this context, there has been a noted increase in academic studies on using this application in the institutional and political communication field. However, no research efforts are aimed at synthesising all the over-information about the platform. Therefore, this study proposes a systematic review to analyse and understand what, how, and who investigates the online dimension of institutional and political communication on TikTok, following its democratisation in the last five years. To this end, the specific objectives set are:

- SO1. Study the characteristics of institutional and political communication research on TikTok and its impact.
- SO2. Define the methodologies used in these studies to understand how the phenomenon of institutional and political communication on TikTok is being analysed.
- SO3. Analyse the conclusions and limitations of these works and represent future trends.

With this purpose, we aim to answer the following research questions:

- RQ1. What is the temporal evolution of institutional and political communication research on TikTok?
- RQ2. What is the geographical distribution of the publications, and is there international collaboration?
- RQ3. At which universities and institutions is there more research on the subject of study?
- RQ4. Which journals publish most about the topic, and what impact do they have?
- RQ5. What are the keywords identified in the literature?
- RQ6. What type of methodology and techniques are used in these works?
- RQ7. What is the sample size?
- RQ8. Which countries are the subject of study to understand the phenomenon of institutional and political communication on TikTok?
- RQ9. What institutions/political parties/ideological groups/candidates have been analysed in the works?
- RQ10. What elements are studied?
- RQ11. Are electoral campaigns more prolific for research?
- RQ12. What conclusions can be drawn from these works, and what kind of application do they have?
- RQ13. What are the main limitations outlined in the articles?
- RQ14. What are the future trends?

2. Material and methods

A systematic review is based on the compilation of research, following a process of exclusion and inclusion, to answer the research questions about a specific issue (Pardal-Refoyo & Pardal-Peláez, 2020). Such works analyse the temporal evolution of research, knowledge areas, themes, researchers creating knowledge, specific characteristics, conclusions, and future trends. This study incorporates the standards of the PRISMA Statement (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses), a guide created in 2009 (Moher *et al.*, 2009) to contribute to and improve the processes and outcomes of systematic reviews. With methodological advancements in science and to address the risk of bias in these studies, the guide was updated in 2020 (Page *et al.*, 2021, p. 792). As recommended, this review follows the steps proposed in the statement from the outset, verifying that the optimal quality requirements are met during the process.

During the first phase of this systematic review, the subject of study (institutional and political communication on TikTok) and the period to be analysed (2018-2023) were defined. 2018 was chosen as the starting point for the literature review because the platform became democratised, becoming the most downloaded app in the United States. The last date to review these databases was 31 December 2023, when the authors' fieldwork ended to begin the subsequent analysis phase.

The research questions were posed, developed, and agreed upon in a second phase, which is essential in any systematic review (Petticrew & Roberts, 2006; Siddaway, Wood & Hedges, 2019). The information sources, namely the Web of Science (WoS) and Scopus databases, were chosen during the third phase.

The fourth phase was dedicated to the literature review, which began in February 2023 with the keywords "political communication" and "TikTok" in WoS and Scopus. However, the

results were ambiguous and did not align with the primary objective of the study (to explain the evolution of research on institutional and political communication on TikTok and its methodological procedures), as they covered other aspects of communication, such as scientific dissemination or the community's behaviour on various topics like musical trends, conversational trends, or advertising consumption by these audiences. Therefore, it was considered necessary to undertake a new search, starting from the keywords of scientific studies related to the subject of study, making use of the Boolean operators AND (used to include all terms separated by the operator) and OR (to find records that include any of the terms separated by said operator). The descriptors "politic*," "communicati*," and "politic* communicati*" were added. Although the results improved compared to the first search by increasing the sample size, it was deemed appropriate, after reviewing the keywords in these works, to add the descriptors "parties," "campaign*," "govern*," and "institutional*." Finally, in April 2023, the search strategy was formulated as follows: ((politic* OR communicati* OR (politic* communicati*) OR parties OR campaign* OR govern* OR institutional*)) AND tiktok. The last search was updated on 31 December 2023. The resulting sample comprised 1,186 articles (622 in WoS and 564 in Scopus).

The PRISMA model's fifth phase is based on selecting studies through inclusion and exclusion criteria, set out according to the PICOS model (Table 1). The first criterion, which refers to the context in which the research in this area is conducted, alludes to open access (Open Access), a movement driven by the Open Society Institute (OSI) in 2001, to advocate for the free availability of scientific information online, removing obstacles that limit knowledge about scientific advances by understanding them as a universal good, and on the other hand, contributing to the professional development of researchers by promoting greater dissemination, visibility, and impact of their studies. The second criterion is established to delineate those works that are scientific articles and not book chapters or results of scientific conferences, given the greater depth addressed by the former. The third inclusion criterion ensures that the research has already been published and not in pre-print, which guarantees that it is the final version of the articles. The fourth and final criterion delimits studies in English, the scientific language that predominates in WoS and Scopus, and Spanish, the language of the researchers of the present work. With these requirements, the sample was screened and refined to respond to the questions posed in the work. First, duplicates were removed (n=161), resulting in an analysis corpus of 1,025 scientific documents. A total of 714 works were excluded for the following reasons that adhere to the 'Comparator/Context' criterion: 600 were not Open Access, 68 were not research articles, 32 had not yet been published, and 14 were not written in English or Spanish. This last step yielded a sample of 311 scientific articles. After reviewing their titles and abstracts, 260 works were excluded, applying the 'Outcomes' category of Table 1, culminating in a selection of 51. Finally, after reading the full texts, 30 articles were excluded because they did not focus on the approach of this review, primarily based on the study of the platform's use by social movements/activist politicians or opinion leaders, and not specifically measuring the use of TikTok by institutions or political parties from official profiles, as outlined in the 'Study Design' criterion of Table 1. No additional publications found in other databases were added (see the complete procedure in Figure 1).

Table 1. PICOS Model.

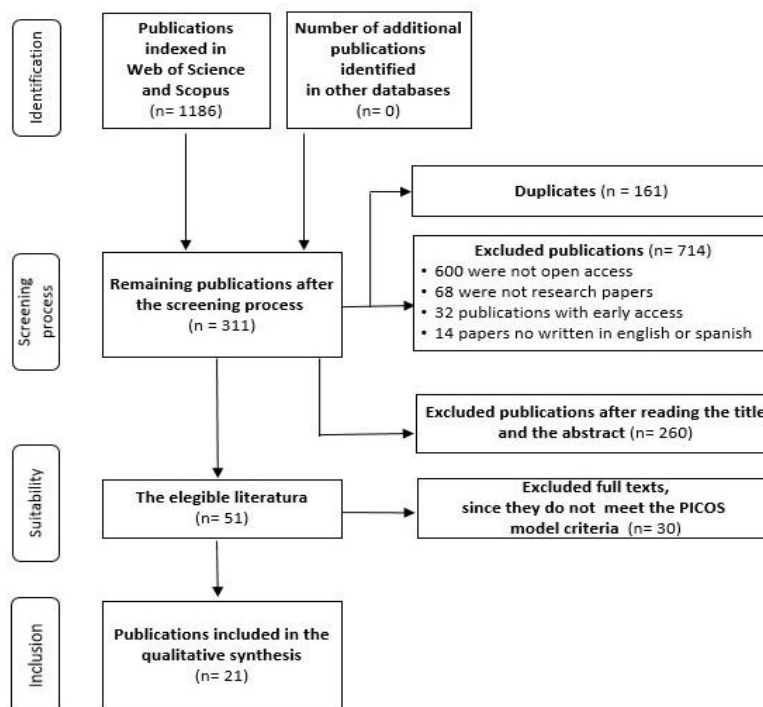
	Inclusion criteria	Exclusion criteria
Participant	Any participants	None
Intervention	Any interventions	None
Comparator/Context	Open Access Research papers Published publications Articles written in English or Spanish	No open access No research papers No published papers Articles not written in English or Spanish
Outcomes	Papers specifically addressing institutional and political communication	Papers on social movements and political behaviour of users
Study design	The use of TikTok by institutions or political parties from official profiles	Papers examining the posts of opinion leaders or social movements/political activists

Source: Adaptation of the PICOS model (Reyes-de-Cózar *et al.*, 2022).

To evaluate and reduce the risk of bias in the application of inclusion and exclusion criteria, these were tested and agreed upon in advance by the three researchers involved in the study. For this purpose, a pilot was conducted using Rayyan, a tool developed by the Qatar Foundation, a non-profit organisation aiming to facilitate the process of systematic reviews (Ouzzani *et al.*, 2016), mainly when conducted by multiple authors. This pilot took place over two sessions on the 3rd and 4th of May, 2023.

In conclusion, 21 articles (Figure 1) were studied, resulting from the process articulated according to the PRISMA protocol and starting from a sample of 1,186 works.

Figure 1. Planning, identification and eligibility process workflow.



Source: Own elaboration.

According to the PRISMA model, the sixth phase focuses on coding, synthesis, and data extraction. The coding variables are specified in Table 2 (see Anex, Table 2) and aim to address each research question based on the proposed specific objectives.

3. Results and discussion

At this point, the final sample of this systematic review is analyzed, which includes 21 articles indexed in WOS and Scopus (see Anex, Table 3).

3.1. Characteristics of research on Institutional and Political Communication on TikTok

The first specific objective aims to study the characteristics of research on institutional and political communication on TikTok and its impact. Out of the 21 articles analyzed, 66.66% fall into the category of political communication [1, 2, 3, 4, 8, 9, 11, 12, 13, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21], while 33.34% are of an institutional nature [5, 6, 7, 10, 14, 15, 16]. Initially, the temporal evolution of the articles in the resulting sample is analyzed. The first work [6] dates back to 2021. It addresses the interaction promoted by the official Healthy China account on TikTok at the beginning of the Covid-19 health pandemic (January 21-April 25, 2020), to assess the communicative effectiveness of the platform in emergency health contexts. In the same year 2021, 5 articles were published (23.81%), which significantly increased in 2022 to reach 9 articles (42.86%). In 2023, there are 7 articles (33.33%).

In the geographical distribution of publications based on the origin of the article's first author, 9 countries are identified. Among them, Spain (47.63%) is the territory where TikTok generates the most interest in the scientific community [3, 4, 7, 8, 11, 14, 15, 18, 19, 20], followed by China (9.52%) [6, 16], Argentina (9.52%) [1, 2], and Colombia (9.52%) [13, 17]. In Canada [12], Ecuador [9], the United States [10], South Korea [5], and the United Kingdom [21], only one article per country is found (4.76%).

Regarding the number of authors of the papers, 28.57% are published by a single researcher [1, 7, 11, 12, 14, 20], 19.05% by two authors [3, 8, 13, 21], 28.57% by three authors [2, 4, 5, 9, 18, 19], 14.28% by four authors [10, 15, 16], and 9.52% by five authors [6, 16]. The two papers with five authors are of Chinese authorship. Although there is diversity in the number of authors, there is limited diversity in nationalities in the papers, which indicates a need for more internationalization in the studies. 80.95% are written by authors from a single country, and 19.05% by authors from two countries [6, 16, 18, 19]. In the case of the first two [6, 16] involve Chinese and British researchers (with the same authors in both papers); in [18], there is a collaboration between Spain, Lithuania, and Egypt, and in [19], there is a partnership between Spain and Switzerland.

There is considerable diversity in the universities and institutions represented in the research. Only the University of Buenos Aires (Argentina), the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona (Spain), the Universidade de Santiago de Compostela (Spain), and the Universidad Ean de Colombia have published twice (15.79% each, accounting for 47.37% among these three educational institutions). Other universities and institutions include Sungkyunkwan University in South Korea, Xi'an Jiaotong University and Huazhong University of Science and Technology in China, as well as various Spanish institutions such as the Universitat de València, the University of Murcia, La Universidad Internacional de la Rioja, the Universidad Complutense de Madrid, the Universidade da Coruña, and the Universidad Pablo de Olavide de Sevilla. There are publications from the Pontificia Universidad Católica del Ecuador, The College of New Jersey in the United States, the University of Toronto Scarborough in Canada, and the University of Surrey in the United Kingdom.

Regarding the journals, there are 17 different journals where these articles have been published. The only journals with more than one article are *Visual Review*, *Universitas-XXI*, *Revista de Ciencias Sociales y Humanas*, *Cultura, Lenguaje y Representación*, and *Media and Communication* (9.52% each), accounting for 38.08% of the total studies. The other journals

include *Astrolabio nueva época*, *Austral Comunicación*, *Profesional de la información*, *Frontiers in Public Health*, *Journal of Medical Internet Research*, *Communication & Society*, *Anuario Electrónico de Estudios en Comunicación Social 'Disertaciones'*, *Health Education Research*, *Social Media + Society*, *Mediterranean Journal of Communication (MJC)*, *SAGE Open*, *Prisma Social*, and *Journal of Contemporary European Studies*.

The systematic review is distributed according to the Q-level of the journals. This work reflects the indexing results 2022, the latest available for WOS and Scopus. These two databases are considered the central databases worldwide. Specifically, WOS is owned by Clarivate Analytics, and Scopus belongs to Elsevier. Journals will also be measured according to the Journal Citation Indicator (JCI), a quality indicator that allows the comparison of journals in different categories. Out of the total sample, only three studies cannot be measured with the indicator because they belong to Scopus [9, 13, 14] and do not have an associated JCI. The findings show that only four studies [3, 5, 6, 12] have been published in Q₁ journals, representing 22.22%. In decreasing order according to the JCI percentile, they are as follows: 1.83 [12], 1.67 [6], 1.3 [5], 1.12 [3]. Most of the studies are grouped in the second and third quartiles. In Q₂, there are 33.33% [8, 10, 16, 18, 19, 21], with two having a JCI of 1.25 [18, 19], two with 0.89 [10, 16], 0.76 [21], and one with 0.6 [8]. Q₃ represents 33.33% [4, 7, 11, 15, 17, 20], with a percentile of 0.36 [15], two with 0.35 [4, 17], one with 0.25 [20], and two with 0.18 [7, 11]. In Q₄, there are two articles (11.11%) with a percentile of 0.09 [1] and 0.06 [2].

The analysis of keyword iterations in the systematic literature review reveals an uneven distribution of keywords among the 21 analyzed articles. The most recurring keyword is "TikTok," which appears in 19 studies, highlighting the focus on this platform. Other terms that repeat with some frequency include "Political Communication" (10 iterations), "Social networks" (7 iterations), and "Social media" (7 iterations), indicating a continued interest in the intersection of politics and social media platforms. Additionally, there is an interest in topics related to the pandemic, such as "Covid-19" (3 iterations) and "Public health crisis" (1 iteration).

3.2. Methodologies applied in the study of Institutional and Political Communication on TikTok

The methodology applied in these studies is primarily mixed methods (66.67%), although qualitative methods (19.05%) and, to a lesser extent, quantitative methods (14.28%) are also used. About 31.58% of the studies employ more than two research techniques (see, Anex Table 4). Content analysis is the preferred method among researchers (70.83%) and is the sole method in the category of those using only one research technique, whether multimodal [4] or using negative binomial regression [6]. Other quantitative techniques include descriptive statistics and Chi-square. In qualitative studies, case studies appear as a combined technique (12.5%), as do in-depth interviews (8.33%), such as those conducted with campaign managers [11]. Structured surveys, which inquire about how the audience consumes TikTok content, are observed only once [1] but involve a substantial analysis corpus (1483 participants). Additionally, they are studied alongside TikTok videos in press articles covering related topics [12].

The sample size is small, with an average corpus of 277 videos. It is important to note that one study [14] significantly increases this value compared to the others. The most miniature samples consist of fewer than 50 posts [1, 9, 13], while the most common samples range between 100 and 200 videos [2, 3, 4, 8, 11, 12, 15, 16, 21]. Samples with more than 201 [5, 6, 10, 17] and 270 [6, 10, 14, 18, 19, 20] videos are considered in the median range. The article by Forja-Pena (2022) does not specify the sample size [7].

The elements analyzed (Table 4) primarily include the date, time, or frequency of publication [1, 2, 3, 5, 8, 12, 14, 15, 20]; engagement, obtained from views, likes, shares, comments, favourites, and interaction, whether their communication is unidirectional (informative) or bidirectional (call to share or call to participation), is considered in all studies

except for two [2, 17, 21]. Mentions are also a subject of analysis [11, 14, 20]. The number of videos, as well as their age [9, 14, 16, 20], duration [6, 9, 10, 16], text [1, 4, 5, 6, 7, 9, 10, 11, 12, 14, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21], theme [2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 15, 16, 20], and multimodal language, understood as the use of music, memes, images, filters, emojis, stickers, GIFs, and hashtags specific to this social network [1, 2, 4, 7, 10, 11, 12, 14, 15, 16, 18, 19, 20, 21], are studied. Other observed elements include the type of content, message and video typology [2, 9, 16, 20], the genre used (video, duet, challenge) [3, 4, 20], format [3, 4, 8, 10, 20]; source [3, 4, 20], and language [10, 12].

Additionally, emotions, tone, and the overall sentiment of the messages are analyzed [4, 10, 16, 21]; fallacies and rhetorical devices for persuasion [17, 18]; hate speech [19] or negative content [21]; main actors and their actions [4, 21]; the presence of copy, manifest symbolism, political ideology, and propaganda typology [9]; and the enunciation plane of entities from the political imaginary (enumerable collectives, broader collectives, meta-collectives, nominalized formulas, and nominal forms with explanatory value) and discourse components (descriptive, didactic, prescriptive, programmatic) [13]. Only two studies examine community comments and the sociodemographic characteristics of the audience (age, gender, education level, occupation, and region) [7, 9].

The most examined countries are Spain (34.48%) and China (10.34%), followed by Argentina, the United Kingdom, and Colombia (8.34% each), and the category 'International' (8.34%), which comprises studies that comparatively observe the activity on TikTok of healthcare or cultural institutions, such as museums. Other studies focus on countries like Canada, Ecuador, Chile, Poland, France, and Germany (3.57% each). The countries selected for these analyses directly correspond to the origin of the first author of the articles. It is worth noting that less than a quarter of the studies are related to election campaigns (19.05%), specifically the 2021 presidential elections in Ecuador [9], the 2021 Madrid Regional elections [11], and the 2022 Colombian presidential elections [13, 17].

Regarding the key figures, we find political parties and politicians such as Horacio Rodríguez Larreta [1, 2], Andrés Arauz and Guillermo Lasso [9], Jagmeet Singh [12], Rodolfo Hernández [13, 17], Gustavo Petro, Federico Gutiérrez, and Sergio Fajardo [17], José Antonio Kast in Chile [19], and Marine Le Pen, Matteo Salvini, and Eric Zemmour in Italy and France [21]. Also, there is an analysis related to Platforma Obywatelska Lewica, Konfederacja, Prawo i Sprawiedliwość (PiS), and Polskie Stronnictwo Ludowe (PSL) in Poland [18], and the UK Independence Party [19]. Furthermore, there are comparative analyses between national Spanish parties like PP, PSOE, Unidas Podemos, Ciudadanos, and Vox [3, 4, 8, 18, 19, 20, 21], as well as regional parties in Spain such as the Popular Party of the Community of Madrid and Más Madrid [11].

At the institutional level, government health organizations such as the National Health Commission of China (NHCC) [5, 6] and the Ministries of Health in the UK, Germany, and Spain [7] are reviewed. Additionally, United Nations organizations [10] such as the American Red Cross, the British Red Cross, and the World Health Organization are included. One study involves 40 public hospitals in Western China [16]. At the same time, another focuses on the museum activity [14] of institutions like the State Russian Museum, Metropolitan Museum Of Art, State Hermitage Museum, Centre Pompidou, Prado National Museum, Tate Modern, D'Orsay, Somerset House, Galleria degli Uffizi, Victoria and Albert Museum, Mucem, National Gallery (Singapore), National Gallery (London), Foundation Louis Vuitton, Thyssen-Bornemisza, Rijksmuseum, Du Quai Branly, Bourse de Commerce-Pinault Collection, Tel Aviv Museum of Arts Of Fine Arts, Faberge Museum, L'Orangerie, and the Palais de Tokyo. One study focuses on the Museo del Prado in Spain [15].

3.3. *Conclusions, limitations and future prospects*

Finally, the third of the objectives seeks to analyze the conclusions and limitations and represent future trends. According to the conclusions of the analyzed articles, several of them introduce the variable of the COVID-19 pandemic as a growth factor for the TikTok social network (Cervi *et al.*, 2021, p. 269), either in risk/crisis communication [10], in transmitting information about museums [15], or in political communication [1].

Similarly, the adaptation of communication to young audiences is another conclusion that is consistent across various publications [1, 2, 12, 14, 17, 20, 21]. In political communication, publications [11, 20] emphasize the combination of content spectacularization and a discourse targeted at young people in their summaries. However, it is confirmed that there is no interaction with the audience.

In this same vein, there needs to be more generation of conversation. According to the analyzed studies, there is minimal interaction between the accounts that post content on TikTok and their followers, indicating a traditional use of political communication [1, 4, 8, 9, 11, 18, 20].

Thus, the use of TikTok as a transmitter of info-entertainment content and even as a vehicle for spectacularization of content in political and institutional communication is highlighted in the conclusions of some publications [1, 4, 11, 12, 13, 19, 20, 21], in a manner consistent with the findings of López-Rabadán & Doménech-Fabregat (2018). In one of the cases, messages with a low sense of value are noted [16], as a result of the trivialization and superficial treatment of politics, as suggested by Valdez-López *et al.* (2020) and Berrocal *et al.* (2012). Another study [17] reflects on persuasion during political campaigns, devoid of any argumentation on this platform and fueled by fallacies through rhetorical figures that ultimately create supposed convincing messages and a credible identity construction of the candidate. Also, two of the studies conclude that, although a high level of hate speech might be expected in right-wing populist content, it is not the case. Hatred does not increase engagement, which could be due to TikTok's algorithm reducing the visibility of these videos [19]. Another point to consider is that populism takes advantage of the platform to dispel the demonized image of its leaders [21].

The primary limitations arising from these studies are methodological and range from the need to include comment analysis [1, 3, 10, 12, 14, 15] to the exploratory nature and the limited scientific literature, which impacts the quality of the work [3, 8, 10, 11, 16]. This underscores the importance of studying future trends, extending the time frame given the changing and fluid nature of the platform, and understanding how the audience's reaction is articulated through active participation. It is proposed also to examine videos created by communities, beyond the content generated by official profiles [10], and not to restrict sample selection to those videos with the highest engagement [10, 16], as comments and shares can be turned off by accounts [10] or subject to censorship as in the case of China [6]. In such cases, they may not reflect the real participation of users. Therefore, it is ideal to study the impact of scientific dissemination through institutional profiles at the population level to determine, for example, the health knowledge acquired and the positive behavioural change in the public [16]. Given the context of a health crisis in which these studies are situated, it is relevant to advocate for applying crisis communication strategies [5]. Furthermore, including interviews with experts [12, 15, 16] is recommended, and the limitations of case studies are noted [4].

Prospects delve into creating a strategy that validates the effective use of TikTok for political communication, meaning with acceptable engagement, without compromising the credibility of information [1], or harming the communication objectives of institutions and political parties [7]. However, considering that interaction is more successful when incorporating styles, narratives, and scenography from the world of entertainment into the communication repertoire [3], it suggests an increase in "politainment" on the platform [11,

20], which could lead to a decrease and trivialization of content quality. It is also considered essential to study the electoral strategies of countries like Argentina [2] or employ comparative analysis of different political parties [4] or geographical contexts [18], as well as to study left-wing populism [19, 21]. There is even a proposal to comparatively analyze the feasibility of these studies in Western countries that tend towards individualism or in Eastern countries like China that lean towards collectivism [6], as well as to contrast the discursive strategy across various social media platforms simultaneously [17].

Most of the studies focus on understanding the role of communication on this social network and the impact it has on citizens (Gil de Zúñiga *et al.*, 2017; Vaccari & Valeriani, 2016; Cervi & Marín-Lladó, 2022). Politically, they emphasize the potential impact on election outcomes regarding votes [11]. Therefore, it is proposed to examine platform users' demographic data and cognitive, emotional, and behavioural responses [10]. Similarly, the analysis of user comments [2], their sentiments, and thematic patterns [5] are recommended, as the TikTok community dominates and is capable of generating political content that needs to be reviewed [8]. In this context, they highlight an ethical reflection on the contribution of institutional and political communication to strengthening the democratic system [14].

There is also a focus on understanding the motivation behind the creation of videos through qualitative studies [6], as well as studying the level of audience engagement [14]. In the methodological section, it is recommended to include better frame-by-frame video coding to capture their characteristics and intentionality [16] and to conduct a longitudinal study that allows for more robust conclusions [12].

At the institutional level, there is a focus on studying the impact in terms of workload that managing an official profile on this platform may entail, as it requires a high demand for content creation and the need for hiring to strengthen the channel in order to connect with society sufficiently [15].

4. Conclusions

The main objective of this study is to understand, through a systematic review, what, how, and who is researching the use of TikTok as a tool for institutional and political communication. SO1 aimed to study the characteristics of these researches, considering their temporal evolution, the countries where most research is conducted, and whether there is significant international collaboration, such as comparative studies. It also aimed to identify this field's most prolific universities, institutions, and journals. Regarding this, it is concluded that the first research studies appeared in 2021, coinciding with the COVID-19 pandemic and the entry of political parties and institutions onto the platform (Cervi & Marín-Llado, 2021; Cervi, Tejedor & Marín-Llado, 2021; Chen *et al.*, 2021; Li *et al.*, 2021; Zhang *et al.*, 2021). However, the surge in research takes place in 2022, a year in which there is significant growth due to the increase in new official profiles and the frequency of publications from these accounts (Che *et al.*, 2022; Forja-Pena, 2022; Gamir-Ríos & Sánchez-Castillo, 2022; Rodríguez-Hernández, 2022; Sánchez-Amboage, 2022). It is also in 2022 when the focus shifts to the use of TikTok in electoral campaigns (López-Fernández, 2022; Niño Pantoja & Gálvis Ardila, 2022). In 2023, this issue will dominate most of the research activity (Herrera-Morejón, 2023; Moir, 2023; Peña-Rojas, 2023), in addition to focusing on other topics such as the presence of hate speech in political communication by populisms (Zamora-Medina, Suminas, and Fahmy, 2023) and the influence of TikTok discourse on young voters (González-Aguilar, Segado-Boj, and Makhortykh, 2023). It is worth noting that most studies focus on political communication, with limited attention given to institutional communication.

Regarding the countries with the highest publication activity, there is a particular emphasis on regions such as Spain, Latin America, and Asia, demonstrating the transcultural relevance of TikTok. However, although the trend is for these studies to have three authors, there needs to be more international collaboration, as most come from a single country.

Additionally, there is a concentration of research in specific universities in Spain and Colombia. Publications are distributed across journals covering various approaches, ranging from public health communication to political analysis, highlighting the interdisciplinary nature of TikTok research. The quality of these journals is sufficient to establish authority on the subject of study, although there is a predominance of second and third-quartile journals; only a quarter of the works are found in the first quartile of the JCR. Lastly, the identified keywords in the literature indicate the thematic areas of interest and the current research focus.

SO₂ aimed to define the methodologies applied to understand how the phenomenon is being analyzed. It is essential to highlight that mixed methods research is prominent, with content analysis being the most commonly used technique in one-third of the studies. Although the sample sizes are not extensive, with an average of 300 pieces of content analyzed, they are sufficient to draw reliable conclusions. Sometimes, the sample selection cannot be expanded due to the limited number of publications from these official profiles, which have entered the platform prematurely. Other times, it is due to screening criteria based on engagement, a factor that limits the studies and reduces their depth. Research encompasses a variety of geographical contexts, with a notable concentration in Spain and China. It extends to a wide range of political parties, candidates, and organizations from different countries, especially in healthcare and culture in the institutional sphere. However, there are few comparative studies between countries, whether in the institutional (Forja-Pena, 2022; Rodríguez-Hernández, 2022) or political (Albertazzi & Bonansinga, 2023; González-Aguilar, Segado-Boj & Makhortykh, 2023; Zamora-Medina, Suminas & Fahmy, 2023) realms, something that would enrich the research. While electoral campaigns are not emphasized, it would be opportune to study these pivotal moments in more detail compared to normalcy periods to establish whether discourse intensifies during election time (Morejón-Llamas, 2023).

The elements analyzed revolve around the engagement promoted by these posts, the level of interaction they generate, and whether there is bi-directional communication or if TikTok is used in a unidirectional manner without apparent debate. Other standard variables in these studies include examining how well these contents adapt to the platform's multi-modal language (Jaramillo-Dent, Contreras-Pulido & Pérez-Rodríguez, 2022), the discursive frameworks and strategies employed, the thematic contexts in which they are situated, the prevailing emotional tone, and the rhetorical devices used. It is important to note that this work excluded scientific articles that analyzed the audience, including only those that addressed the content published by official accounts of political parties, political leaders, or institutional entities.

SO₃ aimed to analyze these studies' conclusions, limitations, and future prospects, thus undertaking a critical evaluation to enhance the scientific research on TikTok as a communicative tool. The analyzed articles identified that the Covid-19 pandemic boosted its use in crisis and political communication, highlighting its adaptation to young audiences and the tendency towards content spectacularization. It also points out the potential of this space for right-wing populist parties and their extremist leaders to mitigate the demonization of their image to reach new adolescent audiences (Albertazzi & Bonansinga, 2023). Despite the communicative potential of this platform, there is evidence of limited honest dialogue and debate with users, indicating a relatively traditional approach in the political sphere.

Among the limitations of these studies, the usage restrictions imposed on TikTok in countries like the United States and some members of the European Union are prominent. The case of Canada, a country where the use of TikTok on federal devices was prohibited, serves as an example of the complications this tool may face in institutional and political communication, given the geopolitical conflicts surrounding the platform (Jia & Liang, 2021). Criticism of superficiality and "politainment" in political messages points to challenges in constructing authentic discourse on this social network that can avoid the polarization affecting current audiences. Additionally, methods that incorporate comment analysis and a

deeper understanding of engagement and audience responses are needed, as well as the enrichment that sentiment analysis and other discourse analysis methods can provide. Future trends suggest a need for communication strategies that balance entertainment and credibility, contributing to the development and democratic maintenance of societies.

This work, despite addressing the research questions and achieving the proposed objectives, has certain limitations stemming from the small sample size. This limitation could be overcome with a future systematic review that extends the time frame to 2024, a year in which an increase in such studies is expected due to the intense global electoral activity that took place in 2023. This research has highlighted the need for future studies to enhance their methodological strategies to understand better the phenomenon of institutional and political communication on TikTok. This would enable monitoring of its discourses and comprehension of how society is informed and mobilized on this rapidly growing social network, especially among young audiences that will shape the future of democracies. Similarly, it is advisable to begin geographical comparisons of the application of this communicative resource in a globalized and interconnected society. Moreover, ethical considerations should be considered to preserve sustainable and peaceful communication fostering political discourse.

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Annex

Table 2 is available in the Figshare data repository with the following doi:

<https://www.doi.org/10.6084/m9.figshare.25187693>

Table 3 is available in the Figshare data repository with the following doi:

<https://www.doi.org/10.6084/m9.figshare.25187723>

Table 4 is available in the Figshare data repository with the following doi:

<https://www.doi.org/10.6084/m9.figshare.25187741>