NARRATIVES, LEADERSHIP AND POLITICAL COMMUNICATION ON TIKTOK: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF SÁNCHEZ AND FEIJÓO

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Abstract
This study provides a comparative analysis of how Pedro Sánchez and Alberto Núñez Feijóo, leaders of Spain's main political parties, build their political leadership on TikTok during their first six months of activity on this social media platform. The aim is to identify the narrative strategies they employ, the formal resources and most recurring themes, and the level of engagement their posts generate, in order to understand how they adapt to the platform's specific language. A mixed-methods content analysis is conducted on 137 videos (76 by Pedro Sánchez and 61 by Alberto Núñez Feijóo) published between September 2025 and February 2026. To this end, an analysis sheet is used to record identification variables, formal aspects, narrative aspects and interaction. The results reveal two clearly distinct communication styles. Whilst Sánchez maintains a more regular presence, adapted to TikTok's audiovisual language, and is able to strike a balance between institutional and personal content through a warm and emotional tone, Núñez Feijóo adopts a more traditional and conservative style, where confrontation and criticism of the government form the central focus of his strategy. It is concluded that the humanisation and personalisation of leadership pays off in terms of engagement on TikTok, as it fosters greater identification with the user, although the ability to adapt to the platform's narrative and formal conventions also plays a part.

Keywords: Political communication; TikTok; digital storytelling; political leadership; personalization.

1. Introduction

The political communication ecosystem has undergone a profound transformation over the last decade as a result of the rise and consolidation of social media. They have become essential spaces for disseminating ideas and mobilising citizens (Abejón-Mendoza and Mayoral-Sánchez, 2017), but also for opening up a range of possibilities for new strategies and narrative dynamics (Egea-Barquero and Zamora-Medina, 2023). Indeed, with the progressive digitalisation of the media sphere, the development of strategies centred on visibility, immediacy and the construction of leadership has fostered the creation of a more direct, permanent and emotional relationship between the political class and its audience, particularly the younger generation (Chaves-Montero and Gadea, 2017; Roemmele & Gibson, 2020).

As Gómez de Travesedo-Rojas and Gil-Ramírez (2020) point out, "reaching out to potential young voters forces politicians to reinvent their communication strategies and migrate them from social media platforms such as Facebook or Twitter to others where digital natives currently represent the majority of the audience" (p. 64). Consequently, it is no longer sufficient to prioritise immediacy and emotion in discourse, as is the case on platforms such as Instagram or X (formerly Twitter); the public now demands an extra element of spectacle, entertainment and distinctiveness to make them pause and engage with a particular piece of content amongst all that is available (Cervi and Marín-Lladó, 2021).

Platforms such as TikTok have gained increasing relevance within current political communication precisely because they have become a space where the political sphere can generate content that is shorter, more direct and more visually striking than it has traditionally produced, in order to reach an audience disenchanted with traditional media (Castro and Díaz, 2021) and disconnected from political information. Although this platform was initially launched as a social network for short videos recorded on mobile devices, designed to entertain through creative and original content, it has evolved to become a strategic space for the political sphere as well, particularly regarding the construction of new public narratives and the democratisation of content. Its algorithmic logic, based on personalised video recommendations, as well as its highly emotional and interactive nature, make it a platform of considerable relevance for understanding new forms of political persuasion and citizen *engagement* (Cervi and Marín-Lladó, 2021; Omar & Dequan, 2020).

However, this new landscape also presents risks to areas such as democratic health, as the use of certain narrative strategies and propaganda campaigns aims to undermine public trust in institutions in order to sow doubts about democratic processes (Rodríguez-Fernández et al., 2025). In this sense, TikTok acts not only as a new channel for dissemination, but also as an environment that shapes the way in which political discourse is produced, distributed and received by users. Hence, the study of this platform is essential to understanding how political communication and leadership are articulated in a context where digital visibility can coexist with high levels of discursive polarisation.

Recent research reveals that TikTok has begun to establish itself as a strategic tool during electoral campaigns and in shaping the public image of candidates and political parties themselves (Gómez de Travesedo-Rojas et al., 2023; Lozano et al., 2024; Figueredo-Benítez et al., 2025), as leaders adapt their narrative to maximise the virality and reach of their posts. Furthermore, other studies confirm that the engagement achieved on TikTok does not depend exclusively on the volume of posts, but rather on the ability to generate emotional identification, trust and a sense of closeness among the audience (Obergozo-Terradillos et al., 2024). To this end, it is essential to utilise engagement metrics to help increase the visibility of political actors, but also to engage digital communities with the published content and thus enter the algorithmic circulation characteristic of this platform.

As a result of all this, the rise of TikTok in the field of political communication should not be interpreted merely as an adaptation to a new channel, but as an environment that redefines the established communicative dynamics between leaders, parties and the public. It is therefore not surprising that an increasing number of political parties are using humour on their official accounts (López-Fernández, 2022) or that candidates are sharing aspects of their personal lives, as it has been shown that these practices increase audience engagement and enhance the public's perception of authenticity and spontaneity (Peng, 2021; Luebke and Steffan, 2023). This visibility gained in the digital sphere seeks to be transferred to the media agenda of traditional outlets and, ultimately, to exert a decisive influence on public opinion.

TikTok is thus establishing itself therefore, as a prime space for analysing how political leadership is constructed and represented on social media in the context of intense media competition and discursive polarisation, particularly given that the platform itself helps to intensify elements already present in digital political communication, such as the personalisation of leadership, the emotional nature of discourse, and confrontation as a narrative device to achieve greater visibility.

1.1. The construction of political leadership on social media

In the digital context, political leadership forms part of a multifaceted phenomenon in which institutional representation or the performance of public duties in the exercise of office are no longer the sole considerations. Leadership is constructed as a personal political brand whose legitimacy depends, to a large extent, on its ability to generate emotional identification and convey authenticity, approachability and/or trust. In this sense, so-called *'backstage* communication'—where political leaders have no qualms about revealing aspects of their private and family life—is particularly valued by younger age groups (Parmelee, 2022) as it is a way of connecting with public figures with whom it is easier to empathise. This is undoubtedly a strategy that is having an increasing impact on the construction of solid and recognisable political leadership.

In this vein, Selva-Ruiz and Caro-Castaño (2017) observed how the sharing of everyday and emotional aspects on social media contributes to the creation of a strategy to humanise leadership that is particularly effective among young audiences. This logic has been reinforced by other audiovisual platforms where the visual and narrative components take on central importance. For example, on Instagram, we can see how the image of political leadership can be managed through resources that create a sense of closeness for the user, such as framing, setting, clothing, colours, or the very audiovisual editing used to impart more or less rhythm to the scenes (Bast, 2021).

This phenomenon focuses on the personalisation of politics, that is, on quietly shifting the spotlight from political parties to the figure leading them. Personalisation, therefore, is one of the defining features of digital political communication and the backbone of building a more human and less technical leadership. To this end, a sense of closeness is projected and narratives are created based on everyday and familiar scenes, personal and leisure moments, or emotional aspects that make it easier to empathise with users and reduce the symbolic distance between the political leader and the public through an emotional connection (López-Meri et al., 2020; Egea-Barquero and Zamora-Medina, 2023).

This personalisation of leadership is consolidated through the development of a distinct visual identity. On audiovisual platforms such as TikTok, this dimension takes on even greater significance, as the image often precedes the policy content of the party represented by the political leader. Indeed, in these environments, what is known as the 'economy of digital reading' (Scolari, 2004) prevails, where the predominance of image over text, accompanied by brief, direct and effective language, is key to achieving communicative objectives (González-Fernández, 2025). Recent studies on TikTok in Spain reveal that political actors adapt their communication to more performative, visual and emotional codes in order to promote the spectacularisation of political leadership (Plazas-Olmedo and López-Rabadán, 2026). Furthermore, the construction of a narrative using close-ups, music, words or phrases in the style of a slogan, or direct appeals to the user, helps to generate *engagement* and ensures that the content is well-positioned within the social media algorithm.

Alongside personalisation and visual identity, the leadership role one chooses to adopt is another key factor in building digital political leadership. Given that highly emotional content generates the most interaction, it is hardly surprising that it is increasingly common to find content from political figures in which confrontation, conflict and polarisation are the true protagonists of the narrative (Casero-Ripollés, 2018). The dramatisation of conflict is thus one of the most common strategies for attracting users and increasing user interaction on platforms.

However, the political position held by the protagonist will have a decisive influence on the way in which their leadership is constructed on social media. This is because whilst leaders in government tend to opt for more institutional profiles linked to their administration and the performance of their duties in office, opposition leaders tend to opt for more confrontational narrative strategies, aimed at mobilising the electorate and, above all, at ideological differentiation (Enli and Rosenberg, 2018; Roemmele and Gibson, 2020).

1.2. Objectives

The main objective of this study is to conduct a comparative analysis of the political communication strategies employed by Pedro Sánchez and Alberto Núñez Feijóo on their TikTok profiles during their first six months of activity, with the aim of identifying their narrative models and leadership styles in the construction of their public image on this social media platform. Furthermore, the specific objectives are as follows:

- To quantify the frequency of posts, the pace of activity and the duration of the videos published by both leaders on the platform.
- To evaluate the use of formal resources to ascertain the extent to which the published content is adapted to TikTok's own language.
- To determine the predominant themes and communicative tones in the narrative of the posts.
- To identify the leadership model projected by both leaders in order to understand how they construct their political identity on this social media platform.
- To analyse the impact and reach of the posts by analysing the most relevant engagement metrics.

2. Materials and Methods

2.1 Study Design

This study adopts an analytical-descriptive research design based on a mixed-methods content analysis approach (Krippendorff, 1990; Piñeiro-Naval, 2020), combining quantitative and qualitative techniques to examine the communication strategies employed by two leading Spanish political figures on TikTok.

The study focuses on the official TikTok profiles of Pedro Sánchez (@sanchezcastejon), Prime Minister of Spain and leader of the Spanish Socialist Workers' Party (PSOE), and Alberto Núñez Feijóo (@nunezfeijoo), leader of the opposition and president of the People's Party (PP). The selection of these accounts is based on their political relevance and institutional significance, as both figures represent Spain's two main political parties.

Both politicians launched their official TikTok accounts in September 2025, within a few days of each other, seeking to establish a presence on a platform particularly relevant to younger audiences. Their arrival on TikTok took place in a political context characterised by several regional electoral processes, including those in Castile and León, Andalusia, Extremadura and Aragon.

The observation period covers the first six months of activity on the platform, from September 2025 to February 2026. This timeframe makes it possible to examine the initial development of both leaders' communication strategies and compare their content production, narrative approaches and audience engagement during their early presence on TikTok.

The research procedure consisted of identifying and collecting all publicly available video posts published by both political leaders during the observation period, followed by their systematic classification using a purpose-designed content analysis coding sheet. The collected information was subsequently organised and processed for quantitative and qualitative analysis.

2.2 Data and Variables

The study population comprises the video content published on the official TikTok accounts of Pedro Sánchez (@sanchezcastejon) and Alberto Núñez Feijóo (@nunezfeijoo) during the period under examination.

A census-based sampling approach was adopted, including all posts published by both accounts between September 2025 and February 2026. The final dataset consists of 137 posts (N = 137), distributed as follows: 76 posts published by Pedro Sánchez and 61 by Alberto Núñez Feijóo.

The selection criteria were based on the following considerations: (1) the accounts had to be the politicians' official TikTok profiles; (2) the content had to have been published within the established observation period; and (3) the content had to be available as a video post for analysis. TikTok Stories were excluded because of their ephemeral nature and the difficulty of systematically retrieving and examining them after their display period had elapsed.

The unit of analysis was each individual video post. A coding sheet was designed to collect and classify the information according to four analytical dimensions, comprising the following variables:

a) Identification variables

- Publication date: date on which the video was published.
- Video duration: length of the video.

b) Formal variables

- Audiovisual format: video with voice-over or on-camera speech; video with music; video with text; and video combining music and text.

• Digital and audiovisual resources: presence or absence of subtitles, links, tags, hashtags, mentions, emojis and artificial intelligence (AI)-generated resources.

c) Narrative variables

• Main topic: domestic politics, international politics, electoral campaign events, party events, personal life or other topics.

• Communicative tone: informative, emotional, confrontational, propagandistic, humorous or other.

• Attack on political opponents: presence or absence of explicit criticism or attacks directed at political opponents.

• Leadership role: institutional leader, political party leader, close associate or other.

d) Interaction variables

• Views: total number of video views.

• Likes: total number of likes received.

• Comments: total number of comments.

• Favourites: total number of times the video was added to users' favourites.

The coding sheet was developed specifically in accordance with the research objectives and provided a common analytical framework for examining and comparing the formal, narrative and interaction-related characteristics of both politicians' TikTok content.

2.3 Data Preparation and Analysis

The information obtained from the two official TikTok profiles was organised using a structured coding sheet, which served as the instrument for recording and classifying the 137 video posts included in the study. Each video constituted an individual unit of analysis and was examined according to the identification, formal, narrative and interaction variables described above.

The resulting dataset was processed using IBM SPSS Statistics (version 24). This software was used to organise the coded information, conduct statistical analyses and examine the distribution of the variables. The analytical procedure also enabled comparisons between the two political leaders, focusing on differences in their content production, audiovisual formats, narrative strategies and audience engagement.

Quantitative and qualitative techniques were combined to provide a comprehensive examination of the material. The quantitative component focused on the identification and comparison of patterns and frequencies across the coded variables, while the qualitative component addressed the interpretation of the thematic content, communicative tones and leadership representations present in the videos.

This combined analytical approach made it possible to identify similarities and differences between the two politicians' communication strategies and to examine how each constructed their political presence on TikTok during the first six months of activity.

3. Results

3.1. Identification

The dates of the content published by both leaders on their TikTok profiles reveal both the frequency and the pace of their activity. In the case of Pedro Sánchez, a somewhat more sustained and regular posting strategy is evident compared to that of Alberto Núñez Feijóo. Whilst the former posts an average of 12.7 videos per month, the latter posts an average of 10.2. Although both have a relatively consistent presence on the platform, there are periods of heightened activity, with November being the month with the most posts on Sánchez's profile (20), coinciding with significant institutional exposure, and December for Núñez Feijóo (20), focusing on the end-of-year political and parliamentary agenda.

Table 1. Monthly distribution of posts

Month	Pedro Sánchez		Alberto Núñez Feijóo	
	N	%	N	%
September	11	14,5	6	9,8
October	9	11,8	11	18
November	20	26,3	9	14,8
December	12	15,8	20	32,8
January	9	11,8	9	14,8
February	15	19,7	6	9,8
TOTAL	76	100%	61	100%

Source: prepared by the author

As regards video length, both leaders opt for a format suited to TikTok's logic, where short-form content takes precedence on this platform. This is why neither Sánchez nor Núñez Feijóo have many videos longer than 120 seconds. However, there are significant differences between them: whilst Sánchez mainly opts for videos under 60 seconds (53.9%), Feijóo has a higher proportion of content lasting between 60 and 120 seconds (50.8%).

Table 2. **Distribution of the duration of published content**

Duration	**Pedro Sánchez**		**Alberto Núñez Feijóo**	
	N	%	N	%
Less than 60 seconds	41	53,9	29	47,5
Between 60 and 120 seconds	33	43,4	31	50,8
More than 120 seconds	2	2,6	1	1,6
TOTAL	76	100%	61	100%

Source: prepared by the author

3.2. Formal aspects

The results regarding audiovisual format reveal that Sánchez and Núñez Feijóo adopt different production strategies. In the case of the Prime Minister, the predominant format is video with music and integrated text, whilst the leader of the opposition takes a more traditional and classic approach to video without any additional elements. Thus, it is evident that Sánchez's content is better adapted to TikTok's visual and algorithmic culture than that of Núñez Feijóo, as the latter follows more traditional models of audiovisual content in which the centrality of the speech predominates.

Table 3. Distribution of audiovisual formats of published content

Format	**Pedro Sánchez**		**Alberto Núñez Feijóo**	
	N	%	N	%
Video (voice on/off)	21	27,63	35	57,38
Video + music	7	9,21	6	9,84
Video + text	19	25	11	18,03
Video + music + text	29	38,16	9	14,75
TOTAL	76	100%	61	100%

Source: prepared by the author

Furthermore, the use of resources is linked to the reach and visibility of the published content. In this way, the communication strategies of both leaders coincide in their use of subtitles in all their videos, with the aim of making both their message and their content more accessible if, as is often the case, the content is consumed in silence; they also coincide in their decision not to use tags or links in any of their posts. In the rest of the resources used, there is greater disparity and, consequently, two distinct models of communication style are evident, as can be seen in the table below.

Table 4. Distribution of resource usage in published content

Resources	**Pedro Sánchez**		**Alberto Núñez Feijóo**	
	N	%	N	%
Hashtag	66	86,8	15	24,6
Mentions	8	10,5	1	1,6
Emojis	34	44,7	3	4,9
AI	0	0%	12	19,7

Source: prepared by the author

Pedro Sánchez is therefore pursuing a strategy aimed at increasing the reach of his content and, consequently, boosting the likelihood of engagement and virality – a trend reflected in the high frequency of hashtag use (86.8% of all his posts). Of all these, two hashtags stand out above the rest: #GobiernoDeEspaña, used in government-related content,

and #Booktok, used in posts where he makes music and book recommendations for the weekend. Furthermore, the inclusion of emojis in 44.7% of his videos and mentions in 10.5% reinforces this approach by creating a more emotional, approachable and less formal style of communication, characteristic of digital culture.

In contrast, Alberto Núñez Feijóo follows a more conservative strategy regarding the use of these resources, as hashtags appear in only 24.6% of his posts, the most prominent being #Congreso, used in videos of his speeches during parliamentary question time ( ) in the Congress of Deputies, and #España, which is used repeatedly in posts taking a national stance or 1111rioritizin the government. Furthermore, the use of emojis (4.9%) and mentions (1.6%) is practically negligible.

However, there is a notable difference between the resources used by both leaders in their content regarding the use of Artificial Intelligence. Whilst Sánchez does not use it in any of his posts, Núñez Feijóo incorporates it into 12 of his 61 videos (19.7%). Its use is linked to 1111rioritizing1111 strategies, where criticism and political confrontation through montages and audiovisual representations are implicit. In this regard, the leader of the Partido Popular also uses colour alterations to emphasise this 1111rioritizing1111 and persuasion when the image of Pedro Sánchez appears in his videos, as he always appears in black and white despite the rest of the video being in colour.

3.3. Narrative aspects

The narrative strategies of Sánchez and Núñez Feijóo are diametrically opposed, as can be seen in the themes featured in their videos. Whilst the Prime Minister seeks a balance between institutional action and the 1111rioritizing of his leadership, the leader of the Popular Party focuses on opposing and 1111rioritizin the Government's actions.

Table 5. Distribution of themes in published content

Theme	Pedro Sánchez		Alberto Núñez Feijóo	
	N	%	N	%
National politics	39	51,3	36	59
International politics	12	15,8	1	1,6
Election campaign events	0	0	5	8,2
Party events	1	1,3	5	8,2
Personal life	19	25	3	4,9
Other	5	6,6	11	18
TOTAL	76	100%	61	100%

Source: prepared by the author

The fact is that Pedro Sánchez prioritises domestic politics and his role as Prime Minister (44.7%) with posts that mainly highlight legislative achievements, such as the increase in the national minimum wage, housing laws and child protection legislation; it is worth noting that a quarter of his content is devoted to his personal life (25%), highlighting his weekly cultural recommendations for books and music – this being his main distinguishing feature – as well as his participation in sports such as enduro. International politics also carries significant weight (15.8%), something that undoubtedly helps him project his image as a global leader through his agenda at the United Nations, the European Council or climate summits. It is striking that his role as leader of the PSOE barely features in either party events (1.3%) or election campaign events (0%), whilst other matters such as outtakes, visits to bookshops or Radio 3 studios feature more prominently, to showcase a more approachable side, distanced from his institutional image.

For his part, Núñez Feijóo's posts also focus predominantly on domestic politics (59%), although the emphasis shifts to 1111rioritizing his contributions during parliamentary question time, as well as attacking Pedro Sánchez and his management of the government. It is worth noting that, unlike Sánchez, there is hardly any coverage of his personal life (3%) or international politics (1.6%), but he does give greater prominence to his role as leader of the Partido Popular, both through election campaign events (8.2%) in Extremadura and Aragón, and through party events (8.2%), such as the rally against Pedro Sánchez's government held in Madrid at the Temple of Debod on 30 October. Finally, it should be noted that there are other themes also present within Núñez Feijóo's communication strategy, which seek to project an image of approachability linked to public activity. Notable examples include videos in which he describes the attractions of certain regions and cities in Spain, strolls through the streets and chats with citizens, or attends events such as football matches or motorbike rallies.

The tone of communication is closely linked to the subject matter of the posts, thus continuing to reflect the clear difference in communication strategy that both leaders follow to shape their discourse on TikTok.

Table 6. Distribution of communication tone in published content

Communicative tone	Pedro Sánchez		Alberto Núñez Feijóo	
	N	%	N	%
News	43	56,6	19	31,1
Emotional	28	36,8	14	23
Confrontational	2	2,6	18	29,5
Propagandistic	2	2,6	10	16,4
Humorous	1	1,3	0	0
Other	0	0	0	0
TOTAL	76	100%	61	100%

Source: prepared by the author

In Sánchez's case, the dominant tone is informative (56.6%) and is used to explain measures, political decisions or government actions, always with an educational aim that seeks to convey the work of the Executive to the user in a simple and engaging way. Thus, he frequently uses a list format to summarise the week's most important news, highlight interesting points from the Council of Ministers, or explain the reasons for celebrating 'Democracy Day'. This is followed by the emotional tone (36.8%), which is predominantly present in content related to his personal life, something that helps to humanise his leadership and generate trust and a sense of closeness with the audience. The remaining communicative tones have an insignificant presence, although it is worth noting the scant use of conflict within his content (2.6%). Sánchez rarely resorts to confrontational frameworks, doing so on only two occasions: once when he denied suffering from a cardiovascular condition following a hoax spread by the far-right and right-wing parties regarding his health, and another when he attacked these parties for their climate denialism.

In Núñez Feijóo's case, although the predominant tone is also informative (31.1%), in this instance it is used primarily to challenge the policies of Pedro Sánchez's government, as well as t te his stance on socially sensitive issues such as housing and the regularisation of immigrants. The strong presence of the confrontational tone (29.5%) is notable, reflecting a strategy geared towards opposition, criticism and differentiation from his ideological adversary. Thus, attacks on Pedro Sánchez, referring to him as "dangerous" or a "criminal", "liar" or "corrupt", are frequent in his posts. Furthermore, the emotional tone also carries significant weight (23%) in content where Núñez Feijóo seeks to establish a sense of closeness and rapport with users by showing his less institutional side, for example, when he walks the streets of different cities and talks to residents or when he reveals his interests or more personal side. Finally, a propagandistic tone also features (16.4%) in the narrative of the Popular Party leader when addressing his electorate, both at election campaign events and at events organised by his own party. Through this, he seeks to reinforce his messages and ideological positions among digital users.

Another narrative aspect to analyse is that of attacking the opponent, a variable of interest because it measures not only the political tone of his discourse but also the role that conflict plays as a narrative device in his digital communication. In this case, a clear strategic difference between the two political leaders is evident, as whilst Pedro Sánchez's content shows a low incidence of attacks (2.6%), in Núñez Feijóo's content they are present in 49% of his posts. This data indicates that political attacks are not an occasional tactic in his political communication strategy, but rather a structural pillar in which the attacks are personalised against Pedro Sánchez or, failing that, against his government's actions. This strategy constructs a narrative of permanent opposition based on a reactive discourse, where criticism, denial and questioning of the opponent are constant.

All of this contributes to the construction of the leadership image projected to the digital community via TikTok. Thus, the role of institutional leader predominates in the majority of Pedro Sánchez's posts (59.4%), as his communication is framed by his position as Prime Minister of Spain. This is evident in content where he focuses on government action, public administration or his work as an institutional representative both within and outside the country. Furthermore, it is noteworthy that the role of approachable leader (38%) is more prominent than that of party leader (2.6%), although one must take into account the low presence of party identity in his posts and the high proportion of content centred on his more personal side, with culture and sport standing out as the most relevant areas through which he seeks to humanise his image.

In the case of Núñez Feijóo, it is the role of political party leader that is most prominent (59.2%), as it must be borne in mind that he leads the opposition to the government and, therefore, his content is directly focused on political confrontation and on mobilising his electorate through the ideological exposition of the party he represents. However, the role of institutional leader is the least prominent in his content (17.8%), meaning that his communication strategy, despite including policy proposals or showcasing his ability to govern, is not built on representing the state, but rather on the logic of a competitive political actor. Finally, the role of approachable leader occupies a prominent place (23%) and is present when Núñez Feijóo seeks to generate emotional identification by speaking about personal matters, discussing the issues that concern him with local residents, or presenting himself as a more spontaneous citizen, distanced from his role as a politician.

3.4. Interaction

An analysis of interaction on TikTok across the profiles of Pedro Sánchez and Alberto Núñez Feijóo reveals which types of messages achieve greater visibility, exposure and engagement within the platform's algorithmic ecosystem. Thus, the number of views generated by Sánchez's posts is massive, with 34.2% of his content exceeding one million views. Consequently, one in three of the Prime Minister's videos becomes a viral sensation on TikTok, with those focusing on national politics and ' ' (where he reports on his government's performance—immigration, housing, the economy) standing out, but particularly those featuring content centred on his more personal side.

Table 7. Pedro Sánchez's posts with the highest number of views

Pedro Sánchez		
Topic	Content	Views
Personal life	Off on an enduro ride to celebrate another year. Here's to 54! #Bike #Sport #Birthday	8.1M
Personal life	A different kind of Saturday: enduro, snow and a wonderful landscape.	7M
National politics	We are paving the way to regularise the situation of migrants. People we live alongside every day. We are paving the way to regularise the situation of migrants. People we live alongside every day.	5.4M
Personal life	Commenting on my Wrapped 2025 🎧 🎼	4.8M
Personal life	My recommendations for the weekend. 📖 🎶 #BookTok #MusicOnTikTok #books #playlist	3.4M

Source: prepared by the author

As can be seen in the table (Table 7), among the videos with the most views are those related to his sporting activities (enduro trails), although those with the greatest and most consistent impact are those related to his weekend cultural recommendations. This content is his distinguishing feature, so much so that of the 26 posts out of the total (76) that have exceeded one million views, 35% of them correspond to this content in which he takes on the role of a cultural influencer (books and music).

In the case of Núñez Feijóo, it should be noted that the impact of his videos is more modest. None of them has exceeded one million views, and of those videos that have exceeded 100,000 views, 50% focus on national politics.

Table 8. Alberto Núñez Feijóo's posts with the highest number of views

Alberto Núñez Feijóo		
Topic	Content	Views
National politics	Pedro Sánchez is lying to you, though that's nothing new. Pensions YES, Squatting NO.	750.4k
National politics	Keep on laughing	353.8K
Other	A stroll through A Coruña	291.3K
Election campaign event	Visiting #Extremadura means feeling welcome from the very first moment. It's impossible not to feel at home.	209.4K
National politics	Legal, controlled immigration, with people who are ready and willing to integrate: YES, WELCOME. #order #pp	183.7K

Source: prepared by the author

The table above (Table 8) shows that, beyond national policy content, the videos with the greatest impact are those that adopt a confrontational tone towards the government's actions led by Pedro Sánchez. This reactive

communication strategy, based on attacking the opponent, generates greater interest and reinforces his position as leader of the opposition.

As for the other metrics to consider, it should be noted that the results show a clear difference in user response to the videos posted by both leaders. Sánchez's content that generates the most engagement is that which deals with his personal life. Thus, the video about his enduro ride, which he posted to mark his birthday, is not only the one with the most views, but also the one with the most 'Likes' and comments, highlighting that TikTok users favour leisure content with an emotional tone and a high degree of personalisation. As for the 'Favourites' metric, the content that registers the highest peaks corresponds to his weekend cultural recommendations, specifically the post in which he invites users to read **Anatomy of a Moment** by Javier Cercas, in the month the series based on this work premieres, and invites them to listen to **Lux**, Rosalía's new album, and in particular her song **Magnolias**. This data reveals that users not only view his content but also save it as a cultural reference, thereby consolidating his role as an influencer.

Table 9. Pedro Sánchez's posts with the highest engagement

Pedro Sánchez		
Likes	Comments	Saves
508.1K (Enduro/Birthday)	29.3K (Enduro/Birthday)	104.6K (Weekend cultural recommendation)
411.6 K (Regularisation of migrants)	27.4K (Enduro/Snow)	29.3K (Regularisation of migrants)
400.2K (Enduro/Smow)	29.3K (Regularisation of migrants)	25.8K (Enduro/Birthday)
379.5K (Spotify Wrapped 2025)	15.4K (SERÉ Judicial Career Scholarships)	22.4K (Spotify Wrapped)
230.8K (House's Tour of Moncloa)	14.3K (Spain's support for Palestine)	20.8K (Housing rent)

Source: prepared by the author

Meanwhile, the content posted by Núñez Feijóo generates less engagement than that of Pedro Sánchez, and all of it deals with domestic politics. The video with the most 'Likes' and comments has a confrontational tone and directly attacks the Prime Minister. The post 'Sánchez is lying to you' tops these metrics and shows that his audience endorses the criticism levelled by the leader of the People's Party at the head of the government. As for "Favourites", the trend continues, as a speech by Núñez Feijóo in Parliament in which he reproaches Pedro Sánchez for not being able to go out in public whilst he, as leader of the Popular Party, can do so because he enjoys the public's affection, is the one with the greatest impact. In fact, three of the five videos with the most favourites contain a direct attack on the government or the Prime Minister, which reinforces the fact that confrontation is the backbone of the Popular Party leader's audience engagement.

Table 10. Alberto Núñez Feijóo's posts with the highest engagement

Alberto Núñez Feijóo		
Likes	Comments	Saves
49.1K (Attack on Sánchez / Pensions yes, squatting no)	2.4K (Attack on Sánchez / Pensions yes, squatting no)	2.5K (Speech in Parliament)
33.5 K (Speech in Parliament)	1.7K (Legal and controlled immigration)	2.4K (Attack on Sánchez / Pensions yes, squatting no)
10.8K (Walk through A Coruña)	856 (Pension increase)	549 (Walk through A Coruña)

10.3K (Inmigration)	715 (Visit to Extremadura)	375 (Walk around Jaca)
9.8K (Pensions)	576 (Speech in Parliament)	361 (Legal and controlled immigration)

Source: prepared by the author

Nevertheless, it should be noted that Núñez Feijóo's more emotional tone is also well received by his followers, as videos such as 'A Walk Through A Coruña', 'A Visit to Extremadura' or 'A Walk Through Jaca' manage to rank among the five pieces of content that generate the greatest impact out of all his posts, despite the fact that engagement is significantly lower.

4. Discussion

The results reveal two differentiated approaches to the construction of political leadership on TikTok. Although both Pedro Sánchez and Alberto Núñez Feijóo use the platform to strengthen their public image and communicate their political positions, their strategies differ in terms of content, audiovisual resources and narrative tone. Sánchez adopts a more personalised and emotionally oriented approach, combining institutional communication with everyday and personal content. Feijóo, in contrast, places greater emphasis on political criticism, confrontation and his position as leader of the opposition. These findings reinforce the idea that TikTok is not merely an additional channel for political dissemination, but a platform whose communicative conventions shape how political actors present themselves and connect with their audiences (Cervi & Marín-Lladó, 2021).

Regarding the first objective, the analysis shows that both leaders maintained a relatively consistent presence during the period examined, although Sánchez displayed a more regular publication pattern, whereas Feijóo concentrated his activity around specific political events. This suggests different approaches to managing their digital presence: a continuous communication strategy in Sánchez's case and a more event-driven one in Feijóo's. These findings can be considered alongside those of Gamir-Ríos and Sánchez-Castillo (2022), who highlighted the relevance of publication activity and content characteristics in political communication on TikTok. Nevertheless, publication frequency alone does not explain visibility, since the performance of individual posts may also depend on their subject matter, audiovisual presentation and publication context.

With regard to the second objective, Sánchez makes greater use of music, text and visual resources, producing content more closely aligned with TikTok's audiovisual conventions. Feijóo, meanwhile, tends to employ more conservative formats, with greater reliance on textual elements and less frequent use of hashtags and emojis. This difference highlights the importance of adapting political messages to the visual, concise and performative language of the platform. In this respect, Cervi and Marín-Lladó (2021) underline the emergence of a distinctive language of political communication on TikTok, while Egea-Barquero and Zamora-Medina (2023) demonstrate how visual elements contribute to the construction of political leadership and public image on social media. These findings also complement those of Obergozo-Terradillos et al. (2024), who emphasise the relevance of adapting political content to the communicative characteristics of social platforms.

The analysis of themes and communicative tones, corresponding to the third objective, further highlights the differences between the two leaders. Sánchez combines institutional and national political issues with personal interests and everyday activities, adopting predominantly informative and emotional tones. Feijóo, on the other hand, focuses more heavily on national politics and combines informative communication with confrontational messages directed at the government. This contrast reflects two distinct narrative identities: one that combines institutional representation with personalisation, and another that prioritises political opposition and ideological differentiation. This interpretation is consistent with research on the personalisation of political communication. Selva-Ruiz and Caro-Castaño (2017) show how sharing everyday and personal aspects can contribute to humanising political figures, while Egea-Barquero and Zamora-Medina (2023) highlight the importance of visual representation in shaping political leadership. The findings also support the distinction established by Enli and Rosenberg (2018) and Roemmele and Gibson (2020) between the institutional communication of government leaders and the more confrontational strategies frequently adopted by opposition figures.

Regarding the fourth objective, the results indicate that Sánchez primarily presents himself as an institutional leader, while also incorporating elements that portray him as an approachable and relatable individual. Feijóo, by contrast, is more frequently represented as the leader of his political party and as the main figure challenging the government's actions. These findings point to two different forms of digital leadership: a hybrid model combining institutional representation and personalisation, and a more explicitly partisan and oppositional model. This distinction can be understood within the broader context of political personalisation, whereby attention shifts from political

organisations and programmes towards the individual characteristics and public image of their leaders. It also reflects the transformation of political communication in digital environments, where leadership is shaped not only by institutional responsibilities but also by the roles and identities projected through social media (Casero-Ripollés, 2018).

Finally, the fifth objective examined the reach and impact of the publications through engagement metrics. Sánchez achieved higher levels of visibility and interaction overall during the period analysed. Some of his most successful posts addressed subjects unrelated to institutional or political activity, such as sport and cultural recommendations, obtaining millions of views and high levels of interaction. Feijóo's most influential publications, by contrast, were more closely associated with political issues and confrontational messages, although their overall performance remained lower. These findings are consistent with previous research highlighting the relevance of authenticity, personal communication and emotional identification in the construction of political images and audience engagement (Enli, 2015; Luebke & Steffan, 2023). However, the differences observed should not be interpreted as evidence that a particular communication strategy directly causes higher engagement. Other factors, including publication timing, audience characteristics and the platform's recommendation mechanisms, may also influence the performance of individual posts.

Taken together, the findings contribute to understanding how political leadership is constructed on TikTok through the interaction between content, audiovisual language and the public roles adopted by political figures. The comparison identifies two distinct approaches in the cases analysed: Sánchez's combination of institutional communication, personalisation and emotional content, and Feijóo's emphasis on partisan positioning, criticism and confrontation. The results suggest that visibility on TikTok cannot be understood exclusively in terms of publication frequency or the political relevance of the topics addressed. The way messages are presented, the narrative resources employed and the relationship projected with audiences are also relevant dimensions for interpreting the interaction generated by political content.

5. Conclusion

This study aimed to analyse and compare the communication strategies employed by Pedro Sánchez and Alberto Núñez Feijóo on TikTok during the first six months of activity of their official accounts, from September 2025 to February 2026. Based on the analysis of 137 publications, the research shows that both political leaders use the platform to construct and project their political identities, although they adopt substantially different approaches in terms of content, audiovisual resources, narrative strategies and audience interaction.

The main contribution of this research lies in identifying two distinct models of political leadership construction on TikTok. Pedro Sánchez develops a hybrid communication strategy that combines his institutional role as Prime Minister with personalisation, emotional content and a discourse of approachability. Alberto Núñez Feijóo, in contrast, adopts a more explicitly partisan and oppositional approach, characterised by political criticism, confrontation and the defence of his party's ideological position. These differences are also reflected in the interaction indicators, with Sánchez's publications achieving higher levels of visibility and audience engagement during the period analysed.

Overall, the findings suggest that the construction of political leadership on TikTok depends not only on the content of political messages but also on their adaptation to the platform's audiovisual, narrative and communicative conventions. Personalisation, emotional appeal and relatability emerge as relevant characteristics of the content associated with higher interaction levels in the case examined, while political confrontation constitutes a central feature of the opposition leader's communication strategy.

The scope of these conclusions is limited to the two Spanish political profiles and the six-month observation period considered. Accordingly, the findings should not be generalised to all political leaders or interpreted as evidence of causal relationships between specific communication strategies and audience engagement.

Future research should extend the observation period to determine whether the communication strategies identified remain stable or undergo changes over time. It would also be valuable to include a larger and more diverse sample of political leaders, both within Spain and in other national contexts, in order to identify recurring narrative patterns and differences in the construction of digital political leadership. Finally, comparative research across different social media platforms could help establish how the characteristics and communicative conventions of each digital environment shape the ways in which political figures construct and project their public identities.

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