Policy 2.0 in Ecuador. Analysis of discourse and political communication on Facebook

Política 2.0 en Ecuador. Análisis del discurso y la comunicación política en Facebook

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RESUMEN.
Introducción: Las redes sociales son reconocidas por el impacto en las decisiones de los usuarios, y han sido estudiadas para determinar su incidencia en el ámbito político. **Metodología**: La presente investigación analiza la campaña electoral de los candidatos a presidentes de Ecuador, en el año 2021, a partir de tres objetivos: analizar la comunicación 2.0 para determinar en qué medida los candidatos establecen una relación interactiva con los electores en Facebook; analizar los elementos lingüísticos y las emociones en las publicaciones para identificar el tipo de discurso político que emplean; y determinar la agenda política digital y la oferta de campaña en las publicaciones realizadas por los presidenciables. Para alcanzar estos objetivos se implementó una metodología mixta. La investigación se desarrolló en dos etapas. En la primera etapa se aplicó el Modelo de evaluación de la comunicación 2.0 en las redes sociales, que desarrolla un análisis cualitativo, de igual forma se analizó y cuantificó somáticamente las emociones que se transmitieron en las campañas electorales y en la segunda etapa se codificó 1.543 publicaciones para identificar la oferta de campaña y la agenda política de los candidatos.**Resultados**: La comunicación política en las redes sociales no es estratégica, se observa un exceso de información que satura la red social y que además carece de contenido de valor para el ciudadano. **Conclusiones**: La comunicación política 2.0 es incipiente en Ecuador, se utiliza Facebook como un canal de comunicación tradicional, con contenido retórico, poco interesante, pero cargado de emocionalidad positiva para intentar conectar con el electorado.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Comunicación digital; política; campaña electoral; redes sociales; emociones; agenda política; discurso político.

ABSTRACT
Introduction: Social networks are recognized for their impact on users' decisions. They have been studied to determine their incidence in the political arena. **Methodology**: This research analyzes the electoral campaign of the candidates for president of Ecuador, in the year 2021, based on three objectives: to analyze the 2.0 communication to determine to what extent the candidates establish an interactive

relationship with voters on Facebook; to analyze the linguistic elements and emotions in the publications to identify the type of political discourse they use; and to determine the digital political agenda in the publications elaborated by the presidential candidates, for their campaign offer. To achieve these objectives, a mixed methodology was implemented. The research was developed in two stages. In the first stage was applied the Model of evaluation of communication 2.0 in social networks which develops a qualitative analysis, in the same way, the emotions that were transmitted in the electoral campaigns were analyzed and quantified somatically, and in the second stage 1,543 publications were codified to identify the campaign offer and the political agenda of the candidates. **Results**: Political communication in social networks is not strategic, there is an excess of information that saturates the social network and also lacks content of value for the citizen. **Conclusions**: Political communication 2.0 is incipient in Ecuador, Facebook is used as a traditional communication channel, with rhetorical and uninteresting content, but loaded with positive emotionality to try to connect with the electorate.

KEYWORDS: Digital communication; politics; electoral campaign; social media; emotions; political agenda; political speech.

CONTENIDO

CONTENT

Translation by Paula González (Universidad Católica Andrés Bello, Venezuela)

1. Introduction

Political communication is in an evolutionary process, which begins with a massive and controlled communication, aimed at informing in an asymmetric and unidirectional way, to a multimedia communication on the Internet. The main characteristic of this new communication model is the active and voluntary participation of voters through digital environments and platforms. Citizens have always sought information and references from political parties, especially candidates and their campaign proposals, to decide in the electoral process but this communication process is currently influenced by a collaborative attitude of the electorate, which implies bidirectional and interactive communication developing horizontally, in which the citizen acquires power in the communication process. Túñez and Altamirano (2015) state:

It is a fact that the democratization of the possibility of being a transmitter of messages with potential mass audiences as recipients and the universalization of interpersonal connection through the Internet allows users to interact one on one, or one to several, or, in small groups, and interact with everyone. Message flows have also varied, evolving from a unidirectional (discursive) mode to a truly interactive circulation and, simultaneously, in various media (p. 14)

"Social networks have shown themselves to be a unique environment due to their ability to connect users and facilitate interaction between the political sphere and the public" (Blasco-Duatis et al., 2018, p. 270). In other words, political communication evolves into a bidirectional, participatory, voluntary, and committed model in which the citizen is the one who controls the communication processes. In this scenario, "social networks offer greater facilities to directly contact, give visibility to the participants, encourage debates, or even alert about possible conflicts" (Barandiarán, Unceta, and Peña, 2020, p.272).

Therefore, when using 2.0 communication strategies, it is essential to maintain a 2.0 attitude and commitment, that is, to adapt to the needs of the user, who, in the digital age, is the one who sets the course and trends. In this sense, Ñopo (2021) states that "new technologies are providing a new public space. On the one hand, new technologies help citizens obtain information immediately, and on the other, they open a window for citizens to exercise their freedom of expression" (p. 100). In this way, Facebook (FB) is consolidated as an ideal channel for political communication. It is considered a

non-persuasive channel as it is based on three principles such as the voluntary affiliation of users, the collaborative contribution of content by each of them, and voluntary attention to the actions carried out by brands (Alonso Mosquera, and Muñoz de Luna, 2013), which allows developing non-invasive and direct communication with the target audience.

To analyze the evolution of political communication in digital environments, this research proposes three study approaches, first, communication 2.0 processes are evaluated to determine the interaction and relationship established between candidates and voters through Facebook.

Second, it focuses on the analysis of the use of language and emotionality of the candidates' speech, for which the natural language processing tool, Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count (LIWC), is applied to the data. Thirdly, it seeks to understand, from the perspective of the political agenda, why certain issues are addressed by the candidates and others are not, to understand where the focus is and what are the public policy priorities that are chosen in the discourse on social networks. Based on the content analysis, the position regarding the issues that are most interesting to transmit to citizens through the electoral proposals is examined.

With these three approaches, an attempt is made to carry out a methodological triangulation and determine what linguistic elements the Ecuadorian political leaders use in their messages, the emotionality, and the topics of the political agenda that prevail in their posts. In short, it is determined how these linguistic elements also affect the 2.0 communication of the candidates with their followers.

1.1 Facebook and politics

Social networks applied to the political sphere have had a boom in the last decade. Facebook has grown exponentially since its origins in February 2004, positioning itself as the network with the most followers worldwide. The main characteristics that this network presents for its success are the flexibility, adaptation, evolution, and viral capacity that the contents reach. With this background, FB should be considered as a political communication tool and adapt to the communication model in which the user is the center and content is king.

In the digital political scenario, the traditional power relations, in which the hegemony in the construction of the discourse was held by the political and media spheres, are modified. In the online context, civil society, previously a passive target of mediated political messages, acquires a status similar to that of political institutions or media companies, as the Internet and especially social platforms enable their direct and active participation in the contents that circulate on the web, their grouping, and their self-regulation outside the discursive elites (Gil Ramírez and Gómez de Travesedo Rojas, 2021, p. 65).

On Facebook, groups created by consumers or political organizations provide the ideal forum for small communities of people with a common interest to communicate and express themselves regarding that interest. Approaching the discourse of social networks, in the case of Facebook, allows us to explore new stories of political participation based on the direct access that citizens have to the messages offered by the different political parties, politicians, or other traditional media linked to the digital world (Rodríguez Fidalgo et al., 2017, p. 851). Although social network users generally do not pay special attention to the information provided by political party profiles and their leaders are not particularly popular, their Facebook pages can garner great attention in times of greater mobilization and civic enthusiasm, as occurs during electoral processes (Cited in Valera-Ordaz et al., 2018, p. 57).

The starting point for the use of Facebook in politics was the presidential campaign of Barak Obama, in 2008, in which "a virtual organization was created at the national level that motivated 3.1 million individual contributors and mobilized a base movement of more than 5 million volunteers" (Cogburn and Espinoza-Vásquez, 2011, p.189), which allowed not only to segment the public and raise funds but also win the elections. The situation was similar in the 2016 Trump campaign in the United States, investment in new platforms and social networks made him dominate the media landscape.

As Facebook is a social network used daily by 2,740 million people (Galeano, 2021), it is a platform that allows interaction with voters, especially with young people. Sweetser and Lariscy (2008), after studying 5,735 Facebook comments of the candidates for the United States House of Representatives

and Senate, were able to observe that the messages of citizens with the candidates were positive but without content, superficial. However, the communication was symmetrical and bidirectional, which caused a "friendly" relationship between the candidate and the voter. For their part, Bode et al. (2014) confirm that the political participation of adolescents -a segment of the electorate with a tradition that is not very active on these issues- can be predicted from the use they make of social networks, "especially if they can be encouraged to be volunteers, contribute, and proselytize among their Facebook friends and peers" (Williams and Gulati, 2009, p.2). A literature review by Eric Van Steenburg (2015) also determines that "research on political advertising is flourishing", and one of the avenues is "resonance and emotion-based advertising" (p.30).

There are other studies on the political use of Facebook that focus on increasing political awareness (Pasek et al., 2006; Vitak et al., 2011); in shaping political decision-making (Kushin and Yamamoto, 2013); on the impact of the political use of Facebook (Bode et al., 2014; Vitak et al., 2011), among others. Local studies such as the one carried out by Baquerizo-Neira et al. (2021) analyze the use of language and the issues promoted by the mayoral candidates of Guayaquil and Quito in the municipal elections of March 2019. They apply the digital content analysis technique and the Fanpage Karma monitoring tool to 743 publications and, as a result, show that Facebook is mainly used as a loudspeaker for the offline campaign, as a space for promoting political proposals and not as a platform for interaction between female politicians and their supporters.

1.2 Sentiment analysis and social networks

The LIWC natural language processing tool was designed to identify "negative life experiences that could predict later improvements in health" from writing and has been widely used in psychology and linguistics (Tausczik & Pennebaker, 2009). Currently, it is also used to examine a wide variety of textual sources such as: literary fragments, advertising pieces, personal narratives, conferences, textbooks, conversations, etc. (Pennebaker et al., 2003, p. 553). For example, Newman et al. (2008) use it to examine gender differences in language use, by analyzing a database of more than 14,000 text files from 70 different studies.

Other authors such as Deltell et al. (2013) apply it to predict the political trend of the 2012 Andalusian elections. These experts research the flow and content of tweets to determine if the "political sentiment and trends within a community" could be predicted by characterizing the personality of users in social networks.

Alashri et al. (2018) carry out the sentiment analysis of 22,000 posts by political candidates on Facebook and more than 48 million comments, to determine the interaction between them and citizens during the 2016 presidential elections in the United States. As a result, they classify the participants based on the positive and negative feelings identified in their comments, besides the psychological and linguistic differences that can be observed in the messages of the analyzed users.

In social networks, it has also been applied by Park et al. (2015), who analyze the Facebook posts of 66,732 users to predict their personality. On the other hand, Dutt et al. (2018) analyze 3,500 Facebook ads using natural language processing techniques, to identify the textual and semantic characteristics associated with the most effective ads. This is how it is discovered that advertising has a less positive feeling and is focused on past situations. Furthermore, they find that the duration of the campaigns and the promotion of the ads do not seek to influence the elections.

In local research, Pita et al., (2016) analyze the linguistic profiles of Ecuadorian political leaders on the microblogging platform Twitter. To do this, they apply the LIWC tool to 330,000 tweets collected from 221 Twitter users considered as: political leaders, followers of leaders, and common users. They build a vector for each user's tweets using 12 psychological dimensions from the LIWC software and compare users with different profiles. These experts find that the profile of the group of leaders is different and that about 30% of the followers of the leaders are similar to at least one leader.

1.3 Political agenda in social media

The academic literature establishes that political parties try to take advantage of the political agenda

(the most important topics that are debated) on those topics in which they must be trustworthy (Budge and Hofferbert 1990; Klingemann et al., 1994). This means that a political party talks about the economy, public health, or administration if it has experience on these issues or has set an agenda before. In this way, electoral competition in a democratic system consists of emphasizing certain issues and nullifying or silencing others (Cruz et al., 2020). In this line, a large number of studies in the "Comparative policy agendas" community, starting from the "agenda-setting" theory, use the theory property of the topic, to explain why political elites pay attention to some topics and not to others (Green and Jennings 2012; Green and Jennings, 2019; Green-Pedersen and Mortensen, 2010).

This theory was originally developed to explain why parties pay attention to particular issues during election campaigns. In this sense, political parties are considered to highlight issues in which they have a reputation for greater competence and their opponents are less considered (Budge and Farlie, 1983; Petrocik, 1996). Along these lines, it is to be expected that the left-wing parties will concentrate more on issues related to welfare, equal rights, or the environment, where the public perceives that they perform better and will accentuate their electoral promises, their discourses on these topics. On the other hand, right-wing parties, by contrast, are expected to pay more attention to issues such as the economy, taxes, or crime where they have a reputation for performing well.

Studies of political agendas in England, on the throne discourse, for example, find that the agenda-setting role of the discourse reflects the strengths of political parties. It means that conservative governments tend to pay less attention to civil rights and minority issues, social issues, and government operations, but historically pay more attention to international affairs than other governments (Jennings et al., 2011).

However, in the new digital scenarios where political information plays a determining role in the agenda-setting, and journalistic specialization faces the complexity of integrating knowledge with a new model of information production, condensed in less and less space and integrated into the new patterns of media and news consumption (López-López and Vásquez-González, 2018), it is necessary to analyze how political candidates address issues of interest in social media. Following these ideas, could it be expected that the agenda that is trying to be set in the electoral campaign follows this partisan logic? Do the candidates closest to the left like Pérez, Arauz; of social democracy like Hervas, and the right like Lasso maintain this logic? What are the most important issues highlighted in the electoral campaign through Facebook? Is there positive or negative emotionality in their posts? These are some of the questions that we try to answer, understanding the posts as their discursive elements.

2. Objectives

The research analyzes the electoral campaign of the presidential candidates for the 2021 elections in Ecuador on Facebook, for which three objectives are set:
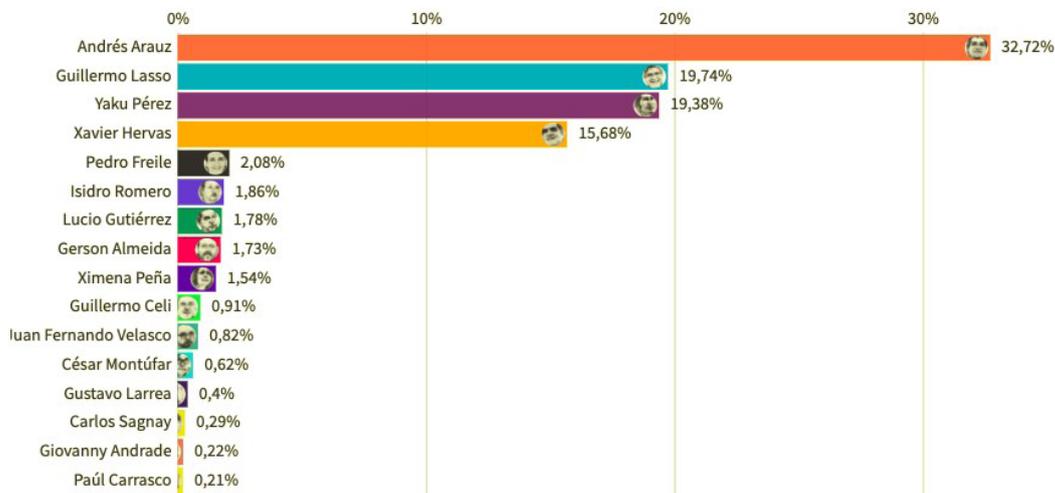
1) Evaluate the 2.0 communication processes between presidential candidates and voters, based on the premise that communication in social media must be bidirectional and strengthen the horizontal relationship.
2) Analyze the linguistic and emotional elements of the presidential candidates' publications as resources for their campaign communication strategy.
3) Determine the digital political agenda, what were the issues addressed by the candidates on the social network.

3. Methodology

To meet the proposed objectives, a mixed methodology is used, which consists of the systematic integration of quantitative and qualitative methods, in a single study, to obtain a complete vision of the addressed phenomenon. This methodology allows "generating and verifying theories, expanding the trust, validity, and understanding of the results" (Chaves - Montero, 2018, p. 182).

The research is carried out during the 2021 electoral period, which begins on December 31st, 2020, and ends on February 7th, 2021. In the first stage, the communication processes are evaluated, selecting as a sample the 15 candidates for the presidency, to determine if the implementation of successful

digital strategies affects the voting decision. In the second phase, to carry out the content analysis in the official Facebook accounts, the candidates who obtain 87.52% of the votes are selected. Applicants who do not exceed 3% of acceptance by Ecuadorians are not analyzed. In the research, 1,543 posts were coded, 408 posts by Andrés Arauz, 449 posts by Guillermo Lasso, 369 posts by Yaku Pérez, and 317 by Xavier Hervas.

Chart 1: Results of the 1st electoral round
Source: Primicias (2021). t.ly/ZxC3

3.1 Social Analysis

One of the main advantages of social media is the amount of information they provide about their followers and their behavior on the network. Although no consensus is reached on how to assess social media, the authors agree that the Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) should be selected depending on the needs of the research. KPIs allow you to evaluate the results of campaigns on social networks.

To carry out the quantitative analysis, the Evaluation Model of Communication 2.0 in Social Media was used, which assesses communication 2.0 that takes place in social media, based on the premise that this type of promotion must meet the main characteristics of Web 2.0: Political communication 2.0 is based on the interaction generated between candidates and voters 2.0. For this interaction to be achieved, the political parties or the candidates must create the appropriate conditions, therefore, it is necessary to consolidate a community, for the candidates to constantly update the contents and promote the participation of the users through the co-creation of content, dialogue, and interaction with followers establishing bidirectional and horizontal communication in equal spaces. On the other hand, the participation and engagement of users are essential for the development of communication 2.0.
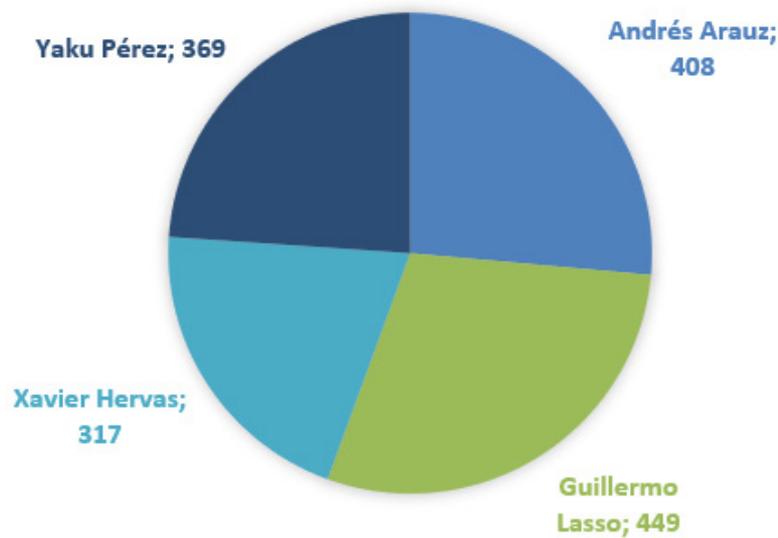
To determine the communication processes between the presidential candidates and the electorate, six variables are evaluated that interrelate the following key performance indicators: presence, growth, activity, level of service, participation, and engagement (Altamirano, et al., 2018).

3.2 Análisis de Sentimiento

Once the Facebook extraction is done, the corpus for analysis is obtained and each post is processed through the Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count (LIWC) program to determine the use of the candidates' language in the context of the electoral campaign. This software provides an English and Spanish dictionary that is empirically validated to reflect a psychological dimension in different contexts (Pennebaker et al., 2003).

The program analyzes more than 70 linguistic variables. A total of 1,543 publications of the presidential candidates are processed (see chart 2), to which all the categories provided by the tool are applied, to identify emotionality as a discourse strategy used in the candidates' posts. For each psychological dimension, the computer program calculates the relative frequency with which words related to that

dimension appear in a post.

Chart 2. Facebook Posts
Source: Prepared by the authors

Con este análisis se observa que los candidatos políticos ecuatorianos emplean, en mayor medida, como recursos lingüísticos los pronombres personales (yo, nosotros, tu/usted, él/ella, ellos); procesos psicológicos: emociones positivas y negativas; y, dimensiones del contenido tradicional como temas sociales: familia, necesidades sociales, amigos, asuntos humanos. Y, otros temas como: tiempo, trabajo, logro, hogar, dinero, religión. Estos últimos se contrastaron con la agenda política de los candidatos.

3.3 Content Analysis

Content analysis is a technique to study and analyze communication in an objective, systematic, and quantitative way. "Sometimes the definition of content analysis is extended to a research technique to make valid and reliable inferences from data regarding its context" (Toro Jaramillo and Parra Ramírez, 2006, p. 169).

To study the political agenda raised through Facebook posts, the methodology used by the Ecuadorian Political Agendas Project (Aguirre, 2020), a research project applied to Ecuador, is used. This coding is done following the policy content-coding framework created by the Spanish Policy Agendas Project (https://q-dem.com/es/), for the linguistic relationship, also based on the content-coding framework originally created by Baumgartner and Jones (2010), (https://www.comparativeagendas.net/) to research agenda-setting in the US. For this study, the adapted codebook for Ecuador is considered, based on the master codebook.

The Ecuadorian coding system involves categories for the main public policy issues (24) and different sub-issues within each of these categories, 247 (see Annex 1). The project created a national version of the master codebook, keeping the original categories but adding a new code (9) related to Ecuador's "welfare" development model and some subcodes according to Ecuadorian reality. A peculiarity in the coding process was considered, code 0, it has been called "rhetoric". It is a unit of analysis that could not be coded according to the proposed methodology.

It is important to explain the need to include these last two codes. First of all, regarding code 9, welfare. It was considered taking into account that the political-ideological philosophy of the political process of the citizen revolution, "welfare", materialized in the 2008 Constitution of the Republic through a constituent assembly. This Constitution maintains a normative framework in which rights are dedicated around this philosophy, "welfare", and it is not possible to codify according to the list of base

codes, precisely because of its Western and Anglo-Saxon epistemology. Given this, considering this code allowed to accommodate the legal consideration of the country.

Second, one of the considerations through the studies of the discursive political agenda denotes that, in Latin America, it is the emotional, not logical, and narrative discourse (Aguirre, 2016) that does not appeal to clear ideas but rather maintains the objective of convincing and persuading, the normal. Considering that the political communication of the case study is circumscribed to this Latin way of communicating, this code is taken into account not only to measure when there is no political agenda but also when it is spoken differently. It should be clarified that one possibility would undoubtedly be not to take this code into account and only traditionally measure the focus, however, this would mean not making visible the discursive richness of the country's reality and westernizing the discourse.

Although this last code "0" is not mentioned in the agenda-setting studies, it has been kept here for two reasons. First, as a result of the coding, there were topics at the level of the quasi-sentences, considering the Facebook posts, which were not subject to any coding because they did not have political content. In these units of analysis, the candidates told an anecdote, thanked for certain issues, or used phrases with emotional content, as well as using slogans typical of their electoral campaigns. Second, because this code is the one with the highest percentage of attention among all the posts analyzed. In other words, the candidates pay more attention to "rhetorical" issues than other issues of political content, even those that have been of greater importance, such as government, economy, or rights and freedoms.

The posts have been coded at the level of quasi-sentences. A quasi-sentence (or policy statement) is a statement of a single policy idea or issue but it is not essentially a complete sentence (Volkens, 2002). Typically, this parsing component is identifiable by the use of the sentence-ending period within a post. Post transcripts were blind coded by three researchers, first to determine whether each quasi-sentence had any political content, and second to assign the main topic code and subtopic code to the quasi-sentence. This system resulted in an 85% inter-coder agreement on most posts. Residual differences were resolved by the coders through discussion and the project leader made the final decision when there was no agreement between the coders.

To check if the candidates' posts focus on specific issues such as rights or if they focus on issues related to the traditional functions of the State, it is necessary to measure how attention is fragmented in each post and the aggregated information. As an introductory result, the percentage of attention for each topic is obtained, taking into account the value of the frequency of each topic compared to all the units of analysis.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Communication 2.0

Political communication 2.0 is determined by the interaction and relationship established on Facebook between political candidates and voters. This relationship is based on communication that takes place in spaces of equality; therefore, it should not be traditional or unidirectional, in which the candidate speaks from a virtual platform and citizens listen, on the contrary, citizens have a voice and the candidate establishes spaces for dialogue with them.

4.1.1. Presence

The research determined that there is a relationship between the candidates with the highest number of votes and those with the greatest presence on the network, although not in the same order. The presence of Guillermo Lasso is 1,046,416, the second candidate with the highest presence is Juan Fernando Velasco with 278,750, it is important to emphasize that he is a recognized singer in the country and during the campaign he used his artistic account, followed by Yaku Pérez (267,969), Xavier Hervas (143,956), and Andrés Arauz (136,070). However, the penetration of the candidates is low, Lasso reaches 8% of the 13.3 million network users in the country, (Del Alcázar Ponce, 2021) Velasco and Pérez manage to attract 2%, and Hervas and Arauz reach 1%, the other candidates do not exceed 0.4%, which is related to the percentage of votes they reached.
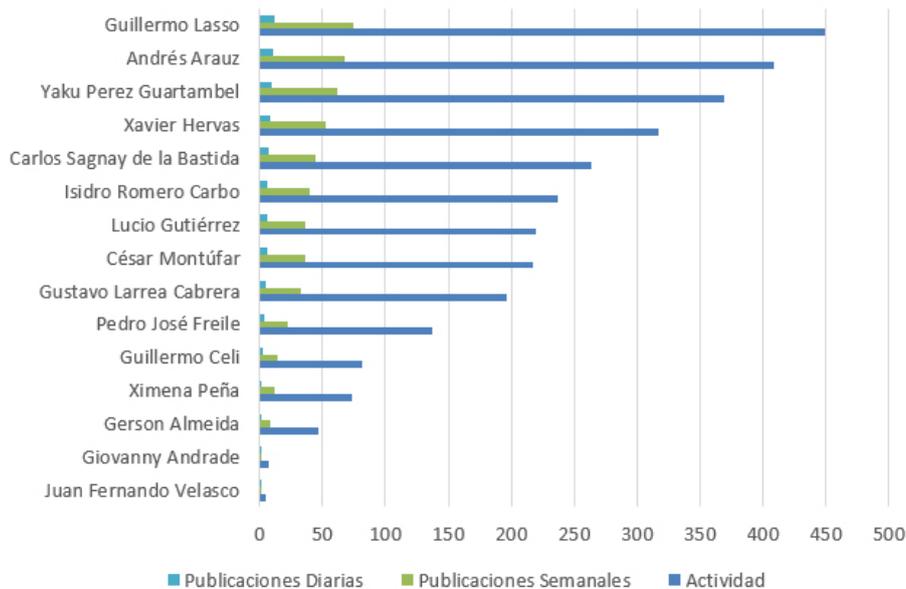
Chart 3: Presence on Facebook
Source: Prepared by the authors

4.1.2. Growth

Regarding growth, Pedro José Freire stands out, incorporating 30,087 fans, Yaku Pérez 15,631, Isidro Romero Carbo 11,973. The other candidates do not exceed 5,000 new followers, and 4 candidates do not grow, and in the case of Gerson Almeida, he loses 384 fans, probably due to the lack of a digital strategy and the saturation of the social network with uninteresting information.

4.1.3. Activity

From the analyzed sample, it is observed that Guillermo Lasso is the most active candidate, he publishes an average of 5 posts per day, while 6 candidates publish less than one post per day, which is not strategic in an electoral campaign because they saturate the social network with candidate information as in the first case, or there is a lack of information and presence as occurs with the candidates Almeida, Andrade, and Velasco.

Chart 4: Activity on Facebook
Source: Prepared by the authors

4.1.4. Service level

The level of service evaluates the candidates' response to followers. In the analyzed period, the level of service is 0 for all the candidates, showing that the interaction is low, which reflects a low engagement, mainly from Arauz, who registers 522 publications from his fans, and Lasso, who has 168 unanswered publications.

4.1.5. Participation

It is observed that Ecuadorians are not very active in the profiles of politicians, in the period of a little over three months, 11,954,955 interactions are recorded when there are 13.3 million users of the network (Del Alcázar Ponce, 2021). There is a direct relationship between the most active candidates on the network and those who achieve the greatest participation of the followers, however, the quality of published content can make the difference, Arauz and Hervas with fewer publications than Lasso and Pérez surpass them in interaction, and the participation of the followers of Pedro José Freire should be highlighted, who, with few publications, achieves significant interaction from his fans.

Ecuadorian voters are not very engaged in Facebook accounts, 72% of the interactions correspond to reactions, and in the same proportion (14%) users comment or share information, generating little virality of the electoral proposals. It is necessary to clarify that the majority of citizens present positive attitudes when reacting to the accounts of the presidential candidates. 74% of the reactions correspond to the "like" option and 15.8% of the followers select the "love" option, only 1.2% of the users click on the "angry" reaction and 0.2% on the "sad" reaction. The candidate who receives the highest number of negative reactions is Guillermo Lasso (49,186), followed by Andrés Arauz (39,457), Xavier Hervas (6,559), and Yaku Pérez (6,479) but they are also the ones who obtain the highest percentage of positive reactions.

Chart 5. Facebook Fan Engagement
Source: Prepared by the authors

In the case of presidential candidates, the analysis showed that engagement is proportional to the candidates' participation in the network; Arauz, Hervas, Lasso, and Pérez are the ones who achieve the greatest engagement from their followers but the high percentage of engagement of Freire should be emphasized, who with very clear and valuable content, achieves that his followers participate more actively, demonstrating greater engagement.

4.1.6. Communication Index 2.0

The communication 2.0 evaluation model is quantitative, to have an exact vision of the interactive communication process. For the assessment, the actions, reactions, and interactions, both of the candidates and the 2.0 voters, in the Facebook accounts are weighted, which allows the creation of indexes of presence, growth, activity, level of service, participation, and engagement, variables selected based

on the basic characteristics of communication 2.0. These indices, obtained in the research process, allow the evaluation and cataloging of the performance of the presidential candidates and each variable studied.

The Model allows evaluating communication 2.0 from a comparative perspective, that is, it interrelates several accounts of a certain social environment. Once the KPIs are obtained to evaluate the selected variables, the data is normalized, normalizing the performance indicators allows creating a standard scale that keeps the same proportions between the variables, in this process the applied formula is: $Ni = (X-Min / Max. – Min.) * 100$. Lastly, these results are interrelated to create the communication index 2.0. Once the indices are available, for each of the accounts, the results of the analyzed variables are added and divided by six to weigh the results and catalog them (Altamirano et al, 2018).

Table 1. Communication 2.0 Index

Candidates	Presence	Growth	Activity	Service	Participation	Engagement	Communication 2.0 Index	Category
Guillermo Lasso	100	19	100	0	69	63	58	Acceptable
Andrés Arauz	13	1	91	0	100	100	51	Acceptable
Yaku Perez	26	53	82	0	43	48	42	Acceptable
Xavier Hervas	14	1	70	0	69	89	41	Acceptable
Pedro José Freile	5	100	30	0	8	23	28	Acceptable low
Isidro Romero Carbo	2	41	52	0	11	19	21	Acceptable low
César Montúfar	4	18	48	0	5	9	14	Improvable
Lucio Gutiérrez	3	5	48	0	2	4	10	Improvable
Carlos Sagnay	1	2	58	0	0	0	10	Improvable
Gustavo Larrea	3	2	43	0	1	2	8	Improvable
Guillermo Celi	3	10	17	0	1	7	6	Improvable
Juan Fernando Velasco	27	3	0	0	0	5	6	Improvable
Ximena Peña	1	3	15	0	0	1	3	Improvable
Gerson Almeida	2	0	9	0	1	5	3	Improvable
Giovanny Andrade	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	Improvable

Fuente: Elaborado por los autores

As can be seen, there is no communication process in the fan pages of the candidates for the presidency of Ecuador, none of the candidates reaches the category of optimal and highly acceptable, social networks are created, without a clear objective and are mainly used to disseminate information, as a traditional means of communication, when their main characteristic is interactivity. The contents that they disseminate, as verified in the research, are thought of in the interests of the candidate, not in the needs of the audience, for that reason, the participation and engagement of the voters are low. It cannot be a coincidence that the four candidates with the highest popular acceptance and vote are the ones who obtain the best score in the communication process, this is mainly because they manage to build a community, maintain a 2.0 attitude, frequently publish on their social accounts, although the level of response and interaction is low.

When evaluating the communication 2.0 processes between presidential candidates and voters (O1), it is concluded that Facebook is underused as a traditional media that does not encourage participation (Gamir-Ríos, 2021), that is, presidential candidates only disseminate information and they lack spaces that promote debate or dialogue with voters, "because the intentions of political actors to interact with users and vice versa are almost nil; so the socio-digital networks are used as a kind of political agenda

and a means of disseminating their political marketing campaigns" (Toxtle and González, 2020. p. 89), so it is concluded that, in the accounts of the candidates in presidential elections, interactive and participatory communication 2.0 is not promoted but rather is used as a broadcasting platform (Recalde, Baquerizo, and Zunino, 2019; Neira, Uribe, and Gonzalez, 2020). In none of the analyzed accounts are there any publications that promote dialogue and citizen participation or that allow the candidate to listen and know the needs of their voters, nor are there live broadcasts to interact with the citizen, much less are interactive spaces identified, such as forums, surveys, among other alternatives offered by the social network.

4. Data analysis with natural language processing software (LIWC)

An element of the political strategy in the campaign context is the emotionality of the candidates' speech, for this, the data is processed with the LIWC software and in the results, it is observed that the language used by the candidates towards their followers is direct, they mostly use the pronouns "he/she" in their publications (see Chart 6), as observed in the following publications:
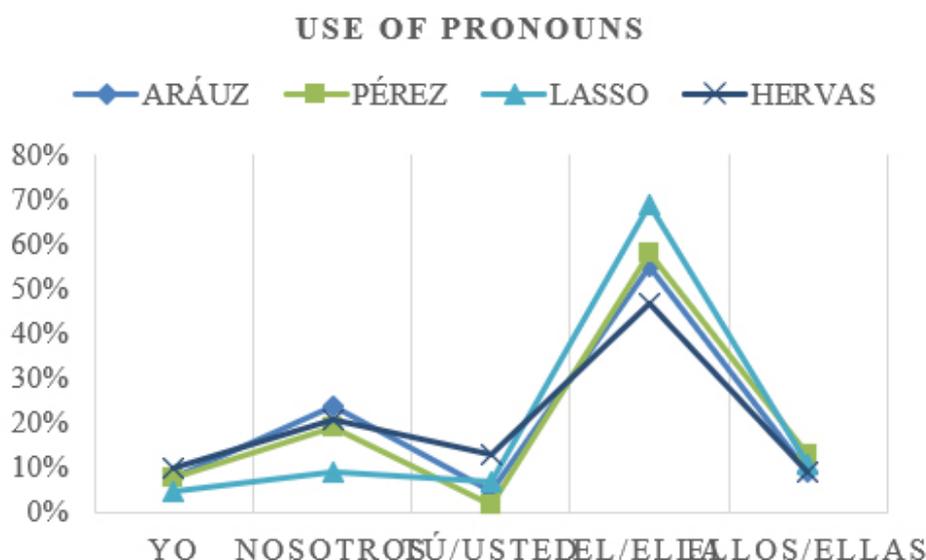
> Peace and social tranquility are based on trust in institutions. An honest electoral process is what the Ecuadorian people demand. #AbramosLasUrnasEcuador #EstamosConYaku

> For years, thousands of young people could not enter university or were denied the career of their choice. With #CapacidadParaCambiar, they will have the freedom to choose their own path to grow. We'll give autonomy to universities! #LassoPresidente2021. (Lasso, 2021)

It is also evident that Aráuz and Hervas are the only ones who, when addressing their followers, use the pronoun "we", a populist characteristic that "encompasses the speaker, his party, his supporters, and the people" (Charaudeau, P., and Gentile, A., 2009, p.271). The use of the first-person plural connotes a relationship with the group to which it is addressed and also determines a certain authority in the speaker (Ruas et al., 2013), as noted in the following posts:

> This second round must be an area of democratic discussion that enriches our society. ☝️ We will continue to tour, listen, and offer proposals. We propose the unity of love for our country, of love for the people, with a clear objective: a better future for Ecuador. (Aráuz, 2021)

> The https://www.atlasintel.org/ survey places us in 4th place with 3.3% voting intention. We grow! Thanks to all those who bet on us, the #GenteNueva. Share our proposals, help more people join. The commitment is today. #Atrévete. #XavierHervasPresidente. (Hervas, 2021)

Chart 6: Frequency of use of pronouns in political candidates' posts
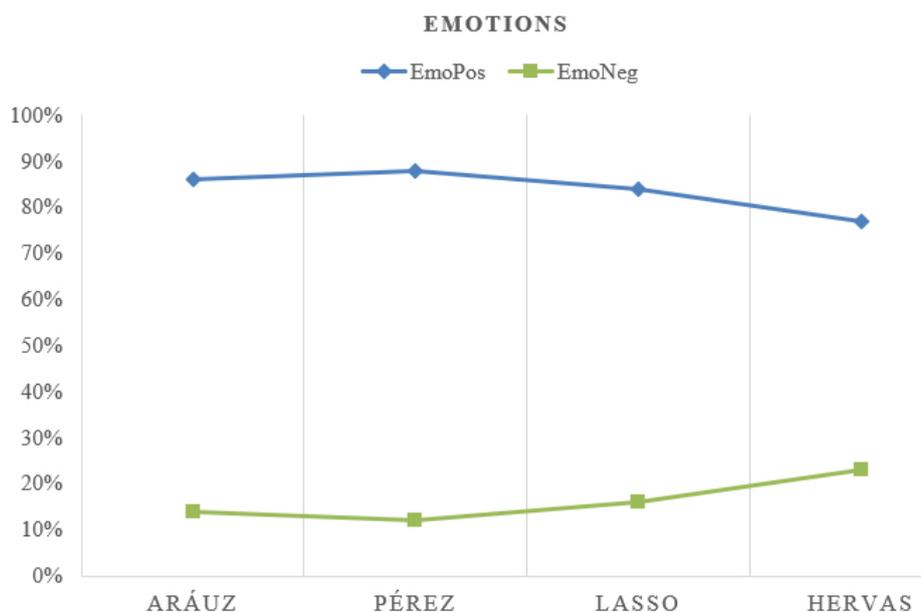**Source**: Prepared by the authors

Regarding the use of pronouns, it is observed that, as has already been said, the candidates' discourse is not of a populist type because "there is not an us and them, that is, on the one hand, a leader and his followers; on the other, the enemies of that leader, who are also enemies of the people" (Patriau, 2012, p. 300). In the use of the language of the analyzed candidates, it is evident, to a greater extent, the use of the personal pronoun "he/she" in their publications and the topics that appeared most frequently were achievement and employment, a "coherent" speech in a country hit by the post-pandemic global economic crisis.

Furthermore, the analysis confirms that everyone uses positive language in the campaign speech (see Chart 7). This is consistent with "charisma" as a characteristic of the political leader. The most used words in the posts are: prosperous, hope, pride, smile, affection, energy, motivation, enthusiasm, joy, honesty, happy, good vibes, efficient, better, opportunities, among others. These are observed accompanied by hashtags with the campaign slogans. Below are two publications that refer to positive emotionality:

> Thank you, Manabí, with its beautiful beaches and hospitable people that treated us to so much joy in a magical sunset, enjoying where we come from: the #Sea and its #Waters. Juyayay #Manabi! #YakuPresidente #ClaroQueSePuede #YakuEs. (Yaku, 2021)

> I invite you to vote for CHANGE and a Government Plan that seeks freedom, the strengthening of democracy, and building a country of opportunities. With joy and enthusiasm, this February 7th we are going to vote for the #CapacidadParaCambiar. LASSO PRESIDENT 202. (Lasso, 2021)
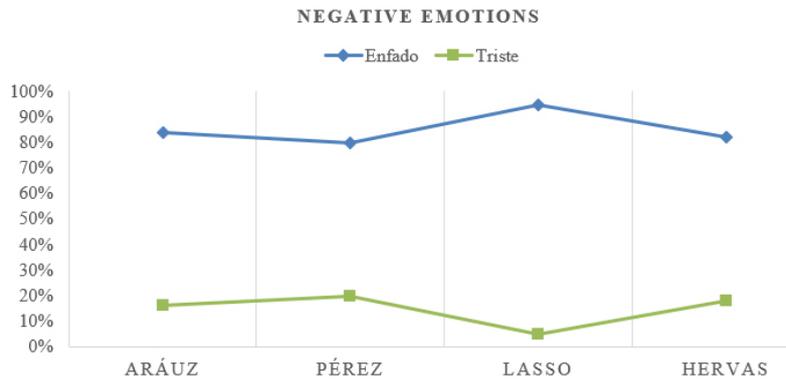
It is also observed that, to a lesser extent, a language with negative emotionality is used. However, within this category, there are more words associated with the category "anger" (85%) than with "sad" (15%). From this, it can be inferred that, in an electoral context, the discourse is developed around elements such as disputes and disqualification between the candidates, rejection of the outgoing government, complaints of irregularities in the electoral process, or discussions of politically relevant issues (see Chart 7). In the cast are: struggle, corruption, outrage, violence, fraud, stealing, gender violence, cheating, slander, insecurity, unemployment, poverty, delinquent, crime, murderers, repression, protest, among others.

Chart 7: Use of positive and negative emotions in candidates' posts
Source: Prepared by the authors

Posts like: "Don't let them treat us like we're stupid. We are fighting against demagoguery, against corruption. #DebatePresidencial2021 #EcuadorDecide2021 #XavierHervasPresidente (Hervas, 2021)", represent the use of negative connotations in candidates' campaign speech.

NEGATIVE EMOTIONS

Chart 8: Use of negative emotions in candidates' posts
Source: Prepared by the authors

From the analysis of the candidates' use of the language, other words associated with topics such as achievement and employment are identified. Hervas is the one that most uses words associated with the money category in most of his publications (54%), this is combined with his campaign proposals regarding the reactivation plans for the agricultural sector and access to national and international markets. On the other hand, Lasso uses language related to achievement (41%) and employment (42%), followed by Pérez (28% achievement and 37% employment), and Aráuz (29% achievement and 30% employment).
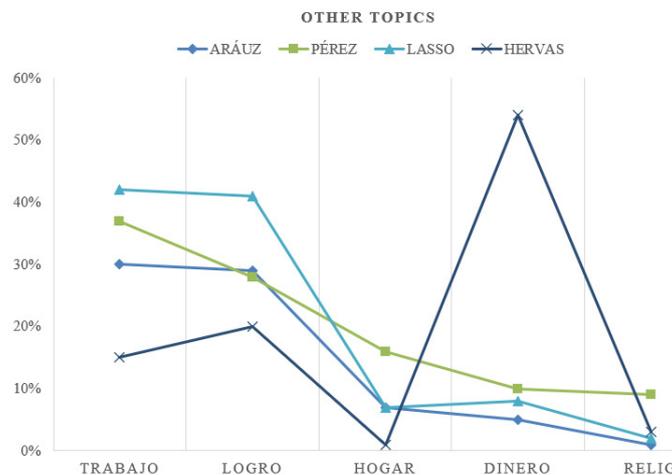
The first is related to the offer to create two million jobs in the four years of government; the second offers employment, future, and dignity; and, the third, decent work. Some examples are shown below:

In our 4 years of government, WE WILL CREATE 2 MILLION JOBS. Ecuadorians will have a decent and productive job, well paid, and with social security. #ConLassoHayEMPLEO #PropuestasDeLasso #CapacidadParaCambiar #LassoPresidente2021. (Lasso, 2021)

#Live | Thanks to the people of Pastaza for their enthusiasm and joy. We are getting closer! With renewed hope, the Ecuador of work, future, and dignity is coming. (Arauz, 2021)

Pérez is the only candidate who addresses the issue related to the home (16%). Few are the references linked to religion (see Chart 9).

That I am traveling to Mexico? Yes, I am in Mexico and Remigio Crespo streets in my beautiful river city of Cuenca. Playing as a family with agüita, mishkitullito, and cheerful national music. Juyayay the #Carnaval2021 (Pérez, 2021)

OTHER TOPICS

Chart 9: Topics identified with the LIWC tool in candidates' posts
Source: Prepared by the authors

From the emotional analysis of the use of language by candidates in political campaigns, it can be concluded that in this case -positive emotion- is not an element that influences the increase in interaction between candidates and their followers. This responds to the finding of Stieglitz and Dang-Xuan (2012) who maintain that negative messages posted on Facebook receive more comments and generate more interaction than positive ones. Likewise, these authors determined that there is greater interaction because people "comment more in discussions about politically relevant problems, issues, or concerns" (p.12).

5. Analysis of the political agenda

Taking into account the percentage of attention, the following findings are obtained: The four candidates publish, for the most part, rhetorical, emotional content, or the transmission of campaign events (code 0) that do not represent the policies proposed by the parties, coinciding with the studies carried out by López-Meri et al. (2020) who state that "parties and their leaders tend to promote their campaign events and programs, as well as to ask for votes, but they hardly use Facebook to encourage real dialogue with their followers" (p.241).

To a lesser extent, the candidates present their electoral offer: Lasso bases his proposal on employment and health; Arauz talks about government and public administration and education. For his part, Hervas addresses issues related to government and public administration with the economy; and Pérez focuses on the codes of government and public administration and environment.

Table 2. *Percentage of attention of the Facebook posts of the 4 candidates*

Code	Guillermo Lasso	Andrés Arauz	Xavier Hervas	Yaku Pérez
Rhetoric	72,61	79,04	54,55	54,07
Economy	2,59	1,72	1,97	2,22
Rights	0,27	1,37	0,98	2,47
Health	3,48	1,37	1,97	0,74
Agriculture	0,45	0,69	0,74	0,74
Employment	8,21	1,49	0,25	0,25
Education	1,07	1,83	1,47	3,70
Environment		0,11	0,25	5,43
Transport	0,36	0,80	0,49	0,99
Domestic policy	2,85	0,92	0,49	0,74
Social Policy	1,43	0,80		
Commercial Policy	1,07	1,49		0,25
Defense	0,18			
Research	0,09	1,37	0,25	0,49
Foreign trade	1,07			
Foreign policy			0,49	
Government	2,41	6,87	36,12	27,90
Natural resources	1,87			
Cultural events		0,11		

Source. Prepared by the authors.

The most important thing to note is that the percentage of attention partially coincides with the partisan logic of ownership of issues, thus, if the concentration of attention on government and public administration is taken into account, an issue that can be considered typical of left-wing parties, it coincides with the candidates Arauz, Pérez, and Hervas, which is related to what is determined by the academic literature. In the case of Lasso, there is no ideological parallelism, that is, considering that

he is a candidate in the right-wing ideological spectrum, he does not focus on the conservative issues that the academic literature determines, for example, economics or domestic policy and justice, in fact, he focuses on topics such as employment and health. This may be precisely because the public agenda and public opinion polls determined which are the most important issues for Ecuadorians, where issues such as employment (within the economy) and health are the most important. Particular issues of each candidate, it is seen that they go hand in hand with the work plans of the candidates. For example, Pérez has as the third most important issue, the problem of the environment. Hervas and Arauz, economy and education, respectively.

Finally, the most striking issue is that the concentration of the political agenda does not go to issues with political content, rather the opposite, it focuses on issues that, for this study, we have called "rhetoric" where it is evident that the candidates use campaign slogans, discursive narratives, an emotional language without political substance. This shows the need to transmit a message of form, persuasion, without real proposals but that generate cultural resonance, but not to punctually point out the campaign proposals and their ways of achieving them. This is evidenced in Chart 10.
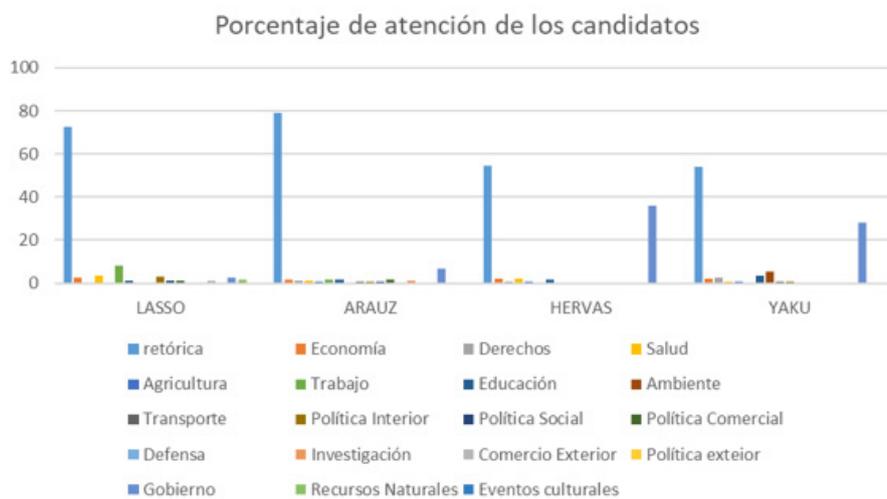

Chart 10: Percentage of attention of the Facebook posts of the four candidates
Source: Prepared by the authors

6. Conclusions

Much is said about the importance of Facebook and its impact on the electoral campaign, it is considered as a platform for disseminating political offers that makes it possible to reach segmented but numerous audiences and some more idealistic strategists speak of the possibility of establishing relationships between candidates and voters. However, the reality is completely different, research shows that, in Ecuador, the impact is really low, only 15.9% of Facebook users in the country follow the account of a presidential candidate, probably due to the lack of strategy in campaigns and the "improvised" dissemination of content that is not interesting for the audience because it does not adapt to their needs or interests, much less show solutions to their problems.

For their part, voters, in the absence of a creative strategy, interesting content, and spaces that promote debate, adopt a passive attitude since their interaction is not very engaged, they participate through the "like" option and do not generate or share content, essential actions to obtain referencing and virality, which allow more people to join the electoral proposal. Despite these results, there is a coincidence, the four candidates who best develop the digital communication strategy are those who lead the electoral process, although it should be emphasized that they are also the ones who pay the most advertising. On the Facebook social network, Lasso invested $598,410, Arauz devoted $210,699, Pérez paid $180,148 in ads, and Hervas $70,687 (Facebook, 2021).

Among the results, it stands out that the participation of the voters is proportional to the activity in

the account when the levels of publication are low, that is, the lower the number of publications of the candidates, the less the interaction of the citizens, but it should be noted that interactivity is influenced by the quality of the published content and the political discourse. Another interesting finding of the research is that smaller communities generate greater engagement, unlike accounts with a greater number of followers, which may be the subject of another research to verify the authenticity of the profiles.

As a result of the analysis of the linguistic elements (O2), it was identified that the use of language does not respond to a populist discourse and that the emotionality of the publications is positive, this determines that the message used by political leaders is a strategy that allows accelerating the diffusion of the message in the network (Dang-Xuan et al, 2013) and generates an increase of votes (Zullow et al, 1988). For future research, it is important to consider that a limitation of the natural language processing tool (LIWC) is that it does not discriminate against the use of hashtags in publications.

Finally, when analyzing the digital political agenda and what were the issues addressed by the candidates in the social network (O3), it is determined that the political agenda used in social networks clearly has a rhetorical approach or is mostly focused on it, leaving for the future the need to deepen this and possibly its discursive relationship with populism.

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Annex 1. Political agenda, 24 main topics

Code	Description	Code	Description
0	Rhetoric	14	Housing
1	Economy	15	Commerce and Banking
2	Rights	16	Defense
3	Health	17	Research, technology, and communication
4	Agriculture	18	Foreign trade
5	Employment	19	Foreign policy
6	Education and culture	20	Government
7	Environment	21	Natural resources and water management
8	Energy	23	Culture
9	Wellfare	27	Weather
10	Transport	29	Sports
12	Domestic Policy and Justice	30	Obituaries and fatal events
13	Social Policy		

Source: Prepared by the authors