



The construction of political narratives in South American electoral campaigns: a social media analysis

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: Contemporary political communication is characterized by a "narrative turn," where politicians and parties strategically employ stories to construct identities, mobilize the masses, and legitimize their power. This study aims to analyze the frequency with which presidential candidates resort to political narratives and to assess whether the trend towards a 'narrative turn' in electoral campaigns is confirmed. **Methodology** A quantitative exploratory content analysis was conducted on social media posts (Instagram, X, Facebook, and TikTok) by presidential candidates in seven South American countries. Variables related to the presence of political narratives, their nature, predominant themes, and public reactions were coded. Data reliability was ensured through a rigorous coding process and inter-rater analysis. **Results:** The study reveals a predominance of narrative content in South American presidential campaigns, confirming the "narrative turn" in political communication. Personalized storytelling outperforms storydoing, suggesting a preference for first-person stories. **Discussion:** Candidates prioritize proselytizing themes, but the public shows greater interest in personalized storytelling, questioning the effectiveness of storydoing. **Conclusions:** The results exhibit a transformation in political communication, where narratives and images play a central role. Citizens value emotional connection and identification with candidates, posing challenges for the construction of a more informed and rational public debate.

Keywords: political narratives; election campaigns; South America; social media; political communication; public engagement.

1. INTRODUCTION

Narratives have existed since the beginning of humanity. In *The Republic* (IV B.C./2003), Plato illustrates how Socrates manipulated myths and legends to support his legal arguments. Aristotle (335 B.C./2010) devoted several pages of *Poetics* to the narrative structure as an artistic instrument for representing reality. During the Middle Ages, Augustine of Hippo, in his autobiography *Confessions* (398 CE/2009), tried to reveal the true path to memory, as professed and guarded by God. Centuries later, Giambattista Vico (1725/2012) corrected the theologian and proposed that life is the result of the stories that human beings create in their minds. In the twentieth century, Propp (1928/1981) shattered traditional tales to sustain that a narrative sequence survives the passage of time. Then came the turn of narratology, the structuralists, the Labovians, the linguists and the social psychologists, all lines of research that, with their variants, coexist to this day.

Human beings use narratives to form groups, relate to each other, differentiate themselves from other identities, remember experiences, entertain themselves and order the world around them (Jones et al., 2024). Since the time human beings come to the world, when parents read them fables or bedtime stories, they witness the power of narratives. Later, they listen to them, critique or reproduce them at school, university and work. A person is born, grows up, develops and grows old surrounded by stories. Indeed, money, nations, religions, languages, culture and laws are compelling cases of shared narratives. They are all underpinned by the constitutive force of narrative. What truly defines certain institutions, such as a country's currency, is not their physical form, but the deep meaning people attach to them over time. As Seargeant (2020) asserts: "Remove stories from the human equation and civilization itself disappears from the scene" (p. 59).

Although narratives are a powerful tool for constructing meaning, they are not the only means by which people acquire knowledge. Human beings have multiple cognitive systems that allow them to process information in different ways. According to Bruner (1986), there are two modes of thinking: paradigmatic, which is based on logic and numbers, and narrative, which relies on stories and symbols. Kahneman (2011) reinforces this distinction, noting that logical thinking is slower and more deliberate while narrative thinking is faster and more intuitive. Epstein (1994) adds that the experiential system, associated with narrative thinking, processes information automatically and effortlessly, facilitating the construction of meaning. Consequently, as Haidt (2019) points out, narratives tend to generate emotional reactions, whereas data promote reflection. Given the visceral and persuasive nature of narratives, it is not surprising that they have a superior power to influence people's beliefs and behaviors, as Polletta and Callahan (2017) assert. A clear example of this can be seen on social networks, where personal stories and anecdotes are used to mobilize audiences and generate social change.

The advantages of narratives are numerous: in a changing, entropic and chaotic world, narratives simplify and provide clarity (Gardner, 1978; Yorke, 2014; Selbin, 2020); they activate emotions (Silbert et al., 2014) and connect with the limbic system (Simmons, 2007); they transform the abstract into concrete (Seargeant, 2020); and make visible the problems of a community (Habermas, 1984; Pierce et al., 2024); they bring credibility (Green et al., 2022); and they serve to anticipate risky situations (Monroy et al., 2018); they allow the public to co-experience the protagonists' experiences, as if they were their own (Breithaupt, 2023); they create and revitalize the sense of belonging to collectives (McAdams, 2006; De Fina, 2023); they mobilize wills (Heath & Heath, 2007); they function as therapeutic tools in clinical treatments (Sacks, 1985); narratives turn the private into the social, and vice versa (Arendt, 2023; Jackson, 2002); and provide entertainment and simulation to people (Seargeant, 2020).

Despite narrative's wide range of utilities, several authors have noted its decline. For example, Benjamin (1968) argued that postmodernity has eroded the grand narratives that characterized modernity. Lyotard (1979/1991) expanded on this idea, proposing that the growth of globalized business and political elites has led to the fragmentation of knowledge and the disappearance of grand narratives. More recently, authors such as Vallance (2016) have denounced the proliferation of superficial micro-narratives that serve particular interests and to the detriment of ideologies, claiming that storytelling is dead. Montague (2018) and Weber (2019) share this pessimistic view, while Salmon (2019) attributes the crisis of storytelling to the predominance of digital platforms, which, driven by the attention economy and clickbait, have favored the production of brief, viral and sensationalist content.

Contrary to the previous paragraph, many researchers argue that, for decades, narratives—in all their morphologies—have monopolized communication. This means that institutions, brands, and communicators prioritize storytelling over transmitting specific information about their functions, products, or projects. Defining the strategy is equivalent to defining the narrative. This phenomenon has many names: *the narrative turn* (Polkinghorne, 1988; Pujadas Capdevilla, 2016), *primado del relato* (Borrat, 2000), *the imperative narrative* (Jackson, 2002), *the narrative effect* (Rincón, 2008), *narrarquía* (Cárcar Benito, 2016), and the *storytelling boom* (Fernandes, 2017). All of them agree that, far from being in disuse or in crisis, narrative contents increase their usage, their effects and their propagation in the digital age.

Political communication is immersed in the narrative turn (Hyvärinen, 2010; Finucane, 2018; Seargeant, 2020; De Fina, 2023; Sarasqueta, 2021). In government management and election campaigning, politicians use narratives to project a positive image, gain followers, and legitimize their authority. In social networks, rallies, neighborhood meetings and the media, they tell anecdotes, evoke epics, reconstruct biographies, share jokes and recall past battles. According to specialized literature, narrative permeates all aspects of political communication (De Fina, 2023). Any issue, from insecurity to corruption, is addressed through a carefully constructed story that seeks to resonate with common sense (Polletta & Callahan, 2017). According to Sujatha Fernandes (2017), this is how hegemony is constructed in the 21st century. Electoral competition is primarily a narrative dispute: candidates together with their supporters seek to transform particular interests into general interests through a deliberate sequence of facts, plots, causalities, characters, and scenarios. This dynamic transform reality into a sort of film script where heroes, villains, and plot twists coexist. Rather than *zoon politikon*, candidates assume the role of *homo narrans*.

1.1. Content typology

The narrative is a sequence of causal events, chronologically structured by human agency and oriented towards a specific goal (Seargeant, 2020). According to its temporal extension, the narrative model falls into two categories: strategic (structural) and tactical (conjunctural). The narrative, i.e., the semantic direction of a management or electoral campaign, and the counter-narrative, i.e., a device saturated with negative meaning that is configured with the sole objective of undermining the reputational capital of another actor or another force, are part of the first level. On the other hand, there are the narrative techniques such as storytelling and storydoing, which intervene on a daily basis and are aimed at the permanent construction of meaning. Thus, they belong to the tactical dimension (Sarasqueta et al., 2024). These two terms, which are fundamental to this research, will be defined below.

Personal storytelling is a story presented verbally in the first person by a politician to position him/herself (Mochla et al., 2023). It typically adheres to a three-part structure (order-disorder-order) and is characterized by the presence of a protagonist, conflict, moral, causal sequence, and central value (e.g., effort, honesty, courage). Examples include José Mujica's stories, former president of Uruguay, about his experience in prison or those of U.S. legislator Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez's stories about her life as an immigrant.

Then there is outsourced storytelling, which repeats the essence and morphology of the previous one but changes the protagonist to an ordinary citizen. Through his social networks, the politician tells and shares the stories of an exemplary neighbor, consecrated athlete, and successful entrepreneur to represent his values. Rather than self-narrating, the politician narrates to third parties (Sarasqueta et al., 2022). As Atkins and Finlayson (2012) assert, these types of stories have "a special authority to validate and legitimize claims about the world and what should be done about it" (p. 173). Examples of this strategy include the classic ad by former U.S. President Lyndon B. Johnson about the girl Daisy and the nuclear threat or, more recently, Argentine President Javier Milei discussing the successful career of entrepreneur Elon Musk and explaining why he is a role model.

In recent years, a new narrative technique has emerged in politics: storydoing. Unlike storytelling, which focuses on verbal narration, storydoing is characterized by its visual and active nature (Sarasqueta, 2021). Storydoing is presented in the first person and seeks to convey a clear and concise message through concrete actions. The goal is for the viewer to identify with the protagonist and be motivated to imitate his or her behavior. Examples of this storydoing technique include the actions of Leo Varadkar, the former Prime Minister of Ireland, who returned to his medical practice during the pandemic, and Mauricio Macri, the former President of Argentina, who was seen performing everyday acts alongside citizens.

Finally, there is paradigmatic content, or causal rational thinking (Bruner, 1986; Breithaupt, 2023). As explained above, it consists of the candidate's publications supported by arguments, logic, statistics, and ephemera. Here, the aim is not to evoke emotion or empathy, but rather to convince with rigorous, contrasting information. Examples of this category include when Spanish President Pedro Sánchez presents data showing employment growth during his administration and when Democratic candidate Kamala Harris details her tax relief proposal to combat child poverty.

Studying political narratives is essential to understanding electoral processes in democracies. This type of research is necessary to determine the nature of the current public debate. The extent to which candidates to power use cold (statistical) and hot (narrative) data to present their projects, that is, whether they act more like *homo rationalis* or *homo passionalis*, may indicate the role they assume with regard to the citizenry: whether they perform a pedagogical task or a merely entertaining task. This aspect could also be relevant because one of the variables that explain affective polarization is the lack of detailed and precise explanations on social or economic problems by the leaders. It is also relevant to investigate whether narrative content elicits a more positive emotional response than paradigmatic content, a finding would help outline the type of citizen found on the other side of the screens.

Taking the above into account, this paper asks whether the so-called "narrative turn" occurs in South American electoral campaigns. That is, if indeed this communication phenomenon, characterized by the production and circulation of stories, is part of presidential candidates' digital strategies in their race for power in seven South American countries. In turn, understanding the different forms that narrative can take raises the question of which technique prevails in electoral campaigns: first-person narrative (storytelling), third-person narrative (outsourced storytelling) or through actions (storydoing). Stretching this concern, it is also interesting to know which are the prevailing themes when politicians use narratives. In other words, to discover the agenda or agendas that are proposed in the region's presidential campaigns. Shifting the focus of the analysis from discursive production to the social reception of discourse (Verón, 1987), the question that emerges is what effect narratives have on the public. Whether or not the persuasive power assigned to these narratives by the specialized literature is materialized or whether, on the contrary, the posts constructed by with statistics or arguments receive a more positive reception.

2. OBJECTIVES

In order to address the questions raised in the previous section, this study aims to conduct an exhaustive analysis of the digital content used in the presidential campaigns of seven South American countries. The goal is to identify predominant narrative strategies and assess their impact on public opinion.

Based on the above, the following specific objectives have been established:

- O1: Identifying the type of content —paradigmatic or narrative— that prevails in South American presidential campaigns.
- O2: Exploring whether stories are structured through words (storytelling and outsourced storytelling) or actions (storydoing).
- O3: Determining the type of content that generates the most positive reactions from users.
- O4: Determining the main themes that candidates address when using storytelling techniques.

These objectives were set to analyze and evaluate the use of narratives in a specific context (seven South American countries), while, by including four main digital platforms —TikTok, X, Instagram, and Facebook— a representative sample of digital spaces where current political campaigns are taking place is guaranteed. According to Data Reportal (2024), these platforms account for most of the online activity of the South American population, providing an integral view of the narrative strategies used by candidates. In this way, the aim is to enrich the academic debate on the intersection among politics, social media, and electoral strategies.

3. METHODOLOGY

This study is part of the Camilo José Cela University's international Digital Laboratory of Political Narratives project, which proposes a systematic approach to analyzing political narratives on social media during election campaigns. The project generated a common methodology with valid scales to measure the communication performance of candidates, as well as social reactions and general dynamics on each digital platform. So as to meet the set objectives, the following methodology was applied.

3.1. Sample data and timeframe

The Instagram, X, Facebook, and TikTok platforms of the two candidates who came out on top in the presidential elections in the following countries were surveyed: Argentina, Chile, Ecuador, Paraguay, Bolivia, Peru, and Uruguay. These four mentioned platforms were chosen because they capture different generational audiences, are among the ten most used in South America, and have diverse records (Data Reportal, 2024). In relation to countries, Spanish-speaking ones were chosen where there were researchers willing to carry out the coding. In this regard, economic limitations made it difficult to expand the sample to more countries and candidates in the region. During the electoral campaign period, as determined by the relevant authority in each country, the researchers coded all publications in each social network's feed. They carried out an exhaustive analysis of the textual content of the publications and the associated images, considering visual elements such as composition, gestures, colorimetry, and symbology. Each publication represented a unit of analysis. Once coding was complete, each researcher entered their database into an online interface. All the collected information was then consolidated into a single database to carry out a comparative analysis of the seven countries' electoral campaigns.

In these countries, the last presidential election campaign was analyzed when the database was constructed: March – June 2024. Stories, featured stories, and biographies were excluded. The following two tables specify the examined accounts and the scope of the sample.

Table 1. Social network accounts a Restricted access nalyzed.

Candidate	Country	TikTok account	X account	Facebook account	Instagram account
Santiago Peña	Paraguay	@santipenap	Restricted access	Santiago Peña	@santipenapy
Efraín Alegre	Paraguay	@efrainalegreoficial	@EfrainAlegre	Efraín Alegre	@EfrainAlegre
Gabriel Boric	Chile	@gabrielboric	@GabrielBoric	Gabriel Boric	@gabrielboric
José Antonio Kast	Chile	@joseantoniokast	@joseantoniokast	José Antonio Kast	@joseantoniokast
Daniel Noboa	Ecuador	@danielnobaok	@ danielnobaok	Daniel Noboa Azin	@danielnobaok
Luisa González	Ecuador	@luisamgonzalezec	@LuisaGonzalezEc	Luisa González	@luisamgonzalezec
Daniel Martínez	Uruguay	Not used	@Dmartinez_uy	Daniel Martínez Villaamil	@danielmartinez_uy
Lacalle Pou	Uruguay	Not used	@LuisLacallePou	Luis Lacalle Pou	@luislacallepou
Sergio Massa	Argentina	@sergiotmassa	@SergioMassa	Sergio Massa	@SergioMassaOk
Luis Arce	Bolivia	Not used	@LuchoXBolivia	Lucho Arce	@luchoxbolivia
Carlos Mesa	Bolivia	Not used	@carlosdmesag	Carlos D. Mesa Gisbert	@carlosdmesag
Pedro Castillo Terrones	Peru	Not used	@PedroCastilloTe	Pedro Castillo Terrones	No usó
Keiko Fujimori Higuchi	Peru	@keikofujimorih	@KeikoFujimori	Keiko Sofía Fujimori Higuchi	@keikofujimorih

Source: Own elaboration.

Table 2. Sample's scope.

Candidate	Election campaign timeframe	Analyzed units in X	Analyzed units in Instagram	Analyzed units in TikTok	Analyzed units in Facebook	Total
Santiago Peña	16/11/2022-27/04/2023	-	210	6	211	427
Efraín Alegre	16/11/2022-27/04/2023	110	257	7	285	659
Gabriel Boric	22/09/2021-19/12/2021	930	441	69	423	1863
José Antonio Kast	22/09/2021-19/12/2021	983	386	17	415	1801
Daniel Noboa	8/8/2023-19/11/2023	146	181	64	125	516
Luisa González	8/8/2023-19/11/2023	661	371	174	342	1548
Daniel Martínez	01/07/2019-29/11/2019	336	129	-	160	625
Luis Lacalle Pou	01/07/2019-29/11/2019	351	245	-	260	856
Javier Milei	9/9/2023-19/11/2023	384	273	3	-	660
Sergio Massa	9/9/2023-19/11/2023	262	112	58	74	506
Luis Arce	3/2/2020-18/10/2020	1011	341	-	772	2124
Carlos Mesa	3/2/2020-18/10/2020	363	397	-	672	1432
Pedro Castillo Terrones	22/12/2020-6/6/2021	- 191	-	-	1031	1222
Keiko Fujimori	22/12/2020-	- 283	146	29	376	834

Candidate	Election campaign timeframe	Analyzed units in X	Analyzed units in Instagram	Analyzed units in TikTok	Analyzed units in Facebook	Total
Higuchi	6/6/2021					
Total		6011	3489	427	5146	15073

Source: Own elaboration.

3.2. Study type and research technique

This study uses an exploratory quantitative approach to examine a relatively little known phenomenon: the use of narratives in seven South American presidential campaigns on the platforms TikTok, Instagram, Facebook, and X. Its approach is descriptive and aims to systematically reveal the frequency and type of narratives used, the dominant themes, and the social reactions generated by the above elements. The choice of the comparative analysis method (Nohlen, 2013) is justified by the capacity it offers to identify relationships between cases of a similar nature, in this case, presidential candidates in South America, who use social networks as a proselytizing tool.

To achieve an objective and quantitative description, a content analysis was implemented (Neuendorf, 2002; Igartua Perosanz, 2006). The information collected was standardized to ensure the verifiability and applicability of the research findings in other contexts (Krippendorff, 1990). This research technique, which covers both the pre-categorization of textual data and its quantification, was applied to all the publications (photographs, videos, badges, memes, etc.) of the presidential candidates during the election campaign on X, Facebook, Instagram and TikTok. Each publication was coded using dichotomous variables to classify the presence or absence of personalized storytelling, outsourced storytelling, storydoing and paradigmatic content. Additionally, ordinal variables were used to categorize the predominant theme in each case, including security, economy, corruption, family, leisure, foreign policy, proselytism, education, health, social issues, electoral fraud and others. These concepts, validated by various researchers (Bruner, 1986; De Fina & Georgakopoulou, 2015; Sarasqueta, 2021; Sarasqueta et al., 2022; García-Beaudoux et al., 2023), were fundamental to the analysis. Likewise, the number of "likes" received by each publication was quantified since this metric constitutes an indicator of users' positive evaluation of the content.

3.3. Reliability

In the final phase of the study, standardized training was implemented for seven researchers, one per country, to ensure a common criterion in the application of a detailed classification code. Local researchers, who had in-depth knowledge of the socio-political context, were responsible for constructing, cleaning, and coding the database, thus ensuring the rigor and validity of the results. Direct access to primary sources significantly facilitated data collection and analysis.

In order to mitigate the ambiguity inherent to the variables, a three-phase protocol was implemented to ensure intercoder reliability. First, a pilot test was conducted to ensure a consensual interpretation of the coding manual. Then, pilot tests were conducted with documents outside the main sample. Throughout the coding process, coders received continuous supervision to promote consistency. Finally, a post-coding test was conducted to evaluate the consistency of the intercoder agreements.

The codebook also contemplated the following variables: date; number of "likes"; number of comments; whether or not the leader appears in the published post; and use of historical images. All variables were subjected to a descriptive process to obtain frequency distributions, total statistical numbers of position and central tendency statistics, in addition to a bivariate analysis of the (X²) hypothesis contrast so as to confirm the null (H₀) or alternative (H₁) hypothesis, in other words, to determine their level of association or correlation. To ensure internal consistency, 30% (n = 43) of units of analysis underwent an external inter-rater process. The statistical procedure was performed using IBM SPSS v.26.0.

4. RESULTS

A1: Results obtained in relation to Objective 1, which focuses on identifying the type of predominant content —paradigmatic or narrative— in the presidential campaigns of South America.

The results of the study ($n = 15,073$; 100%) support the thesis of a "narrative turn" in political communication (Hyvärinen, 2010; Fernandes, 2017; Finucane, 2018; Seargeant, 2020; Sarasqueta, 2021; De Fina, 2023). The predominance of narrative content (79.32%; $n = 11,956$) over paradigmatic content (20.68%; $n = 3,117$) suggests that candidates prioritize stories to emotionally connect with an electorate with increasingly fragmented attention (Aira, 2020; Brady et al., 2020; Gennaro & Ash, 2022). This preference for narratives is explained by their greater ability to capture attention and generate identification in citizens, compared to logical and extensive explanations (Stieglitz & Dang Xuan, 2013; Gutiérrez Rubí, 2019).

When the analysis is disaggregated by country, considerable differences in frequency of usage are observed. Argentina (62.61%) and Uruguay (62.32%) have the lowest use of narrative content, while Peru (90.37%) and Bolivia (86.95%) have the highest, using stories in nearly 9 out of 10 publications for campaigning.

Table 3. *Paradigmatic and narrative content.*

Content type	Argentina	Bolivia	Chile	Ecuador	Paraguay	Peru	Uruguay	Regional
Paradigmatic	37.39%	13.05%	21.89%	24.52%	14.09%	9.63%	37.68%	20.68%
Narrative	62.61%	86.95%	78.11%	75.48%	85.91%	90.37%	62.32%	79.32%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

Source: Own elaboration.

A2: The result obtained in relation to Objective 2: To explore whether stories structured through words (storytelling and outsourced storytelling) or through actions (storydoing) prevail.

Regarding the nature of predominant narratives, it is evident that storytelling (both personalized and outsourced) surpasses storydoing. There is a substantial difference between the two narrative modalities: 72.44% versus 27.56%. This suggests that candidates prefer to express their stories through words rather than actions. Verbal language, rhetorical details, and moralizing predominate over nonverbal language, concrete facts, and mimesis (Sarasqueta, 2021). A tentative explanation for this finding could be that it is more accessible to articulate a story discursively than to represent it through activities, since the latter requires more economic, territorial and human resources.

As for the analysis by country, there are important nuances. Presidential candidates in Argentina, Paraguay, and Uruguay make an effort to alternate verbal stories with stories based on facts, while candidates in Peru and Ecuador use storydoing in one out of ten publications. Candidates in Chile and Bolivia fall somewhere in between.

Table 4. *Narrative content structuring type.*

Story structuring type	Argentina	Bolivia	Chile	Ecuador	Paraguay	Peru	Uruguay	Regional
Through word	59.59%	68.98%	68.48%	86.20%	64.42%	87.08%	61.86%	72.44%
Through actions	40.41%	31.02%	31.52%	13.80%	35.58%	12.92%	38.14%	27.56%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

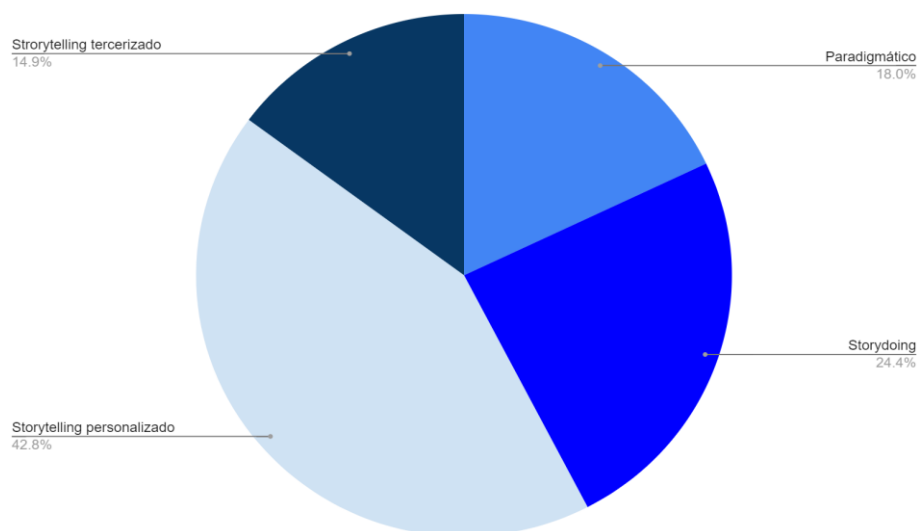
Source: Own elaboration.

A3. Results obtained in relation to Objective 3: Determine the type of content that generates the most positive reactions from users.

Shifting from discursive production to reception, the findings also reveal a paradox: citizens do not emphasize narratives in which candidates transition from the first to the third person. Citizens are identified as preferring personalized storytelling (42.8%), i.e., stories narrated in the first person by the politician, over storydoing (24.4%), paradigmatic content (18%), and outsourced storytelling (14.9%). These percentages question the superior impact of storydoing over storytelling, as stated by Sarasqueta (2021) who argues that citizens currently demand facts from candidates rather than words. Furthermore, they relativize the need for protagonism and mobilization of the digital citizen (Casero-Ripollés et al., 2016; della Porta et al., 2017), since the category in which this can appear in an election campaign, as mentioned by competitors, occupies the last place, with only 14.9% of the publications.

This supremacy of personalized storytelling can be framed as what Amado (2017) calls "pop politics": Politicians are presented as show-business celebrities who play sports, dine at popular restaurants, travel to the country's main tourist destinations, and play with their dogs like ordinary citizens. Management responsibility is replaced by entertainment. The important thing is to capture the attention of cybercitizens and gain their acceptance through "likes", positive comments, or going their activities viral.

Figure 1. Percentage of "likes" by content type.



Source: Own elaboration.

Table 5. Number of "likes" by content type.

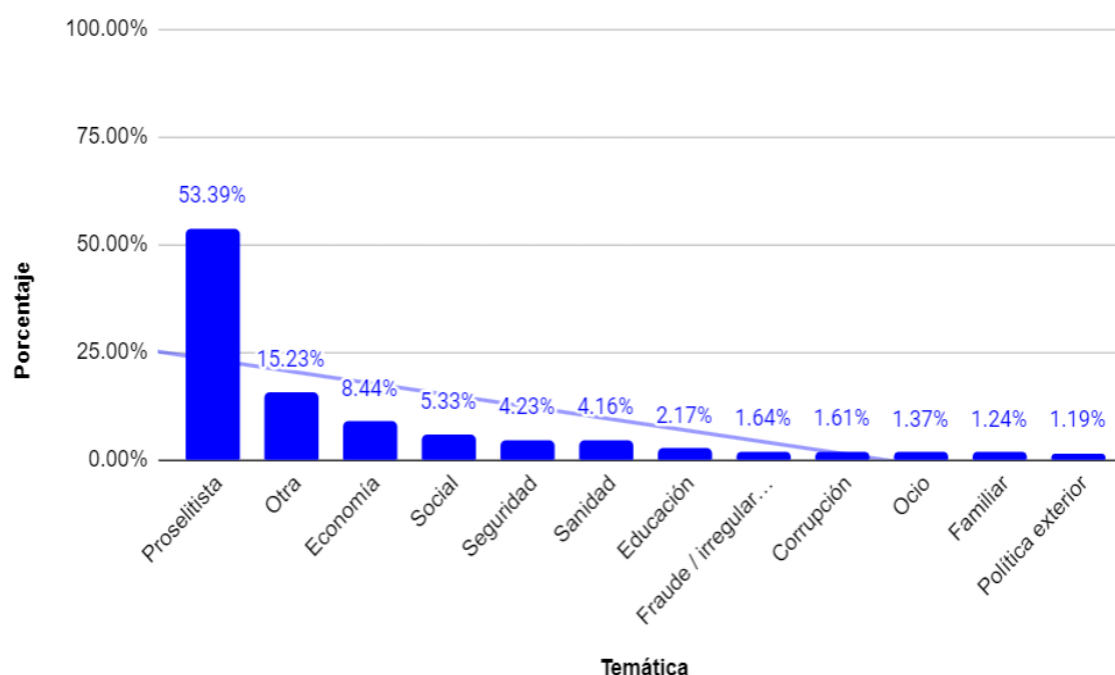
Content type	Number of "likes"	
	N	%
Paradigmatic	31,031,961	17.97%
Storydoing	42,143,680	24.40%
Personalized Storytelling	73,875,424	42.77%
Outsourced Storytelling	25,657,378	14.86%
Total	172,708,443	100%

Source: Own elaboration.

A4: Results obtained in relation to Objective 4: To determine the key themes addressed by the candidates when applying any of the narrative techniques.

Finally, it is crucial to identify the themes that structure the narrative content. In other words, it is necessary to specify the agenda that candidates try to promote through the stories they disseminate on their social networks. The most frequent category, at 53.39%, is “proselytizing”, including activities such as rallies, presentations of the presidential formula, campaign closings, neighborhood tours, meetings with neighbors, electoral debates, responses to rivals, surveys and internal disputes. This suggests the existence of a resonance chamber: the electoral campaign narrates itself. More than half of the narratives —personalized storytelling, outsourced storytelling and storydoing— are used to reflect the different dimensions of the proselytizing process. The economy (8.44%) is only in third place, while security, health and education, three key pillars of social welfare, do not reach 5%. As shown in Table 6, it is important to note that this self-narration occurs in all the analyzed countries, reaching its peak in Peru's electoral campaign (69.31%) and its minimum in Bolivia's electoral campaign (31.5%).

Figure 2. Themes used at the regional level.



Source: Own elaboration.

Table 6. Themes used according to the country.

Themes	Argentina	Bolivia	Chile	Ecuador	Paraguay	Peru	Uruguay	Regional
Security	2.32%	0.37%	6.69%	12.55%	0.37%	1.12%	4.46%	4.23%
Economy	18.27%	6.47%	6.17%	10.32%	10.22%	4.67%	12.36%	8.44%
Corruption	1.03%	1.24%	2.40%	0.87%	3.04%	2.09%	0.34%	1.61%
Family	1.80%	0.39%	0.85%	1.89%	2.30%	1.51%	1.76%	1.24%
Entertainment	1.80%	1.18%	1.26%	1.41%	2.58%	0.88%	1.55%	1.37%
Foreign policy	4.12%	0.56%	1.45%	1.21%	0.28%	1.12%	0.54%	1.19%
Proselytism	58.75%	31.50%	65.72%	42.30%	52.21%	69.31%	65.43%	53.39%
Education	3.34%	1.52%	0.87%	5.72%	0.46%	1.61%	3.11%	2.17%
Health	1.37%	10.32%	2.70%	3.00%	0.55%	2.87%	1.22%	4.16%
Social	3.69%	9.96%	3.38%	6.69%	2.39%	4.09%	2.36%	5.33%
Electoral fraud/ election irregularities	0.43%	2.70%	0.00%	1.41%	0.00%	5.69%	0.00%	1.64%
Others	3.09%	33.80%	8.52%	12.65%	25.60%	5.06%	6.89%	15.23%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

Source: Own elaboration.

5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

This research fulfills what was initially proposed to elaborate the state of political narratives in South American electoral campaigns, specifically on four social media: Instagram, X, Facebook, and TikTok. The main finding reveals a dual trend: first, the narrative shift (Hyvärinen, 2010; Finucane, 2018; Seargeant, 2020; Sarasqueta, 2021; De Fina, 2023) is evident in the candidates' official communications. Narrative techniques far outweigh paradigmatic content (58.64%). This result evidence a political leadership which is more focused on the didactic function than its descriptive and programmatic functions (Veron, 1987). Thus, the transparent, stable, symmetrical, and rational agora proposed by Habermas (1984) is overlapped by a more emotional, dynamic and fleeting exchange. The public debate begins to be led by those political figures who excel at storytelling or recounting rather than explaining or arguing. As the authorities of meaning change, so do the social exchanges and their outcomes. In turn, this majority production of narratives can be linked to a phenomenon that has steadily grown in open systems in recent years: affective polarization. By relying on emotions, narratives can overshadow rational agreements or disagreements about particular public policies, fostering hostility and animosity toward other groups (Iyengar et al., 2019; Bruns et al., 2024). Therefore, it is important for political actors and communicators to understand the practical implications of designing balanced strategies with narrative and paradigmatic content. In other words, strategies that excite and invite reflection on the country's project while establishing common ground among different political forces. Therefore, in its practical implications, it is relevant that both political players and communicators understand the importance of designing balanced strategies, with narrative and paradigmatic contents. In other words, strategies that seek to excite, but also invite reflection on the country project and, at the same time, establish foundations for bringing positions closer between the different political forces.

On the other hand, citizens are highly receptive to these narrative contents, especially valuing those that generate identification and emotional connection. The question is whether there is a supply of political narratives because there is social demand, or vice versa. In any case, multiple questions arise: Do narratives improve the quality of public debate? Do they encourage citizens to participate through public networks? Do they strengthen the link between representatives and the represented? Do they encourage polarization, due to their emotional charge and their lower dose of argumentation?

Similarly, as Freistein and Gadinger (2020) and Zamora-Medina (2023) argue in their analyses of visuality in electoral campaigns that the visual register has acquired an undeniable importance in the engineering of contemporary political narratives. Both personalized storytelling, which seeks to emotionally connect the candidate with the public, and outsourced storytelling, which appeals to the construction of collective identities, and storydoing, which employs actions in the creation of the story, enhance their message through images. In the context of social media, where visual content dominates, platforms such as TikTok, Instagram and Facebook have turned images into the primary communication resource (Data Reportal, 2024). Unlike in the 20th century when stories circulated more homogeneously across different media, the image has emerged as the predominant format in the digital era, ranging from photos and videos to memes, infographics, and reels. This proliferation of visual content responds to the logic of the attention economy, which demands concise, easy-to-understand messages. As a cognitive shortcut, the image stands as a fundamental tool for condensing complex ideas and generating an impact on the audience (Schill, 2012; Lilleker & Liefbroer, 2018).

For future lines of research, several questions arise. First, it is crucial to determine whether the narrative turn observed in the electoral campaigns of seven South American countries occurs in similar political contexts, such as presidential elections in Central American, European, African or Asian countries. Second, it is necessary to delve deeper into the social impact of narratives in social networks, not only by quantifying metrics such as 'likes', comments and shares, but also by using opinion mining and natural language processing techniques to analyze the semantic content and sentiment expressed in the comments. This will allow to identify patterns in narrative construction, opinion polarization, and influence on public opinion. Additionally, it is relevant to

incorporate the analysis of the tone of the messages, differentiating between positive, negative and contrasting publications, to evaluate the degree of affective polarization and its impact on citizen participation (Lorenzo-Rodríguez & Torcal, 2022). Finally, it is essential to consider the historical and political context of each country, as well as the specific characteristics of the different social media platforms, in order to understand the particular dynamics of political communication in each case.

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