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REVIEW

Likes are not votes: Critical analysis of the influence of electoral campaigns on TikTok in relation to the results of the presidential election, Mexico 2024

Los likes no son votos: Análisis crítico de la influencia de las campañas electorales en Tik Tok en relación con los resultados de la elección presidencial, México 2024

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: the study analyzed the influence of digital presence on TikTok on electoral results in Mexico. It was framed within the literature on digital democracy and the link between the media and electoral behavior. Given that TikTok has gained relevance as a political platform, the objective was to determine if popularity on this social network translated into real votes. To this end, the TikTok activity of presidential candidates Claudia Sheinbaum, Xóchitl Gálvez and Jorge Álvarez Máynez was examined, comparing digital metrics with surveys and electoral results.
Development: the analysis included the compilation of data on the frequency of publications, the reach of the videos, the level of interaction and the content of the messages issued by each candidate. In addition, surveys conducted since January 2024 were evaluated, as well as the final results of the elections. It was observed that TikTok allowed candidates to build a public image and generate interaction with the electorate, but its impact on voting intention was relative. Claudia Sheinbaum maintained a stable trend, Xóchitl Gálvez showed variations in her performance depending on the pollsters and Jorge Álvarez Máynez experienced significant growth on social media, although this was not reflected in his electoral result.
Conclusions: the study concluded that visibility on TikTok did not guarantee electoral success. Although social networks are powerful dissemination tools, territorial mobilization and traditional strategies are still decisive. The need to integrate digital platforms into a broader political strategy was emphasized.

Keywords: Digital Democracy; TikTok; Electoral Behavior; Political Campaigns; Social Networks.

RESUMEN

Introducción: el estudio analizó la influencia de la presencia digital en TikTok sobre los resultados electorales en México. Se enmarcó en la literatura sobre democracia digital y el vínculo entre medios de comunicación y comportamiento electoral. Dado que TikTok ha adquirido relevancia como plataforma política, el objetivo fue determinar si la popularidad en esta red social se traducía en votos reales. Para ello, se examinó la actividad en TikTok de los candidatos presidenciales Claudia Sheinbaum, Xóchitl Gálvez y Jorge Álvarez Máynez, contrastando métricas digitales con encuestas y resultados electorales.
Desarrollo: el análisis incluyó la recopilación de datos sobre frecuencia de publicaciones, alcance de los videos, nivel de interacción y contenido de los mensajes emitidos por cada candidato. Además, se evaluaron encuestas realizadas desde enero de 2024, así como los resultados finales de las elecciones. Se observó que TikTok permitió a los candidatos construir una imagen pública y generar interacción con el electorado, pero su impacto en la intención de voto resultó relativo. Claudia Sheinbaum mantuvo una tendencia estable, Xóchitl Gálvez mostró variaciones en su desempeño según las encuestadoras y Jorge Álvarez Máynez experimentó un crecimiento significativo en redes, aunque esto no se reflejó en su resultado electoral.
Conclusiones: el estudio concluyó que la visibilidad en TikTok no garantizó el éxito electoral. Aunque las redes sociales son herramientas poderosas de difusión, la movilización territorial y las estrategias tradicionales siguen siendo determinantes. Se enfatizó la necesidad de integrar las plataformas digitales dentro de una estrategia política más amplia.

Palabras clave: Democracia Digital; TikTok; Comportamiento Electoral; Campañas Políticas; Redes Sociales.

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INTRODUCTION

This study examines the influence of digital presence on TikTok on election results in Mexico. In this sense, it joins the growing literature on digital democracy and the vast field of knowledge on the relationship between media and electoral behavior. Specifically, in a political context where digital platforms such as TikTok have gained prominence for their ability to "influence electoral behavior" [1] this study seeks to understand whether digital popularity can translate into actual votes.

The discussion takes on a particular nuance in Mexico, where, according to [2] there are 90 million active internet users, making it one of the main channels through which Mexicans receive information. Specifically, TikTok is one of the social networks with the most users in the country, with more than 60 million people of voting age active on the platform.[3] As a result, it is considered relevant to analyze the presence on this platform of three presidential candidates: Jorge Álvarez Máynez from the Citizen's Movement, Claudia Sheinbaum from the Let's Keep Making History coalition (PT, PVEM, Morena), and Xóchitl Gálvez, from the Strength and Heart for Mexico coalition (PRI, PAN, PRD).

A comparative analysis of the three presidential candidates' activity on TikTok during the election campaign was conducted to carry out this study. Information was collected on the frequency of posts, the reach of videos (measured in views), the level of interaction (measured in comments, likes, and shares), and the content of the messages posted. This data was compared with the results of pre-election polls and the final election results to identify possible correlations between the candidates' presence on TikTok and their electoral performance.

Social media interactions have become a valuable resource for political campaigns, as they allow not only the measurement of candidates' popularity but also the creation of a sense of closeness and connection with voters. According to [4] election campaigns "are intense processes of communication and mobilization," in which parties and candidates seek public representation using traditional and, increasingly, digital tools.

DEVELOPMENT

Context of the campaigns in Mexico and the 2024 electoral process: Pluralism on social media

In Mexico, the electoral campaign is defined in the regulatory framework of the General Law on Electoral Institutions and Procedures in Article 242. It is considered part of the electoral process, along with the pre-campaign and inter-campaign periods. The interrelationship between these three phases and their proximity makes them easy to confuse, so it is necessary to distinguish between them.

According to [5] the pre-campaign is the initial stage of the electoral process. It aims at the internal selection of candidates by political parties, coalitions, or joint candidacies. At this stage, the rules are clear: candidates cannot participate simultaneously in the selection processes of more than one party unless there is a coalition agreement or joint candidacy. In addition, early campaigning, such as calling for votes, is not allowed to avoid any undue advantage.

On the other hand, [5] defines the inter-campaign phase as the period between the pre-campaign and the official start of the campaigns. During this period, political parties have the opportunity to resolve internal conflicts or disputes over the selection of their candidates, ensuring that registered candidates have the necessary support. In this phase, candidates and parties may only disseminate propaganda of an informative or ideological nature and invite citizens to participate in the elections or to join their parties. It is not permitted to endorse any candidate or call for votes to avoid early campaigning that could upset the balance of the contest.

Thirdly, election campaigns represent the focal point of this process, when, according to [5] political parties, coalitions, joint candidacies, and officially registered candidates seek to persuade the electorate to support them at the polls. Legally, campaigns begin after candidates' official registration and end a few days before election day. During this phase, activities such as public meetings, assemblies, marches, and disseminating messages through the media are permitted, with all aiming to win votes.

In the context of the recent elections in Mexico, the dynamics within political parties, especially in the PT-Morena-PVEM coalition, were marked by irregularities outside the law, where the pre-campaign and inter-campaign periods were used to disseminate messages about their candidates. Later, once the candidates were defined in the pre-campaign stage, Claudia Sheinbaum (PT-Morena-PVEM, "Let's Keep Making History"), Xóchitl Gálvez (PAN-PRI-PRD, "Strength and Heart for Mexico") and, initially, Samuel García (Citizens' Movement), efforts intensified to position their figures.

RESULTS

This study starts with polls conducted by various polling firms that closely followed the election campaign. Once the context of the elections has been outlined, this study will consider all opinion polls conducted since January 2024, the month in which the final candidates were announced.

Below are the results of three polling companies that tracked raw electoral preferences monthly. The results answer the question: Who would you vote for if the presidential elections were held today? or equivalent.

As can be seen, the pollsters present different results. To compare the percentages for each month between the three tables and evaluate the variation in electoral preference, the tables provided have been reviewed. Below is an analysis of the month-to-month variation, bearing in mind that in March, the Enkoll table does not present raw preference data because it focused on measuring the results of the debate, which is not relevant to this study.

Candidato	Enero	Febrero	Marzo (al cierre del mes)	Abril (al cierre del mes)	Mayo (al cierre del mes)
Claudia Sheinbaum	54%	56%	57%	58%	59%
Xóchitl Gálvez	20%	21%	20%	18%	18%
Jorge Álvarez Máynez	3%	5%	8%	13%	20%
No sabe	20%	18%	15%	11%	3%

Figure 1. Electoral preference polls [6,7,8,9,10]

Candidato	Enero	Febrero	Marzo	Abril	Mayo
Claudia Sheinbaum	54%	53%		54%	53%
Xóchitl Gálvez	27%	29%		30%	31%
Jorge Álvarez Máynez	3%	3%		7%	10%
No sabe	7%	15%		9%	6%
Ninguno	9%				

Figure 2. Enkoll electoral preference polls [11,12,13,14]

Candidato	Enero	Febrero	Marzo	Abril	Mayo
Claudia Sheinbaum	52.30	53.70	54.80	55.40	53.80
Xóchitl Gálvez	28.50	28.90	29.60	28.50	24.10
Jorge Álvarez Máynez	6.40	5.90	4.40	11.40	19.30
No sabe	9.20	11.50	11.20	4.70	2.80

Figure 3. Demoscopia electoral preference polls [15]

Claudia Sheinbaum shows a stable upward trend in Algoritmo polls through May, reaching her highest point at 59 %. In Enkoll, the variation is more minor, with relatively stable figures, while Demoscopia also shows an upward trend through April, with a slight drop in May. This suggests that, despite the debates, her campaign remained strong and did not suffer any drastic negative changes. Algoritmo tends to show greater optimism towards Claudia compared to other pollsters, which could be due to methodological differences.

Figure 4. Graph showing variation in preferences

Xóchitl Gálvez shows a significant decline in May, according to [15] falling from 28,50 % in April to 24,10 %. Algoritmo reflects a gradual decline since March, while Enkoll shows a growth trend, reaching a peak of 31 % in May. This behavior indicates that the impact of the debates may have been negative for Xóchitl, mainly reflected in the Demoscopia data. At the same time, other pollsters show less influence or even a positive perception in specific segments.

Jorge Álvarez Máynez shows a notable improvement, especially in Algoritmo, which registers an increase from 3 % in January to 20 % in May, suggesting a positive change in his electoral perception. [11,12,13,14,15] also reflect growth, although to a lesser extent. This increase after the debates suggests that his performance was perceived favorably by a significant portion of the electorate.

Overall, the debates had a significant impact on electoral preferences, with a notable decline for Xóchitl Gálvez and a rise for Jorge Álvarez Máynez. Pollsters differ in the magnitude of the changes, which could be attributed to methodological and sampling variations. Claudia Sheinbaum maintains a dominant and stable position, indicating a solid support base that was not significantly affected by recent events.

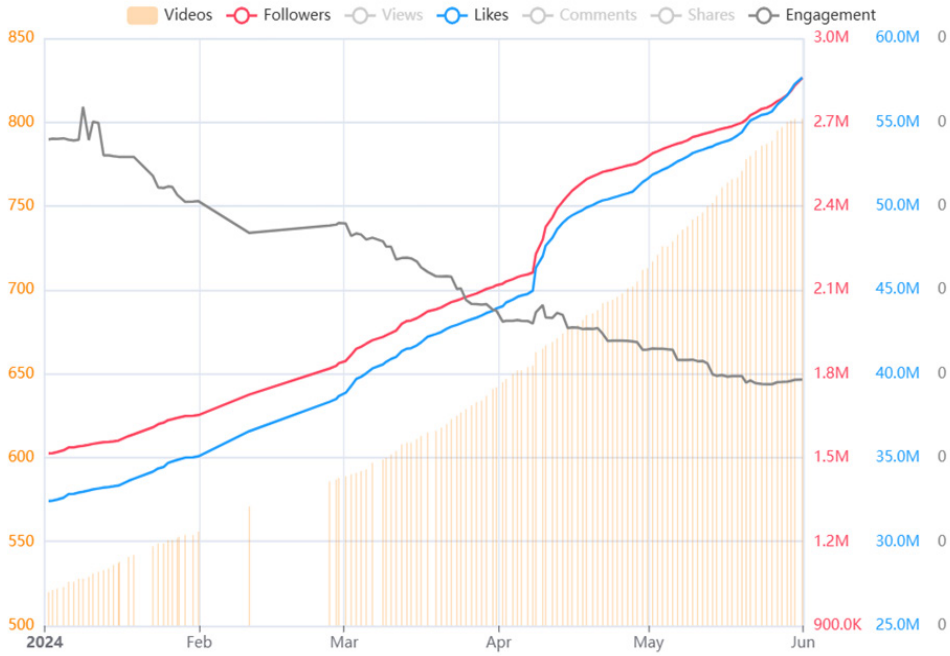

Figure 5. TikTok growth Claudia Sheinbaum (Exolyt, 2024)

Similarly, Claudia Sheinbaum experienced notable growth in her presence on TikTok during the period analyzed. The number of followers increased from 2,1 million to 2,7 million, representing a growth of 28,57 %, according to data retrieved from the digital metrics analysis platform Exolyt (2024). This increase in followers was accompanied by a significant increase in the number of likes, which rose from 1,8 million to 2,9 million, equivalent to a growth of 61,11 %. This growth reflects a higher level of interaction and popularity of the candidate's content on the platform.

In addition, the candidate increased his activity on TikTok, increasing the number of videos posted from 550 to 800, representing a 45,45 % increase in content production. On average, each video received around 3,625 likes, indicating a positive reception from the public. These data suggest that the candidate has managed to capture and maintain the attention of many users, consolidating his presence on this social network during the analysis period.

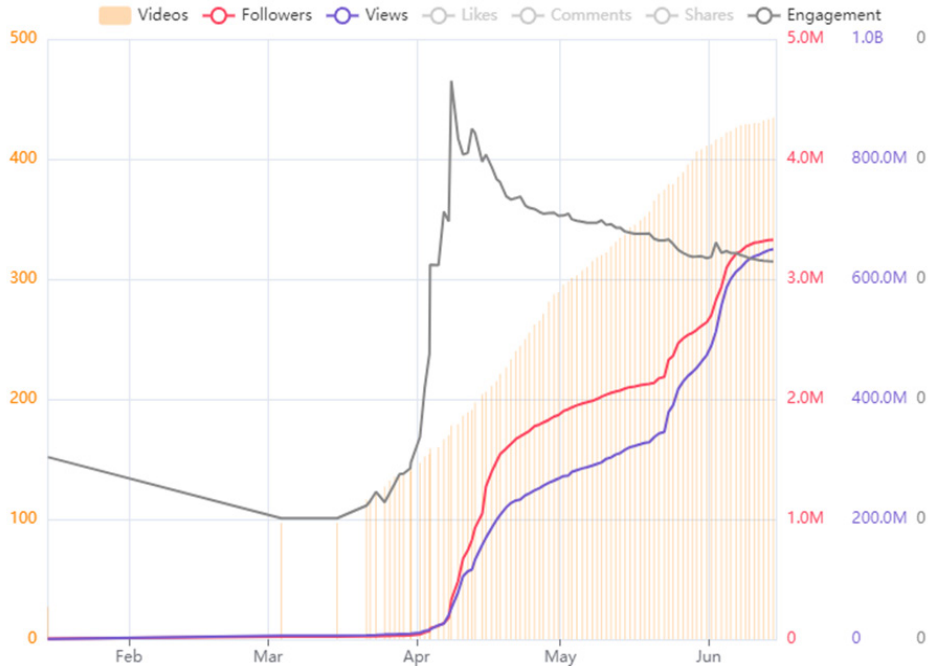

Figure 6. TikTok growth Jorge Álvares Máynez (Exolyt, 2024)

During the period analyzed, Jorge Álvarez Máynez experienced significant growth in his presence on TikTok. The number of followers increased from approximately 100,000 to 3,2 million, representing a growth of 3,100 %, according to the data shown in the image. This increase in followers was accompanied by a significant increase in the number of views, which rose from 0 to 600 million, indicating a considerable impact of the content on the platform and greater reach.

In addition, Álvarez Máynez increased his activity on TikTok, posting more than 400 videos throughout the period, especially starting in April, representing a notable increase in content production. This coincided with a spike in engagement, which peaked at around 4 million in April, indicating that the content resonated particularly strongly with the audience during this month.

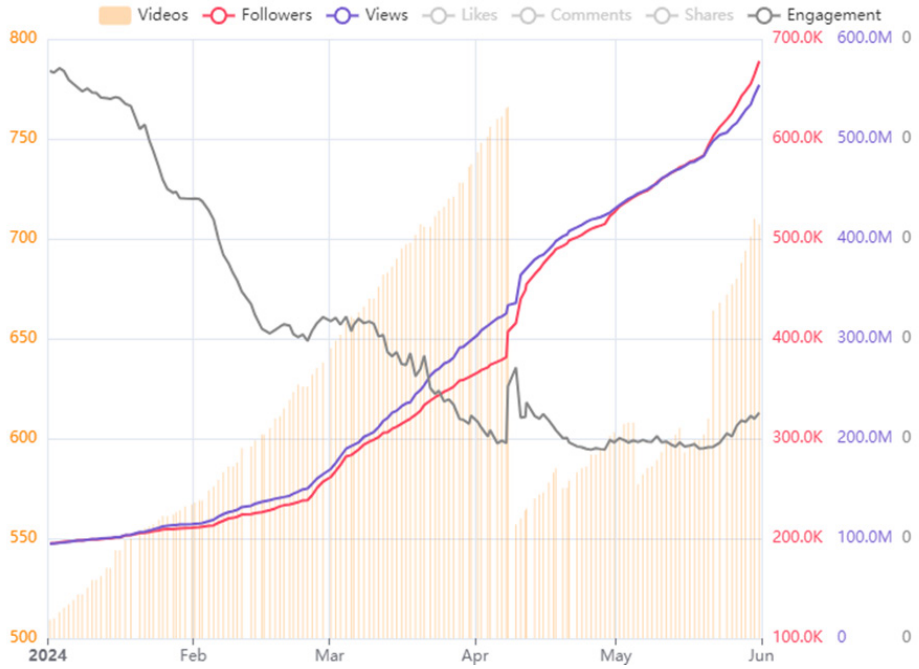

Figure 7. TikTok growth Jorge Álvares Máynez (Exolyt, 2024)

Xóchitl Gálvez, meanwhile, experienced remarkable growth in her presence on TikTok. According to the data retrieved, the

number of followers increased from approximately 200 000 to 700 000, representing a 250 % growth. This increase in followers was accompanied by a significant increase in video views, which rose from 100 million to over 500 million, equivalent to 400 % growth. This growth reflects higher visibility for the candidate's content on the platform, although not necessarily more significant interaction.

In addition, Gálvez increased her activity on TikTok, increasing the number of videos posted from 550 to more than 800, representing a 45,45 % increase in content production. However, despite the increase in followers and views, the level of engagement decreased from 750 000 interactions to around 300 000, reflecting a significant drop of 60 %. These data suggest that, although the candidate has managed to capture the attention of more users, active interaction with her content has decreased during the period analyzed.

When evaluating the trends and sentiment of comments and posts related to candidates on TikTok, patterns were observed that suggest that digital visibility generates a significant level of engagement with voters. However [16] caution that a political campaign is a multifaceted phenomenon that depends on more than just media visibility. According to these authors, a campaign "involves attracting votes for one's cause and repelling votes for one's opponents." In this sense, while TikTok can effectively generate a positive image of candidates, it must also be integrated with traditional strategies such as territorial mobilization and direct communication with the electorate in critical areas of the country.

The study also found that TikTok's impact on election results is not linear. Social media are powerful tools for increasing the visibility of candidates. However, a variety of factors can moderate their effect on the votes obtained [4] argues that the key to mobilizing the vote lies in "persuading citizens that change is necessary" and that candidates represent a "new form of public management." In other words, digital platforms, including TikTok, can effectively shape perceptions of novelty and change. However, the effectiveness of these messages also depends on the candidate's ability to present clear proposals that address the country's pressing problems.

One of the fundamental elements in this analysis is comparing data collected on TikTok with the results of polls conducted during the campaign and with the votes obtained in the elections, [1] points out that polls are "an essential tool for identifying the sentiments and interests of undecided voters," suggesting that constant monitoring of the electorate's mood is crucial for adjusting campaign strategies. This point is relevant in the context of TikTok, where immediacy and the ability of candidates to react quickly to viral trends can make a difference in public perception.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on a comparison between TikTok metrics, the evolution of polls, and the final vote, it can be concluded that contrary to the popular narrative that seeks to position social media as the ultimate space for disseminating political ideals, the reality is that its reach is quite limited when it comes to electoral issues, at least. In this sense, "electoral campaigns are not only processes of digital persuasion but also courtship and territorial mobilization," according to [4] underscoring the importance of a mixed approach combining digital and more traditional strategies. In this sense, social media should be seen as a complementary tool, not as the sole determining factor in electoral results.[16]

This conclusion is supported by the stark contrast between, for example, the 3,100 % growth in followers for candidate Jorge Álvarez Maynez, who even had more followers than Claudia Sheinbaum and Xochitl Gálvez, but despite this, came in third with around 10 % of the vote. Based on polls that gave him 3 % of the vote, he would have seen a 233 % increase in votes, while based on polls that gave him 6 %, the increase would have been only 66 %; both results are far removed from his explosion on social media.[17,18]

Furthermore, if one took the total number of final followers among the three candidates, adding Claudia Sheinbaum's 2,8 million, Jorge Álvarez Maynez's 3,2 million, and Xóchitl Gálvez's 700,000, expressed as percentages, it would be: Claudia Sheinbaum would have ended up with 41,79 % of the total followers, Álvarez Maynez with 47,76 %, and Xóchitl Gálvez with 10,45 %. These numbers do not reflect the election results for any of the three candidates, so when analyzing electoral behavior, social media metrics do not seem to be the best indicator to use to predict how voters will choose.[17,18,19]

In conclusion, this study seeks to provide a critical view of TikTok's role in modern political campaigns and invites reflection on the actual impact of social media in the electoral context. While it is undeniable that platforms such as TikTok allow candidates to reach a broader electorate and connect with them more directly, the analysis suggests that other factors, such as the ability of candidates to mobilize their bases through grassroots work, remain decisive for electoral success. Thus, as [1] points out, "communication on social media must be aligned with a broader political strategy that considers all aspects of electoral behavior." This comprehensive approach is key to understanding the role that TikTok may play in future elections.[20]

FINANCING

None.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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