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Media Strategies in the 2023 Sectional Elections of Otavalo, Ecuador

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Abstract

This study analyzes the impact of new media strategies on the 2023 sectional elections in Otavalo. To identify the tactics employed, the role of social networks like Facebook was evaluated in comparison to traditional communication methods in campaigns, aiming to determine whether these influenced citizens' decisions. The hypothesis proposed was that the use of social media, combined with photos, videos, and graphic text, contributed to strong positioning, especially with the participation of influential political figures, such as former President Rafael Correa. This impact generated a strong reaction among both core supporters and undecided voters, favoring the candidacy of Anabel Hermosa. A mixed methodology was used: interviews with the campaign team and analysis of Facebook posts through content and discourse matrices. The results highlight how the candidate managed to connect with a culturally diverse population. The strategy demonstrated that, with creativity in both digital and traditional communication, it is possible to genuinely connect with citizens, even on a limited budget. This study offers a new perspective on communication trends in local electoral campaigns with indigenous presence.

Keywords: Political Communication; Social Networks; Citizen Participation; Political Culture.

Introduction

This thesis primarily aims to analyze the impact of digital media communication strategies on the 2023 sectional elections in Otavalo, focusing on the use of the social network Facebook by Anabel Hermosa. Through this analysis, the study seeks to identify and examine the tactics employed, as well as the role Facebook played compared to traditional campaign methods. In this way, it offers a broader perspective on the future of political communication in local contexts, evaluating whether these strategies were key to Anabel Hermosa's success in her path to the mayoralty. Thus, the study intends to provide a new perspective on the communication methods politicians use to connect with the public in digital campaigns.

In the 2023 sectional elections in Otavalo, digital platforms played a fundamental role in disseminating political campaigns, with Facebook being the primary tool for transmitting communication messages. Despite being a small city, in October 2022, when official candidacies were announced, the electoral context was highly competitive, with eight candidates vying for the mayoralty and a notably dissatisfied population with the outgoing administration.

Among the most prominent candidates were Gabriela Jaramillo and Lourdes Altalima, both with prior political experience and positioned as favorites according to polls. Among the other six candidates, Efraín Amaguaña stood out, generating trends among the city's youth with his innovative ideas, and Nelson Velázquez, whose work in social aid, disseminated through social

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media, had a significant impact on the more conservative indigenous sector.

However, the victory went to Anabel Hermosa, an Otavaleña woman who, throughout her life, has held important roles both in sports and politics. She was a councilwoman in Quito during the administration of Augusto Barrera and became the second vice-mayor of the Metropolitan District of Quito. She also excelled in basketball, being selected for the Imbabura provincial team and the Ecuadorian national team.

Hermosa was part of the technical team for Quito's Master Mobility Plan, coordinated at the National Transit Agency, served as the district director of the Ministry of Economic and Social Inclusion (MIES), and directed the Executive Unit of Popular Commerce. Before entering politics, she worked on significant projects such as the Trolebús and the Ecovía in Quito.

In politics, after a successful career in technical and managerial positions, Anabel Hermosa was invited by Alianza País to run as a councilwoman in Quito, a position she not only accepted but won, eventually becoming vice-mayor. After some time away from politics, she received the proposal to run as a candidate for the mayoralty of Otavalo, her hometown. However, lacking prior political experience in Otavalo, she gained the reputation of being an "outsider," a perception that intensified as she represented the political party Revolución Ciudadana, founded by former president Rafael Correa, who, along with several of his supporters, has been involved in corruption cases.

In the Otavalo electoral contest, it was known that connecting with the surrounding communities was essential to win. This need became even more evident in light of a study by the Ecuadorian agency Céntrico Digital (2021), which investigated the impact of social media on the indigenous world. The study identified, through hashtags like #TikTokIndígena, #IndigenousTikTok, #IndígenasEcuador, #IndígenaOtavalo, and #IndígenaImbabura, the existence of indigenous youth producing educational, ancestral gastronomy, and humor content.

Each candidate implemented different strategies to capture digital votes through Facebook, using political messages, social activism, and viral trends to attract younger voters. Anabel Hermosa combined a youthful, nostalgic, and dialogic political message on Facebook, focusing on both indigenous communities and the young urban population of Otavalo. This phenomenon reflects an evolution in political dynamics, where conventional methods, such as rallies or physical propaganda, were complemented by innovative tactics based on social media use.

According to Elvis Ríos, Héver Páez, and Jairo Barbos (2020), communication is the creation and implementation of communicative strategies that can be developed in social and journalistic scenarios. The term "communication strategy" generates controversy, as in some cases it is interpreted as a set of communicative actions without a clear focus, while in others it is reduced to the production of graphic materials aimed at solving problems without a deep analysis of the communicative context.

Social networks have become fundamental platforms for political elections. Andrea Moreno, Elizabeth Castellero, and Álvaro Serna (2024) affirm that digital platforms offer a more accessible and direct space where political actors can interact with their audiences immediately, eliminating the need for traditional intermediaries. This facilitates a more fluid communication that, in addition to generating impact, contributes to the creation of an agenda for both politicians and public opinion.

Ángela Parra (2018) points out that communication media have evolved over the years, playing

a key role in political campaigns. The incorporation of technology in these processes has driven the creation of new communication strategies aimed at dynamizing and enhancing the possibilities of electoral success. In this sense, television, radio, and the internet have undergone this transformation, adapting to remain essential in disseminating content with political messages.

Daniela Vinueza (2018) states that the application of social networks in electoral campaigns has allowed society to have a voice to express their opinions on relevant economic and social issues, fostering the creation of virtual groups to debate these matters. However, this evolution has led to a decrease in in-person participation in debate spaces. This has prompted reflection on the use of technology and its impact on decision-making, especially regarding the positioning of leaders for public office.

Martha Mercado (2018) mentions that social networks have created a kind of democracy in political communication, where platforms like Facebook, X, TikTok, and YouTube facilitate direct connection between citizens and their candidates. This allows political parties to develop proposals based on their work plans and, in addition, generate reactions in voters through the candidate's figure, humanizing them in every action.

Dixon Zambrano (2023) states that modernization has created new instruments for generating communication and that, with the digitalization of platforms like Facebook, TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube, many have diminished the importance of traditional media, such as radio, newspapers, and television. This evolution has allowed for more direct communication with the electorate, as evidenced in the new communicative strategies implemented during Barack Obama's 2008 campaign. Communication has undergone a radical transformation, consolidating Facebook as the social network with the most interaction on political issues worldwide. For this reason, politicians use it to generate popularity and continuously interact with their supporters.

Karen Álvarez and Jessica Aymacaña (2022) argue that communication has undergone constant transformation over the years. In the journalistic field, both analog cameras and phones have been replaced by digital technologies capable of transmitting messages more quickly to various online communities. This has facilitated a more direct connection with the public, giving rise to new communicative concepts for political campaigns, such as the use of images, voice recordings, videos, and blogs, which are now fundamental tools for disseminating messages and connecting with voters.

Geovanna Ambi (2018) cites as an example what happened during the Arab Spring, where young activists used digital platforms to create virtual communities and raise their voices in protest. Similarly, in the United States, digital platforms were key in Barack Obama's campaign, largely displacing traditional media. Based on these examples, Latin America has sought to replicate this model as a key resource in modern political communication.

Robinson Tandazo, Evelyn Gallegos, and Vladimir Ávila (2021) mention that currently, the most prominent social networks are Facebook, Twitter, and TikTok. In Latin America, Facebook has played a fundamental role in implementing various social campaigns, thanks to its broad user base both locally and globally. The capabilities it offers for content creation and dissemination, especially in video format, facilitate its rapid circulation among users, allowing for high levels of visibility and communicative effectiveness.

David Camacho (2023) states that through the wide variety of digital platforms, candidates have

the opportunity to share their proposals, events, propaganda, activities, and interviews without necessarily resorting to traditional media, enabling more direct communication with the electorate. The use of social media has acquired key power within political campaigns, making it essential to analyze how these processes affect electoral outcomes.

Lina Roa (2019) affirms that by the end of 2017, the political campaigns of presidential aspirants began disseminating their proposals through new communication channels, such as digital platforms, which became a key tool for designing tactics in their messages and approaching voters more effectively and directly. This change allowed for exponential growth in youth participation, who actively interacted, whether by expressing opinions, sharing content, or directly engaging as supporters in campaigns.

Sara Toaquiza and Nina Aguiar (2022) mention that traditional campaign strategies, when complemented with social networks, not only increase candidate visibility but also strengthen connections with potential voters and improve the effectiveness of political communication. In this sense, Julio Mancero (2023) argues that the digital era has been growing, and politicians have taken advantage of its benefits to win elections. Although most young people do not actively participate in social networks during campaigns, they see this new communication space as more effective than traditional media for conveying political messages. However, there are also differing opinions and certain reservations about its effectiveness.

Danilo Mora (2024) states that with various ways to transmit a message, the use of digital platforms has gained great importance in electoral campaigns. If creative, relevant, and entertaining content is created, adapted to direct interaction with voters' concerns, it will have a significant impact on the dissemination of messages on social networks.

According to Hugo Tomala (2020), during the 2017 presidential elections, social networks like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram positioned themselves as fundamental tools for politics in Ecuador. Presidential candidates regularly shared their campaign activities through photos, videos, and news, while interacting with their followers, challenging traditional unidirectional political communication. This phenomenon also marked a significant change in the way politics is conducted in the country, with the emergence of information and communication technologies, especially social networks, as instruments of post-truth. Objective facts gave way to opinion formation and generation.

Carlos Llamuca (2019) points out that candidates in electoral campaigns share their work plans, combining them with relevant trends on social networks to generate interaction both in the physical and digital population. To this end, they employ various communication tools, such as advertisements, dissemination of messages on social networks, and the installation of billboards, among other resources.

Andrea Gonzales (2019) argues that during an electoral campaign, there are various ways to communicate a message, but social networks have emerged as a highly impactful tool, becoming a fundamental communication channel for a growing digital population. However, despite their increasing relevance, their use has not always been appropriate. External factors have caused errors that prevent candidates from reflecting the same results in the digital environment as in the real context of elections. In line with Gonzales (2019), Evelin Meneses and Alejandra Carpio (2022) affirm that social networks have driven political strategists to massively adopt ICTs. However, it has not yet been proven that they guarantee a candidate's victory in electoral

processes. Therefore, having all this information allows campaign analysts to design and create clear and precise messages, aiming to generate a high impact on voters without losing the seriousness of the political message, avoiding it becoming a spectacle of speculations.

For Verónica Altamirano, Pablo Ruiz, and Gabriela Baquerizo (2022), in the last decade, social networks have had a notable influence in the political sphere. Facebook, since its launch in 2004, has experienced remarkable growth, becoming the platform with the most users worldwide. Its success is attributed to its adaptability, constant evolution, and the viralization of content. Therefore, it is crucial to consider Facebook as a key tool in political communication and adapt to a model where the user is the protagonist and content occupies a central role.

Political discourse and narrative construction on social networks have evolved, becoming an essential part of media strategies in electoral campaigns. According to Van Dijk and Mendizábal (1999), political discourse is defined by its context and the political practices that shape it, being relevant not only who enunciates it but also the scenario, intentions, and political goals that frame it. Nina Aguiar (2023) argues that discursive relationships represent discourse as a practice, that is, as an active manifestation of power relations in various social contexts.

For Byron Castillo (2023), discourse in electoral campaigns is not limited to a well-structured presentation but must strategically integrate psychological, linguistic, and rhetorical elements. The balanced combination of these elements allows for the creation of direct messages that connect with the citizenry and generate the desired impact. In this process, it is crucial to recognize the power of words, which evoke emotions and create a deeper connection with the public.

Similarly, Karla Vinueza (2024) points out that discourse analysis is essential to understand the strategies, elements, and variables that seek to generate empathy and persuasion towards the candidate. The rise of digital platforms has transformed citizens' habits, not only in consuming information but also in actively interacting with it in their daily lives and political decisions. In response, political discourses have migrated to the digital realm, adapting to technological advancements and using web 2.0 to connect with young audiences. Additionally, the Covid-19 pandemic, which caused a prolonged confinement, facilitated a transition towards digital politics, creating digital communities among young people and adults. The 2021 campaign, mostly virtual, leveraged platforms, digital tools, and technology in events and live broadcasts to reach voters.

Methodology

With the advancement of technology, social networks have had a significant impact on society and the field of communication, and their evolution has been monumental. A clear example of this is Facebook, which became a fundamental tool for Anabel Hermosa's campaign and was also leveraged by the various candidates running for mayor of Otavalo. The primary objective was clear: to generate messages that would provoke reactions within Otavalo society, whether in support or to create controversy. In Otavalo, given the high percentage of Millennials using platforms such as Facebook, WhatsApp, and Instagram, content strategies were focused on these social networks. On the other hand, Generation Z, largely influenced by youth migration in the city and the limited interest in politics among the few resident young people, did not show a notable impact.

Based on this, the research adopted a mixed approach (qualitative and quantitative). To this end,

the interview technique was used, targeting the campaign manager and the social media coordinator of candidate Anabel Hermosa. The questions focused on the media strategies implemented for Facebook, exploring the objectives set and how this platform was utilized. Subsequently, a broader analysis was conducted using two methods: content analysis and discourse analysis.

Content analysis focused on studying the likes, comments, and shares of the posts with the highest interaction on Facebook during the campaign. Meanwhile, discourse analysis explored the structure and meaning of the textual posts made by the candidate that generated the most interaction among citizens on Facebook. Each message and idea was analyzed through denotative and connotative interpretation.

To carry out these analyses, different matrices were created. For content analysis, the most relevant posts were selected from a total of 30, based on the reactions of likes, comments, and shares by the digital population towards candidate Anabel Hermosa. The goal was to identify trends in each post in relation to the audience.

On the other hand, the matrix for discourse analysis focused on both the textual and visual content of the messages, prioritizing those posts that generated media impact on Facebook due to their proposals and that, directly or indirectly, mentioned former president Rafael Correa. The focus was on analyzing the connotative and denotative aspects associated with these posts.

In summary, the applied methodology allowed for a comprehensive approach to the media strategies employed by candidate Anabel Hermosa on Facebook during the 2023 Otavalo elections. The combination of content analysis and discourse analysis facilitated a clearer understanding of the disseminated messages, their structure and meaning, as well as the interactions of the Otavalo population. The designed matrices were key to identifying trends, evaluating each post, and exploring the narrative discourse in each of them.

Analysis of Results and Discussion

The strategies employed in Anabel Hermosa's campaign during the 2023 sectional elections in Otavalo reveal important insights into the use of social media and traditional methods in political communication. The campaign highlighted how diverse resources were utilized to position a candidate who was initially little-known and to connect with a diverse population, both in rural and urban areas.

The media strategies of Anabel Hermosa's campaign were based on a structured approach, encompassing both social and cultural dimensions. On the social front, activities such as medical brigades and direct attention to community issues not only helped address concrete needs but also built an image of commitment and closeness. These efforts were primarily communicated through Facebook, a key tool for reaching people and keeping them informed.

In the cultural dimension, Otavalo, being a diverse region rich in traditions, responded positively to the message of unity and inclusion promoted by the campaign. By highlighting intercultural values in Facebook posts and giving space to different ethnic groups, the campaign succeeded in building an authentic connection with the population. This cultural approach was not only strategic but also necessary, considering the unique characteristics of the region, especially given that former president Rafael Correa was consistently present in her political discourse toward the

indigenous Otavaleño culture.

Regarding the use of social media, Facebook was the primary platform for disseminating activities and engaging with the population. The campaign strategically leveraged this network to gain recognition, particularly in rural and urban communities. Anabel Hermosa was presented as a female leader, which had a significant impact, as many women identified with her and saw her as a different kind of representative in local politics. In response to attacks and rumors on social media, instead of engaging in confrontations, the team focused on reinforcing her image through posts and biographical videos with positive messages that showcased her human and professional side.

Another notable aspect was the segmentation of the strategy. In rural communities, the combination of community radios and Facebook allowed for greater reach among millennials, without neglecting direct communication. In urban areas, TikTok was used to target younger audiences, enabling the campaign to adapt its message according to the characteristics of each sector, making it more effective. Additionally, the historical support of the *Revolución Ciudadana* party in both rural and urban sectors of Otavalo was also a key tool.

Finally, the combination of traditional and digital methods played a crucial role. Community meetings and digital messages in Kichwa were fundamental in rural areas, while live broadcasts, photos, and videos were key for urban audiences. Despite limited resources, the campaign demonstrated that, with creativity and a strategic approach, it is possible to establish a solid and genuine connection with the population to position a candidate. These results show that success does not depend on budget but on the ability to respond to the electorate's needs through appropriate strategies.

In the first content analysis matrix, 13 posts stood out for the level of interaction they generated in terms of likes, comments, and shares on Facebook. It was observed that the use of former president Rafael Correa's image had a significant impact, particularly in posts encouraging voters to support Anabel Hermosa and those inviting them to live broadcasts. This demonstrates how Correa's image generated visibility and virality among both his supporters and detractors, becoming a tool for persuasion and positioning within Anabel Hermosa's media strategies. Leveraging his influence on Facebook and his emotional connection with voters in both urban and rural areas of Otavalo, this strategy amplified her message.

Additionally, the campaign capitalized on Anabel Hermosa's strong performance in the January 15, 2023 debate, where her participation stood out due to her impactful messages and key phrases. These were strategically used in Facebook posts to generate virality among the audience. These excerpts generated a high level of interaction, both on her main page and on other pages that shared her message, solidifying her leadership image and differentiating her from her opponents. Thus, both the use of Correa's image and the key moments from the debate contributed to strengthening her campaign's media strategies and amplifying her message on social media.

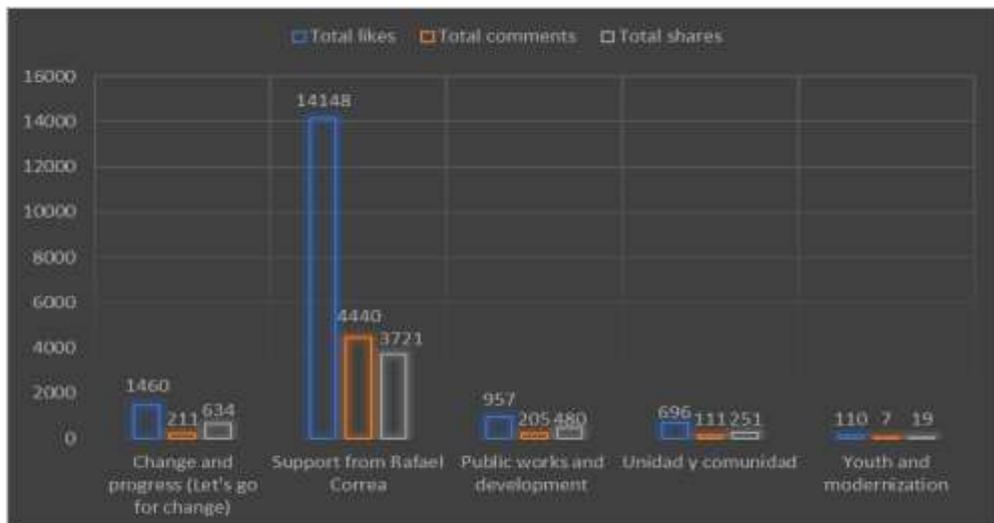
This matrix provides a detailed analysis of the performance of various posts, considering their themes, interactions, and overall impact. Posts related to support for Rafael Correa showed the highest impact, while those focusing on unity and community, though important, received a more subdued response. The analysis also indicates that content about progress and public works garnered significant reception, though not comparable to the support for Correa. Below is a description of the analysis in the first matrix.

Topic	Posts	Total, Likes	Total, Comments	Total, Shares	Overall Impact
Change and Progress ("Let's Go for Change")	2,4,8,10,12	1,460	211	634	High
Support from Rafael Correa	1,7,12	14,148	4,440	3,721	Very High
Public Works and Development	3,6,9,11	957	205	480	Medium
Unity and Community	4,6,11	696	111	251	Low
Youth and Modernization	13	110	7	19	Very Low

Matrix 1: Content analysis and interaction in Anabel Hermosa's electoral campaign

Source: Own elaboration

In the second matrix, it was observed how the greatest impact of each publication was distributed according to its theme. It was evident that the use of former President Rafael Correa's figure, both as an image and in discourse, generated a greater impact on Facebook posts. His presence in the messages amplified the campaign's resonance, as his figure continues to be a key reference for many voters, which contributed to increasing the interaction and visibility of the posts.



Matrix 2: Impact of Anabel Hermosa's campaign

Source: Own elaboration

In the discourse analysis, key themes such as change and progress were identified, represented in the slogan "Let's go for change," the endorsement of former President Rafael Correa, public

works, urban development, unity, and modernization. Among the 13 selected posts, 5 stood out for their high reach due to the participation of former President Correa in videos and various photos, which generated greater prominence than that of Mayor Anabel Hermosa. This resulted in a significant impact, demonstrating that Correa's political figure continues to carry weight among both his supporters and detractors, as his presence evokes emotions and memories of his political past.

Similarly, Anabel Hermosa's performance in the debate held on Facebook left a positive impression among undecided voters. Each message she shared during the debate invoked nostalgia, highlighting the achievements of Alianza País, now transformed into Revolución Ciudadana, and presenting them as projects applicable to the city of Otavalo. These statements generated attacks from other candidates, but Hermosa's ability to avoid confrontations and focus on concrete proposals for the city reflected political maturity, allowing her to connect more directly with undecided voters. To validate these results, the following matrices were developed.

Image	Denotative	Connotative
	<p>The post includes a video in which former President Rafael Correa expresses his support for Anabel Hermosa, his party's candidate for the mayoralty of Otavalo. In the message, Correa promises a radical transformation of the city, leaving behind old politics and emphasizing a focus on well-being rooted in nostalgia for his past administration.</p>	<p>The constant presence of the former president in the posts, particularly in this video, overshadows that of the candidate herself, reflecting an attempt to evoke nostalgia for the legacy of the Citizens' Revolution in Otavalo and its communities. By presenting Anabel as his trusted candidate, her image as a strong political figure within the party and the city is reinforced. Both the video and the message convey a sense of hope and transformation for Otavalo, centered on renewing local politics, promoting progress, and improving quality of life.</p>
	<p>This post invites citizens and supporters of Otavalo to a live interview with Anabel Hermosa, hosted by former President Rafael Correa via Facebook. The event, titled "A Live with Correa," will feature the mayoral candidate, who will share her campaign experience and the achievements made during Correa's administration. In the image, Correa and Hermosa are shown</p>	<p>The message conveys political endorsement and trust, presenting Anabel Hermosa as the heir to the achievements of the Citizens' Revolution, backed by the polarizing figure of Rafael Correa. The embrace between the two and the backdrop of Otavalo symbolize an alliance for progress. The phrase "don't</p>

	<p>embracing, accompanied by emoticons and with the city in the background, aiming to connect with Otavalo's more conservative audience.</p>	<p>miss it" creates a sense of urgency, while the "live" format seeks to engage a younger audience, focusing on their expectations of stability and quality of life.</p>
	<p>The video features Anabel Hermosa detailing her plans for Otavalo, which include the construction of a bus terminal, a cultural interpretation center, a sports center, the expansion of the Plaza de los Ponchos, and the creation of a commerce hub. Additionally, she mentions the recovery of tourist attractions and public spaces, emphasizing that her team has the necessary experience from previous administrations to carry out these projects.</p>	<p>The video highlights Anabel Hermosa's experience, generating confidence in her ability to execute projects that represent progress and economic development. Phrases like "we know how to do it" reinforce her image as a leader with a proven track record, focused on improving citizens' quality of life and projecting Otavalo as a more modern and prosperous city.</p>

Matrix 3: Analysis of the discourse in Anabel Hermosa's campaign messages

Source: Own elaboration

The results show that Anabel Hermosa's campaign achieved a solid balance between traditional and digital communication, particularly through Facebook. This combination allowed the campaign to overcome limited resources and effectively position a relatively unknown candidate in Otavalo's political landscape. The endorsement of former President Rafael Correa was key in crafting the campaign's message, generating nostalgia and trust among the citizens of Otavalo. This persuasion tactic helped create an emotional connection with both supporters and undecided voters.

Additionally, the segmentation of the media strategy on Facebook enabled the adaptation of messages according to the characteristics of each sector. In rural communities, direct communication was prioritized, complemented by community radio broadcasts on Facebook, while in urban areas, engaging posts, videos, and photos were utilized. Anabel Hermosa's performance in the electoral debate on Facebook also played a significant role, as her clear and impactful messages generated viral snippets, positioning her as a leader committed to Otavalo's progress.

Conclusions

Media strategies played a decisive role in the 2023 sectional elections in Otavalo for the Revolución Ciudadana candidate, Anabel Hermosa. The analysis revealed that, through an effective combination of digital resources, cultural, nostalgic, and social messages, and the

presence of political figures like Rafael Correa—all tailored to the local context of Otavalo—the campaign overcame initial challenges and positioned Anabel as a leader close to Otavalo's voters.

The campaign benefited from the integration of traditional and digital methods. Community activities and messages of unity among the city's different ethnic groups, disseminated through Facebook, generated trust in rural areas, while modern and segmented communication on social media connected with the young urban audience. Each piece of content, whether written, photographic, or video-based, impacted emotions and narratives of change, appealing both to nostalgia for the past achievements of the Citizens' Revolution and the desire for political change in the city.

The content and discourse analysis demonstrated that posts related to Rafael Correa's support for the candidate had a greater impact, becoming a fundamental resource for the campaign's virality. This reinforced the party's core vote and created an image of change and nostalgia among undecided voters. The former president's figure stood out as a symbol of legitimacy and continuity, and Anabel's team effectively harnessed this influence in a politically polarized city.

Furthermore, the construction of a narrative centered on the candidate's experience in technical roles and her commitment to change strengthened her image as a viable and fresh option, in contrast to the other candidates who were already known in Otavalo but carried political fatigue.

The study reflects how the adaptation of media strategies on platforms like Facebook can redefine electoral success, even in communities where platforms like TikTok hold little relevance. Facebook emerged as a key tool for viralizing proposals, emotionally connecting with the electorate, and reaching communities where its use predominates over other social networks.

This work not only validates the achievement of the proposed objectives but also provides a foundation for future research on the impact of digital communication on social media in local political contexts, such as the case of Otavalo.

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