

## Use and Utilisation of Instagram as a Method of Institutional Communication, Transparency and Citizen Participation: The Case of Alicante City Council

Uso y utilización de Instagram como método de comunicación institucional, transparencia y participación ciudadana: el caso del Ayuntamiento de Alicante

Manuel Octavio Del Campo Villares<sup>1,a</sup>, Francisco-Jesús Ferreiro-Seoane<sup>2,b</sup>, Miguel Antonio Molina Picazo<sup>3,c</sup>, Eladio Jardón-Ferreiro<sup>4,d</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Universidad de A Coruña, España

<sup>2</sup> Universidad de Santiago de Compostela, España

<sup>3</sup> Instituto Mediterráneo Estudios de Protocolo, España

<sup>4</sup> Instituto Internacional de Marketing y Comunicación, España

✉ [amoctadcv@udc.es](mailto:amoctadcv@udc.es)

✉ [bfranciscojesus.ferreiro@usc.es](mailto:bfranciscojesus.ferreiro@usc.es)

✉ [cmiguel.molina@protocoloimep.com](mailto:cmiguel.molina@protocoloimep.com)

✉ [dinfo@institutoimc.com](mailto:dinfo@institutoimc.com)

### Abstract

The digital era has transformed political and institutional communication and the use of social networks in this process. A revolution that has been accelerated due to the COVID-19 pandemic is transforming communication between local institutions and citizenship towards a bi-directionality where transparency, participation and channeling of citizen's demands become important. In this context, it's fundamental to study and understand which communicative methods and tools in the social networks and which kind of strategies, stories, and narratives the institutions use. For this purpose, this study analyzes the profiles of the social network Instagram of Alicante City Council and its mayor through multimedia content analysis of publications in the first half of 2021. In addition, it analyzes the Instagram elements used by accounts, communication strategies, storytelling and their media impact. Through this case study it can be observed the communicative errors of local institutions in the use of social networks since they are still in a process of adaptation, and the discursive and strategic differences between institutional social networks and those of political representatives.

**Keywords:** political communication; institution council; social networks; Instagram.

## 1. Introduction

Institutional and political communication has always been subject to the communicative and social context, adapting to the information tools and instruments of the moment. However, in recent years digitalisation and the emergence of social networks have radically transformed the communication paradigm, establishing a new information model to which institutional communication has had to adapt and, in fact, continues to do so.

In fact, nowadays the role of digitalisation is essential for digital communication and at this point it can be said that all media communications are digital (Linares Pérez, 2022). Social networks have transformed our information and communication mechanisms. Similarly, this inclusion of social networks has also occurred at the institutional level and its use is considered convenient for any political communication plan, not only because of their consolidated use, but also because a large part of the population is only informed through them (Gámir Ríos, et al., 2022).

These new communication formulas have also revolutionised the way small institutions such as town councils or the municipal public officials that make them up have communicated. They are thus obliged to adapt to these new tools and ways of communicating with their citizens, channeling their demands, and even exercising mechanisms of open government and transparency. However, even though by 2020 most municipalities had already made the leap to the most popular social networks, it seems that they have not yet managed to exploit them to their full potential (Cervi, et al., 2022).

In this context, the decline of Facebook, the generalisation of Twitter and the progressive popularisation of Instagram for political communication (Gámir Ríos, et al., 2022) have positioned Instagram as the social network with the greatest capacity for political and institutional impact. The IAB Spain Annual Study 2021 places Instagram in second place in terms of preference with respect to other social networks and ahead of Facebook in terms of use, with an average of 1 hour and 28 minutes of daily connection (Linares Pérez, 2022).

Consequently, this study analyses the functioning of Instagram as a tool for political and institutional communication in municipal politics and local institutions to analyse and study the level of adaptation of these types of institutions to new forms of communication and the strategies and communicative mechanisms used by these institutions and their representatives. Specifically, the Instagram profiles of Alicante City Council and its mayor will be studied to observe the type of content used and the communicative strategies, subsequently measuring the media impact and effectiveness of this institutional communication. The analysis focuses on the case study of Alicante City Council and the social network that has become most relevant in recent years, Instagram. It has been and is used by many institutions to directly inform citizens of their institutional action and to establish communicative relations with their constituents.

The justification for the choice of topic is based in the exponential relevance that digital communication is gaining in institutional communication and direct relations with citizens. Especially in smaller institutions that are closer to citizens, where these tools play an increasingly relevant role in informing citizens, exercising transparency, participation and channeling people's demands. This reality has become even more relevant with the Covid-19 crisis, where these institutions have been forced to make an urgent and rapid adaptation, which in many cases had not taken place before, to be able to respond to the demands and needs of citizens telematically. As a result, the digitalisation of these administrations and the use of social networks to interact with citizens have been promoted, although these processes are not always carried out correctly.

In addition, it should be noted that the study analyses the theories on the stories and strategies of political communication and focuses the study on its own classification that helps to move towards an adaptation of political communication to the current reality. In this way, it groups communicative methods and makes a great research contribution to the political communication of local authorities in social networks.

## 2. Theoretical framework

The content published on the social networks of public institutions and their representatives does not only respond to the fashions or content formats promoted by each social network, but also responds to the strategies, stories and methods of political and institutional communication. This is a very relevant part of political communication that has been studied for decades, but which today requires an adaptation of the theory developed to the new communication paradigm of the current digital era.

These obsolete theoretical frameworks must be used and updated to the new digital communicative forms and the impact they have on aspects such as transparency, the channeling of citizen demands, institutional information processes and citizen participation must be studied. It is in this sense that this article was developed, which then analyses and deploys the basic theoretical framework necessary to address this communicative phenomenon, in particular, institutional communication on Instagram through the case study of Alicante City Council.

### 2.1. Institutional Communication

The field of study of institutional and political communication was born only a few decades ago. However, its practical and academic relevance has been such that it has been defined by countless authors, studies and theories. But if we analyse the academic beginnings of this discipline, we must go back to Dan Nimmo, who is the promoter behind the study of this subject. In his works, the author and his colleague David Swanson "Political communication theory and research: an overview" (1977), "Handbook of Political Communication" (1981) and "New Directions in Political Communication" (1992), have been contextualised and defined the most basic theoretical framework of institutional and political communication. Broadly speaking, they posed institutional communication as a complex and interdisciplinary field of analysis where a diversity of interpretations and theorisations converge in the same fragmented and diverse field (Swanson & Nimmo, 1992). Institutional communication is defined as a process of intervention through which institutions attempt to establish relationships and influences on citizens (Nimmo & Sanders, 1981). That is, the impact of political communication on people through an established structure and through various effects that can be cognitive, affective and behavioural (Nimmo, 1977).

Furthermore, institutional communication is also grounded in and interrelated with corporate communication and the theory developed on this basis. In this sense, Cornelissen (2008) understands institutional communication management as the framework for effectively coordinating both internal and external communication to establish and maintain a good reputation with the different audiences on which the organisation depends. Likewise, for Capriotti (1999) understands it as "the mental structure of the organisation formed by the public as a result of the processing of all the information related to the organisation". Therefore, he defines its main objective as the creation and maintenance of a positive image in the eyes of public opinion. An opinion that people form of institutions based on what they

observe or perceive of them through the media, social networks or any other means. A personal image of the institution, which, if not covered or offered through the organisation's own institutional communication, will be developed by other intermediaries. It is therefore at the mercy of their interests and objectives, and probably against those of the institution.

Following these approaches, the perspective and interdisciplinarity of this subject have been refined into a fundamental part of political action as a mechanism and tool for citizens' legitimacy and trust in the institutions that represent them. In this way, public communication becomes a decision-making process for action in public affairs that has a purpose that affects the organisation of human groups in their public life and that is supported by power (Crick, 2001) and that is, therefore, a necessity for promoting trust between institutions and citizens (Graver, 2003). It also includes new aspects, elements, strategies and limits that shape and delimit institutional communication under an increasingly specific and determined scope.

María José Canel defined "political or government communication as the activity of certain people and institutions (politicians, communicators, journalists and citizens) in which, as a result of interaction, there is an exchange of messages with which political decisions are made and applied in the community" (Canel, 1999). Furthermore, she specified its conceptualisation as strategy-based decision-making and placed key elements in this activity, such as the communicative time perspective, which was influenced by limits such as the duration of the mandate or the segmentation of the public.

In addition, the new institutional communication has had to adapt to the new communicative framework of the digital era. It has meant a revolution in the ways of communicating that has not only changed the methods and mechanisms of communication but has also changed the concept itself. Thus, moving towards two-way communication that goes beyond mere communication towards citizens to convert communication into a bidirectional process in which aspects such as citizen participation, the channeling of demands, information on problems or dialogue are integrated (Canel, 2018). A concept that moves towards communication as an active part of transparency, accountability, governance or innovation of institutions and their political representatives.

A conceptualisation and understanding of institutional communication that has become even more important with the Covid-19 crisis that has forced public institutions and especially local ones to adapt to these new forms of communication and the establishment of a bidirectional and continuous communication. "This is so because current political and campaign communication is inserted in a scenario that mutates and transforms at great speed, driven by the constant change of the tools and instruments provided by new communication technologies" (Martínez, 2020). Furthermore, this context emphasises that "interaction with the media and social networks has become an essential variant for effective crisis management" (Villalobos Paz, 2021). This context has shown the necessary adaptation and use of social networks as a fundamental and essential tool for local public administrations, their institutions and representatives.

## 2.2. The political narrative and its communicative strategies

Another fundamental issue is to understand the strategies and objectives of the political narratives that make up institutional communication and the purpose for which each of its types is used. The basis of the strategy of trying to persuade citizens according to certain political interests is based on narrating stories to obtain greater visibility and leadership in accordance with the facts, which if properly communicated can generate values of identity, sensitivity, closeness, mobilisation, hope or change, among others (Ruiz, 2013). In other

words, the discourse approach, also known as "storytelling", is fundamental to establish these relations of closeness and representativeness between institutions and citizens.

In this sense, political storytelling has psychological functions on the viewer that are based on three functions (D'Adamo and García, 2016). The first of which is that it facilitates citizens to integrate into a prosperous society and to obtain the benefits of a positive social identity. The second is that they provide citizens with certain convictions that help politicians to divert attention from certain issues, reframing the reality of political activity in terms of their interests. Thirdly, the narrative helps to elaborate and establish cognitive heuristics which facilitate citizens' understanding of the message in ambiguous situations. Currently, Mergel and Bretschneider (2013) establish three types of communicative strategies that are carried out by public institutions through social networks, which are referred to by Grande (2013) as Push, Pull and Networking strategies.

Firstly, the push strategy is based on a unidirectional communicative network in which social networks are used as an extension of the web portals of the institutions without varying or extending the information published on these portals, "no additional resources are invested to design content specifically for social networks" (Grande, 2013).

Secondly, the pull strategy establishes a model in which there is interaction between institutions and citizens through the different functions that social networks provide (comments, messages or others). Thus encouraging citizen interaction from a more conversational and direct point of view, offering citizens the possibility of being heard. Thus presenting an opportunity to interact with audiences and for the government to provide an innovative channel of representation, dissemination of information and education that a traditional and static website cannot provide (Mergel y Bretschneider, 2013).

Third, the networking strategy that focuses on the development of such conversations, their promotion and the creation of networks in which citizens and other agents of society generate content and share it with other users. This strategy involves the promotion of citizen interaction through a network strategy that increases the influence of institutions through a greater role in social networks by the individuals and organizations with which it relates (Grande, 2013).

### 2.3. Instagram in Institutional Communication

Instagram was born in early October 2010, exclusively for Apple devices (Linares Pérez, 2022) with a communicative model based on the power of denotation of photographs and the emergence of a type of conversation based on portraits, selfies and videos (Quevedo-Redondo y Portalés-Oliva, 2017).

However, Local public administration does not take advantage of the potential offered by social networks (Cervi, et al., 2022). So, the development of institutional communication by political representatives and institutions is still limited and requires a major modernization of communication mechanisms and strategies on Instagram.

In addition, the successful evolution of Instagram has been able to include most of the temporary trends in digital networks over the years. Being thus able to consolidate as the most used social network, especially among youth. Regarding its evolution, it is observed since 2011, new options have appeared, such as the possibility of including hashtags, tagging other users, stories, a new way of making publications, the ability to make ads and advertising in the application, Instagram TV in 2018 and in 2020 it will be called Reels (Linares Pérez, 2022).

Studies on the political use of this platform in Spain began with the Local Elections of 2015 (Quevedo-Redondo y Portalés-Oliva, 2017), but knowledge of the use of local authorities and their representatives is still very limited. As an example of studies on the use of Instagram in similar local entities is the study by Cristina Linares Pérez (2022) on communication through Instagram in the City Council of Sabadell or the article by José Gamir-Ríos, Lorena Cano-Orón, Vicente Fenoll and María Iranzo-Cabrera (2022) about the institutional communication of the City Councils of Barcelona, Sabadell and Manresa on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter. However, this analysis beyond the simple study of the content and uses of Instagram relates to a theoretical approach with the types of political strategies and stories that are narrated.

All this coupled with the direct impact that this social network has had on the how to communicate in politics, through more human and personal methods. Becoming a space in which more traditional institutional and political communication are intermingled with more informal and everyday content. Consequently, the show invades a territory previously reserved for information, turning details about the privacy and personality of the rulers into objects of the claims of knowledge that feed the celebrities (Quevedo-Redondo y Portalés-Oliva, 2017).

## 2.4. Types of stories

As for the type of stories and their purpose the author Juan David Cárdenas Ruiz encompassed the different types of stories and their usefulness for political communication by compiling the theories of the authors D'Adamo y García (2016), Denning (2008) and Polletta (2008) in his article entitled "Storytelling and political marketing: humanity and emotions". The following types of narratives and stories are collected.

About the types of stories theorized by Orlando D'Adamo and Virginia García we find the stories of challenge, the stories of connection and the creative stories. The first ones of challenge pose the triumph of will over adversity and are used to generate emotions, the challenges of connection state the similarity or empathy with other people in difficulties and convey solidarity towards these people and, finally, the creative narratives address innovation and the generation of change from a reframing of reality and are used to mobilise towards change (Ruiz, 2013).

About the types of stories of Stephen Denning are collected five types of stories: those of springboard, those that communicate "who you are", those that communicate the "institutional brand", those that transmit knowledge and those that guide towards the future. Springboard stories are real narratives of past events that inspire actions into the future and are perfect for mobilizing positive attitudes. Stories that communicate "who you are" narrate how the leader has faced adversities in the past and are able to generate trust and identification. The stories that communicate the "institutional brand" relate the brand that the candidate represents through organizational achievements and are used to convey identification and institutional trust. Stories that convey knowledge detail existing problems and how to solve them, thus generating credibility. Finally, the stories that guide the future try to stage the future, especially in the face of crises, being useful to give hope in the citizenry (Ruiz, 2013).

Thirdly, on the stories raised by Francesc Polletta distinguish the stories of personal struggles that positively show the future and a neutral perspective of management, especially in the face of crises and generate understanding and identification. As well as the stories of

victimization that try to make real and understandable the consequences of government actions generating awareness and mobilization (Ruiz, 2013).

Consequently, in this study three types of stories are proposed that group and unite the theories mentioned above in a simple, clarifying classification based on the communicative mechanism of reference that characterize the type of story or political narrative. It is thus the first major contribution of this academic study and a commitment to unify criteria and categories to better understand political and institutional communication.

To this aim, three categories are defined that are reflected in Table 1 in which, based on the aforementioned literature, the three types of stories or political stories proposed by this study in a manner related to the types of Juan David Cárdenas Ruiz (2013) and their corresponding definitions are exposed and defined. The first of these is the propositional stories whose stories focus on the future, on the paths to reach it and the proposals that will reach a situation of improved change, base the legitimacy of the message on ideas and proposals to structure a project that improves reality. The second so-called empathizers focus on establishing a discursive framework in which the manager is close to the problems of the citizenry, even including as an individual suffering from these problems, supporting political legitimacy in the representation of people’s interests and demands. Third, linking stories that focus on creating a brand legitimacy by which the management of the past, the brand or the leader are more than able to solve the problems of the citizenry, narrating situations and contexts in which the brand has given adequate answers. The latter in turn tries to create a link, a closeness and a sympathy of citizens with the brand and feel represented by it.

**Table 1. Proposal of types of stories used in political communication and their purposes.**

Types of Stories/Narrative	Types of Ruiz (2013)	Characteristics	Utility
Propositional Stories	Story Challenge	They tell the ways and proposals to reach a new reality better than the current one, to produce a change or to solve the existing problems. In times of crisis, they offer a better future and the victory of the will to adversity.	Hope Credibility
	Creative Narrative		
	Stories that convey knowledge		
	Stories that lead to the future		
Stories Empathizing	Story connection	They relate a closeness and a proximity to citizenship and its problems. They tell the testimonies of people affected, of past situations, even of the manager. It involves closeness, solidarity and concern for people’s problems.	Awareness-raising Mobilizing Solidarity
	Trampoline stories		
	Victimization stories		
Stories Linking	Stories that communicate "who you are"	Institutional Accounts of past management related to what you represent and how you represent it. They narrate the brand and its history, the organizational achievements, of past efforts of the leader or organization and focus on the consequences of government actions.	Identification Understanding Confidence
	Stories that communicate the "brand"		
	Stories of personal struggles		

Source: Authors' elaboration.

In this sense, it should be mentioned that each of the three types of stories relate to each of the theoretical types of political representation established by Hanna Pitkin in her work "The concept of representation". It should be noted that the types of representation have been excepted from the concept of formal representation that is based on institutional and legal legitimacy based on authorization that usually prevails only in the context of constitutional or institutional crises in which the debate political and institutional can be framed within the legitimacy of political leaders, in normal democratic contexts such stories do not usually play into political communication. After that, we find that propositional stories respond to substantive representation insofar as they focus the message on policies, the representation of the political preferences of the citizenry and the search for the improvement of the future interest of society. Empathetic stories relate to Pitkin's descriptive representation based on a similarity between the representative and the represented, objective that try to fulfill these stories by seeking a closeness and link between both by showing the politician or the institution as an equal to people who suffer the same problems and, therefore, represents their demands. Finally, linking stories are identified with symbolic representation by focusing on the brand, the brand's credibility and its ability to manage in the past (Pitkin, 1967).

### 3. Methodology

In the 21st century, social networks are playing an important role in the development of institutional communication at all levels of government. In this sense, it is necessary to analyze and understand the use of social networks by smaller administrations, such as municipal ones. Specifically, the social network Instagram has become a source of information and communication very popular among young people in Spain.

In this sense, through the case study of social networks of the City Council of Alicante we will be able to analyze the use that the public administration is carrying out of digital communication networks. Specifically, an own study will be carried out based on a specific analysis of the content on the social network Instagram account of the City Council of Alicante and its mayor. This will determine the use of Instagram carried out by the consistory with institutional character and the highest political representative of the institution, its mayor. In both cases, the use being made of the networks, the type of content they share, the types of stories, their periodicity and their impact on the exercise of political and institutional communication will be identified, as well as the transparency that this information mechanism entails towards the citizenship of the city.

All this, with the aim of determining which communication strategies and information design are most effective in the current communication paradigm in which these social networks are used to achieve a rapprochement of public institutions with citizens. In addition, in this way it will be possible to determine whether it is taking advantage of the potential that Instagram offers for the promotion of citizen participation and open government in the case of Alicante.

To this aim, the following research questions were raised: What formats and content are used in the Instagram profiles of the City Council of Alicante and its mayor? What about the communicative impact and effectiveness of each of them? What are the stories, narrative and communication strategies most used and appropriate to municipal institutional communication?

As for the methodology used for the empirical collection of data, a communicative analysis of multimedia content of Instagram profiles has been carried out in which the different aspects that compose the content of both accounts have been studied.



The analysis of Instagram accounts has been carried out in all publications made during the first half of 2021. Through a daily analysis of the account of the City Council of Alicante and the account of its mayor between the months of January and June have been operationalized the amount of content published for each variable, as well as the type of content or its characteristics depending on the variable. In short, the methodology of obtaining the data has been based on a manual collection of the publications made in both accounts each day.

The study variables are the different elements that are part of the audiovisual content of the social network Instagram as the type of format, the title of the photo, the date of publication, the type of content published, the use of hashtags, tags, location, emojis, comments posted and likes of each post. The following [table 2](#) shows all the variables analyzed in the Instagram accounts. In addition, the communicative impact of these publications and their "engagement" ratio have been used as variables.

**Table 2. Variables analysed in Instagram accounts**

Variable	Categories	Section
Followers and followed	-	<a href="#">Table 3</a>
Tone and language	-	<a href="#">Table 3</a>
Content Format	Photo, video, mix, carousel, IGTV, Reels	<a href="#">Table 4</a>
Hashtags	Most used hashtags	paragraph 4.2
Location	Most used locations	paragraph 4.2
Tags	-	praghaph 4.2
Emoticons	Frecuencies and most used	<a href="#">Table 5</a>
Likes	-	<a href="#">Table 6</a>
Comments	-	<a href="#">Table 6</a>
Ratio de Engagement	Bad, good, excelent	paragraph 4.4
Stories	-	paragraph 4.5
Highlight stories	Categories and last modification	<a href="#">Table 7</a>
Content type	Citizenship, political, personal and hybrid	<a href="#">Table 8</a>

Source: Authors' elaboration.

Likewise, the types of narrative and communicative stories used based on the theoretical development carried out in the theoretical framework have been considered as variables. The activity is intended to analyze the type of content and the political narrative used to understand the communication strategy that both accounts use to achieve the objectives set in this work. With this, it will be possible to analyze the most appropriate mechanisms and strategies and to analyze whether the potential that this network makes available through the various tools and functions that the application facilitates to promote the approach to the citizenship.

The hypothesis raised in this study assumes that the process of adaptation of local institutions to the new forms of digital and political communication is still in the process of

development, and therefore an improved communication will be found in many aspects, although under an appropriate process of improvement. The media impact is likely to be quite improving, as is the content and use of the tools. In addition, on the stories, narrative and strategies we will find that they must be different among institutions and political representatives, the first being more linked to a communication based on policies and municipal action and the accounts of politicians, in this case the mayor, more linked to the emotions of the citizenry, their problems and needs, as well as their personal brand.

## 4. Results

As stated above, the comparative analysis between both Instagram accounts will be carried out based on the type of content published on the social network and based on the most relevant aspects of the published content. Analyzing the content, messages, strategies and stories of the publications of the communicative content of both Instagram profiles. [Table 3](#) shows the general results and data of the two profiles analyzed, giving both the basic profile data (followers, followed and posts) and an overview of the generated content models (content types, tone and elements).

**Table 3. Comparative analysis of the Instagram accounts of the City Council and the Mayor of Alicante**

	Mayor of Alicante	City Council of Alicante
Followers	11.600	28.900
Followes	225	4.173
Analized Period	6 months (January-June)	6 months (January-June)
Nº of publications produced	232	84
Weekly average publications	9,28	3,36
Type of publications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- New public policies</li> <li>- Initiatives and new projects</li> <li>- Information content</li> <li>- Agenda, visits and events</li> <li>- His private life</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Initiatives and new projects</li> <li>- Information content</li> </ul>
Tone or language used	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Close and inclusive language</li> <li>- Regular use of emoticons</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Formal language and tone.</li> <li>- Regular use of emoticons</li> </ul>
Multimedia elements used	Pictures, videos, carousels, reels and IGTV (Instagram Television)	Pictures, videos and IGTV
Multimedia elements used	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Low use of tags</li> <li>- Regular use of hashtags</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Low use of tags</li> <li>- Regular use of hashtags</li> </ul>

Source: Authors' elaboration.

In a general perspective, it is observed that the profile of the City Council is more popular, having more followers, but has a lower content creation. On the contrary, the profile of the mayor does not have so many followers, but it has much more activity in the social network. Specifically, between one profile and another during the same period you can see a difference of 148 posts in six months, being almost triple by the mayor. This translates into the average activity of each profile with an average of the mayor of 9.28 posts per week, six points higher than the city council, 3.36 weekly posts.

Similarities can be observed in the type of publications they carry out. Both accounts inform citizens of initiatives and new projects and publish informative content about what happens in the city of Alicante. The profile of the mayor expands the content providing content related to agenda, visits or events that come on behalf of the City Council of Alicante in addition to publications of a personal nature.

Regarding the tone used there are differentiated approaches, the profile of the mayor uses a language that is closer and more inclusive with the people, always speaking in plural, asking questions to the citizen and using emoticons in much of his publications. On the other hand, the city council uses a more institutional tone following the usual model used in its press releases, identical to the one we can see on its website. Regarding the multimedia elements or format of the posts in the case of the profile of the mayor we visualize that it makes use of all the formats that Instagram allows: photos, videos, carousel, IGTV or Reels. However, the City Council only makes use of photos, videos and IGTV.

Finally, we find the use of interactive elements in publications and within them we find tags and hashtags. In both cases we find a widespread use of the hashtag, since in almost all its publications it is used, however, the use of tags is not so common.

## 4.1 Content format

First, we should study the format of the content exposed in Instagram accounts. Within the types of formats, we find photos, videos, carousels, IGTV (Instagram Television), Reels or Mixed (combination of photo and video). [Table 4](#) contains a detailed summary of the type of content and its format, which highlights a preponderance of photo or reel publications in both accounts. That is, a clear preference for photographic content over video-based content.

It should be noted that the format most used by both is photography, especially in the account of the City Council, representing more than half of the published content. In addition, it highlights a greater use by the account of the mayor with a greater creation of content than that of its town council. The mayor's account published in the period analyzed 230 posts compared to 84 of the City Council, in short, almost three times less.

Although both accounts follow the same common lines and structures, some specific differences can be observed. Specifically, the account of the municipality uses only 3.3% of mixed content, unlike the account of the mayor, in which represents 22.2% of formats. Consequently, in the case of the mayor the use of video in the profile either through the mixed format, video, IGTV or Reels accounts for 37.8% of the total publications, having a greater impact on communication and interaction with the public. In contrast, the City Council uses video in a much smaller way, representing only 15.5% of the content analyzed. It also highlights the null use by the City Council of the Reels format which increasingly has more weight within this network and the content consumed in social networks and forms of information.

**Table 4. Types of formats and use of tools in publications of both profiles**

Format	Mayor of Alicante		City Council of Alicante	
	Frecuency	Percentage	Frecuency	Percentage
Photo	71	30,9%	48	51,7%
Video	24	10,4%	7	8,3%
Mixed	51	22,2%	3	3,6%
Carousel	72	31,3%	23	27,4%
IGTV	5	2,2%	3	3,6%
Reels	7	3%	0	0%
Use of Hashtags	165	71,7%	78	92,86%
Using Location	188	81,7%	48	57,1%
Use of Tags	68	29,4%	31	36,9%
Use of Emojis	189	82,2%	80	95,2%
TOTAL	230	100%	84	100%

Source: Authors' elaboration.

## 4.2 Publication elements: use of hashtags, location, tags and emoticons

Both the hashtag, location and tags are elements that can be added to a publication to achieve greater visibility and impact, facilitating the goal of reaching a greater number of followers. This question becomes even more important if you consider that both accounts are addressed to a very specific public, the citizens of Alicante, and therefore the use of these will help to reach their target audience more easily.

In addition, [Table 4](#) shows the data obtained from the use of the elements mentioned in the publications of both profiles. In which we can see comparatively the number of publications that use these complementary tools and the percentage that represents on the total of the publications of the analyzed period.

First, on the figure of hashtags highlights a greater use of hashtags of the City Council than the mayor. The most used hashtag in both profiles is #Alicante, although in the case of the profile of the mayor is not observed a common pattern in its use. However, in the case of the City Council highlights that most of its publications include at least one of the 3 official hashtags: #Alicante, #Alicantecity y #Alicantegram. Of the 78 publications in which hashtags have been used, in 100% of the publications #Alicante has been used, #Alicantecity has been used in 44.2% and last, with 24.7% the hashtag #Alicantegram. These results reflect a good use of this tool by the institution using its official hashtags regularly in its publications.

It should be noted the regular use of official hashtags of events used by both accounts, these are commonly used again achieving greater visibility by appearing in what we might call a conversation of a particular subject. In the case of Alicante City Council, the most used possible hashtags were #SemanaSanta, #8m, #Diainternacionaldelamujer, #Fogueres2022, #Santafaz, #Covid19, #Voltaciclista, #WorldPadelTour y #Fitur2021. On the other hand, in the case of the Mayor, they were #Unacitaconlvida, #Rellenarvidas, #Fitur2021, #Covid19,
















#Juntosloconseguiremos, #Galaimportantes, #18FestivalAlicante, #WorldPadelTour, #SantaFaz2021, #TheOceanRaceEurope, #Vueltaalmundoavela, #YoconMazon, #MazonPresidente, #IndultosNoJusticiaSi, #IndultosNo, #13JIndultosNo, #FogueresdeSantJoan y #Fogueres2022.

Secondly, the use of location in publications that shows us the physical place in which the published audiovisual material was obtained can be a good mechanism at the communicative level, as well as the transparency of the actions carried out by the consistory and its chief representative. In addition, the location helps achieve greater visibility of the publications since it includes them within a group of photographs located in the same place. In this way those who consult this location within the social network can view the publication without having to follow the user, being able to promote the visibility of our profile and increase the number of followers. The profile of the mayor has used the location in 81,4% of publications and the City Council includes its location at 57.1%. In both accounts the most used locations are Alicante and Alicante City Council.

Third, the use of tags serves to mention another user that appears in the publications, either a private person or another institution. This increases the visibility of our profile and is an element that helps provide more information to viewers. The use of tags in the Mayor’s publications is low, barely used in 29.4% of the analyzed publications. Similarly, in the profile of the City Council 38.3% of publications included at least one tag.

Fourth, the use of emoticons is a fundamental aspect within current digital political communication. These pictograms help communicate without the need to use words, enhancing the emotional content of the same and facilitate the approach to citizenship by using a language that is used daily. Their inclusion in the content of profiles is common and frequent, in the case of the Mayor they are used in 82.2% of them and in the profile of the City Council is even higher, being present in 98.8% of the analyzed publications. In addition, it has been observed that depending on the characteristics of the publication and the topic addressed therein, a specific emoji or another was selected. Table 5 shows the most used emoticons and the content of the posts used in Instagram profile posts.

**Table 5. Most commonly used emoticons in both profiles depending on the content**

Emoticon	Content	Emoticon	Content	Emoticon	Content
	Blood donation campaigns		Mourning		Works on public roads
	Hercules Football Club		New guidelines, measures and public policies		Parks and gardens
	Messages of encouragement and strength		Sporting events		Hogueras of San Juan
	Local commerce		Interview appearances		Film festivals and movies
	PP messages		Public transport network		Photographs of Alicante

Source: Authors' elaboration.

### 4.3 Media impact and effectiveness of publications: likes and comments

After analysing the content, it is important to study the media impact that this content has had on the social network Instagram. In this sense it is essential to consider the impressions of the publications of both accounts. Impressions are about interventions by other users, specifically comments and likes.

The following table 6 shows the average results of "Likes" and "Comments" per post. Allowing to visualize the activity of the followers of each profile through the total comments they make, as well as the total likes of the analyzed publications.

**Table 6. Likes and comments in both instagram profiles**

	Likes							Comments					
	Mayor			City Council				Mayor			City Council		
Interval	Fr.	%	Total	Fr	%	Total	Interval	Fr.	%	Total	Fr	%	Total
0-100	0	0	0	1	1,2	50	0-5	41	17,7	103	19	22,6	48
100-200	5	2,2	750	4	4,8	600	6-10	64	27,6	480	20	23,8	150
200-300	27	11,7	6.750	10	11,9	2.500	11-15	39	16,8	488	12	14,3	150
300-400	64	27,8	22.400	5	6	1.750	16-20	31	13,4	543	7	8,3	123
400-500	52	22,6	23.400	13	15,5	5.800	21-25	17	7,3	383	8	9,5	180
500-600	29	12,6	15.950	12	14,3	6.600	26-30	9	3,9	248	5	6	138
600-700	24	10,4	15.600	8	9,5	5.200	31-35	9	3,9	293	4	4,8	130
700-800	13	5,7	9.750	11	13,1	8.250	36-40	5	2,2	188	4	4,8	150
800-900	6	2,6	5.100	3	3,6	2.550	41-45	3	1,3	128	0	0	0
900-1000	2	0,9	1.900	5	6	4.750	46-50	5	2,2	238	0	0	0
+1000	8	3,5	8.800	12	14,3	12.000	+50	8	3,4	480	5	6	300
Total	232	100	110.400	84	100	50.600	Total	232	100	3572	84	100	1369
Average	480			602,97			Media	15,3			16,27		

Source: Authors' elaboration  
For Clarification: Fr = Frecuency

As it can be seen the publications of the 6 months studied total 110,400 "Likes" making an average of 480 "Likes" per publication and a total of 3,572 comments, making an average of 15.3 comments per post. In the case of the City Council, the publications show an average of 602 likes and 16.27 comments per post. There is a wide variation between publications and the modal interval is between 400 and 500 likes (15.5%) and highlights 14.3% of publications exceed 1000 likes. Similarly, it can be extracted that the modal comment interval between 5 and 10 per publication with 23.8%, although closely followed by the lower interval (1-5) with 22.6%. In the case of the Mayor, most publications (27.8%) have an average of 300 to 400 likes, and that 22.6% of publications have 400 to 500 likes. The most repeated figure in comments is also 5 to 10 comments with 27.6%, followed by the interval of 10 to 15 comments with 16.8% and just 3.4% exceeds 50 comments.

It should be noted from the analysis the absence of response from both profiles to comments made by citizens about the negligent state of certain services or places in the city

which sometimes directly affect the welfare of these. Responding briefly to the comments is a very simple and beneficial issue for the image of both profiles facing the citizenry.

#### 4.4 Ratio of "engagement"

From an analytical point of view, these results help us to better understand the impact that publications have among followers and other users, this is called the "engagement" ratio, and represents the percentage of followers who interact or participate in the profile. The ratio also significantly influences the algorithm of Instagram, the higher the visibility the posts will have, as you are located higher within the "feed" of our followers. Establishing a control of this data is essential to assess whether communication with citizens is being effective.

The consultant specialized in social networks Instamatico evaluates in the following way the percentage of ratio of an account in Instagram. To do this, three rating levels are established based on the percentage result of the "engagement" ratio of the consulting firm Instamatico.

- < 1%: bad rating.
- 1% - 3.5%: good rating.
- > 3.5%: excellent rating.

To get the "engagement" ratio it must add the comments and likes of the posts, divide them by the number of followers and multiply them by a hundred. The "engagement" ratio obtained after applying the formula of the profile of the Mayor of Alicante is 4.31%, a positive figure since it exceeds 3.5% recommended by experts. In the case of the profile of the City Council the "engagement" ratio is 2.15%, lower than the previous figure which is at a good level being above 1% and below 3.5%.

Comparatively the profile of the mayor has a higher "engagement" ratio than that of its City Council and therefore can reach a greater number of people and obtains greater efficiency at the communicative level. This result is due to increased use of Instagram and more regular posts on the Mayor's profile. More stories are published and better use is made of the tools made possible by the social network. But above all the use of empathetic stories and links with the mayor through messages and more personal, informal and close content are the key to this good result.

#### 4.5 Everyday content: stories and featured stories on Instagram

The so-called Instagram Stories are a publication format different from the publication in which the user can publish images, photos and posts of other users using texts, emojis and GIFs, among other elements. These have a duration of 24 hours and can be added to a repository called as highlights stories allowing users to consult them after the publication of these. These types of publications are very attractive visually and help to strengthen the bond with the public, allowing a less monotonous, more spontaneous and habitual communication. Being, therefore, the medium through which most interacts with citizens thanks to the functions that this format presents.

Regarding the analysis carried out, it is observed that the use of this function is common in the profile of the mayor with 336 stories published in the analyzed period and an almost total absence of this type of content by the City Council with only 11 published stories.

On the other hand, the highlights stories allow to keep the stories published in the profile permanently so that any user can consult them. [Table 7](#) below lists the categories that group the profile highlights and how long they were last updated.

**Tabla 7. Historias destacadas del perfil y última actualización**

Mayor of Alicante		City Council of Alicante	
Categories	Latest Update	Categories	Latest Update
Alicante	6 semanas	Campaigns	107 semanas
Hogueras	6 semanas	SAIC	108 semanas
Covid-19	7 semanas	Culture	108 semanas
Curiosities	9 semanas	Sports	108 semanas
Fitur 2021	10 semanas	Fogueres	108 semanas
Santa Faz	15 semanas	Youth	113 semanas
Meetings	23 semanas	Fiestivities	114 semanas
Christmas	29 semanas		
Acts and events	33 semanas		
Day by day	36 semanas		
Gota Fría	97 semanas		
Campaign	113 semanas		

Source: Authors' elaboration. Date of consultation of profiles: 30/07/2021.

The results in [table 7](#) show that the use and updating of featured stories is very different, the profile of the mayor shows a continuous use of this function with a last update 6 weeks ago of the topics that generate more content: Alicante, Hogueras and Covid-19. However, the profile of the City Council has completely abandoned this tool exceeding all categories 100 weeks since its last update.

## 5. Discussion on political communication strategies and narratives

Once analyzed and evaluated the content published in the Instagram accounts of the City Council of Alicante and its mayor it is essential to relate these results with the types of content according to the communicative theme of the publications and, above all, of the stories and communicative stories that raise and mark the audiovisual content published. To do this, the theoretical basis exposed in the theoretical framework and the contribution of this study on the three types of stories narrated in communication messages will be used.

The type of content published during the analyzed period tells us in general about the character of the profile, for the realization of the analysis the types of content have been divided between citizen, political, personal or mixed content. Each has its own characteristics and deals with various issues relating to the development and political activity carried out both outside the institution and its representative. The various types of statements and their characteristic elements are set out below.

### A) Type of citizen content publications

- Institutional events and visits organised by the City Council and other institutions.



- Attending public and private events.
  - News interest of the city of Alicante.
  - Curiosities of the city of Alicante.
  - Publications on citizens and businesses of the city.
  - Citizen stories.
  - Answer to citizens' questions.
- B) Types of political publications
- New public policies.
  - Statements of a political nature.
  - Achievements by the City Council.
  - Partisan messages.
  - Attendance at party events.
- C) Type of personal publications
- Moments of the politician's private life.
  - Personal tastes and customs.
  - Activities and actions carried out outside the workplace.
  - Personal memories.
- D) Hybrid content: when a publication includes political, citizen or personal content mixed in a publication.

The following **Table 8** shows the types of content for both Instagram profiles where it is observed that the profile of the Mayor is endowed with a greater political and personal load, against a preponderance of the citizen type in the case of the City Council to be an institution that must maintain a certain neutrality and independence.

**Table 8. Content types**

Content type	Mayor of Alicante		Ayuntamiento de Alicante	
	Frecuency	Percentage	Frecuency	Percentage
Citizen	85	37%	81	97,6%
Political	101	43,9%	2	2,4%
Personal	21	11,7%	0	0%
Hybrid	17	7,4%	0	0%

Source: Authors' elaboration.

The predominant content in the profile of the Mayor is the political with 43.9% of the total analyzed publications, this is followed by citizen content with 37%, third, we find personal content with 11.7% and, finally, the hybrid with 7.4%. On the content published by the City Council we can observe predominates over all other citizen content, 97.6% of the analyzed publications belong to this type, we also find 2.4% political content, not identifying personal or hybrid content in the analysis.

After that, we must analyze the stories and political narrative most used by both accounts. To achieve this end, both the new theory of this study that distinguishes between the three types of stories (propositional, empathic and linking) and the study of authors by Juan David Cárdenas Ruiz will be used (Ruiz, 2013). The results of the analyses applied to the theoretical

contribution of this study on the types of political stories or narratives are reflected in [Table 9](#), which collects the data of use of each of the types of political stories. In addition, two new types of specific stories have been included that were not suitable to any, the partisan messages and the territory brand, which have been included within the linking stories. A category has also been included for those who cannot be correctly identified.

**Table 9. Types of stories and political stories used in both profiles**

Types of stories	Mayor		City Council		Ruiz Types (2013)	Mayor		City Council	
	Frec.	%	Frec.	%		Frec.	%	Frec.	%
Propositional Stories	93	38,1	57	67,9	Narrative Challenge	1	0,4	0	0
					Creative Narrative	6	2,6	0	0
					Stories convey knowledge	71	30,6	57	67,9
					Stories that lead to the future	15	6,5	0	0
Empathetic stories	28	12,1	0	0	Connecting story	26	11,2	0	0
					Trampoline stories	0	0	0	0
					Victimization stories	2	0,9	0	0
Linking stories	102	44	26	31	Stories communicate the "who you are"	8	3,4	0	0
					Institutional Stories communicate the "brand"	63	27,2	25	29,8
					Stories of personal struggles	5	2,2	0	0
					Party Message	16	6,9	0	0
					Territory Brand	10	4,3	1	1,2
Is not identified						9	3,9	1	1,2

Source: Authors' elaboration.

[Table 9](#) shows how there are differences in the types of stories and messages used depending on whether it is the institution, in this case the City Council, or the political representative. In the case of the City Council, it can be seen how the propositional stories predominate, especially those that talk about the policies that will be carried out ("Stories that transmit knowledge") and present the links that value the institutional brand. Regarding the Mayor, there is a greater weight of stories linking both with the institutional brand, and his as leader, of the political party and the region. There is also an important weight of empathic stories, in particular those that try to generate solidarity with affected people, and a less important weight than the city of policies and proposals (propositional stories).

## 6. Conclusions

Following an analysis of the nearly 400 publications produced by both profiles during the period under review, the following questions can be concluded.

On the elements of the social network Instagram and its uses, several conclusions should be mentioned. Regarding the use of tags, we can see that both figures are low considering that in most of both publications other agents involved in networks. The use of hashtags in both accounts presents a high frequency in the use of this tool when making your publications. The use of the location is also positive although by the profile of the City Council can be improved. The use of tags is quite low in both profiles. The element most used by both accounts with

emoticons giving their publications a more emotional and attractive charge for the public. Although it should also be noted the absence of direct interaction with the citizenry through comments or direct messages, during the study it has been observed that the citizenry takes advantage of comments to make requests, requests or consultations, which are never answered. In addition, we note that these errors carry a negative influence on the media impact of accounts and their "engagement" ratios.

Based on the theoretical contribution of this study in view of the diversity of conceptions about political narratives and histories, it can be concluded that there are clear differences in the communicative histories used by institutions and their representatives. Faced with a more purposeful and institutional use by the City Council of Alicante, we can observe more personal stories (empathizing) and links to the figure of the Mayor.

It is worth mentioning that for the specific case analyzed, several proposals for improvement can be proposed to improve the impact of the publications that are made using elements that the application itself offers and that of increasing the ratios of "engagement". Specifically, greater use of tags to include in the publication the various agents that usually appear in them, implementation of Instagram stories in the profile of the City Council of Alicante, the updating of highlights of the profile of the City Council and the implementation of actions of direct communication with the citizenry (function of questions) that allow listening to the citizenry, address their demands and resolve their doubts. Likewise, the use of live videos for important events (plenary speeches, press conferences, institutional visits or interviews) and the response to messages in publications is suggested as a mechanism for direct communication with citizens.

In conclusion, it can be observed that local public institutions are making an important effort to adapt to the new forms of communication of the digital age and especially to the use of social networks. However, there are still many communicative errors both in the misuse of the elements and possibilities offered by Instagram, and in the absence of the establishment of channeling demands, participation or transparency. Errors resulting from the rapid evolution of the political communication that public institutions try to reach, often without the tools or the knowledge to do so.

## Bibliography

- CANEL, María José (1999). *Comunicación política: técnicas y estrategias para la sociedad de la información*. Anaya-Spain.
- CANEL, María José (2018). *La comunicación de la administración pública: Para gobernar con la sociedad*. Fondo de Cultura Económica.
- CAPRIOTTI, Paul. (1999). *Planificación estratégica de la imagen corporativa*. Madrid: Ariel.
- CERVI, Laura, MARÍN-LLADÓ, Carles, & OLIVERAS-VILA, Carmina (2022). La comunicación de los ayuntamientos en las redes sociales: participación ciudadana, información de servicio público y campaña permanente. *AdComunica*, 275-299.
- CORNELISSEN, Joep (2008). *Corporate Communication: A guide to theory and practice*. London: Sage.
- CRICK, Bernard (2001). *En defensa de la política*. Barcelona: Tusquets.
- D'ADAMO, Orlando y Virginia García BEAUDOX. (2016). Comunicación Política: narración de historias, construcción de relatos políticos y persuasión. *Comunicación y hombre*, (12), 23-39.

- DENNING, Steve (2008). *Leadership storytelling. The Encyclopedia of Political and Civic Leadership*.
- GÁMIR RÍOS, José Vicente, CANO ORÓN, Lorena, FENOLL, Vicente, & IRANZO CABRERA, María (2022). Evolución de la comunicación política digital (2011-2019). Ocaso de los blogs, declive de Facebook, generalización de Twitter y popularización de Instagram. *Observatorio (OBS\*)*, 2022, vol. 16, num. 1, p. 90-116.
- GRANDE, Ignacio Criado (2013). Redes sociales para unas administraciones y gobiernos abiertos. Desafíos para la innovación y la creación de valor público. *Buen Gobierno*, (15), 8-25.
- GRAVER, Doris Appel (2003). *The Power of communication: Managing Information y public Organizations*, SAGE, p. 226.
- LINARES PÉREZ, Cristina (2022). *La comunicació pública a través d'Instagram, l'Ajuntament de Sabadell com a cas d'estudi*.
- MARTÍNEZ, Ismael Crespo (2020). Diez tendencias para esta década en Comunicación Política. *Más poder local*, (42), 6-20.
- MERGEL, Ines y Stuart I. BRETSCHEIDER. (2013). A three-stage adoption process for social media use in government. *Public administration review*, 73(3), 390-400.
- NIMMO, Dan (1977). Political communication theory and research: An overview. *Annals of the International Communication Association*, 1(1), 441-452.
- NIMMO, Dan & Keith R. SANDERS. (1981). *Handbook of political communication*. Sage Publications.
- PITKIN, Hanna Fenichel (1967). *The concept of representation (Vol. 75)*. Univ of California Press.
- POLLETTA, Francesca (2008). Storytelling in politics. *Contexts*, 7(4), 26-31.
- QUEVEDO-REDONDO, Raquel, & PORTALÉS-OLIVA, Marta (2017). Imagen y comunicación política en Instagram. Celebrificación de los candidatos a la presidencia del Gobierno. *El Profesional de la Información*, 26(5), 916-927. <https://doi.org/10.3145/epi.2017.sep.13>
- RUIZ, Juan David Cárdenas (2013). Storytelling y márquetin político: humanidad y emociones. *Poliantea*, 9(16), 33-50.
- SWANSON, David L. y Dan NIMMO. (1992). *New directions in political communication: A resource book*.
- VILLALOBOS PAZ, Daniela de (2021). *Comunicación política ante la Covid-19 en España; el uso de Instagram y TikTok por parte de las administraciones para alcanzar al público juvenil*.