

PUBLIC RELATIONS, POLITICAL COMMUNICATIONS, AND AUDIOVISUAL NARRATIVE: CASE STUDY, THE SPOT OF THE PARTIDO POPULAR IN THE ELECTIONS TO THE MADRID ASSEMBLY OF 2021

RELACIONES PÚBLICAS, COMUNICACIÓN POLÍTICA Y NARRATIVA AUDIOVISUAL. ESTUDIO DE CASO, EL SPOT ELECTORAL DEL PARTIDO POPULAR EN LAS ELECCIONES A LA ASAMBLEA DE MADRID DE 2021

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ABSTRACT

Partido Popular of Madrid, faced with the threat of a possible motion of censure and taking advantage of the advantage that polls gave its candidate in voting intention, called early elections for May 4th, 2021, unilaterally, surprisingly breaking with Ciudadanos, his partner in government. The communication team of the Partido Popular of Madrid made a video in which the candidate Isabel Díaz Ayuso was shown visiting different places in the Community of Madrid, where the Covid-19 pandemic has not managed to completely stop her activity day-to-day, largely thanks to the firmness shown by the president herself through the policies implemented in the region. In this work, an analysis of the Libertad spot is made, focusing on both the formal part and the content. To carry out this work, the audiovisual piece was broken down shot by shot, analyzing the content of the visual, sound, and graphic resources that compose them. Through this analysis, the following general results have been obtained: the video does not achieve the objective of reinforcing the image of the popular candidate as it is perceived as unrealistic, as it is deeply manipulated and exaggeratedly interpreted. It also fails to defend liberal ideology by showing the benefits of a misunderstood freedom that can be offensive to people affected by Covid-19, by ignoring the consequences of management during the pandemic.

KEYWORDS: Electoral communication, Audiovisual analysis, Narrative, Video, Spot, Propaganda, Politics, Partido Popular, Madrid.

RESUMEN

El Partido Popular de Madrid ante la amenaza de una posible moción de censura y aprovechando la ventaja que le otorgaban a su candidata las encuestas en intención de voto, convocó elecciones anticipadas para el 4 de mayo de 2021, de manera unilateral, rompiendo sorpresivamente con Ciudadanos, su socio de gobierno. El equipo de comunicación del partido Popular de Madrid realizó un vídeo en el que se mostró a la candidata Isabel Díaz Ayuso recorriendo diferentes lugares de la Comunidad de Madrid, en los que la pandemia de la Covid-19 no ha conseguido detener del todo su actividad cotidiana, en gran parte gracias a la firmeza demostrada por la propia presidenta a través de las políticas implementadas en la región. En el presente trabajo se hace un análisis del spot *Libertad*, incidiendo tanto en la parte formal como en la de contenido. Para llevar a cabo dicha labor se desglosó la pieza audiovisual plano a plano analizando el contenido de los elementos visuales, sonoros y recursos gráficos que las componen. Mediante este análisis se han obtenido los siguientes resultados generales, el vídeo no consigue el objetivo de reforzar la imagen de la candidata popular al ser percibido como poco realista, al estar profundamente manipulado y exageradamente interpretado. También fracasa en la defensa de la ideología liberal al mostrar las bondades de una libertad mal entendida que puede resultar ofensiva para las personas afectadas por el Covid-19, al obviar las consecuencias de la gestión durante la pandemia.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Comunicación electoral, análisis audiovisual, narrativa, vídeo, spot, propaganda, política, Partido Popular, Madrid.

1. INTRODUCTION

People who dedicate themselves to political life depend to a large extent on their presence in the media and on the correct use of the different tools that they offer them to build their public image, show the results of their policies, and spread their ideology. This practice will determine the success or failure of their political career.

Isabel Díaz Ayuso was the politician personally appointed by the leader of the Partido Popular, Pablo Casado as the Partido Popular candidate for the community of Madrid to change the damaged image of the Partido Popular in the region. The politician had to empower herself to be considered a solid candidate since she was completely unknown to public opinion and the media, which attributed her most notable achievement to have been the ideologue of the Pecas Twitter account, the popular pet of Esperanza Aguirre. Furthermore, Madrid politics was questioned by some barons of the Partido Popular who did not understand the decision of the party's national

leadership, due to the controversial opinions of Isabel Díaz Ayuso on certain issues and, above all, if one takes into account the result of the elections to the Madrid Assembly in 2019, in which Ángel Gabilondo, candidate of the Partido Socialista de Madrid, was the most voted politician, taking 7 seats more.

The severity of the Covid-19 pandemic caught the world's rulers and institutions off guard. In general, all the governments were overcome by the situation, including that of the Community of Madrid, which came to have the highest incidence figures in Spain and the European Union, suffice it to remember a desolate Ayuso crying at mass for the deceased, with makeup mixed with tears running down her face, or the controversial photographs in which the candidate posed for the cover of the newspaper *El Mundo*, imitating a *Virgin of Sorrows*. "The media also question the reliability and emotional stability of women politicians. You already know that the stereotype says that women are emotional creatures" (García, 2017). The communication team and some newspaper heads took the opportunity to present the president as a person of great empathy, the victim of an unfortunate situation in which nothing could be done.

Figure 1. Ayuso cries at mass for the victims of Covid-19



Source: La Voz de Galicia, 2020

Figure 2. Ayuso poses imitating the *Virgin of Sorrows*

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Source: Infolibre, 2020

The Covid-19 pandemic was an opportunity for the Madrid president to empower herself and demonstrate her worth as a politician. The systematic confrontation with the Government of Spain helped Isabel Díaz Ayuso to reaffirm herself and dispel any doubts about her appointment as head of the Partido Popular de Madrid. With her decisions, she began to mark the media agenda, acquiring all the protagonism of the opposition, demonstrating her leadership skills. "Political leaders we know today must undergo an inexorable test of visibility as an essential path to legitimize themselves before readers, whom they must convince by transferring a positive and differentiated image" (Peña, 2011).

The Manichaeian messages, in the form of slogans, used by Isabel Díaz Ayuso in the image and likeness of Trumpism as "socialism or freedom", which would later become "communism or freedom", have served to fuel social tension and to promote neoliberal policies closer to economic freedom than to personal freedom. Furthermore, the so-called traditional regionalism has been promoted, adopting the strategy of victimization, accusing the central government of promoting "Madridphobia", by reporting the data on the accumulated incidence of infection in the Community of Madrid.

This confrontational strategy boosted Díaz Ayuso in voting intention polls, even at the national level. The Partido Popular de Madrid took advantage of this situation to call early elections in the Community of Madrid using as excuses the failed motions of censure presented by Ciudadanos and the Partido Socialista Obrero Español (PSOE) in the Region of Murcia and by the PSOE in Castilla y León and incidentally get rid of Ciudadanos, that was uncomfortable for them after having had some clashes due to differences in criteria in the management of the pandemic.

This sudden decision took all the parties by surprise and had consequences that reached the Government of Spain. The leader of Podemos, Pablo Iglesias, resigned as vice president of the government to be the candidate for the Community of Madrid, in the face of a possible collapse of his political party. Ciudadanos dispensed with its number one in Madrid, Ignacio Aguado, openly opposed to Ayuso, and replaced him

with the parliamentary deputy Edmundo Vals. Más Madrid and, especially, PSM-PSOE kept their candidates, Mónica García and Ángel Gabilondo, being aware of the difficulty of proposing an unknown candidate, with so little time.

Isabel Díaz Ayuso won the favor of a large part of the media to lead the political agenda, she knew how to read the social context generated by the pandemic and take advantage of it to create an atmosphere of ideal polarization to apply a strategy of confrontation from which she obtained great results. The call for regional elections was used by the Partido Popular de Madrid to make an electoral video that showed the friendliest face of its candidate, to mitigate the image of hostility projected in her criticism of the state government, and, thus, be able to broaden her spectrum of voters.

Electoral videos are an important audiovisual tool that parties have to spread the ideology and policies to be implemented, as well as to make their candidates known. "Spots are characterized by being messages to capture attention and, in the best of cases, vote, so they generally use persuasive communication" (García, 2017).

Isabel Díaz Ayuso went from being a politician with little experience to becoming the spearhead of the opposition to the Government of Spain, thanks to the media attention achieved by carrying out an excessively aggressive policy, systematically positioning herself against any decision taken by the central government, contradicting and managing the official figures of those affected by Covid-19.

The communication team of the Partido Popular de Madrid for the electoral spot opted for a complementary approach by avoiding direct confrontation, used on a day-to-day basis by the candidate, and opted for appealing to positive emotions over rationality. "Emotions help citizens remember the message" (Lang, 1991, cited in García, 2017).

Beaudoux and D'Adamo, 2006, cited in Peña and García, 2010, classify as positive advertisements those that "refer to the candidate's qualities, show the party's position on the issues (...). They are considered positive insofar as the message they present speaks in favor of the sender of the message". "The positive ones are in charge of promoting the best face of the candidates and rarely allude to the opponents" (Beaudoux and D'Adamo, 2006, p. 48). The spot shows Díaz Ayuso, as the only protagonist, greeting passers-by, touring different places in the Community of Madrid that maintained their daily activities, oblivious to the pandemic. The idea of "living Madrid-style" in freedom, according to Ayuso, is legitimized and defended in response to the central government's health protection policy.

2. OBJECTIVES

The general objective of this article is to analyze the formal and content part of the electoral spot *Libertad*, presented by the Partido Popular de Madrid for the regional elections held on May 4th, 2021.

The hypothesis is that for electoral spots to generate empathy and a sense of reality in the viewers, they must hide fiction.

3. METHODOLOGY

This article analyzes from a descriptive point of view. As an object of study, the electoral spot *Libertad* is used, produced by the Partido Popular de Madrid for the elections to the Community of Madrid in 2021, and the information obtained after applying the film analysis theories developed by Casetti and di Chio (1991) will be cataloged. For the authors, film analysis, in this case, has been necessary to adapt the methodology to an electoral spot, it consists of acting on the object of study breaking it down and recomposing it, "to better identify the components, architecture, movements, dynamics, etc." (Casetti and di Chio, 1991, p. 17).

Based on this information, emphasis is placed on two different parts, firstly, the formal part, observing both the visual narrative components and the sound narrative components, attending to the different elements of audiovisual language present, style of production, type of shots, camera movements, frames, transitions between shots, lighting, components of the soundtrack, and graphics used. This article includes in this section the narrative structure of the spot, historically related to semiotic analysis.

Secondly, the implicit content of the spot was analyzed, interpreting both its meaning and the message transmitted, taking into account who is the author of the message? Who is it addressed to? What does it intend to achieve?

With the data obtained from the analysis of the spot, an interpretation of the results is made to contextualize them.

4. DISCUSSION

As a result of the methodological proposal, an exhaustive analysis of the form and content of the *Libertad* spot has been carried out, obtaining a series of deductions set out below.

It is an audiovisual piece that has practically dispensed with words to be based on the visual aspect of the images, reinforcing the meaning using sound effects, transmitting positive emotions to the viewers. "The predominance of the image, technical support of the audiovisual discourse, entails an ability to seduce the voter through affective and emotional persuasion." (Peña, 2011, p. 404).

The video has been shot following a single-camera production style, in the image and likeness of cinema and advertising. "Democratic spectacularization, or politainment, is vital in political communication, inspired by fiction, and vice versa. Cinema becomes inspiration and, at the same time, a reflection of reality" (Rodríguez and Padilla, 2018, p. 15).

This type of direction is more complicated to carry out since it is necessary to maintain continuity in the action, interpretation, and common elements between shots, scenes, and sequences that are fragmented, having been shot in different places and even days. "This interpretation without sequential order entails problems of continuity or raccord. Action, gestures, expressions, costumes, lighting, etc., although they have been shot at different times, must be identical in the interleaved shots and consistent with the narrative progression" (Millerson, 2001, p. 592).

The continuity between shots is quite successful, except for some changes in the rhythm of Díaz Ayuso's run, "as a whole, the effect that is achieved is an impression of narrative fluidity, with different points of view" (Millerson, 2001, p.593). The displacement is made from left to right in practically all the fragments of the spot. In the shots that this direction is not followed, it is possibly due to logistical problems related to the location. This movement corresponds to the western natural sense of reading from left to right but also denotes the ideology of the candidate, who seeks to implement neoliberal policies, typical of right-wing parties.

Figure 3. Ayuso moves to the right



Source: Isabel Díaz Ayuso, 2021, 15s

Figure 4. Ayuso moves to the right.



Source: Isabel Díaz Ayuso, 2021, 16s

Figure 5. Ayuso moves to the right



Source: Isabel Díaz Ayuso, 2021, 25s

Figure 6. Ayuso de desplaza hacia la derecha



Source: Isabel Díaz Ayuso, 2021, 30s

It is an electoral spot that can be classified within the genre of political propaganda, the style is intended to be a street report or a documentary video, which shows the path of the candidate of the Partido Popular practicing sports in different places of the Autonomous Community. Practically all the situations that occur in the spot are controlled by the film crew. They are recreations of the real actions that are carried out in the represented spaces. "In these cases, the action, location of the cameras and, on some occasions, also the lighting and scenery (backgrounds, props, etc.) are determined to adapt them to each of the sequences." (Millerson, 2001, p. 598).

Peña and García, 2010, follow the typology of political spots proposed by Devlin in 1987. According to this categorization, the video of the Partido Popular de Madrid can be classified into the following categories, by identifying some of its qualities in its content, *cinema verité*, documentary commercials, man-in-the-street commercials, and slice-of-life commercials.

The *cinema verité* category "corresponds to those spots that show real or life-like scenes from the candidate's life." In the *Libertad* spot, Isabel Díaz Ayuso is shown practicing sports.

"Documentary commercials: they present, for the most part, the achievements of the candidate". The places that Ayuso visits continue with their economic activity thanks to the policies implemented by the government of the Autonomous Community, defying the restrictions on hours and capacity proposed by the central government. The different spaces that appear are a nod to the potential and natural voters of the Partido Popular, owners of businesses such as pharmacies, market stalls, bars, etc. As the spot progresses, it appeals to the world of culture by going through theaters and health workers, by showing the exterior of the questioned Pandemics Hospital Enfermera Isabel Zandal and the most promoted work during the government coalition between PP and Ciudadanos.

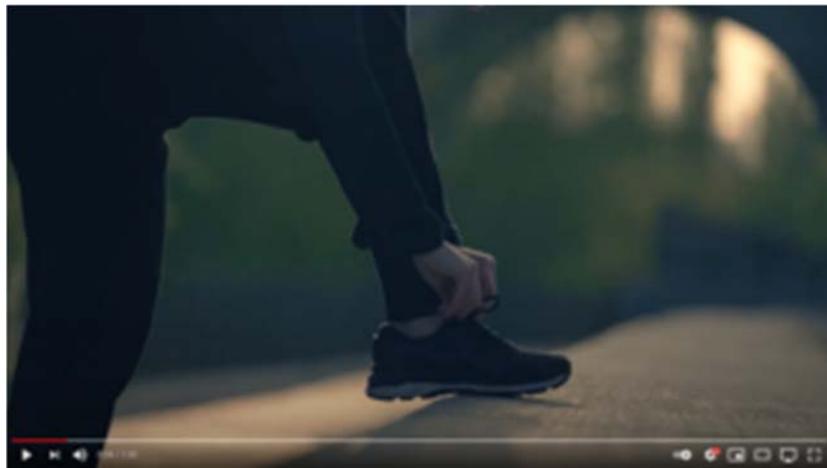
"Slice of life commercials": a "natural" conversation is shown and presented (although they are really actors) in an everyday scene. This type is known as a docudrama." In the spot, the popular candidate tours different locations in the community where people continue their lives normally, despite the pandemic situation. The problem is that the people who appear in most of these locations turn out to be extras, unnaturally performing actions, undermining the credibility of the ad.

The next category, “man-in-the-street commercials” can be related to the previous category as it refers to the anonymous people who appear in election ads. It is about “common citizens, sometimes real and other times paid unknown actors (...). They intend to show, in general, the average voter speaking in favor of the candidate in question (...) the population is capable of detecting that it is a script”. In the Libertad spot, the spoken word is not used but it presents ordinary people in different locations, although it is true that it is directed more towards the owners of establishments than the workers. This detail was not lost on the Unidas Podemos candidate, Pablo Iglesias, when he pointed out that Ayuso had forgotten to show the popular neighborhoods and cities in the south of the Autonomous Community, more in tune with the left-wing vote.

Regarding the structure of the spot, it responds to the classic narrative organization of presentation, middle, and end.

The presentation of the video corresponds to the beginning of a new day, the sunrise in Madrid, and the presidential candidate preparing to start her run. This beginning of the video presents the actions fragmented into five situation shots in different sizes that generate uncertainty and suspense as they are closed or backlit shots, in which the space is barely shown. The viewer wonders where the candidate is or how the city is going to be in the pandemic situation.

Figure 7. Location extreme close-up



Source: Isabel Díaz Ayuso, 2021, 4s

Figure 8. Extreme close-up of the candidate's eyes



Source: Isabel Díaz Ayuso, 2021, 6s

Figure 9. Extreme close-up of the hand closing the zipper



Source: Isabel Díaz Ayuso, 2021, 7s

The content of the video included in the part of the narration knot is the journey that Díaz Ayuso makes throughout the Community of Madrid. During practically the entire spot, the Madrid candidate appears in the image, running through different places where people carry out their daily activities. This route is shown through the succession of multiple cut-edited shots, conveying the sensation of speed as the rhythm increases.

The ending part of the spot is one of the moments in which the main problems could arise. The moment when Isabel Díaz Ayuso reaches her goal in Puerta del Sol in Madrid and the camera moves around her, doing a 360° tracking shot, showing the entire space. The tour ends with a closed close-up of the candidate, catching her breath, looking directly at the camera which, by breaking the fourth wall, directly appeals to the viewers. As these are the busiest places in Madrid, it is impossible to control access to passers-by and, therefore, the possibility of outsiders or undesirable elements appearing on the shot is enormous. To solve this, they resorted to shooting in these places with lenses with little depth of field, applying the technique of the bokeh effect. This ensures that people who are not interesting in the shot are not recognized, as they appear completely out of focus.

Figure 10. Shot with little depth of field



Source: Isabel Díaz Ayuso, 2021, 44s

In the graphics section, the video of the Partido Popular shows the title *Libertad*, in capital letters, at the end of the footage under the name of the candidate. The used font combines a standard, academic typeface with the more informal and modern letter "A" that appears to be handwritten. At the same time, that letter "A" forms an equilateral triangle supported on its base, conveying stability.

Figure 11. Ayuso breaks the fourth wall with the title of the spot superimposed



Source: Isabel Díaz Ayuso, 2021, 52s

The video closes with the updated logo of the Partido Popular. The seagull has been transfigured to the top part of a heart. This icon has also been used in other elections by Ciudadanos, Unidas Podemos, and the PSOE. Additionally, the seagull has gone from being white to wearing the colors of the Spanish flag. The typography has also changed, now it is more stylized and in navy blue. Under the initials of the PP, "Comunidad de Madrid" appears in capital letters, alluding to the region in which the elections are held.

Figure 12. Logo of the Partido Popular de Madrid



Source: Isabel Díaz Ayuso, 2021, 58s

In the sound part, the different elements that make up the soundtrack are analyzed, considering that the Madrid PP spot does not contain an intelligible voice or music of any kind. The importance of the treatment of sound effects in the video is pointed out by amplifying certain sounds while attenuating others. The chirping of birds, the breathing, the zipper closing, the steps, the crowd in the streets of Madrid, etc., manage to create a common thread throughout the entire spot, while at the same time the actions are underlined and they transmit sensations that reinforce the atmosphere that is intended to be created. It is diegetic sound, directly related to the story being told, although they are sounds incorporated a posteriori, in the post-production phase. The sound source does not arise from the actions or objects seen in the image, the environmental sounds have been manufactured and incorporated into the images. It is a reconstruction of the sound environments, skillfully manipulated, although it can be seen that these sounds do not correspond to the actions and the number of people that appear in the shots. Off-screen spaces have also been created through the use of off-screen sound effects, for example, the sound of bells denoting the presence of churches open for mass celebrations. Likewise, sound effects have been incorporated, which do not exist in reality, to enhance some movements and jumps during the candidate's route, to reinforce the use of slow-motion in the jumps, and to add spectacularity.

Regarding the implicit content of the spot, its meaning, and the transmitted message, the proposal of García (2017, p. 166) is considered, which affects the meaning of the presented actions, taking into account the meaning the proposed topics and the used rhetorical figures convey.

As previously mentioned, the spot narrates the route that Isabel Díaz Ayuso takes until she reaches her destination in Puerta del Sol, where the headquarters of the Government of the Community of Madrid is located. On that path to the presidency, the popular candidate, just like the heroes of mythical stories, must strive to get her reward. While Ayuso practices running, different places are shown that reflect the management carried out by her during the pandemic, without restricting the exercise of commercial, cultural, and religious activity. The possibility of participating in these activities is perceived by most people as something positive, offering them hope in a time of calamity. "Change, hope, and destiny are almost always symbolic components through which immanent historicity is erased and an illusion of transcendence is reestablished" (Meyer et al. 2013, p. 393).

Isabel Díaz Ayuso has ensured that these actions are widely accepted and, incidentally, serve as a justification for the neoliberal policies that she intends to implement by identifying herself with a value longed for by everyone, freedom, ignoring the counter-values that could be associated with it, by presenting them as an option opposed to the policies of the central government perceived as totalitarian and castrating, instead of protective.

5. CONCLUSIONS

Isabel Díaz Ayuso in her beginnings in front-line politics has had some slips before the microphones, unbecoming of a first-level politician, which have made her seem more humane and closer in the eyes of public opinion. Over time, Ayuso has managed to polish her presence in the media and has resorted to a hyperbolic communicative style that has helped her achieve a great media following. This strategy has brought her great benefits in terms of repercussion and popularity.

The arrival of the pandemic was a turning point in her communication style. The popular politician oscillated between victimhood, being singled out for not stopping the high number of victims produced by Covid-19 in the Community of Madrid, and extreme aggressiveness against the central government, often making opposing political decisions on her own initiative, being accused of disloyalty by the central executive and by a large part of the regional governments. The danger of adopting these attitudes is that for them to have an effect, they have to be more and more exaggerated and may even produce the opposite effect if people perceive that the imposed attitude is actually a pose.

The communication team of the Partido Popular de Madrid has opted for a different strategy to carry out the electoral spot, instead of elaborating a negative message, in which the adversary is directly vilified, they have chosen to launch a positive message, showing to the Community of Madrid in an idyllic way in which people continue with their day to day, oblivious to the pandemic and from there, by contrast, criticism of the central government is deduced. A paradise is created on Earth that can be related to the most naive literary and cinematographic utopias. The danger of showing that perfect city is that it takes on the appearance of an artificial place, in which people act as if they were automatons, a place that lacks a soul. The political proposal of the Partido Popular de Madrid is to promote a "Madrid-style" lifestyle in a place that forgets to show the ravages caused by the pandemic.

The Madrid politician does not need audiovisual artifices to make her ideals visible, it is enough for her to broadcast her statements through the media to convince a large number of the Madrid electorate.

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PUBLIC RELATIONS, POLITICAL COMMUNICATIONS, AND AUDIOVISUAL
NARRATIVE: CASE STUDY, THE SPOT OF THE PARTIDO POPULAR IN THE
ELECTIONS TO THE MADRID ASSEMBLY OF 2021

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