Article

Attracting the Vote on TikTok: Far-Right Parties' Emotional Communication Strategies in the 2024 European Elections

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Abstract: This study analyses the emotional communication strategies employed by far-right party leaders on TikTok during the 2024 European elections, focusing on their appeal to voters. Combining quantitative and qualitative content analysis of 472 videos from 27 leaders in 24 countries, the research examines the dominant emotions, themes, stylistic resources, and their impact on engagement. The results reveal a dual strategy that combines positive emotions such as hope and ambition, which generate the highest levels of engagement, with negative emotions such as fear and uncertainty, which emphasise crisis narratives. Leaders who balance optimism with polarising narratives show greater resonance, particularly with audiences. The findings underscore the growing role of TikTok in far-right political communication and demonstrate its effectiveness in mobilising emotional engagement among young people. Despite limitations, the study highlights the sophistication of emotional strategies in digital political communication and provides insights into how far-right leaders use TikTok to influence voter behaviour.

Keywords: political communication; TikTok; far-right party; emotional communication strategies; European elections

1. Introduction

The year 2024 has been a key year in world politics. Many elections have taken place in which parties of different ideological approaches, with their leaders at the forefront, have come to power in the United States, Russia, and Europe, in a context of global uncertainty due to constant disinformation and polarisation (Colomina, 2023), as well as manipulation and suspicions of electoral fraud (Carothers & Lee, 2024), not to mention the fear of possible interference by foreign countries.

One of the most important elections was that of the European Parliament, where more than 360 million citizens of the continent—specifically of the 27 member states of the European Union (hereafter, EU)—were summoned from 6 to 9 June to choose the destiny of Europe through 720 parliamentarians who will represent them in a legislature that will expire in 2029 (Gómez et al., 2024).

Attention has once again turned to far-right parties, characterised by their constant questioning of democracy and promotion of Eurosceptic and anti-immigration ideas (Moreno Moreno & Rojo Martínez, 2021), among other arguments. These parties have already performed well in the 2014 and 2019 elections (Manucci, 2021) and were predicted to gain more power in the 2024 elections and thus shift the European Parliament further to the right (Mudde, 2024b). The main consequence is an alignment similar to that of

many member states, which have normalised and consolidated far-right parties (Mondon & Winter, 2020; Mudde, 2019).

The final results of the election partially confirmed the predictions. The far-right has increased in Austria, France, Hungary, and Italy (Ivaldi, 2024). Therefore, the ultra-vote has made this political spectrum the second preferred choice after the European People's Party, with one in four parliamentarians belonging to the radical right, which theoretically falls into different groups based on ideology, albeit not always in practice (Mudde, 2024a). Most of these formations are found in the Patriots for Europe, European Conservatives and Reformists, and Europe of Sovereign Nations groups, although they can also be found in the European People's Party and the non-attached.

These parties have garnered significant support from the youth electorate, a significant segment of the population, during these elections. According to Eurostat (2024a), an estimated 22 million individuals were eligible to vote for the first time. This figure does not include the youth population of Ireland, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, or Poland, as these data are not available. In this regard, it is noteworthy that in nations such as Germany, Austria, Belgium, and Malta, 16-year-olds are eligible to participate in elections, as well as 17-year-olds in Greece (Goujard et al., 2024). But this figure would go up even more with the rest of Generation Z's youth vote, which is made up of people born between 1995 and early 2000. Nonetheless, despite the 64% of EU young people under the age of 30 expressing their intention to vote in these elections to the European Parliament (European Union, 2024b), with Romania and Portugal exhibiting a positive attitude, while Luxembourg, Lithuania, and Malta exhibited a less committed attitude, the final turnout of those under the age of 24 was 36% (European Union, 2024a).

Many of these young individuals are deeply concerned with safeguarding peace and enhancing international security and cooperation, combating climate change and economic and social disparities, and advocating for human rights, democracy, and employment prospects (European Union, 2024b). They are also aware of other issues, such as mass immigration or access to housing, but they feel apathy towards traditional politics and flirt with extreme right-wing parties, as they have done in these European elections. There has been an increase in the percentage of youth voters who vote for parties of this type. For example, in Germany, the support for Alternative for Germany (AfD) among voters between the ages of 24 and 30 increased by 11% for the 2019 European elections. For France's National Rally (RN), the increase was 10%, with this force obtaining 30% of the youth vote at the state level (Vinocur & Goury-Laffont, 2024).

This young audience can obtain information or access news through social networks. Furthermore, in 2023, 97% of young Europeans under the age of 29 used the Internet daily, with 88% participating in social networks (Eurostat, 2024b). According to the findings of We Are Social (2024), a significant proportion of 16–24-year-olds worldwide utilise social networks for various reasons. These includes but are not limited to keeping in touch with family and friends (47.5%), occupying leisure time (43.9%), discovering content (34.5%), observing current affairs (32.3%), and perusing news and stories (29.2%). Therefore, it is not surprising that political parties of any ideological spectrum are increasingly entering the world of social networks in order to reach their target audience and to connect emotionally with them and amplify their messages on platforms such as X, Instagram, YouTube, or, more recently, TikTok.

The primary objective of this paper is to scrutinise the emotional communication tactics employed by leaders of extreme right-wing parties on TikTok during the campaign for the 2024 European elections. This is done to identify how they are trying to attract the youth vote. This study therefore aims to achieve the subsequent specific objectives:

SO1. Determine the predominant emotions in audiovisual messages (positive, negative, and neutral).

SO2. Examine the recurring themes used to connect voters' concerns or aspirations, especially young people.

SO3. Analyse the stylistic and narrative resources used to generate emotional impact (music, language, visual effects, etc.).

SO4. Determine the frequency and type of emotional content generated by the videos.

SO5. Compare the strategies of the different leaders of the parties analysed.

Therefore, this study has been developed because of the following research questions:

RQ1. Which emotions dominate the videos posted by the leaders of extreme right-wing parties on TikTok during the period analysed?

RQ2. What are the most common themes found in the messages published on TikTok?

RQ3. Which audiovisual resources are used to enhance the emotional impact, including music, editing, effects, and body language?

RQ4. What is the magnitude of these messages, and how does it relate to affective polarisation (positive, negative, or neutral) in TikTok posts by far-right leaders?

RQ5. What are the variations in emotional strategies based on the country or political leader?

RQ6. What types of interactions are generated by videos containing emotional content, such as "likes", comments, and shares?

RQ7. Is there a correlation between the utilisation of particular emotions and the degree of engagement?

RQ8. Are there any particular appeals to identity, cultural, or social values specifically aimed at young people?

After establishing the objectives and research questions, we propose a series of hypotheses that will guide the analysis of the content disseminated by the leaders of far-right on TikTok parties during the 2024 European elections. These hypotheses seek to explore how emotional, thematic, and stylistic strategies are used to connect with different segments of the audience, especially young people, and how these strategies impact the interaction generated by the videos.

General Hypothesis:

GH: Leaders of far-right parties on TikTok employ emotional, thematic, and stylistic communication strategies designed to maximise impact and engagement. They adapt to the characteristics and preferences of digital audiences.

Specific Hypotheses:

SH1: The messages disseminated by far-right party leaders on TikTok are designed with a style, content, and tone that specifically appeal to young audiences. They incorporate topics relevant to their interests and forms of communication characteristic of this demographic.

SH2: Negative emotions such as fear, anger, and disgust dominate the analysed videos and are used as tools to polarise and mobilise the audience.

SH3: Videos that integrate negative and unpleasant emotions generate a higher level of interaction and engagement than videos that lack these elements.

1.1. TikTok, a Vein for Political Communication Targeting Young People

The 2008 US elections marked the dawn of a new era in global political communication, owing to the emergence of social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter. This, among other factors, led to the election of Barack Obama as the 44th President of the United States of America (Costa, 2009; Hendrix, 2019). Other nations have since adopted this approach, initially as political communication tools and later as communication strategies

(Román-San-Miguel et al., 2021). Leaders and parties are increasingly using social networks to disseminate their messages (Estellés & Castellví, 2020).

The scholarly literature pertaining to political communication and social networks, including but not limited to Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok, has been gaining increasing prominence in recent times (Stieglitz & Dang-Xuan, 2013; Casero-Ripollés, 2018; Corchia, 2019; Lipschultz, 2022; Subekti et al., 2023). However, it is notable that TikTok has recently been incorporated into party communication strategies. This social network of Chinese origin, initiated in 2016, has experienced a rapid expansion lately, especially since the COVID-19 pandemic. This is due to its short and appealing videos, which provide a novel platform for social entertainment. It presents an opportunity to communicate that has not been overlooked by political parties and leaders (Berdón-Prieto et al., 2023; Cervi & Marín-Lladó, 2021; Cervi et al., 2023; Moir, 2023; Morejón-Llamas, 2023; Zamora-Medina et al., 2023), as was previously the case with other social platforms (Tucker et al., 2018). However, there is a more compelling reason, as TikTok is an application where young people have a significant presence, unlike Facebook, Instagram, or X.

Despite its resemblance to other social networks, TikTok possesses distinct characteristics, such as its vertical layout and incorporation of musical elements or songs (González-Aguilar et al., 2023). Furthermore, the relatively brief duration of its videos, which, from a political standpoint, favours a more informal approach (Gekker, 2019), has the potential to captivate young users (Medina-Serrano et al., 2020) and allows parties to send their messages to these audiences directly and without filters (Albertazzi & Bonansinga, 2024).

The utilisation of social media by populists and the far right as their primary means of disseminating their political message (Guerrero-Solé et al., 2020) is not a novel occurrence. However, it has definitely increased with the emergence of TikTok, initiating a trend that leads to concern about how nationalist and conspiratorial content thrives, sponsored by the platform's algorithm, which boosts the content that generates the most participation and popularity (Hohner et al., 2024). Social media platforms have played a significant role in this phenomenon, as evidenced by the utilisation of brief and direct videos, sometimes featuring rebellious language, which aim to captivate viewers' attention within a few seconds. This facilitates the dissemination and propagation of the messages. To achieve this, the parties use simplified content with powerful phrases and a visual aesthetic based on striking images edited with musical and textual effects, memes, symbols, colours, etc. These initiatives aim to reach out to people who are disenchanted with the traditional political system and economic elites.

The scientific community is still unsure about the importance of studying TikTok, youth, and extreme right-wing parties. Studies on the impact of the TikTok network on Generation Z can be found regarding the youth binomial. On the one hand, there exists research on the causal correlation between the use of TikTok by young individuals and their civic behaviour in real life (Moffett & Rice, 2024; Seppälä, 2022), as well as the opportunities and risks associated with the expression of social movements on TikTok (Literat & Kligler-Vilenchik, 2023). However, there are also studies on the significant increase in young people's interest in political practices presented in short videos (Hindarto, 2022) and political and entertainment content during elections (Cervi et al., 2023).

Studies that include extreme right-wing parties also cover various countries in Latin America, the United States, Spain, and Canada. In the context of Latin America, they concentrate on the utilisation of the network of political leaders and parties in Argentina and Chile (Ariza et al., 2023; Rivera López et al., 2024). Concerning the United States, we have discovered research on the presence of right-wing and left-wing populism among young individuals through interactions on TikTok (Amend, 2024). The analysis of the impact of the network on the political identity of young adults aged 18 to 25 conducted by

Church (2022) indicates that 91% of the respondents have altered their political ideology. In Canada, we find studies of propaganda aimed at young people by the Groyper movement (Quintal, 2022), and in Spain, we find comparative studies between political leaders in Spain and Poland (Zamora-Medina et al., 2023) or studies of the political party Vox (Castro Martínez & Díaz Morilla, 2021).

Since then, very little research has been conducted on a continental European scale (Albertazzi & Bonansinga, 2024) and, to date, we have not found any that refer to the European elections of 2024. This does not only represent a novel contribution to the investigation of a social network to which the European Commission placed restrictions in 2023 for its use by its employees, for fear of security and access to their data (Sweney, 2023). It also contributes to the verification of the strength of the continent, as pointed out by Goujard et al. (2024): "Around Europe, the social media platform has become populist leaders' experimental lab during elections, sharing bombastic TV appearances and fiery speeches framed by bright backgrounds and emojis while attacking migrants, Islam, and climate change".

1.2. Emotional Strategies for Political Communication

The success of these parties is explained, among other factors, by how they use communication to mobilise their supporters, as well as to persuade and recruit undecided voters or new followers, such as young people of voting age. The communication strategy of the far right frequently employs diverse tactics, utilising emotions (Freistein et al., 2022) as valuable tools to establish a connection with voters, a practice that is also employed by traditional parties (Szabó, 2020).

Emotions have become of crucial importance in the digital ecosystem. An important part of online communication has an emotional component (Gheorghe, 2019). The mobilisation of the electorate is triggered by emotions. Citizens vote out of passion, anger, rage, indignation, hope, anger, nostalgia, etc. A citizen who has no feelings declines to abstain from voting (Crespo-Martínez et al., 2022). Love, disgust, fear, or humour constitute the foundation of any political campaign and are conveyed through both conventional and digital media (Méndez-Muros, 2021) and social networks.

In this sense, the media are relevant in terms of emotional connection, as spaces of ideological reproduction and social legitimisation beyond being a source of knowledge and transmission of opinions. In all of them, emotions play a fundamental role in connecting with the public, and political leaders create images that shape an identity for their followers (Rebollo-Catalán & Hornillo Gómez, 2010). This is particularly evident among populist politicians, who are not reticent to seek any assistance that facilitates emotional expansion (Charaudeau & Gentile, 2009).

The use of a broad spectrum of emotions linked to populism is common to a large part of extreme right-wing parties (Guerrero-Solé et al., 2023). Populist communication, therefore, is used strategically, with direct messages that appeal to the emotional side of voters. These are emotive and polarising messages, which are disseminated on social networks on the Internet (with ephemeral stories, shocking images, or short videos) and appeal to feelings such as fear. This is precisely one of the most emblematic emotional approaches of the far right, namely the appeal to fear and external threat to elicit concern among voters. According to Brader's (2005) research, voters who are exposed to messages of fear or anxiety exhibit an increase in their levels of vigilance and information-seeking. Similarly, populist politicians employ positive emotions, such as presenting themselves as ordinary individuals to achieve public identification on social networks (Kissas, 2024) or cultivating a sense of closeness with citizens (Bast, 2021).

Emphasising the insecurity of nations is a good weapon to use against the foreigner. In fact, a common tactic is to exaggerate the dangers of non-European citizens' immigration to their nations, seeing it as a threat to national identity, cultural customs, and their economy. From this stems the fear of terrorism, for example Islamist terrorism, as well as the criminality of certain groups or communities (Vasilopoulos et al., 2019).

Far-right parties use other frames, such as frustration and antipathy with the traditional political system, to blame other institutions for failing to solve problems such as unemployment, uncontrolled immigration, etc. It is therefore not surprising to find tactics such as the generation of distrust towards the political and economic elites (European Union, European Central Bank, traditional parties, etc.). Against this backdrop, a political revival is proposed, which these parties believe they embody with the backing of the populace. It is a valid strategy to attract voters who have been ignored or disappointed by the competition by presenting themselves as rebel, Eurosceptic, or anti-establishment parties (Szczerbiak & Taggart, 2024). They often portray themselves as victims of the political and media system.

Another pertinent approach is to appeal to identity and nationalism, wherein formations evoke past grandeur in a nostalgic manner. Formations employ national symbology and narratives to foster a sense of belonging and collective identity, ultimately leading to the rejection of the different. A recurring tactic is the protection of traditional national values (such as homeland, family, and religion) against moral decadence in Europe (Donders, 2020). It also involves the incorporation of songs or figures from popular culture (Dunkel & Schiller, 2025), which exhibit emotional efficacy for both young individuals and traditional audiences.

In addition to the above, the use of crisis rhetoric is another axis of interest in the emotional communication employed by far-right parties. They declare an economic, migratory, and social crisis in a Europe that requires transformation (Boréus, 2022). They employ strategies that appeal to the emotions of urgency to mobilise voters to act swiftly, relying on their postulates (Nguyen et al., 2021).

2. Materials and Methods

This study expands upon the theoretical foundations previously outlined and scrutinises the emotional communication tactics employed by far-right party leaders on TikTok, employing a methodology that integrates quantitative and qualitative content analysis (Callejo, 2010; Flick, 2004; Krippendorff, 2004; Wimmer & Dominick, 1996) and employs a comparative approach (Hallin & Mancini, 2004). However, it is imperative to note that the extreme right is a broad term that encompasses both radical (populist) and extreme forms of right-wing politics: "the far right includes all those ultranationalist collective actors sharing a common exclusionary and authoritarian worldview—predominantly determined on sociocultural criteria—yet varying allegiances to democracy" (Pirro, 2023, p. 103).

Three key dimensions of the phenomenon are explored: (1) the political party, (2) the political leader and his or her profile on TikTok, and (3) the videos posted during the 2024 European election campaign. The initial phase of the analysis comprised of identifying the parties and leaders who would constitute the research sample. The initial selection of the sample comprised 45 political parties from 26 nations that participated in the 2024 European elections and were identified with a far-right ideology: Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs—FPO (Austria); Nieuw-Vlaamse Alliantie—N-VA and Vlaams Belang—VB (Belgium); Има такъв народ/Ima Takŭv Narod and Възраждане (Bulgaria); Domovinski pokret—DP and Most nezavisnih lista (Croatia); Εθνικό Λαϊκό Μέτωπο—ELAM (Cyprus); Občanská demokratická strana—ODS and Svoboda a přímá demokracie—SPD (Czech Republic); Danmarksdemokraterne and

Dansk Folkeparti—DF (Denmark); Eesti Konservatiivne Rahvaerakond—EKRE (Estonia); Perussuomalaiset/Sannfinländarna—PS (Finland); Rassemblement national—RN and Reconquête—REC (France); Alternative für Deutschland—AfD (Germany); Dimokratikó Patriotikó Kínima—NIKI, Ellinikí Lýsi—EL/EΛ, and Foni Logikis (Greece); Fidesz-Magyar Polgári Szövetség—KDNP and Mi Hazánk (Hungary); Fratelli d'Italia—FdI and Lega Salvini Premier (Italy); Nacionālā apvienība (Latvia); Lietuvos lenkų rinkimų akcija—Krikščioniškų šeimų sąjunga or (Lithuania); Alternativ Demokratesch Reformpartei—ADR (Luxembourg); Conrad Borg Manché (independent) and Imperium Europa (Malta); BoerBurgerBeweging—BBB, Forum voor Democratie—FvD, Partij voor de Vrijheid—PVV, and Staatkundig Gereformeerde Partij—SGP (The Netherlands); Konfederacja Wolność i Niepodległość and Prawo i Sprawiedliwość—PiS (Poland); CHEGA—CH (Portugal); Alianța pentru Unirea Românilor—AUR and SOS România—SOS (Romania); Republika and Sloboda a Solidarita—SaS (Slovakia); Nova Slovenija–Krščanski demokrati—N.Si and Slovenska demokratska stranka—SDS (Slovenia); Se Acabó la Fiesta (SALF) and VOX (Spain); and Sverigedemokraterna—SD (Sweden).

This classification was determined by a report in the newspaper Público (Sangiao, 2024), which was based on the academic initiative The PopuList, which we have also used (Rooduijn et al., 2023), although it is outdated to 2022. In addition, the parties of this ideology present in the previous European elections were included in this ranking, included in the European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR) and Identity and Democracy (ID) groups of the European Parliament.

In 2024, from this initial group, 40 parties from 25 countries achieved parliamentary representation, with the only exceptions being Ireland and Malta. However, it was considered that mere membership in the ECR and ID groups does not necessarily imply that all groups are extreme right. Therefore, a thorough review of the ideological characteristics of each party was conducted, excluding parties that, although initially labelled as far-right typologies, we consider to be more aligned with other right or centre-right positions: liberalism, conservatism, nationalism, or other typologies (Christians, democrats, etc.). Specifically, the political parties that have been dropped are the following: Nieuw-Vlaamse Alliantie—N-VA (Belgium); Има такъв народ/Ima Takŭv Narod (Bulgaria); Občanská demokratická strana—ODS (Czech Republic); Danmarksdemokraterne (Denmark); Lietuvos lenkų rinkimų akcija—Krikščioniškų šeimų sąjunga or (Lithuania); BoerBurgerBeweging—BBB (The Netherlands); Staatkundig Gereformeerde Partij—SGP (The Netherlands); and Se Acabó la Fiesta (SALF) (Spain). Following this process, after consulting party websites and other sources (Flores & Charte, 2024; Señorán López, 2024), the sample was reduced to 32 far-right political parties from 24 countries, distributed across five groups in the European Parliament: Patriots for Europe (PfE), European Conservatives and Reformists Group (ECR), Europe of Sovereign Nations Group (ESN Group), and the European Union.

However, not all of the leaders of the former far-right formations have profiles on the Chinese social network. For the analysis of the emotional strategies of their leaders on TikTok, we considered the official accounts of their representatives. The final sample consisted of 27 verified or, failing that, unverified accounts, covering a total of 19 countries (Table 1). Profiles that raised questions regarding their authenticity or representativeness were discarded, having searched for this information on the parties' websites and on the profiles of the leaders on other social networks. This is the case of dubious profiles of Christos Christou, from Εθνικό Λαϊκό Μέτωπο—ELAM (Cyprus); Martin Helme, from Eesti Konservatiivne Rahvaerakond—EKRE (Estonia); Raivis Dzintars, from Nacionālā apvienība (Latvia); Alexandra Schoos, from Alternativ Demokratesch Reformpartei—ADR

(Luxembourg); Geert Wilders, from Partij voor de Vrijheid—PVV (The Netherlands); and Jaroslaw Kaczynski, from Prawo i Sprawiedliwość—PiS (Poland).

Table 1. Sample and units of analysis of the research.

Country	Political Party	Leader's Name	Number of Videos
Austria	Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs—FPO	Herbert Kickl	9
Belgium	Vlaams Belang—VB	Tom Van Grieken	62
Bulgaria	Възраждане	Kostadin Kostadinov	4
Croatia	Domovinski pokret—DP	Ivan Penava	0
Czech Republic	Svoboda a přímá demokracie—SPD	Tomio Okamura	56
Denmark	Dansk Folkeparti—DF	Morten Messerschmidt	1
Finland	Perussuomalaiset/Sannfinländarna—PS	Riikka Purra	0
France	Rassemblement national—RN	Marine Le Pen	21
France	Reconquête—REC	Éric Zemmour	8
Germany	Alternative für Deutschland—AfD	Tino Chrupalla	11
Germany	Alternative für Deutschland—AfD	Alice Weidel	
Greece	Dimokratikó Patriotikó Kínima—NIKI	Dimitris Natsios	10
Greece	Ellinikí Lýsi—EL/EΛ	Kyriakos Velopoulos	46
Greece	Foni Logikis	Afroditi Latinopoulou	4
Hungary	Fidesz-Magyar Polgári Szövetség—KDNP	Viktor Orbán	24
Hungary	Mi Hazánk	László Toroczkai	21
Italy	Fratelli d'Italia—FdI	Georgia Meloni	21
Italy	Lega Salvini Premier	Matteo Salvini	46
Poland	Konfederacja Wolność i Niepodległość	Slawomir Mentzen	2
Portugal	CHEGA—CH	André Ventura	31
Romania	Alianța pentru Unirea Românilor—AUR	George Simion	31
Romania	SOS România—SOS	Diana Sosoaca	10
Slovakia	Republika	Milan Uhrík	35
Slovenia	Nova Slovenija–Krščanski demokrati—N.Si	Matej Tonin	0
Slovenia	Slovenska demokratska stranka—SDS	Janez Janša	1
Spain	VOX	Santiago Abascal	18
Sweden	Sverigedemokraterna—SD	Jimmie Åkesson	0
TOTAL			472

A key aspect of data collection was the determination of the time of analysis, which was set between 22 May and 9 June 2024, inclusive, covering a total of 19 days. This interval is two days before and two days after the official election campaign calendar set by the Spanish Central Electoral Board (2024). As not all nations commence and conclude their electoral campaigns on identical dates, we opted to scrutinise the Spanish instance, which spanned from 24 May to 7 June, with an additional two days preceding and following this period. This ensures a broad observation framework that culminates on Election Day itself, allowing for both the activity before and immediately after the official campaign period. In

this context, 472 videos were manually collected through the TikTok app, which constitute the units of analysis of this research. This figure represents the total number of videos (universe) of each political leader during the above timeframe. The recording and field study of the videos was carried out over the months of October, November, and December 2024. Below is the analysis sheet used for this content.

According to the stated objectives and to address the research inquiries, a content analysis was conducted (Krippendorff, 2004), employing an analysis sheet. The selection of categories was based on a combined inductive and deductive approach. On the one hand, the theoretical foundation for emotional analysis is supported by research on universal emotions and their recognition in communication (Ekman, 1992; Sautera et al., 2010; Ortega Fernández & Rodríguez Hernández, 2021), on the role of emotions in political polarization and mobilization (Freistein et al., 2022; Badajoz-Dávila et al., 2023), and on the impact of political discourse on social media (Crespo-Martínez et al., 2022; Moret-Soler et al., 2022; Domínguez-García et al., 2023; Colussi et al., 2024; Martínez-Fresneda & Zazo-Correa, 2024). On the other hand, an exploratory phase was conducted to identify recurring patterns in the videos, allowing the adaptation of existing categories to the specific digital and political context of the study. This process ensured that the categories were theoretically consistent and mutually exclusive, preventing coding overlaps and guaranteeing analytical clarity.

An analysis sheet has been applied to each of the key dimensions, including contextualisation of the party, the leader and his TikTok account, and the content analysis of the publications. This sheet defines the primary study variables, which can be summarised as follows:

Dimension 1: contextualisation of the party. This includes variables such as the name of the party, territorial scope, year of the foundation, motto, logo, website, and political spectrum (which can range from extreme left to extreme right). Additionally, the ideology of the party is defined, which may include categories such as identity nationalism, national conservatism, anti-communism, Euroscepticism, Christian nationalism, and extreme right-wing populism.

Dimension 2: the leader and their TikTok account. Information is collected regarding the leader's name, gender, age, and brief background. The TikTok account is also looked at, including its verification, profile picture, description, number of followers, and "likes".

Dimension 3: content analysis. This dimension collects descriptive variables such as the video link, date of publication, video duration, and the inclusion of descriptive text, hashtags, or mentions. Engagement variables are also analysed, such as the number of "likes", comments, and shares. Due to the scope of the research, we have selected a singular option to categorise themes, emotions, strategic orientation, and target audience, among other factors. The main themes are identified, such as cultural identity, security, immigration, criticism of the political system, etc., and the target audience is identified. In the emotional content variables, we determined the predominant emotion in the video (for instance, fear, pride, hope), the polarisation (positive: emotions fostering well-being, hope, or belonging; negative: emotions inducing fear, anger, or rejection; neutral: balanced or low-intensity emotions), and the strategic orientation of the emotion, which encompasses positive emotions related to personal well-being and social connectedness; negative emotions linked to danger, anger, or suffering; and neutral emotions with both positive and negative tendencies. In this regard, the predominant emotion coding includes categories such as "Positive emotions of personal enjoyment", "Emotions of empathy and social connection", "Pride and ambition", "Emotions of danger and insecurity", "Intense negative emotions", "Emotions of displeasure", "Hope and excitement", and "Emotions of suffering and vulnerability." These categories were selected because they encompass both emotions that foster identification and political mobilization as well as those that generate

polarization and rejection, key elements in far-right communication (Freistein et al., 2022; Badajoz-Dávila et al., 2023). Additionally, criteria were established to ensure that these categories are theoretically consistent and mutually exclusive, ensuring that each video is classified under a single predominant emotion and preventing overlaps in coding. Finally, stylistic and technical aspects are considered, such as the use of music and visual effects, body language, and the presence of symbolic elements (flags, national or party symbols).

To ensure quality of the analysis, a detailed codebook (García-Estévez et al., 2025) was developed and coders were trained through a two-stage calibration process. Initially, a pilot analysis was conducted to identify and rectify any potential inconsistencies in the analysis card. Next, inter-rater reliability was assessed using Scott's indices and Cohen's Kappa coefficient (k) to reach a high level of agreement (90%), supporting the robustness of the coding tool. For data processing and the creation of contingency, frequency, and cross-tabulations and graphs, IBM SPSS Statistics was used, version 30.

Given the intricate and extensive nature of the data, an interpretative-hermeneutic approach was selected, in accordance with the recommendations of Gadamer (2015, 2004) and Ferrater Mora (1990). This methodology, which facilitates a comprehensive comprehension of the significances underlying the data, is complemented by qualitative discourse analysis methodologies, such as those advocated by Coffey and Atkinson (1996) and Sayago (2014). The qualitative techniques employed encompass open coding, which involves identifying recurring themes in the analysed content; narrative analysis, which examines the stories or narratives emerging from the videos and their connection with emotions and political messages; and contextualisation, which integrates the data into its cultural and political context to guarantee precise interpretation. It has been possible to identify patterns, recognise similarities and differences between discourses, and draw richer and more meaningful conclusions.

3. Results

3.1. Contextualising the Party, the Leader and His TikTok Account

The far-right parties under study vary significantly in terms of year of foundation, slogans, and ideological orientations, although they share a common political spectrum and converge on key themes such as identity nationalism and far-right populism. The chronology of the parties varies from historical formations such as the Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs, founded in 1956, to recent movements such as Foni Logikis in Greece (2023). This is indicative of a resurgence of the far-right political landscape, as evidenced by the emergence of novel actors in recent decades, such as SOS România (2021), Republika (2021), and CHEGA (2019).

The parties studied have a broad geographical spread across Northern, Southern, Eastern, and Western Europe. This aspect allows us to investigate how specific contextual factors, such as the migration crisis or political disaffection, shape the communication strategies and ideological discourses of the far right in different regions of the continent. Some parties stand out for their use of nationalist slogans that appeal to identity and protectionist sentiments, such as 'Our country first' (Alternative für Deutschland, Germany) or 'First the people themselves' (Vlaams Belang, Belgium). Others opt for messages of justice or traditional values, such as 'Justice for Hungary' (Mi Hazánk, Hungary) or 'Faith, Nation, Family' (NIKI, Greece). However, not all parties present clear-cut slogans, which could reflect differences in their communication strategies.

As for their ideological orientations, bearing in mind that they all fall within the spectrum of the extreme right, we must recognise that it is precisely ultra-right populism that is the predominant category (Figure 1). Seven parties identified along these lines were identified. This approach combines anti-elite discourse with nationalist claims to attract

disenchanted segments of the population. Identitárian nationalist ideology is present in six parties, an ideology that focuses on preserving and prioritising national cultural and ethnic identity over external influences. Both national conservatism and Euroscepticism are represented in four political parties, highlighting a tendency towards traditional policies and rejection of supranational European integration. To a lesser extent, Christian nationalism manifests itself in two distinct factions, emphasising a narrative founded on religious principles. It is surprising that none of the parties explicitly prioritise the categories of anti-communism and anti-globalisation, which may indicate a shift from traditional far-right approaches towards novel discursive axes.
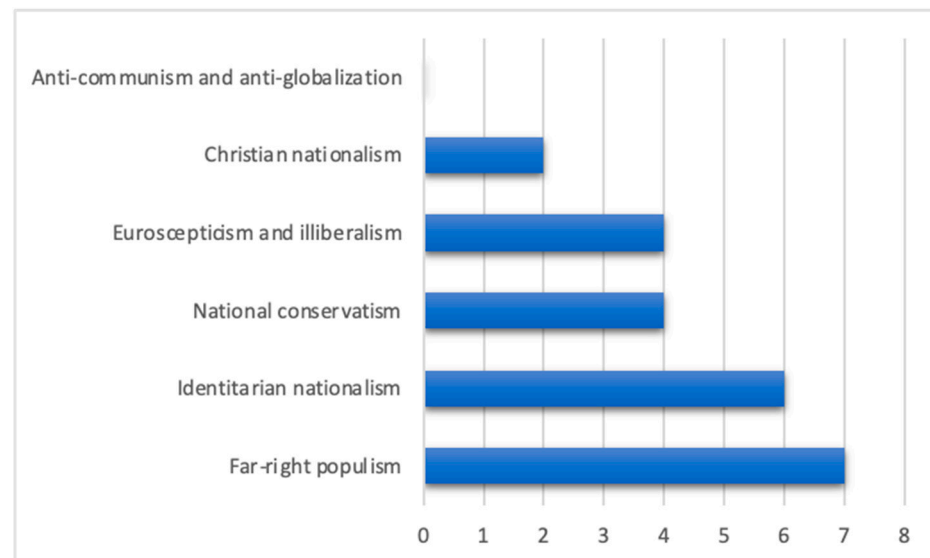
Figure 1. Extreme right-wing political ideology of the analysed parties.

The analysis of political leaders and their TikTok accounts reveals significant characteristics, both in terms of demographics and visual and communication strategies. Male representation is predominant, with 18 men outnumbering 6 women, indicating a distinct gender disparity in the political leadership of European far-right parties. The average age is 48.38 years, with slight differences between genders. Men have an average age of 48.89 years, and women have a slightly lower average age of 46.83 years. These data suggest that parties tend to select leaders who are at a stage of professional and political maturity, with a slight preference for older male leaders.

These political actors tend to use profile images that focus on close-ups (17 cases) or medium shots (7 cases), conveying closeness and personalisation. Leaders typically appear in close-up or medium shots, attired in formal attire comprising suits, shirts, and ties, with occasional instances of more casual attire. These visual choices reflect political leadership expectations, as well as national and strategic differences in how each public figure is presented.

Leaders often highlight their political positions and slogans related to their roles in their account descriptions, most of which are not officially verified (14 accounts versus 10 verified). For instance, Marine Le Pen and Matteo Salvini emphasise their responsibilities as national representatives, whereas others, such as Tom Van Grieken, opt for more direct communications aimed at political mobilisation. This approach strengthens their authority and links their profile to their party and national identity.

The number of followers and "likes" on profiles varies significantly, reflecting both the popularity of leaders and the effectiveness of their digital strategy. Leaders with a more charismatic and relatable approach, such as Éric Zemmour (356,900 followers and

5,900,000 likes) or Marine Le Pen (1,200,000 followers and 17,700,000 likes), stand out as being the most successful in terms of interaction. However, leaders who are less media-friendly, such as Dimitris Natsios (1620 followers) may have a limited digital presence, which could affect their ability to mobilise on this social network.

In summary, the purpose of profile pictures and descriptions is to convey crucial aspects of one's identity, such as the following:

— National symbolism and professionalism. Leaders such as Slawomir Mentzen and Marine Le Pen employ flags and official contexts in their photographs, thereby reinforcing their nationalist identity and connection to traditional values.

— Closeness and spontaneity. Leaders such as Viktor Orbán or Jimmie Åkesson opt for a more casual and informal approach, incorporating photographs taken outdoors or with an active attitude. This aims to connect with young audiences and create a more accessible image.

— Distinctive narrative style. Leaders such as Diana Șoșoacă stand out for their distinct character, combining populist messages with emotional and cultural content, such as in the case of music videos.

3.2. Content Analysis of European Far-Right Leaders' TikTok Publications

3.2.1. Analysis of the Descriptive Variables

We start by examining the descriptive characteristics and engagement of videos posted on TikTok by European far-right party leaders during the period from 22 May to 9 June 2024. This part of the study aims to identify patterns in the frequency of posts, the length of videos, the use of text, hashtags, and mentions as well as the average impact through engagement variables such as "likes", comments, and shares/favourites.

The characteristics include the frequency of publication. In this regard, the total quantity of videos published by the leaders analysed exhibits significant variation. The average number of posts per party is 21.3 videos, with a maximum of 62 (Vlaams Belang) and a minimum of 0 (Domovinski pokret, Nova Slovenija-Kranski demokrati, Perussuomalaiset/Sannfinländarna, and Swedendemokraterna). The distribution of this platform shows a disparity in the use of this platform as a communication tool. The duration is approximately 1 min and 31 s. A range of 6 seconds to 20 min was observed, indicating significant differences in the narrative and content strategies employed.

The analysis of the videos reveals a predominant utilisation of text and hashtags, while a lower frequency of mentions is observed. A total of 96.2% of the videos utilised hashtags, a prevalent practice in social media platforms to enhance the visibility of the content. However, only 3.8% of videos were presented without any descriptive text, suggesting that it is important to complement videos with written information. Although mentions were present in a much lower percentage (1.3%), they were mainly used to respond to other users or to tag journalists or media outlets.

3.2.2. Analysis of the Variables of the Message and Its Emotional Content

An analysis of the frequency distribution of the predominant themes in TikTok videos of European far-right political parties allows us to obtain an overview of the most recurrent themes in this type of content. The frequency table (Table 2) shows a clear preference for certain themes over others. The most frequent ones include the following: (1) campaign actions, rallies, and appeals to vote (182 videos), which is expected given the political content; (2) criticism of the political system and other parties (73 videos), indicating a strong tendency towards polarisation and political confrontation; and (3) security and immigration (53 videos), indicating a significant concern for security and immigration issues. On the contrary, the least frequent themes are the following: (1) promises for youth

(5 videos), which may indicate less attention to youth concerns for the parties analysed; and (2) rejection of progressive social movements (8 videos), since this theme, although present, does not seem to be a priority in the discourse of these parties.

Table 2. Frequency distribution of the main themes of the videos analysed.

Code	Theme	Frequency	%
1	Cultural and national identity	14	2.97
2	Security and immigration	53	11.23
3	Criticism of the political system and/or other parties	73	15.47
4	Promises for the youth	5	1.06
5	Rejection of progressive social movements	8	1.69
6	Appeal to traditional values	18	3.81
7	Narrative of crisis or decline	19	4.03
8	Euroscepticism and anti-globalisation	14	2.97
9	Campaign actions, rallies and call to vote	182	38.56
10	Other	86	18.22
TOTAL		472	100

Campaign actions, rallies, and appeals to vote are the most represented topic in the videos viewed by most of the leaders, such as those of Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Slovakia, Slovenia, Italy, Poland, Portugal, and Romania, as well as for Marine Le Pen (RN), Kyriakos Velopoulos (EL/EΛ), Afroditi Latinopoulou (Foni Logikis), and László Toroczkai (Mi Hazánk). There are also other relevant issues for some politicians, such as security and immigration for the representatives of AfD (Germany), VB (Belgium), and CHEGA (Portugal); criticism of the political system or European institutions for the leaders of EL/EΛ (Greece), Mi Hazánk (Hungary), and Svoboda a přímá demokracie (Czech Republic); the appeal to traditional values for the leader of the Greek NIKI party; the narrative of crisis or decline for Slawomir Mentzen from Poland; and the rejection of progressive social movements for Morten Messerschmidt, candidate of Dansk Folkeparti. Other issues of varying content were included in the category of other issues, which are of interest to the leaders of Vox (Spain), Republika (Slovakia), Reconquête (France), Foni Logikis (Greece), KDNP (Hungary), and Fratelli d'Italia and Lega Salvini Premier (Italy).

In general, the vast majority of TikTok publications by the political leaders analysed are targeted towards a diverse audience, with only 25 out of 472 videos examined targeting youth. Videos aimed at young voters tend to focus on topics related to campaign actions and calls for votes (10 videos), promises for youth (5 videos), security and immigration (3 videos), traditional values (3 videos), and narratives of crisis or decline (2 videos). These topics are essential to the speech of the extreme right. Moreover, efforts are made to mobilise young people through calls for votes and specific youth pledges. These findings suggest that far-right parties seek to strengthen their support base among young people through issues that reinforce a sense of national identity, security, and rejection of globalisation, while to a lesser extent, they also attempt to connect with their expectations through direct promises.

Some political leaders who are targeting young audiences are Alice Weidel (Germany), Tom Van Grieken (Belgium), Santiago Abascal (Spain), Marine Le Pen (France), Dimitris Natsios (Greece), Viktor Orbán (Hungary), Matteo Salvini (Italy), André Ventura (Portugal), Tomio Okamura (Czech Republic), and George Simion (Romania). In the case of the AfD

leader, the theme of connecting with this audience focuses on political campaign actions and appeals to vote (2 videos), as does the leader of the AUR (1 video). This theme is also used by the leader of VB (1 video), alongside issues of national security and immigration (2 videos), criticism of the political system and other formations (1 video), and election promises to the youth (1 video). The leader of VOX, in addition to releasing a video on appealing to the youth vote, also published a video on another topic, a scenario akin to that of CHEGA. The videos include a video on campaign actions and rallies and another on immigration. The SPD leader, in addition to urging young people to vote in a video, also exposes the decline of the country to them in a video and makes specific promises in another video. These proposals or commitments to the young public are also recurrent topics for the leaders of Rassemblement National (1 video) and Viktor Orbán (1 video). Lastly, the leaders of Lega Salvini Premier and Niki dedicate a video each to connecting with young people through traditional values.

An analysis of the prevailing emotions reveals a strategic plan based on the balanced use of positive and negative emotions to mobilise the electorate. The most prevalent emotion was pride and ambition (80 videos, 16.95%), a positive emotion that aims to reinforce national identity and the perception of personal and collective accomplishment, focusing on the voter's self-worth and their part in shaping political change. However, emotions of intense negative emotion (74 videos, 15.68%) and those of danger and insecurity (73 videos, 15.47%) also stand out as key pillars of emotional communication. This shows a strategy that appeals to fear, the urgency and perceived threat of factors such as immigration, globalisation, or cultural decline, negative emotions that could be explained in the context of a continent affected by a high level of irregular immigration, receiving thousands of illegal immigrants every year, especially from Southern and Eastern European nations, as well as thousands of asylum seekers. This situation is being exploited by a large part of the extreme right-wing parties to demand protection for their countries and strict border control from the European Union, as they see immigrants as responsible for a large part of the continent's problems (insecurity, social conflict, criminality, loss of cultural identity, etc.).

On the other hand, emotions of hope and illusion (68 videos, 14.41%) and empathy and social connection (65 videos, 13.77%) complement this framework, providing a balance for emotional contrast and motivating the audience with visions of a better future under their leadership. Despite the relative weight of emotions such as personal enjoyment (57 videos, 12.08%) and displeasure (55 videos, 11.65%), their presence reinforces the narrative of enjoyment under traditional values and rejection towards political actors or institutions considered adversaries. This emotional design shows a sophisticated use of TikTok to capture the public's attention, creating a balance between fear and optimism. In videos that are specifically targeted towards young individuals (24 videos), these emotions are amplified to mobilise this crucial audience towards the polls.

Analysis of the data shows that far-right European political leaders strategically structured their emotional content on TikTok during the elections, using specific combinations of predominant emotions, levels of polarisation, and strategic orientations (Table 3).

The majority of the videos analysed exhibit negative emotions. These include "Emotions of danger and insecurity" (73 videos), "Emotions of displeasure" (49 videos), and "Intense negative emotions" (74 videos). These emotions are predominantly associated with negative polarisation (208 videos) and strategic orientations focused on danger and insecurity (107 videos) or anger and suffering (93 videos). In many of these videos, the possible dangers of immigration and the dissatisfaction with the political practices of the European Union and, above all, of the representatives and political leaders of the respective nations, are central themes with negative connotations. This approach reflects a communication strategy that appeals to fear, mistrust, and indignation, typical elements in extreme

right-wing speeches, which aim to mobilise the audience by highlighting threats such as immigration, globalisation, or progressive movements.

Table 3. Frequency distribution of the predominant emotions, polarisation, and strategic orientation of the analysed TikTok videos.

Predominant Emotion	Frequency	%
Positive emotions of personal enjoyment	57	12.08
Emotions of empathy and social connection	65	13.77
Pride and ambition	80	16.95
Emotions of danger and insecurity	73	15.47
Intense negative emotions	74	15.68
Emotions of displeasure	49	10.38
Hope and illusion	51	10.81
Emotions of suffering and vulnerability	15	3.18
Other	8	1.69
Polarisation	**Frequency**	**%**
Positive	214	45.34
Negative	208	44.07
Neutral	50	10.59
Strategic orientation of emotion	**Frequency**	**%**
Positive ones related to personal well-being	88	18.64
Positive social connection and hope	119	25.21
Negative statements related to danger or insecurity	107	22.67
Negative feelings related to anger or suffering	93	19.70
Neutral with positive trend	37	7.84
Neutral with negative trend	28	5.93
TOTAL	275	100

Nevertheless, there exists a deliberate utilisation of positive emotions, such as "Hope and Illusion" (51 videos) and "Pride and Ambition" (80 videos), which are associated with positive polarisation (214 videos) and strategic orientations focused on social connection and hope (119 videos) or personal well-being (88 videos). These emotions provide an optimistic message, presenting leaders as a solution to the problems. This approach helps build a "rebirth" or "new opportunity" narrative that is especially attractive to young voters.

Although neutral strategic orientations are less common, they do have a specific role. Emotions such as "pride and ambition" and "positive emotions of personal enjoyment" are occasionally associated with neutral positive or negative trends (28 videos), suggesting a tactical approach to connecting with indecisive audiences or moderate emotional polarisation. Emotions of empathy and social connection are mostly linked to positivity and a focus on hope, which humanises the political message and strengthens the emotional bond with the public.

The distributions reflect a dual strategy of mobilisation through negative emotions (crisis, fear) and an optimistic and hopeful message based on positive emotions (pride, illusion). This balanced narrative allows for the engagement of more radicalised supporters while

attracting undecided or moderate voters. This approach confirms the use of emotionally sophisticated and characteristic communication techniques in electoral contexts.

Emotional tactics differ across nations and political leaders. The communicative strategies of the far-right formations have identifying nuances in each of them, sharing, however, some features and factors in terms of the issues addressed, as we have seen, and the impressions conveyed. For example, the negative emotions of displeasure and those linked to danger and insecurity correspond in many cases to current events, acts, or speeches in which leaders express their misgivings and concerns about what they see as a social and cultural drift of their nations and of Europe itself, mainly due to the effects of the migration crisis. The risks that uncontrolled immigration has and may have for citizens and national customs are the focus of many of the messages we have seen, with allusions to problems of coexistence, crime, rape, and terrorism and radicalisation, in the case of Islamism. As irregular immigration is a problem that especially affects Southern and Eastern European nations, this emotion of danger is more prevalent in the discourses of far-right leaders in these regions, as can be seen in the cases of the Czech Republic, Portugal, Slovakia, and Spain, but also in other nations with a high foreign population (Belgium and Germany). Negative emotions and dislike, in addition to the previous immigration theme, is also linked to apathy and criticism of both the political system (other parties, opposition, etc.) and European institutions. This only goes to show the dissatisfaction of European far-right leaders with the political context of their nations and the continent.

Emotions of danger and insecurity are prevalent across the board in the videos of the two AfD leaders, present in more than half of the cases (6). This emotion is also strongest in the videos of candidates Milan Uhrk, André Ventura, and Santiago Abascal (8 videos each), although in the case of the Slovak leader, positive emotions of personal enjoyment and others of displeasure also stand out (6 videos each). In the case of the two Iberian leaders, the positive emotions of personal enjoyment (7 videos in CHEGA) and empathy and social connection (4 videos in VOX) are also noteworthy. However, in the videos of the Austrian leader, the Greek Natsios, and the Slovenian Jana, the emotions related to hope and illusion shine more brightly (4 videos, 4 videos, and 1 video, respectively), as is the case with Tom Van Grieken, where these emotions, together with those of danger and insecurity, tie in number (16 videos each) and represent more than half of the VB sample.

The emotions of empathy and social connection are the most important for leaders Kostadinov (3 videos) and Sosoaca (5 videos), being also relevant for Orbán (10 videos), together with the emotions of hope and illusion and pride and ambition (4 videos each). It is precisely this emotion of pride that appears most frequently in the leaders of Mi Hazánk (9 videos), Fratelli d'Italia (7 videos), Lega Salvini Premier (16 videos), and Konfederacja (1 video), although it is not in the majority. Therefore, it is possible to discern pronounced negative emotions in the cases of Salvini (16 videos), Toroczkai (5 videos), and Mentzen (1 video), as well as positive emotions of personal enjoyment in the five videos of Meloni.

These negative emotions can also be observed in the leaders Okamura (23 videos) and Simion (12 videos), as well as others of danger and insecurity (11 videos) in the Czech politician and pride and ambition (11 videos) in the Romanian politician. Lastly, we would like to highlight other predominant emotions that were observed in the remaining candidates. After analysing the accounts of the leaders of Denmark and France, we observe a preference for positive emotions and personal enjoyment (1 video for Messerschmidt, 9 for Le Pen, and 6 for Zemmour), as well as for the Greek leader Latinopoulou (2 videos). In the context of the EL/EΛ formation, it is noteworthy that 14 videos exhibit emotions of displeasure, in contrast to 11 videos where empathy and social connection prevail.

The frequency distribution of intensity levels reveals a predominance of medium-intensity messages (249 videos), followed by those with high intensity (143 videos). Ulti-

mately, messages of low intensity are the least prevalent, accounting for a total of 79 videos (Table 4).

Table 4. Contingency table between the polarisation and intensity variables of the analysed Tik-Tok videos.

	Intensity Low	Intensity Medium	Intensity High
Negative polarisation	57	104	53
Positive polarisation	6	116	86
Neutral	16	30	4

The Chi-square test conducted between the variables 'polarisation' and 'intensity' yields a Chi-square value of 63.63, with a minimal *p*-value ($p < 0.001$), indicating a significant correlation between the two variables. The expected frequencies reflect significant differences in the observed distribution of the data. In particular, messages of low intensity are predominantly associated with negative (57 observed versus 35.82 expected) and neutral (16 observed versus 8.37 expected) polarisation. However, messages of high intensity are more present in messages with positive polarisation (86 observed versus 63.02 expected), while messages of average intensity show a more balanced distribution, with significant differences between the polarisation types.

This result indicates that the intensity of the messages is not agnostic to their polarisation. Positive messages tend to be more intense, possibly to inspire optimism and mobilisation, while negative or neutral messages tend to be less intense. This is likely a strategy to reduce the emotional impact and avoid emotional overload in the recipient. This suggests a strategic design for message intensity based on emotional and political orientation.

3.2.3. Analysis of Stylistic and Technical Variables

The predominant absence of music (248 videos), together with neutral or ambient music (67 videos), reflects a strategy based on verbal or visual communication without musical support, to avoid distractions and focus attention on the main message (Table 5). On the contrary, the utilisation of cheerful or lively music in 16.07% of cases (76 videos) indicates an attempt to establish a light and optimistic emotional connection, likely aimed at a younger audience. Although less utilised (30 videos), epic or tense music is strategically employed in settings where values such as heroism, conflict, or urgency are sought to be highlighted, in accordance with the mobilising narratives of certain political parties. Moreover, the low use of nostalgic or melancholy music (14 videos) suggests that the analysed videos do not prioritise the appeal to emotions related to tradition or loss but are more focused on the present and future.

It is interesting to explore whether there is a relationship between the type of music used and the predominant emotion of the message. We conducted a Chi-square analysis on these two variables, revealing a Chi-square value of 164.38, a *p*-value of 5.17×10^{-17}, and a degree of freedom of 40 degrees. This outcome indicates that there exists a statistically significant correlation between the two variables, as the p-value is significantly lower than the conventional significance threshold of ($p < 0.05$). This enables us to reject the null hypothesis that the predominant emotions and the utilisation of music in videos are unrelated. The statistical significance suggests that emotions conveyed in videos are closely associated with the types of music used. This means that the creators of the videos do not use random music but rather use certain musical styles to reinforce or amplify the emotions they want to convey. Certain trends in the contingency table are highlighted below:

1. Absence of music. It is commonly used to convey feelings of disharmony, danger, and insecurity, as well as intense negative emotions. Music alone can be used to create a crudeness or realism effect that intensifies emotional perception.
2. Neutral or ambient music. It appears to be associated with emotions of empathy and social connection, as well as with hope and illusion. This type of music has the potential to serve as a background that does not cause any distraction but rather complements and reinforces warmer and more emotional messages.
3. Epic music. It is primarily related to emotions of pride and ambition and hope and illusion. Epic music emphasises emotions of achievement, grandeur, and optimism.
4. Cheerful or lively music. It is more prevalent in positive emotions, such as hope and illusion, and less common in personal enjoyment. This style promotes optimism and energy, aligning with lighter and more motivating messages.
5. Nostalgic or melancholic music. Although less frequent, it is associated with intense negative emotions and feelings of suffering and vulnerability. Music of this type is probably used to evoke memories or to appeal to feelings of loss and sadness.
6. Tense or dramatic music. It is prevalent in emotions of apprehension and apprehension, as well as in heightened negative emotions. This type of music is often used to intensify drama, fear, or the perception of urgency in the message.

Table 5. Contingency table between the predominant emotion and music usage variables of the analysed TikTok videos.

Predominant Emotion/Music	Absence of Music	Neutral or Ambient	Epic	Cheerful or Lively	Nostalgic or Melancholic	Tense or Dramatic	TOTAL
Positive emotions of personal enjoyment	11	12	2	29	2	1	57
Emotions of empathy and social connection	17	9	6	24	4	5	65
Pride and ambition	40	14	12	6	3	5	80
Emotions of danger and insecurity	48	10	3	3	2	7	73
Intense negative emotions	52	10	5	2	0	5	74
Emotions of displeasure	41	4	1	2	0	1	49
Hope and illusion	20	6	9	9	3	4	51
Emotions of suffering and vulnerability	12	1	0	0	0	2	15
Other	6	1	0	1	0	0	8
TOTAL	247	67	38	76	14	30	472

Finally, we investigate the inclusion of symbols and emblems of the country, party, or others in these videos and their relation to the effectiveness of national strategies (Table 6). The results suggest that the videos of the leaders of the European extreme right-wing on TikTok prioritise the absence of symbology in general, with national emblems mostly absent

(407 videos), with a background presence in 45 cases and prominent use in only 20 videos. This strategy appears to emphasise more direct messages, wherein national symbols are utilised on a one-off basis to reinforce emotions of pride and national identity in crucial contexts, appealing to collective emotional connection without resorting to visual excess. Similarly, the party symbols are absent in a significant number of videos (248), yet their presence is evident in the background (180 videos) and prominent in certain instances (43 videos). This suggests a deliberate strategy to consolidate party identity and establish trust without polarising the audience.

Table 6. Frequency distribution of the inclusion of country symbols, party emblems, or other symbology in analysed TikTok videos.

	National Symbols	**Party Symbols**	**Other Symbols**
Absent	407 (86.23%)	248 (52.54%)	436 (92.37%)
Present in the background	45 (9.53%)	180 (38.14%)	36 (7.63%)
Prominent	20 (4.24%)	43 (9.11%)	0

The absence of any other symbols (436 videos) and their almost non-existent utilisation in the background (36 videos) indicates that they are not pivotal to communication strategies, thereby reinforcing a more controlled and holistic approach. The limited utilisation of symbols indicates a strategy that prioritises verbal and emotional narratives, bolstered by other elements such as tone and music. This strategy facilitates the transmission of emotions such as pride, hope, and social connection, while avoiding oversaturating the message visually. In general, these strategic decisions reflect a calculated strategy to mobilise emotions without over-polarising, thereby optimising reach for a diverse audience, particularly young individuals.

3.2.4. Analysis of Engagement and Response Variables

The engagement metrics analysed (such as "likes", comments, and shares) exhibit a diverse distribution. While the average number of "likes" was 15,991, with a standard deviation of 47,210, the maximum values reached indicate a high potential for viralisation of some contents. The average number of comments is 827, indicating moderate user interaction, whereas the average number of shared comments is 963.8, indicating a tendency to disseminate content. The descriptive statistics for these variables are presented below (Table 7).

The distribution and range of "likes" goes from 2 to 522,100. Videos with more than 100,000 "likes" represent extreme cases; in the comments, the range varies between 1 and 27,100, showing a high concentration at low levels with some outliers; and in shared/favourites, the distribution ranges from 0 to 74,500.

Table 7. Descriptive statistics of the engagement variable.

Variable	**Average**	**Standard Deviation**	**Minimum**	**Maximum**
Likes	15.991	47.210	2	522.100
Comments	827	2.710	1	27.100
Shared/Favourites	963.8	3.492	0	74.500

We have investigated whether there is a significant relationship between the number of "likes" and the main theme of the video. To achieve this, it is necessary to consider the popularity of the leader (in terms of number of followers on TikTok) by normalising

the number of "likes" received by each video by dividing that number by the number of followers of the corresponding leader. These values have been converted into percentages to enhance comparability. As a result, the topics have been ordered based on the average of "normalized likes", from highest to lowest (Table 8).

Table 8. Main topics and normalised likes (%).

Main Topics	Normalised Likes (%)
Rejection of progressive social movements	9.69
Appeal to traditional values	4.27
Cultural and national identity	4.02
Campaign actions, rallies, and calls to vote	3.99
Other	3.92
Security and immigration	3.12
Criticism of the political system and/or other parties	3.03
Euroscepticism and anti-globalisation	2.41
Promises for youth	2.26
Narrative of crisis or decline	1.86

This indicates that videos related to the rejection of progressive social movements, the appeal to traditional values, cultural and national identity, and campaign actions and rallies generate the most interaction. This is followed by general themes (others) and those pertaining to security and immigration, or criticism of the political system and other parties. On the contrary, the less popular topics are those associated with Euroscepticism and anti-globalisation, promises for youth, crisis narratives, and rejection of progressive social movements, which may reflect a lower perceived emotional resonance or relevance in these areas.

In the same vein, we have examined whether there exists a significant correlation between the average normalised likes and the predominant emotion of the video, resulting in the following result (Table 9).

Table 9. Predominant emotion and normalised likes (%).

Predominant Emotion	Normalised Likes (%)
Positive emotions of personal enjoyment	5.88
Emotions of suffering and vulnerability	4.99
Hope and illusion	4.98
Emotions of danger and insecurity	4.01
Emotions of displeasure	3.96
Emotions of empathy and social connection	3.31
Pride and ambition	2.78
Others	1.88
Intense negative emotions	1.88

It is observed that positive emotions of personal enjoyment generate the greatest normalised engagement, closely followed by those related to suffering and vulnerability and hope and excitement. These emotions, which mobilise both personal and collective aspects, appear to have a high impact on the interaction, adjusted to the popularity of

the leader. Emotions such as danger and insecurity and unpleasantness also achieve a certain level of resonance, although to a lesser extent. Conversely, intense negative emotions and ambiguous categories such as other emotions generate significantly lower levels of engagement. These results, along with the calculated Engagement Rate (%) of 17.78%, underscore the importance of emotional content in driving engagement on TikTok. This pattern suggests that despite positive emotions leading to a close interaction, certain negative narratives manage to capture attention, possibly due to their emotional intensity.

4. Discussion and Conclusions

The 2024 European elections are an example of the fact that emotional communication strategies are still more relevant than ever in the field of politics. This is in light of the intricate nature of these elections, as despite sharing a legislative body, there are 27 national elections that are entirely distinct in terms of parties, campaigns, and electoral regulations (Mudde, 2024a). As previously analysed, far-right groups have adeptly implemented these tactics, eliciting both positive and negative emotions. In this regard, they employ strategies that aim to evoke the deepest sentiments of voters, mobilising those who are uncertain, uninformed, or abandoned by traditional political parties or current systems.

In addition to speeches, rallies, and campaign actions, social networks have emerged as a potent vehicle for conveying their messages, capturing voters' attention through polarisation and conflict (Kakavand, 2024; Guerrero-Solé et al., 2020). Among these networks, TikTok stands out as a formidable battlefield for both traditional (Cervi et al., 2023; Zamora-Medina et al., 2023) and extreme right-wing parties (Albertazzi & Bonansinga, 2024; González-Aguilar et al., 2023) and has additionally emerged as a potent instrument for attracting younger voters (Medina-Serrano et al., 2020). Chinese platforms have promoted parties from this ideological spectrum, such as the German AfD (Gilbert, 2024). Because of their visual format, these and other parties deliver messages that are emotional, appealing, and ready for rapid consumption by a wide audience. The content seeks controversy and debate, utilising Eurosceptic, anti-immigrant, and anti-establishment approaches, in accordance with other research (Malet, 2025; Szczerbiak & Taggart, 2024).

This research has specifically focused on the analysis of the emotional communication strategies employed on TikTok by the leaders of European extreme right-wing parties. The objective is to comprehend how they aim to entice the youthful voter, specifically for the elections held in June 2024. The conclusions obtained are in accordance with the objectives and research inquiries posed, furnishing a comprehensive understanding of the utilisation of emotions, themes, and stylistic resources in their publications, as well as their impact on the engagement generated.

The dominant emotions in the videos analysed (RQ1) reflect a balanced strategy between positive and negative emotions, designed to mobilise both undecided voters and their more radical bases. The emotions of 'hope and illusion' (51 videos) and "pride and ambition" (80 videos) stand out as the most efficacious, generating substantial levels of engagement, particularly in terms of "likes" (63,809 and 15,847 on average, respectively). These positive emotions convey an optimistic and motivating message, portraying leaders as icons of change and solutions to the challenges presented. Furthermore, these emotions are particularly important when addressing young audiences, where optimism and interpersonal connection are key to encouraging their political participation. Conversely, negative emotions such as 'danger and insecurity' (73 videos) and 'intense negative emotions' (74 videos) are recurrent and align with the narrative of the political, economic, and social crisis, although they generate less interaction in terms of engagement. This suggests that, despite the efficacy of fear and outrage in attracting attention, their capacity to sustain

emotional connection is limited in comparison to positive emotions such as optimism and belonging.

As for the recurrent themes in the messages (RQ2), the results indicate a clear predominance of 'campaign actions, rallies, and appeal to vote' (182 videos) and 'criticism of the political system and other parties' (73 videos). These concepts reinforce polarisation and political mobilisation (Castelli Gattinara et al., 2022), crucial strategies in the discourse of the far right. However, themes such as 'promises for youth' (5 videos) and 'rejection of progressive social movements' (8 videos) are less frequent, which suggests that attention to specific concerns of young people or social movements is limited. Despite this, the 25 videos specifically targeting young audiences address issues related to campaign actions, specific promises, and narratives of hope, reflecting an attempt to connect directly emotionally with this audience. However, in some cases, these TikTok accounts may have spread lies and conspiracy theories (Morozova & Šlerka, 2024).

The analysis of stylistic and narrative resources (RQ3) reveals a preference for the absence of music (248 videos) or the utilisation of neutral or ambient music (67 videos), strategies that aim to focus attention on the verbal or visual message without any distractions. Nonetheless, upbeat or lively music (76 videos) and epic music (30 videos) are strategically employed to reinforce emotions of optimism, pride, and ambition, particularly in messages aimed at a youthful audience. However, the lack of nostalgic or melancholic music (14 videos) indicates a focus on the present and future, rather than appealing to emotions related to tradition or loss. This scenario contrasts with the dedication to the popular music of each nation, which is likely to be utilised in other political endeavours (Dunkel & Schiller, 2025).

Regarding the frequency and types of interactions generated (RQ5 and RQ6), the findings indicate that videos related to "campaign actions, rallies, and call to vote" garner the highest average "likes" (23,361.50), followed by those related to general themes ("others", 17,842.17) and "Euroscepticism and anti-globalisation" (16,485.71). This suggests that messages promoting direct involvement in the electoral process are those that generate the greatest emotional resonance and connection with the audience. There exists a significant correlation between the type of emotion and the level of engagement generated. Positive emotions, such as "hope and illusion" and "empathy and social connection", are known to generate more interactions, whereas negative emotions, despite being prevalent in crisis narratives, exhibit a more moderate impact in terms of engagement. Nonetheless, the transfer of a certain number of "likes" or shares to the final votes proves to be arduous.

A comparison analysis of leaders (RQ5) highlights differences in emotional and thematic strategies by country and political context. For instance, leaders such as Marine Le Pen and Éric Zemmour amalgamate both positive and negative emotions to produce a balanced emotional impact. Others, such as Tom Van Grieken or Viktor Orbán, emphasise negative emotions linked to insecurity and displeasure, reflecting a more polarised approach. Albertazzi and Bonansinga (2024) praised Le Pen as a serious, responsible, and supportive leader, while Zemmour and Salvini also combined other elements of entertainment and motivation for the spectators, something that is typical of Abascal. These differences demonstrate that contextual factors, such as the migration crisis or political disaffection, shape each leader's communication strategies. The truth is that many of them disseminate messages with a high negative and polarising emotional component, showing recurring themes such as the dangers of irregular immigration (conflict, crime, terrorism, etc.), as well as attacks on other political leaders, the opposition, and even institutions such as the European Union, blaming all of them for the ills of their countries and the continent. This discontent and other negative factors, as well as positive ones, help us to understand how far-right parties construct or mould tailor-made ideological discourses based on vari-

ous contextual axes and frameworks, with differences and similarities between leaders and with a greater or lesser degree of radicalisation.

In relation to RQ8, there is a recurring appeal to identity, cultural and social values specifically directed at young people, although only to a limited extent. The videos analysed include symbolic references to national elements, such as flags and colours of homelands, particularly in contexts of "campaign actions" and "pride and ambition". However, their use is limited, since most videos prefer to convey identity narratives through verbal and emotional language, avoiding the visual saturation of symbols. Social values, such as the protection of the family, security, and rejection of globalisation, are incorporated into speeches addressed to both youth and the general electorate. These values reinforce the collective identity, attracting shared concerns and projecting an image of renewal and stability under their leadership.

Ultimately, it has been confirmed that there exists a significant correlation between the utilisation of specific emotions and the degree of engagement attained (RQ6). The emotions of "hope and illusion" and "empathy and social connection" not only generate more "likes" but are also associated with narratives that promote interpersonal connection and optimism, key aspects to mobilise the young electorate. Conversely, adverse emotions, such as "danger and insecurity" or "displeasure", although effective in attracting attention, exhibit a more limited impact in terms of sustained interaction. This pattern suggests that videos that seek to connect emotionally from a positive perspective are more likely to generate social media reactions. Leaders who bet on hope and human connection could be using a more effective strategy to capture public attention and support.

At this stage, it is essential to revisit the hypotheses and compare them to the results obtained during the analysis. This allows us to evaluate to what extent our initial expectations about the communication strategies used by far-right party leaders on TikTok during the European elections campaign are confirmed. Regarding the general hypothesis (GH), which suggests that far-right party leaders employ emotional, thematic, and stylistic communication strategies to maximise impact and engagement, adjusting to the characteristics and preferences of digital audiences, we can partially confirm this hypothesis. Certain leaders successfully incorporated TikTok's tools and possibilities, including montages, transitions, and music, by adjusting their content to the platform's dynamics. Other leaders, however, opted for a more traditional approach, simply posting clips of parliamentary speeches or media appearances without significantly tailoring their content for TikTok.

For the specific hypotheses, the results were as follows.

SH1: The messages disseminated by far-right party leaders on TikTok are designed with a style, content, and tone that specifically appeal to young audiences, incorporating topics relevant to their interests and forms of communication typical of this demographic. This hypothesis has been partially disregarded. Although TikTok is highly popular among young people, we observed no consistent effort to connect specifically with this audience. Despite the widespread popularity of TikTok, it is noteworthy that only 25 out of the 472 videos analysed were explicitly targeted towards younger audiences, indicating a lack of thematic and stylistic specialisation.

SH2: In the analysed videos, negative emotions, such as fear, anger, and disgust, dominate and are employed as tools to polarise and mobilise the audience. This hypothesis is also rejected, contrary to our expectations. During the analysed period, the results indicate a balance between positive and negative emotions, with a slight predominance of positive emotions (244 cases, 51.7%) compared to negative emotions (228 cases, 48.3%). Positive emotions include categories such as "personal well-being" and "social connection", while negative emotions encompass "danger and insecurity" and "anger or suffering".

SH3: Videos that incorporate negative and unpleasant emotions generate a higher level of interaction and engagement compared to videos that do not. Moreover, this hypothesis is rejected. Positive emotions generated higher levels of engagement in terms of likes, according to the data. Furthermore, the analysis of normalised likes by predominant emotion confirms this trend. Positive emotions of personal enjoyment (0.0588) and hope and excitement (0.0498) led to normalised engagement, while emotions such as danger and insecurity (0.0401) and unpleasantness (0.0396) resonated less strongly. Intense negative emotions (0.0188) showed the lowest level of engagement, suggesting a limited emotional relationship in these cases. This pattern demonstrates the preponderance of positive emotions in generating interaction, although certain negative narratives maintain some capacity to capture attention.

To summarise, the leaders of European far-right parties utilise TikTok as a crucial platform to mobilise their supporters and voters through sophisticated emotional tactics. They achieve a narrative balance by combining positive emotions that inspire optimism and belonging with negative emotions that emphasise threats and crises. The predominant themes and stylistic resources employed, such as the strategic use of music and limited inclusion of symbols, reflect a calculated approach to maximise emotional impact without over-polarising the audience. These results underscore the importance of understanding how emotions and narratives are used in social networks to influence political behaviour, especially in extreme right-wing contexts where emotional communication plays a central role. Our initial assumptions assumed that European far-right parties would heavily rely on negative emotions, which would generate greater impact and engagement. Nevertheless, the results indicate otherwise. Furthermore, it is not supported that European leaders utilise TikTok exclusively to target young individuals, indicating a more comprehensive communication approach than initially anticipated.

However, we must highlight some limitations of our study. Firstly, the complexity of analysing videos in the 15 languages used by far-right leaders (Flemish, Bulgarian, Czech, Danish, French, German, Greek, Hungarian, Italian, Polish, Portuguese, Romanian, Slovak, Slovenian, and Spanish) is significant, since the authors of this research did not have language skills in all of them. This situation has been a handicap for the process of coding emotions and themes, but thanks to the function of subtitles automatically generated by voice recognition in TikTok, the analysis of body language and the observation of speech traits, the consultation of the texts accompanying the videos, the overlays, and the comments of the followers in the videos, as well as consultations on the Internet, we consider that this has been carried out correctly.

Secondly, the research has been segmented due to the absence of personal profiles on TikTok or publications in the studied period by leaders of far-right groups. Even so, in such cases, it appears that their parties do appear to have accounts on the Chinese platform, opting to corporatise their presence on social networks. Furthermore, another limitation is that the analysis has exclusively focused on the leaders of the formations and not on prominent politicians who have participated in European elections. For example, Jordan Bardella, president and head of the list of the National Rally, is one such example. He has been able to use TikTok to tell his daily life and reach an audience of young people more interested in viral dances than in conventional politics (Goujard et al., 2024). And finally, a last limitation would be to know the discourse, through rhetoric, employed by these politicians, something we would like to put into practice in a forthcoming research.

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