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# VISUAL SELF-REPRESENTATION OF SPANISH PARLIAMENTARIANS ON X
## A Multimodal Analysis of Portrait, Banner and Textual Description

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*Digital Political Communication*
*Political Self-Representation*
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**ABSTRACT**

*This study analyses the self-representation of Spanish parliamentarians on the social media platform X, conceptualising the political profile as a multimodal architecture of identity comprising a portrait, banner and biographical description. Using multimodal quantitative analysis and principal component analysis on a sample of 309 parliamentarians, patterns of visual standardisation and symbolic neutralisation were identified. The results revealed a tendency towards a normative parliamentary profile geared towards professionalisation and control over public image, with ideological markers strategically redistributed across the different profile elements. The study provides insight into how digital political communication articulates identity in multimodal contexts.*

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# 1. Introduction

Contemporary political communication takes place within a context of intensive mediatisation, in which political actors adapt their practices, discourses and forms of representation to the logics of the media and digital platforms (Chadwick, 2013; Donges, 2022). Mediatisation does not merely entail greater visibility for politics in the media; it also involves a structural transformation of political action, which is reorganised around criteria such as attention, spectacularisation and personalisation (Bennett & Pfetsch, 2018; Canel, 2018).

Politicians no longer act exclusively as institutional representatives or party spokespersons; their role extends beyond this, as they become media actors who manage a public communication strategy requiring a more active and sustained presence. Social media accelerate this process because they provide spaces in which communication is direct, without journalistic mediation, and narratives are constructed, controlled and distributed by politicians themselves (Casero-Ripollés, 2021). Platforms offer hybrid environments in which informational, expressive and performative logics converge, blurring the boundaries between institutional communication, permanent campaigning and self-promotion (Herranz-de-la-Casa, 2023).

The centrality of platforms such as X, Instagram and TikTok has reinforced a form of politics geared towards constant visibility. Image, tone, emotion and engagement have become key attributes shaping communication strategies on these platforms, beyond the messages conveyed through their content. In this context, politicians have sought to adopt strategies characteristic of influencers and media figures in order to remain relevant within a saturated digital information environment (Engesser et al., 2017). This process has been described as a form of the "celebrification" of politics, in which leadership is articulated through personal exposure, performative authenticity and symbolic proximity to citizens (Mazzoni & Mincigrucci, 2021; Street, 2011).

## *1.1. Political Self-Representation, Self-Branding and Symbolic Neutralisation*

The notion of self-representation constitutes a key theoretical framework for understanding how political actors construct their public identity on social media. Drawing on Goffman's theory (1959), this perspective conceives social interaction as a performance in which individuals manage impressions through situated performances. In the digital sphere, these dynamics are intensified because politicians have unprecedented control over the visual and discursive elements that shape their public image (Gordillo-Rodríguez et al., 2021; Gordillo-Rodríguez & Bellido Pérez, 2023).

Social media enable a form of self-representation based on the selection, prioritisation and repetition of particular identity traits. Unlike traditional media, where politicians' images were mediated by journalists and editors, digital platforms offer relatively stable spaces, such as the profile, which function as permanent stages for self-presentation (Usher, 2016). Here, each visual and textual element contributes to constructing a coherent narrative of the political self, aimed at projecting attributes such as competence, approachability, leadership and authenticity.

Recent academic literature indicates that political self-representation on social media tends to combine professional and personal dimensions, thereby creating a hybrid identity that seeks to humanise political actors without undermining their institutional authority (Archetti, 2017). This tension between proximity and legitimacy constitutes one of the central dimensions of digital political communication, particularly in the current context, characterised by high levels of polarisation and fragmented audiences.

A concept closely linked to digital self-representation is political self-branding, understood as the process through which political actors construct themselves as recognisable and distinctive brands within a competitive electoral market (Cánovas, 2023). This approach forms part of broader dynamics of political personalisation, in which leadership is articulated around individual, biographical and stylistic traits, shifting prominence away from party organisations (Balmas & Sheafer, 2016).

Self-branding entails the constant curation of digital identity, in which visible attributes are carefully selected and elements that may provoke rejection or interpretative ambiguity are minimised. In this regard, personalisation on social media does not always involve greater ideological explicitness, but may instead encourage processes of symbolic neutralisation, particularly within the most stable visual elements of the profile (Navarro et al., 2023).

This neutralisation is evident, for example, in the reduced use of party symbols, ideological colours or explicit references to political organisations, in favour of a professionalised and ostensibly apolitical image. Far from implying genuine de-ideologisation, this process involves the strategic relocation of ideological markers, which tend to shift towards other areas of the profile, such as the banner or textual description. Political identity is thus fragmented and distributed unevenly across the different semiotic resources available, allowing the degree of ideological visibility to be modulated according to context and audience.

### *1.2. The Social Media Profile as a Multimodal Architecture of Identity*

The social media profile can be understood as an architecture of identity composed of an interconnected set of relatively stable visual and textual elements: the profile image, banner or header image, and textual description or biography. Far from functioning as isolated components, these elements operate interdependently in the production of political meaning.

The profile image, generally a photographic portrait, acts as the principal visual anchor of a political figure's digital identity. Its persistent nature and visibility in every user interaction make it a central element of recognition and identity coherence. Academic literature on visual political communication has shown how technical and aesthetic choices, such as frontal orientation, gaze, facial expression and shot scale, significantly influence perceptions of attributes such as competence, warmth and authority (Grabe & Bucy, 2009; Maes, 2015).

The banner or header image provides a broader and more flexible visual space, geared towards the symbolic contextualisation of the political actor. Through this resource, parliamentarians may incorporate territorial, institutional or ideological references, as well as visual narratives linked to particular values, causes or groups (Lalancette & Raynauld, 2020). Unlike the portrait, the banner accommodates a greater symbolic load and a higher degree of variability, functioning as a complementary narrative space.

The textual biography constitutes a key discursive device for identity self-labelling. Despite its brevity, the bio allows parliamentarians to summarise their positions, affiliations, values and even ideological stances, operating as a relatively stable anchoring point within the profile (Rogers et al., 2021). Recent studies have shown that biographies function as indicators of the type of identity that political actors seek to project publicly, revealing identity hierarchies and strategies of symbolic legitimation (Santagiustina et al., 2025).

Multimodal analysis has become established as a central theoretical and methodological approach to the study of digital political communication. From this perspective, meaning does not emerge from isolated elements, but from the structured interaction between different visual, textual and spatial communicative modes articulated within the same semiotic environment (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006). When applied to political profiles on social media, this approach makes it possible to understand how image and text co-contextualise one another to construct coherent identity narratives. At the same time, it is useful for analysing processes of personalisation, symbolic neutralisation and the management of political visibility, with particular attention to the construction of ideology, leadership and legitimacy in mediatised digital environments (Fordjour, 2021; Nurjamin et al., 2023).

### *1.3. Research Objectives and Hypotheses*

The overall objective of this research is to analyse how Spanish parliamentarians construct their political self-representation on the social media platform X through the elements that make up the profile header: photographic portrait, banner and biographical information. These elements are understood as a multimodal architecture of digital identity. From this perspective, the study seeks to identify recurring visual and discursive patterns, as well as to explore the relationships between the aesthetic, compositional and semiotic variables involved in the construction of political meaning.

More specifically, the study pursues three objectives: (1) to describe the dominant trends in the use of visual and textual variables in parliamentarians' portraits and banners; (2) to examine whether significant differences exist in these self-representation strategies according to ideological affiliation; and (3) to identify visual and discursive configurations that make it possible to define prototypical models of portraits and banners within the context of Spanish digital political communication.

On the basis of these objectives, the following exploratory hypotheses are proposed:

H1: Dominant visual patterns exist in parliamentarians' self-representation on X that prioritise personalisation and symbolic neutralisation over explicit party identification.
H2: Political ideology influences the use of particular visual and discursive resources that shape self-representation.

## 2. Methodology

This study adopts a research design aimed at analysing the political self-representation of Spanish parliamentarians on the social media platform X. From a multimodal perspective, it examines the principal elements that make up the profile header: the photographic portrait, banner and biographical information. These elements are understood as interrelated visual and textual resources involved in the construction of digital political identity. To this end, a deductive quantitative analysis of visual variables is applied to the portraits and banners, alongside an inductive analysis of the textual profile descriptions focused on identifying discursive patterns and identity labels. This methodological approach makes it possible to capture both the formal regularities and the symbolic variations present in strategies of political self-representation in digital environments.

### *2.1. Sample and Coding System*

The images and text comprising the sample were collected in March 2024. The study population consisted of the 350 parliamentarians serving in Spain's 15th parliamentary term. Of these, 309 parliamentarians (88.29%) had an active account on the social media platform X.

A deductive coding scheme based on categorical variables was established for the analysis of the portraits and banners. These variables were organised into three broad groups: technical and aesthetic aspects, the attitude of the person depicted (where present), and the context or background represented in the image.

An inductive approach was adopted for the analysis of the textual profile descriptions, complementing the deductive analysis applied to the visual elements. Each description was analysed to identify the presence or absence of these variables, as well as the order and prominence with which they appeared. This analysis made it possible to identify patterns in the discursive construction of political identity and differences in textual self-presentation strategies.

The analysis dictionaries listing and defining the variables and their categories are available in the repository accessible via the link provided in Section 6, Supplementary Material (DiccionarioDescripcionTexto.pdf and DiccionarioFotosBanners.pdf).

### *2.5. Statistical Analysis*

To explore the underlying relationships between the visual variables associated with the portraits and banners, principal component analysis (PCA) was conducted. This strategy made it possible to identify how the values of the variables combined and how they were structured in relation to one another. The corresponding analysis was performed using Varimax rotation with Kaiser normalisation. A convergence criterion of 0.00001 and a maximum of 1,000 iterations were established. This procedure yielded the factor loadings for each variable across the resulting dimensions. The Not applicable categories were coded as additional categories for inclusion in the analysis. The textual profile descriptions were not subjected to dimensionality-reduction techniques, but were instead examined through an inductive approach based on frequency analysis, prominence and discursive categorisation.

To assess the secondary research objective, based on the hypothesis that self-representation strategies differ according to the political group to which each parliamentarian belongs, the chi-square test of independence was used to determine the significance of the relationships between variables, while Cramér's V was employed to calculate the strength of association. The significance threshold was set at $p \leq 0.05$. The independence tests were conducted solely with reference to the Socialist Parliamentary Group, the Popular Parliamentary Group in Congress, the Plurinational SUMAR Parliamentary Group and the VOX Parliamentary Group, as these four groups together accounted for 92% of parliamentarians at the time of data collection. The inclusion of minority parliamentary groups could have generated unbalanced distributions and a high number of expected frequencies below the values recommended for applying the chi-square test, thereby compromising the robustness of the results and disproportionately increasing the weight of isolated, incidental cases.

The statistical analysis was conducted using Python (version 3.9.13) and the SciPy library (version 1.12.0), while the cross-tabulations were analysed using IBM SPSS Statistics (version 27.0.1.0). For reasons of length and readability, the statistical calculations, together with the complete tables presenting the frequencies of the variables examined and the nested comparisons, are provided in Section 6, Supplementary Material (stats.pdf).

## 3. Results Analysis

Of the 309 parliamentarians who had an active account on the social media platform X at the time of data collection, 300 included a profile photograph, 286 displayed a banner and 292 provided a biographical description. Of the 309 parliamentarians with an account on X, 8 included no visual or textual elements (profile image, banner or description), having merely created the account. By contrast, 279 parliamentarians had a profile image, banner and textual description. Table 1 breaks down the use of the three multimodal resources analysed by parliamentary group.

**Table 1**. Multimodal self-representation associated with each parliamentary group

| Parliamentary group | Profile | Banner | Text |
|---|---|---|---|
| Euskal Herria Bildu Parliamentary Group | 6 (2%) | 6 (2.1%) | 6 (2.05%) |
| Junts per Catalunya Parliamentary Group | 6 (2%) | 6 (2.1%) | 6 (2.05%) |
| Mixed Parliamentary Group | 3 (1%) | 3 (1.05%) | 3 (1.03%) |
| SUMAR Plurinational Parliamentary Group | 30 (10%) | 30 (10.5%) | 30 (10.27%) |
| Popular Parliamentary Group in Congress | 106 (35.33%) | 103 (36.01%) | 104 (35.62%) |
| Republican Parliamentary Group | 7 (2.33%) | 7 (2.45%) | 7 (2.4%) |
| Socialist Parliamentary Group | 111 (37%) | 101 (35.31%) | 105 (35.96%) |
| Basque Parliamentary Group (EAJ-PNV) | 3 (1%) | 3 (1.05%) | 3 (1.03%) |
| VOX Parliamentary Group | 28 (9.33%) | 27 (9.44%) | 28 (9.59%) |
| TOTAL | 300 (100%) | 286 (100%) | 292 (100%) |

Source: Authors' own elaboration, 2024.

The distribution of profile images, banners and self-descriptive texts reveals an imbalance, with more than 70% of each modality concentrated in the two largest parliamentary groups: the Socialist Parliamentary Group and the Popular Parliamentary Group in Congress. When the Plurinational SUMAR Parliamentary Group and the VOX Parliamentary Group are added, the cumulative percentages exceed 90% across all modalities. Consequently, the results are subject to sampling bias associated with parliamentary group.

### *3.1. Analysis of Profile Images*

To identify common trends among parliamentarians in the design of the images used as profile pictures on the social media platform X, the total frequencies of the different variables analysed were calculated in aggregate, without taking into account the political affiliation of the parliamentarians concerned. The results of the analysis of each profile image according to the variables considered can be consulted via the link provided in Section 6, Supplementary Material (AnálisisPerfil.pdf).

Some of the variables analysed revealed clear preferences in the design of the images used by parliamentarians to illustrate their profiles. More than 80% of parliamentarians preferred their profile images on the social media platform X to display the following characteristics: no reference to historical events (99%), photographs (97.33%), appearing alone (97%), in colour (96.33%), without flags (94.67%), with the eyes visible (94%), without logos (90.33%), without text (88%), with a stable orientation (86%), with a natural background (84.67%), a centred composition (82.33%), without the party colour (81.67%) and without movement (80%). Parliamentarians also predominantly chose to present themselves individually (78.67%), in spatial locations that were not recognisable (78.33%), with the camera positioned at eye level (60.67%) and in a posed manner (66.33%).

With regard to image orientation, more than half chose to represent themselves frontally (52%), while 37% appeared at a diagonal angle and 10.33% in profile. In addition, 52.33% of parliamentarians looked directly at the camera. Regarding facial expression, 43.67% appeared smiling with their teeth visible, 33.33% displayed a serious expression and 22% smiled without showing their teeth. In terms of

shot scale, 39.67% were represented in a medium close-up, 28.68% in a close-up, 13% in a general close-up and 7.33% in a medium shot. The remaining options each accounted for 5% or less, including full close-up, full medium shot, full shot, medium close-up and extreme close-up. Most parliamentarians therefore opted for shots that emphasised the face, while sometimes also including the upper body.
Principal component analysis was used to define the relationships between the variables more precisely (Table 4). The Not applicable values were not included in the nested tables, as they represented a considerable proportion of the sample and could have had a significant influence on the results.

**Table 4.** Factor loadings of the variables after PCA for each dimension

| | Dimension 1 | Dimension 2 |
|---|---|---|
| Gaze towards the camera | **-0.784** | -0.101 |
| Camera height | 0.330 | 0.152 |
| Shot scale | -0.419 | -0.260 |
| Background | -0.425 | -0.176 |
| Frontality | **0.753** | 0.051 |
| Attitude | **-0.792** | -0.233 |
| Composition | 0.232 | 0.338 |
| Movement | **0.689** | 0.240 |
| Typology | -0.235 | 0.458 |
| Hierarchy | **0.502** | -0.010 |
| Spatial location | **0.554** | -0.135 |
| Tilt or stability | 0.070 | 0.010 |
| Smile | **0.626** | 0.027 |
| Eyes | 0.392 | -0.168 |
| Collectivity | 0.177 | 0.209 |
| Text | -0.032 | **0.869** |
| Flags | 0.171 | -0.016 |
| Colour | 0 | -0.172 |
| Logo/ party preference | -0.038 | **0.869** |
| Party colour | 0.118 | **0.585** |
| Ref. to historical events | -0.041 | -0.064 |

Note: Relevant loadings are shown in green (above 0.5) or red (below -0.5).

Dimension The factor loadings for Dimension 1 revealed relevant positive relationships between frontality, movement, smile, hierarchy and spatial location, while gaze towards the camera and attitude displayed substantial negative associations. Dimension 2 indicated relevant relationships between text, logo/party preference and party colour.

A more detailed examination of the relationships identified by the PCA showed that images without movement accounted for 80% of the total sample of parliamentarians' X profile images. In these images, spatial location was classified as unrecognisable (66.67%) or politically recognisable (9.67%). When the spatial location was unrecognisable, individual representation predominated (88.5%); those portrayed generally appeared smiling (78%), with either direct frontality (65%) or a diagonal orientation (30.5%). By contrast, when the spatial location was politically recognisable, representation could be individual (62.07%) or individual within a group (37.93%), and subjects generally appeared serious (41.38%) or smiling (58.62%). In cases where they appeared serious (41.38%), the orientation tended to be in profile (33.33%) or diagonal (50%), whereas smiling expressions (58.62%) were associated with direct frontality (64.7%).

Secondly, images in which parliamentarians appeared in static representations accounted for 17% of the total sample. Of these, 60.78% were associated with unrecognisable spatial locations and 39.22% with politically recognisable spatial locations. Among the parliamentarians who used a static image, 58.82% appeared individually and 31.37% appeared individually within a group. In these static representations, 74.5% of subjects appeared serious and were photographed diagonally (56.87%) or in profile (31.37%).

Overall, serious facial expressions were associated with photographs taken diagonally (51%) or in profile (23%), whereas smiling expressions (65.76%) were associated with direct frontality (65.99%). In turn, politically recognisable spatial locations (19%) were associated with individual representations

(50.88%) or individuals within a group (42.1%), combined with diagonal portraits (45.61%) or profile portraits (24.56%) and serious expressions (61.4%).

With regard to the gaze towards the camera variable, the distribution was relatively even: 52.33% of portraits showed the subject looking at the camera, while 47.67% did not. Regarding attitude, 66.33% of the sample consisted of posed portraits and 30% displayed a natural attitude. Among portraits displaying a natural attitude, 97.78% of subjects did not look at the camera. By contrast, in posed portraits, 73.87% of parliamentarians looked at the camera.

With regard to Dimension 2, most parliamentarians (76.33%) chose not to include text, party colour or a logo in their portraits. More specifically, a large proportion of the sample contained no text (88%), did not display the party colour (81.67%) and did not show the party logo (90.33%). In cases where portraits included informational text, the sample was divided: 52.17% displayed the party colour, while 47.83% did not. However, when the party colour was not included, the party logo was also absent in 81.82% of cases, whereas when the party colour was displayed, a photographed party logo was also included in 75% of cases. Lastly, when parliamentarians incorporated their party logo, they preferred to show it as part of the photographed scene (89.66%) rather than add it digitally (10.34%).

Considering the four parliamentary groups with the highest frequencies—the Socialist Parliamentary Group, the Popular Parliamentary Group in Congress, the Plurinational SUMAR Parliamentary Group and the VOX Parliamentary Group—the analysed sample comprised a total of 275 parliamentarians. To analyse the relationship between political party and the different visual variables in the portrait, the chi-square test was applied. The variables showing a statistically significant relationship were camera height ($\chi^2(9, N = 275) = 19.14$, $p = .024$, $V = .15$) and reference to historical events ($\chi^2(3, N = 275) = 8.20$, $p = .042$, $V = .17$).

The results showed an overrepresentation of low-angle shots in the VOX Parliamentary Group (53.57%), compared with their more moderate use by the Popular Parliamentary Group in Congress (22.64%), the Socialist Parliamentary Group (19.82%) and the Plurinational SUMAR Parliamentary Group (30%). Being photographed with the camera at eye level was the predominant trend across all the parliamentary groups analysed, particularly in the Popular Parliamentary Group in Congress (64.15%) and the Socialist Parliamentary Group (63.06%), followed by the Plurinational SUMAR Parliamentary Group (46.67%) and the VOX Parliamentary Group (42.86%).

Regarding the analysis of the reference to historical events variable by parliamentary group, the significance obtained through the chi-square test was not considered analytically relevant because the distribution of this dichotomous variable was extremely unbalanced, with 274 No cases compared with only one Yes case.

### *3.2. Analysis of the Banners*

The analysis of the banners used by parliamentarians revealed clear preferences in the design of these images. Several variables included a specific category that accounted for more than 80% of cases, including images in colour (97.55%), no reference to historical events (91.61%), no camera tilt (87.05%) and no logos (81.12%). With regard to typology, of the 286 banners analysed, 209 (73.08%) were photographs, 37 (12.94%) were graphic designs and 30 (10.49%) were photographs incorporating graphic design. The remainder were drawings or works of art. The results of the analysis of each banner are available via the link provided in Section 6, Supplementary Material (AnálisisBanner.pdf).

Parliamentarians also predominantly chose banners with a natural background (78.68%), without flags (77.27%), without movement (76.57%) and without their party colour (70.63%). Since most banners were not portraits, the variables smile (61.89%), collectivity (58.74%), eyes (58.39%), gaze (58.04%), frontality (57%) and attitude (54.55%) were not applicable in a substantial number of cases.

Regarding the collectivity category, 17.13% preferred a banner in which they appeared alone, 11.54% depicted themselves with their in-group, 8.39% with their in-group including the leader and 4.2% solely with their leader. In terms of composition, banners were generally centred (69.93%), while in 26.57% of cases the subject appeared at the periphery of the frame. In addition, 66.78% of the banners contained no text, although 17.83% included slogans and 13.99% included informational text.

The remaining variables did not display such marked trends. Of the parliamentarians, 14.34% selected a banner in which they smiled with their teeth visible, 12.59% appeared serious and 9.09%

smiled without showing their teeth. Eyes were visible in 34.97% of the banners and naturally obscured in 6.29%. In banners depicting an individual, 19.93% appeared frontally, 15.03% diagonally, 4.2% in profile and the remainder were photographed from behind. In 14.69% of the banners, the individuals looked at the camera, while in 26.92% they did not. With regard to shot scale, 39.16% of the banners used a long shot, 10.49% a medium close-up and 7.69% a close-up. The remaining categories, in descending order of frequency, were detail shot (6.64%), full medium shot (3.5%), full shot (2.8%) and general close-up (2.78%).

Taking into account the loadings obtained through PCA (Table 5), the relationships between the variables were defined more precisely. The Not applicable values were not included in the nested tables, as they represented a considerable proportion of the sample and could have had a significant influence on the results.

**Table 5**. Factor loadings of the variables after PCA for each dimension

| | Dimension 1 | Dimension 2 |
|---|---|---|
| Gaze towards the camera | **-0.639** | 0.049 |
| Camera height | -0.262 | 0.221 |
| Shot scale | **0.929** | -0.298 |
| Background | -0.205 | **0.518** |
| Frontality | **-0.644** | 0.021 |
| Attitude | **-0.610** | 0.019 |
| Composition | **0.562** | 0.047 |
| Movement | **-0.669** | -0.211 |
| Typology | 0.404 | **1.125** |
| Hierarchy | **0.593** | -0.071 |
| Spatial location | -0.576 | 0.341 |
| Tilt or stability | 0.300 | 0.214 |
| Smile | **0.635** | -0.064 |
| Eyes | **0.649** | -0.051 |
| Collectivity | **0.632** | -0.060 |
| Text | 0.075 | **1.034** |
| Flags | -0.237 | **-0.702** |
| Colour | -0.273 | -0.097 |
| Logo/party preference | 0.115 | **-0.861** |
| Party colour | 0.201 | **-0.823** |
| Ref. to historical events | 0.264 | 0.052 |

Note: Relevant loadings are shown in green (above 0.5) or red (below -0.5) and are highlighted in bold.

The factor loadings for Dimension 1 identified relevant relationships between shot scale, composition, hierarchy, smile, eyes and collectivity, on the one hand, and gaze towards the camera, frontality, attitude and movement, on the other. Dimension 2 highlighted the relationships between background, typology and text, on the one hand, and flags, party logo or preference and party colour, on the other.

A total of 46% of the sample depicted a group of people without establishing a hierarchy or highlighting any particular individual. Banners depicting individuals alone or groups of several people in which one individual stood out accounted for between 15% and 21% of the total. Regarding shot scale, the most frequent was the medium close-up (22%), followed by the long shot (20%) and the close-up (16%). In descending order, these were followed by the medium shot, full medium shot, full shot, general close-up, medium close-up, other, extreme close-up and detail shot. It is important to note that the medium close-up, close-up and medium shot together accounted for 51.84% of the total sample, indicating that these similar shot scales predominated in the visual composition.

The use of the long shot was concentrated in centred compositions depicting a group of people without hierarchy (66.67%). However, when the composition was peripheral, it tended to depict a group of people in which one individual stood out from the rest (14.8%). When the close-up was preferred, compositions were predominantly peripheral and tended to depict individuals standing out within a group (40.9%) or groups of people without hierarchy (27.27%). In medium shots, compositions tended to place essential elements at the periphery of the frame, depicting groups of people without highlighting any particular individual (47.37%).

When eyes were visible in the banner, most parliamentarians chose to depict themselves alone (78.57%) or with their in-group (90%). However, when they appeared with their leader and their eyes were also visible, they were always shown smiling, either with their teeth visible (54.55%) or without showing their teeth (45.45%).

When subjects did not look at the camera in the banner, parliamentarians generally depicted themselves with a natural attitude and in movement without displacement (41.89%), mainly at a diagonal angle (20.27%). Likewise, when the banner showed no movement and reflected a natural attitude, none featured a gaze towards the camera. When subjects looked at the camera, parliamentarians generally appeared posing and without movement (85.71%), mainly frontally (78.57%).

When banners included a slogan, most featured a photograph showing a natural attitude (44.12%). By contrast, among photographs incorporating graphic design, the distribution was evenly divided between natural and modified backgrounds (26.5% in each category).

When banners did not include flags, most also displayed neither the party logo nor the party colour (73.3%). However, when flags were included, they were predominantly national flags (76.67%) and were accompanied by the party colour in half of the cases. Nevertheless, regardless of whether or not the party colour was displayed, 56.52% of parliamentarians did not include their party logo, while 45.65% did not include the party colour.

Considering the four parliamentary groups with the highest representation—the Socialist Parliamentary Group, the Popular Parliamentary Group in Congress, the Plurinational SUMAR Parliamentary Group and the VOX Parliamentary Group—the analysed sample comprised a total of 261 parliamentarians. To analyse the relationship between political party and the different visual variables of the banner, the chi-square test was applied to this dataset in order to identify relationships across all the variables analysed. The variables that showed a statistically significant relationship with the parliamentarian's political group in the configuration of the banner were shot scale, background, typology, party logo, spatial location, reference to historical events and flags.

The parliamentary groups analysed showed a clear preference for the long shot. This category accounted for 44.66% of banners in the Popular Parliamentary Group in Congress, 44.44% in the VOX Parliamentary Group and 40.59% in the Socialist Parliamentary Group. The Plurinational SUMAR Parliamentary Group, by contrast, displayed a more diverse pattern. Although the long shot remained the most frequent category (20%), the distribution across different intermediate shot scales—medium shot, full medium shot and medium close-up—was more balanced. In contrast to this diversity, the VOX Parliamentary Group concentrated 81.48% of its banners in wider shot scales rather than close-ups.

Although the absence of a logo predominated across all the parliamentary groups analysed, particularly the Socialist Parliamentary Group (76.6%) and the Popular Parliamentary Group in Congress (78.3%), the Yes, photographed category was concentrated in certain groups, most notably the VOX Parliamentary Group (25%), the Socialist Parliamentary Group (9.9%) and the Popular Parliamentary Group in Congress (5.7%). Digitally added logos appeared mainly in the Popular Parliamentary Group in Congress (13.2%) and the Plurinational SUMAR Parliamentary Group (13.3%), whereas their presence was lower in the Socialist Parliamentary Group (4.5%); no cases of digitally added logos were recorded in the VOX Parliamentary Group.

The use of unrecognisable spatial locations predominated across all the parliamentary groups analysed, particularly the VOX Parliamentary Group (70.37%), as well as the Popular Parliamentary Group in Congress (47.57%) and the Socialist Parliamentary Group (41.58%). Recognisable local locations appeared more frequently in the Popular Parliamentary Group in Congress (25.24%) and the Socialist Parliamentary Group (20.79%), whereas the Plurinational SUMAR Parliamentary Group showed a more limited presence (6.67%).

Recognisable political locations were concentrated mainly in the Popular Parliamentary Group in Congress (15.53%) and the Socialist Parliamentary Group (14.85%), and were less frequent in the Plurinational SUMAR Parliamentary Group (13.33%) and the VOX Parliamentary Group (11.11%). The Not applicable category was particularly prominent in the Plurinational SUMAR Parliamentary Group (33.33%) and the Socialist Parliamentary Group (21.78%), indicating a greater presence of banners without an identifiable spatial reference.

Regarding the use of national flags, the VOX Parliamentary Group stood out, including one in 44.4% of its banners, compared with 19.42% in the Popular Parliamentary Group in Congress, 10.9% in the Socialist Parliamentary Group and no cases in Podemos.

The background variable concentrated 79.69% of cases in the Natural category, meaning that minor variations in the remaining categories tended to have a disproportionate effect on the significance of the p-value obtained in the independence test. The results were therefore not considered analytically robust. A similar situation occurred with the typology variable, for which 73.56% of cases were concentrated in the Photograph category.

### *3.3. Analysis of Self-Descriptive Texts*

To identify common trends in the design of the texts used as profile descriptions on the social media platform X, the frequencies of the different variables analysed were calculated for the 292 parliamentarians whose profiles included a textual description. The results of the analysis of each description according to the variables considered can be consulted via the link provided in Section 6, Supplementary Material (AnálisisTextos.pdf). Table 2 presents the frequency analysis of all the analytical variables applied to parliamentarians' profile descriptions.

Some of the variables analysed revealed clear preferences in the design of the descriptions used by parliamentarians as profile text. A total of 86.3% of parliamentarians chose to state their position, while 77.4% included their place of origin. Some 41.1% presented their role within the party, and more than 30% indicated their profession (33.22%) or used slogans or quotations (31.51%). These were followed by references to ideology (15.41%) or family (14.38%). The remaining variables did not display such marked trends. In descending order of frequency, parliamentarians chose to include information about their education (9.25%), interests or hobbies (8.9%), career history (6.51%), links to websites (3.08%), personal affiliations outside the party (2.4%) and other occasional, non-recurring aspects (1.71%). Lastly, 1.37% of the sample included an outdated description or a declaration of authorship, while only 0.68% mentioned their leader.

Regarding the position of variables within the text, the median indicates that reference to the position generally appears first, followed by place of origin, profession, or references to family and education. Slogans or quotations, ideological statements, interests and hobbies, the parliamentarian's career history, mention of the leader, other affiliations and links to websites tend to appear last.

To analyse differences between parliamentary groups across the various study variables, the Kruskal–Wallis test was applied by variable and parliamentary group in order to obtain the mean rank, the Kruskal–Wallis statistic and the corresponding p-value. All the p-values obtained were above 0.05; therefore, no significant differences were observed in the mean ranks between parliamentary groups.

With regard to the languages used in parliamentarians' profile descriptions, different representational strategies were observed. The vast majority of the sample chose to write their description in Spanish (79.1%), followed by Catalan (11.99%), Galician (2.74%) and, lastly, Basque (1.71%). In addition, 5.14% of parliamentarians combined more than one language, with Spanish and English being the most frequent combination (1.37%). It should be noted that English appeared only in combination with Spanish, whereas Basque was always used as the sole language.

Significant differences were found in the use of languages in profile descriptions according to parliamentary group among the four largest groups ($\chi^2(18, N = 267) = 51.41$, $p < .001$, $V = .253$). In the Plurinational SUMAR Parliamentary Group, 60% of parliamentarians used Spanish only, while 30% used Catalan and 10% used Galician. In the Popular Parliamentary Group in Congress, 94.23% of parliamentarians used Spanish exclusively, with very few cases involving combinations with other languages. The Socialist Parliamentary Group primarily used Spanish (79.05%), but also employed other regional languages, such as Catalan and Galician. Lastly, the VOX Parliamentary Group used Spanish almost exclusively (96.43%), with only one case involving another language, in which Spanish was combined with Latin.

Most parliamentary groups referred to their personal place of origin, as reflected in the Popular Parliamentary Group in Congress (79.81%), the Socialist Parliamentary Group (80%) and the VOX Parliamentary Group (82.14%). However, this was less frequent in the Plurinational SUMAR Parliamentary Group (53.33%). This difference in the tendency to report place of origin in the profile

description was statistically significant according to the chi-square test ($\chi^2(2, N = 267) = 10.951$, $p = .012$, $V = .203$).

Regarding the labels used by parliamentarians to refer to their ideology, various forms of representation were observed according to parliamentary group. Of the 309 parliamentarians analysed, 45 included at least one ideological label, while 264 did not. A total of 69 ideological references were recorded, of which 28 appeared alone, 11 in combinations of two, 5 in combinations of three, and one parliamentarian used four.

The Socialist Parliamentary Group recorded the largest number of labels (36 labels among 24 parliamentarians), followed by the Plurinational SUMAR Parliamentary Group (11 labels among 7 parliamentarians), the Republican Parliamentary Group (9 labels among 3 parliamentarians), the Popular Parliamentary Group in Congress (7 labels among 6 parliamentarians), the VOX Parliamentary Group (3 labels among 3 parliamentarians) and the Euskal Herria Bildu Parliamentary Group (3 labels among 2 parliamentarians). By contrast, Junts per Catalunya, the Mixed Parliamentary Group and the Basque Parliamentary Group (EAJ-PNV) reported no ideological labels. In this context, taking into account the four largest parliamentary groups, significant differences were found in the use of ideological labels in profile descriptions according to parliamentary group ($\chi^2(54, N = 267) = 99.984$, $p < .001$, $V = .353$).

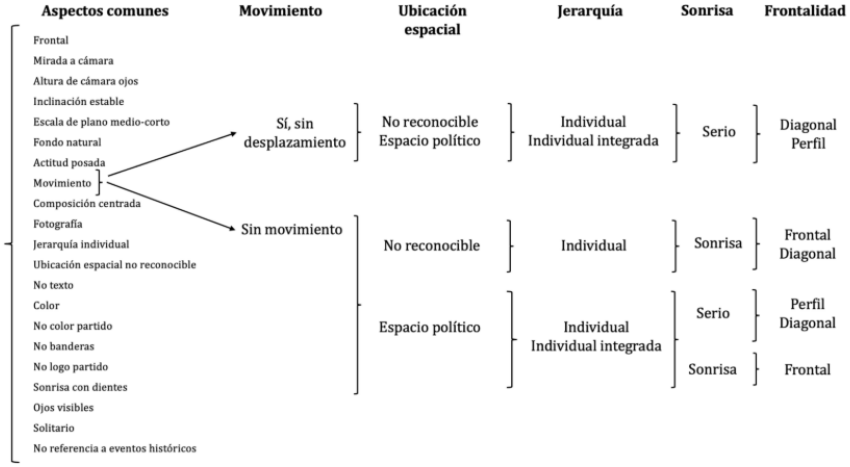
Considering each label individually, the most frequent were "Socialist" (17 cases) and "Feminist" (16 cases), followed by "Left-wing" (6 cases), "Liberal" (5 cases) and "Pro-independence" (4 cases). More specifically, members of the Plurinational SUMAR Parliamentary Group included the ideological positions "feminist", "environmentalist" and "anti-colonial". Among the largest parliamentary groups, the Popular Parliamentary Group in Congress primarily declared "liberal" and "Catholic" ideological positions, while parliamentarians from the Socialist Parliamentary Group mainly reported "socialist" and "feminist" positions. Members of the VOX Parliamentary Group, for their part, referred to the ideological labels "Catholic" and "Chestertonian".

## 4. Discussion

The findings of this study confirm that the self-representation of Spanish parliamentarians on X takes place within a context of advanced mediatisation, in which political identity is constructed through highly standardised textual and visual elements. In keeping with the characteristics of digital political communication (Donges, 2022; Chadwick, 2013), the profiles analysed do not function solely as informational spaces; they are also configured as stable devices of strategic self-representation aimed at achieving greater visibility, reinforcing legitimacy and facilitating public recognition.

The analysis clearly identified a prototypical parliamentary portrait, characterised by individual colour photographs, direct or slightly diagonal orientation, a gaze towards the camera, close-up or medium close-up framing, a centred composition, a static pose and unrecognisable backgrounds. As shown in Figure 1, this set of features constitutes a widely shared visual convention designed to maximise facial recognition, project approachability and minimise contextual or ideological elements that might introduce interpretative ambiguity.

**Figure 1**. Most frequent characteristics of the prototypical portrait of Spanish parliamentarians on X.



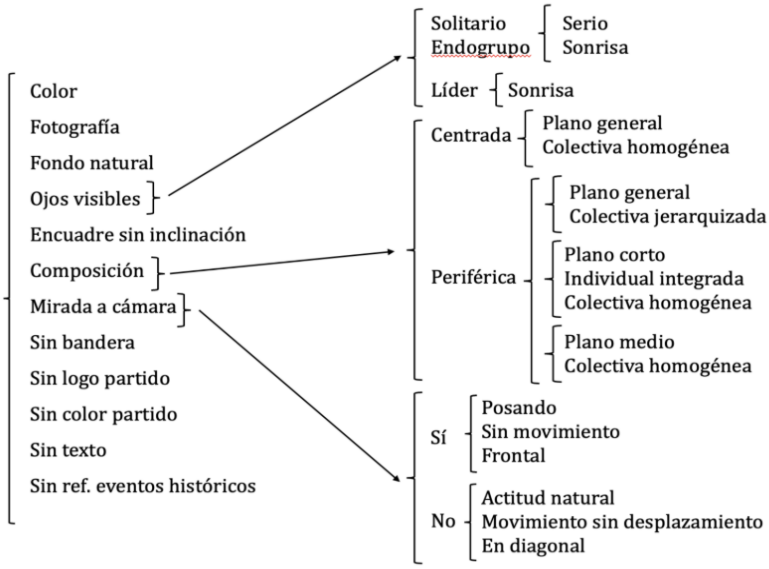

Source: Authors' own elaboration, 2026.

From a theoretical perspective, this pattern is consistent with the logic of political self-branding, understood as a process of identity curation that prioritises attributes such as competence, sobriety and reliability over ideological explicitness (Archetti, 2017; Balmas & Sheafer, 2016). Far from promoting individualised expression, digital personalisation operates here as a mechanism of symbolic homogenisation, reinforcing a prototypical parliamentary profile. This tendency is consistent with approaches suggesting that self-representation on social media, rather than expanding expressive diversity, consolidates established forms of self-representation in order to reduce symbolic risk (Archetti, 2017; Navarro et al., 2023). These results confirm H1 by showing that dominant visual self-representation prioritises institutional legitimacy over party differentiation.

From a multimodal perspective, principal component analysis makes it possible to interpret this standardisation as a dominant visual logic. The first PCA dimension groups variables such as frontality, smiling, individual hierarchy and unrecognisable spatial location, in opposition to more natural attitudes, the absence of a gaze towards the camera and less control over the setting. This axis reflects a clear preference for direct and managed strategies of address designed to ensure visual coherence and identity stability. The sequential organisation of these variables, represented in Figure 1, confirms that, at the most visible level of the profile—the portrait—ideology is subordinated to the logic of professionalisation and the management of political identity, in line with impression management theory (Goffman, 1959).

Nevertheless, the results show that ideology does not disappear from the profile, but is strategically relocated to other components of the header. Unlike the portrait, the banner offers greater compositional flexibility, although it is equally characterised by symbolic restraint. As shown in Figure 2, the most frequent categories in Dimension 1 of the banner prioritise the formal features of the image—the use of colour, a natural background and the absence of camera tilt—followed by compositional elements related to gaze, centrality and hierarchy, while ideological markers appear last.

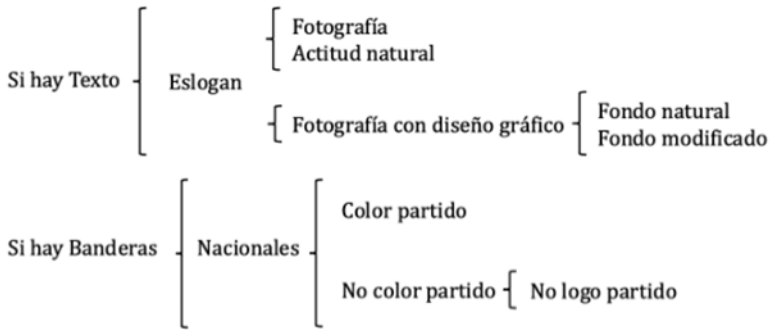
**Figure 2.** Variables grouped according to their highest concentration and their relationship with other variables for Dimension 1.




Source: Authors' own elaboration, 2026.

This arrangement confirms that ideological elements—flags, logos, colours and references to events—occupy a peripheral and secondary position within the dominant visual structure. The variables with the greatest number of significant relationships in the PCA, such as camera height, composition and gaze towards the camera, reinforce this logic, as they are primarily associated with strategies of visual control and identity stabilisation. Figure 3, corresponding to Dimension 2, shows a complementary grouping in which ideological and textual markers tend to cluster together, indicating that ideology is activated selectively and in a structurally situated manner, in combination with text or graphic design. The banner thus functions as an intermediate space for controlled symbolic contextualisation, offering greater expressive scope than the portrait without departing from the broader logic of neutralisation.

**Figure 3**. Variables grouped according to their highest concentration and their relationship with other variables for Dimension 2.

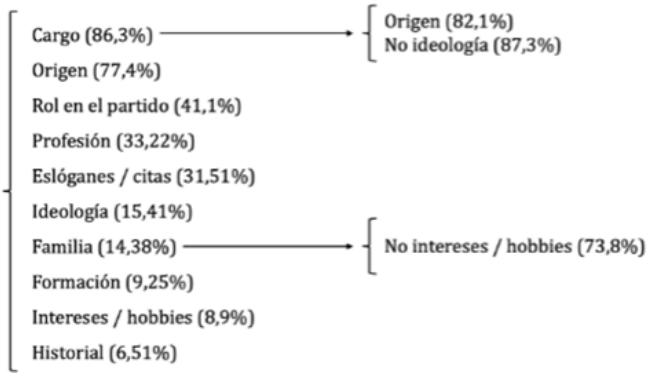



Source: Authors' own elaboration, 2026.

This differential distribution of symbolic content reinforces the idea of the X profile as a multimodal architecture in which each element fulfils a specific semiotic function within a coherent strategy of self-representation. From this multimodal perspective, political meaning does not emerge from isolated elements, but from the structured articulation of visual and textual modes, which determine what can be made visible and in which areas of the profile (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006).

This logic is particularly evident in the autobiographical descriptions, where text functions as the principal space for explicit identity expression and semantic anchoring. As shown in Figure 4, the hierarchy of discursive content places institutional position and territorial origin at the centre of self-representation, while ideological and personal references are clearly relegated to a secondary position. In this regard, the biography enables political actors to define the central elements of their public identity in a controlled manner, compensating for the symbolic neutralisation of the portrait through selective discursive self-identification (Rogers et al., 2021).

**Figure 4**. Most frequent variables in parliamentarians' biographies on the social media platform X, arranged in descending order of frequency.




Source: Authors' own elaboration, 2026.

Although the results revealed a high degree of homogeneity in visual self-representation strategies among the principal parliamentary groups, the VOX Parliamentary Group constituted a partial exception to this general pattern. In the portrait analysis, more than half of its members tended to represent themselves using low-angle shots, a visual choice associated with the projection of strength and symbolic authority (Grabe & Bucy, 2009; Maes, 2015), in contrast to the predominant use of eye-level framing among the other groups. This differentiation was also evident in the banners, where the VOX Parliamentary Group displayed a greater prevalence of wider shot scales and long shots, as opposed to the tighter framing used to reinforce proximity and recognition. These variations partially confirm H2, insofar as ideology influences the selection of certain visual resources without altering the overall structure of self-representation. This contrasts with the predominant preference among the other parliamentary groups for eye-level framing, traditionally associated with proximity, accessibility and empathy.

Taken together, these findings indicate that parliamentary digital political communication prioritises cross-party legitimacy and control over public image at the most visible levels of the profile, while

shifting ideological differentiation towards secondary yet strategically relevant spaces. This trend reinforces the view that, in highly mediatised digital environments, political visibility is conditioned by shared communicative norms that tend to homogenise public expression, even on platforms designed for personalisation (Bennett & Pfetsch, 2018; Chadwick, 2013).

## 5. Conclusions

This study examined the visual and textual self-representation of Spanish parliamentarians on the social media platform X, approaching the political profile as a multimodal architecture of identity comprising the photographic portrait, banner and textual description. From this perspective, the research contributes an integrated approach to the field of digital political communication by shifting attention away from individual items of content and towards stable devices of self-presentation. These devices provide a persistent structure for the public visibility of political actors in contexts of advanced mediatisation.

The results reveal the consolidation of a normative parliamentary profile characterised by marked visual standardisation, particularly in the use of the portrait. The predominance of frontally or diagonally oriented, centred images with unrecognisable backgrounds and no explicit party symbols indicates that self-representation on X prioritises professionalisation, symbolic control and identity coherence. Profiles therefore function less as spaces for expressive differentiation than as devices of legitimation that project competence, approachability and institutional reliability.

From a theoretical perspective, these findings qualify more optimistic interpretations of political personalisation on social media. The form of personalisation examined does not necessarily broaden expressive diversity, but instead operates as a mechanism of symbolic homogenisation compatible with the logics of political self-branding. The multimodal analysis shows that ideology does not disappear entirely from the profile, but is distributed across its different components. While the portrait tends to neutralise ideological content, the banner and, particularly, the textual description concentrate party-political and programmatic markers, thereby configuring a functional segmentation of political meaning.

This differential distribution reinforces the idea of the X profile as a complex communicative architecture in which each element fulfils a specific semiotic function within a coherent strategy of self-representation. The interaction between visual and textual modes not only communicates identity, but also organises the conditions governing political visibility and recognition in the digital public sphere.

From a methodological perspective, this research contributes to communication studies through the use of principal component analysis (PCA). Although this technique has been widely employed in social science research, particularly in psychology, it is not commonly applied to political communication. In the present study, PCA proved effective in identifying latent structures within complex sets of variables used to analyse both texts and images. The use of PCA therefore opens up new avenues for investigating complex symbolic dimensions of political communication.

Although this study focuses on a specific national context and point in time, its approach provides a solid basis for future research exploring the evolution of these strategies over time, their comparison across political systems or their adaptation to different platforms. This study therefore underscores the importance of analysing digital political communication beyond the ephemeral content of social media, highlighting the central role of profiles as symbolic infrastructures that shape political identity and representation in mediatised digital environments.

Regarding the limitations of the study, the uneven distribution of cases according to parliamentary group should be noted. Although the largest parliamentary groups have a sufficient number of profiles to enable statistically consistent analyses and the identification of robust trends—particularly the Socialist Parliamentary Group and the Popular Parliamentary Group in Congress—minority groups are represented by fewer cases and were therefore excluded from certain stages of the study. The results should consequently be interpreted in light of this sampling asymmetry.

## 6. Supplementary Material

Supplementary material is available online at:
https://osf.io/fn8d9/overview?view_only=3007ce7ef5a541f79a7e712fcfad7479

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