

# From Brussels to the “for you” page: Members of the European Parliament TikTok adoption and campaign use

De Bruselas a la página “para ti”: ¿quiénes son los miembros del Parlamento Europeo en TikTok y cómo lo usaron durante la campaña?

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**ABSTRACT: Purpose.** This study examines how Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) adopt and use TikTok with two research goals: identifying the determinants of adoption and analyzing platform use during the common campaign period of the 2024 European elections.

**Methodology.** The dataset includes 719 MEPs from the 10th Parliamentary Term, coded for demographic, political, and social media variables. From this, 374 MEPs were found to have adopted TikTok. A subsample of 194 who posted at least once during the common campaign period was analyzed. **Results and conclusions.** Findings indicate that adoption is more strongly shaped by age, country, European political group size, and cross-platform presence, particularly Instagram, than by ideology. Campaign usage clustered into three typologies: intensive and continuous, sporadic, and episodic campaign-only activity. Crucially, campaign-specific bursts of posting did not increase engagement, suggesting sustained investment in TikTok yields greater visibility. TikTok's adoption reflects not an ideological divide but a strategic negotiation between risks and communicative rewards. Regarding engagement, the Patriots for Europe Group leads in campaign-period likes, followed by Non-Attached Members, which is aligned with previous research on the strategic use of social media by far-right movements and independent campaigns.

**Original contributions.** This study is the first to analyse TikTok adoption and use by MEPs during the electoral period in the context of an intensified regulatory scrutiny of TikTok by the European Commission over data privacy, content moderation, and election integrity.

**Keywords:** TikTok; European Union; politics; politicians; social media.

**RESUMEN: Propósito.** Este estudio examina cómo los Miembros del Parlamento Europeo (MEP) adoptan y usan TikTok con dos objetivos de investigación: identificar los determinantes de la adopción y analizar el uso de la plataforma durante el período de campaña común de las elecciones europeas de 2024. **Metodología.** El conjunto de datos incluye 719 MEP de la 10.<sup>a</sup> legislatura

parlamentaria, codificados para variables demográficas, políticas y de redes sociales. De esto, se encontró que 374 MEP adoptaron TikTok. Se analizó una submuestra de 194 que publicaron al menos una vez durante el período de campaña común. **Resultados y conclusiones.** Los hallazgos indican que la adopción está más fuertemente determinada por la edad, el país, el tamaño del grupo político europeo y la presencia en múltiples plataformas, particularmente Instagram, que por la ideología. El uso durante la campaña se agrupó en tres tipologías: publicación intensiva y continua, publicación esporádica y actividad episódica solo de campaña. Fundamentalmente, las ráfagas de publicaciones específicas de la campaña no aumentaron la interacción, lo que sugiere que la inversión sostenida en TikTok genera mayor visibilidad. La adopción de TikTok no refleja una división ideológica, sino una negociación estratégica entre los riesgos y las recompensas comunicativas. En cuanto a la interacción, Patriots for Europe Group lidera en “me gusta” durante el período de campaña, seguido por los Miembros No Inscritos, lo que coincide con investigaciones previas sobre el uso estratégico de las redes sociales por parte de movimientos de extrema derecha y campañas independientes. **Aporte original.** Este estudio es el primero en analizar la adopción y el uso de TikTok por parte de los eurodiputados durante el período electoral en el contexto de un escrutinio regulatorio intensificado de TikTok por parte de la Comisión Europea por la privacidad de los datos, la moderación de contenido y la integridad electoral.

**Palabras clave:** TikTok; Unión Europea; política; políticos; redes sociales.

## 1. Introduction

In March 2023, an internal email from European Parliament (EU) President Roberta Metsola and Secretary-General Alessandro Chiocchetti instructed staff to uninstall TikTok from both corporate and personal devices that contained institutional applications or email. The message went further, strongly recommending that Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) and their staff do the same. Similar actions were taken by the European Commission and the Council of the European Union, all citing growing cybersecurity concerns and the need to safeguard EU institutions from digital threats (Goujard & Wax, 2023).

Despite these warnings, TikTok continued to gain traction among EU lawmakers. In early 2024, the news outlet POLITICO revealed that at least 186 out of 720 MEPs had an active presence on TikTok, striking a contrast between institutional caution and individual adoption (Goujard & Cokelaere, 2024). This paradox highlights critical questions about how public officials engage with digital platforms they may ultimately be responsible for regulating or restricting. This is not unique to TikTok but indicative of a broader dynamic in how communication technologies are interpreted and appropriated. As media ideologies and idioms of practice concepts suggest, institutions and individuals often interact with the same medium through divergent assumptions, norms, and habitual practices (Gershon, 2010). In this case, while institutional directives framed TikTok as a cybersecurity threat, MEPs approached it as an essential channel for political communication and audience engagement.

The main research goals are to identify which MEPs are adopting the platform following the European elections of June 2024, analyze the demographic, political, and digital factors that influence this adoption, and examine by whom and how the platform was used during the 2024 electoral campaign.

Beyond questions of institutional security, the study of MEPs on TikTok is politically and socially significant. As lawmakers increasingly face decisions about the regulation, oversight, or even banning social media platforms, their own engagement patterns merit careful scrutiny. While previous studies on social media adoption by MEPs exist (Lappas *et al.*, 2019; Larsson, 2015; Scherpereel *et al.*, 2017), none have included TikTok as it is a newer platform. Understanding how elected officials use TikTok provides a valuable lens into the evolving dynamics between digital media, political communication, and legislative accountability in the EU.

## 2. Literature Review

Political Communication within the European Union has been previously studied. Hutter and colleagues (2016) argue there is an asymmetry between collective and individual representation, as the EU still privileges the representation of groups rather than individuals, especially if those individuals don't have executive power, as is the case of MEPs. MEPs' communication is still further challenged by the secondarisation of European issues. European elections are often considered "Second-order national elections" (Reif & Schmitt, 1980) and previous empirical research shows how European issues are first and foremost used as leverage for national political struggles (Moreno et al., 2024). According to Pérez (2013), the EU suffers from deep-seated structural and cultural limits in its public sphere that go beyond episodic media coverage, including a deficit of domestication, a weak sense of a shared European political community, and a deficit of politicisation, where EU politics lack the normal ideological contests seen in national arenas. These twin deficits, he argues, help explain why EU issues struggle to gain traction and why political actors like MEPs face persistent challenges in making European politics salient to citizens and media alike. The lack of media attention may also be a motivation for MEPs to use social media to connect with the electorate..

### 2.1. Social media platforms and its adoption by MEPs

For more than two decades, the portfolio of social media platforms has expanded considerably. Users adopt them for varied motivations and purposes with most common motivations being keeping in touch with friends and family, filling spare time, reading news, finding content and seeing what is being talked about (Kemp, 2025). Social media adoption rates within the EU show minimal regional variation, ranging from 77.9% in Eastern Europe to 81.0% in Western Europe, followed closely by Southern Europe (80.9%) and Northern Europe (80.6%) (Kemp, 2025).

Among the most globally popular platforms are Facebook, YouTube, Instagram and TikTok (Duarte, 2025). These share a capacity to connect individuals and amplify discourse. This communicative potential has encouraged not only common people but also brands, institutions, and political actors to integrate them into strategic communication repertoires. In the political field, adoption occurs through both individual accounts, representing candidates or elected officials, and collective ones, belonging to political parties and their branches (Larsson, 2021; Petrova et al., 2020).

For smaller political parties, particularly those lacking elected representation, or visibility in legacy news outlets, social media has often functioned as a primary channel for political communication (Paatelainen et al., 2022). This pattern is especially evident in emerging far-right formations, which have exploited platform dynamics to broaden message reach and mobilise supporters (Kakavand, 2024). In contrast, long-established parties with a history of government tended to look and make use of social media as a complement to conventional media (Paatelainen et al., 2022). These factors shape both the intensity and effectiveness of online political communication, influencing mobilisation capacity and, ultimately, electoral performance. Studies have also identified and analyzed which characteristics of political actors influence social media adoption and use of different platforms like Facebook and Twitter (Lappas et al., 2019; Larsson, 2015; Scherpereel et al., 2017) concluding that MEPs' social media adoption could be explained by variables such as gender, Euro-party affiliation, and country of origin.

Larsson (2015) and Scherpereel and colleagues (2017) conclude that, while age is a significant factor to predict Twitter/X activity, with younger MEPs being more likely to use Twitter/X more, gender is not. This result, with regard to the influence of gender, is contradicted by Lappas and colleagues (2019). Scherpereel and colleagues (2017) also pointed to political factors (such as “district age”, “electoral system”, and being from a left-wing party) as significant factors to determine the adoption of Twitter/X. Studies outside campaign periods (Valera-Ordaz & Sørensen, 2019) conclude that MEPs are present on social media platforms, but are less popular than their national counterparts.

Research has focused more on the adoption and use of social media by candidates during the European elections campaign period, concluding there is a positive effect of incumbency on social media adoption (Nulty *et al.*, 2016; Rodríguez & Madariaga, 2016).

These studies highlight the academic and social significance of this research and point out demographic and political variables that can influence TikTok adoption as well.

## 2.2. TikTok and Security Concerns

TikTok is a social media platform, mostly accessed via smartphone app. Users can watch, create, and publish short-form videos and longer formats, live videos, and photos. In 2016, the Chinese company ByteDance launched the social media platform “Douyin”, and in 2017 it released TikTok as its international version, which didn't have to comply with China's regulations. It also bought the lip-syncing app musical.ly, moving its users to TikTok in 2018 (Wang & Yeung, 2023). TikTok was the most downloaded app in 2025, the mobile platform with the highest consumer spending, and the social media app with the greatest average time spent (Kemp, 2025). Among users aged 16-24, TikTok ranks as the third favourite social media platform, after Instagram and WhatsApp. By the end of 2024, the platform counted 159 million users on TikTok in the EU (TikTok, 2025a).

There has been rising security concerns by governments across the world regarding TikTok and its use, in particular, by children and government staff, leading to restrictions or even bans (Hassan *et al.*, 2024). In the EU, several member states such as France, the Netherlands, Estonia, Belgium and others have instituted restrictions on TikTok use, mostly on government-issued devices (Euronews, 2025).

One concern raised is the possible use of TikTok for foreign influence in the national democratic processes. These concerns were highlighted when Romania's constitutional court annulled the first round of its 2024 presidential elections due to suspected TikTok-driven influence, with an investigation being called by the EU (Ilie, 2024). Nonetheless, political actors continue to adopt the platform as a tool for communication and mobilisation. This tension can be understood through Gershon's (2010) concepts of media ideologies, beliefs about what a medium is for, and idioms of practice, or socially established conventions of use. While EU institutions primarily frame TikTok as a cybersecurity threat, many politicians regard it as a strategic campaign asset, valued for its features, youth-oriented user base, and viral potential. The result is a paradox of institutional caution alongside individual adoption, where communicative advantages often outweigh security concerns, as also illustrated in the Czech case (Šárovec, 2024).

## 2.3. TikTok, Political Communication, and Politainment

The rise of TikTok has significantly reshaped political communication, particularly in its engagement with younger voters (Zamora-Medina *et al.*, 2023). While TikTok's community guidelines prohibit paid political advertising (TikTok, 2025b), prior research has shown that paid political communication may still circulate on the platform, for instance, through influencers who may be compensated to deliver ideologically driven messages (Papakyriakopoulos *et al.*, 2022). Nevertheless, success on TikTok during a campaign doesn't mean political success, as the platform can work more as an entertainment source than an effective political mobilization tool (Orbegozo-Terradillos *et al.*, 2025). As TikTok highly leans on entertainment value, some studies have focused on how the platform encourages political actors to move beyond traditional messaging, adopting strategies rooted in entertainment, personalization, and emotional appeal.

Recent research (Rastrilla *et al.*, 2023; Zamora-Medina *et al.*, 2023) illustrates how political actors use TikTok's native formats (e.g., memes, music and trends) to connect with young audiences through rapid, emotionally resonant content. Moreover, “politainment” on TikTok is closely tied to the personalization of political actors. Cervi and colleagues (2021, 2023) highlight how politicians curate authenticity by appearing informal, humorous, and emotionally relatable,

adapting their communication to the platform’s vernacular and developing “politainment” strategies. However, as pointed out by Cervi and colleagues (2023) regarding the presidential election in Peru, political actors still don’t fully take advantage of the platforms’ potential, mainly using top-down communication approaches with little interaction with the users. Zamora-Medina and colleagues (2023) reached similar conclusions on the use of TikTok in Spain and Poland, highlighting that although political parties use more rational resources (logos), and political leaders more emotional ones (pathos), there is still little evidence of personality (ethos) in digital persuasion strategies.

This personalization and the performative style used by political actors on TikTok have been particularly effective for far-right movements. Political rhetoric is often portrayed as a dramatized battlefield of Good against Evil, inducing an emotional response (Cervi *et al.*, 2021, p. 267). A study on far-right candidates in the 2024 European Elections (Cartes-Barroso *et al.*, 2025) also concluded their use of a dual strategy combining positive (e.g., hope and ambition) and negative emotions (e.g., fear and uncertainty) emphasises crisis narratives and promotes more engagement. A journalistic study in Politico on the use of TikTok by MEPs (Goujard & Cokelaere, 2024) concluded that far-right MEPs were more successful on the platform, namely in terms of followers and likes.

Finally, the platform’s demand for a high level of personalization also leads some European leaders to wait for their opponents to make the first move, as they may be afraid of losing credibility for adopting its format and language (Castillo, 2021).

### 3. Research objectives and questions

Taking into consideration the literature review, this study is structured around two central research goals, each addressing a distinct aspect of how MEPs engage with the social media platform TikTok.

The first goal is to identify which MEPs have adopted TikTok and to explore the factors that may explain this adoption. Specifically, this involves examining demographic, political, and social media-related variables that could influence whether an MEP has a TikTok account. In line with this goal, the following research questions (RQ) are proposed:

RQ1: Which MEPs have a TikTok account?

RQ2: What demographic, political, and social media-related variables influence TikTok adoption among MEPs?

The second goal is to analyze the use of TikTok by MEPs during the common campaign period for the European elections of June 2024. This includes determining and characterising the MEPs that actively used their accounts during this time and exploring the nature of their engagement with the platform. The following RQs are associated with this goal:

RQ3: How to characterise the MEPs that posted on TikTok accounts during the common campaign period?

RQ4: How are MEPs’ TikTok posting behaviors and engagement patterns characterized during the common campaign period?

### 4. Methodology

#### 4.1. Sample definition and data collection

The main sample consisted of the 719 MEPs for the 10th Parliamentary Term that were identified in the official European Parliament website on January 20, 2025 (European Parliament, 2025a)<sup>1</sup>. Each MEP was assigned a unique identifier and coded for a series of demographic, political, and social media variables (see Table 1) defined by previous work on social media adoption by MEPs and candidates (Lappas *et al.*, 2019; Larsson, 2015; Nulty *et al.*, 2016; Rodríguez & Madariaga, 2016; Scherpereel *et al.*, 2017).

**Table 1.** Independent variables, description, and source

Type	Variable	Description	Source
ID	MEP ID	ID of the MEP from the European Parliament website	(European Parliament, 2025a)
Demographic	Country	The country that elected the MEP	(European Parliament, 2025a)
	Age	Age the MEP will turn in 2025 based on their birth year	(European Parliament, 2025a)
	Gender	Gender of the MEP as registered - Male or Female, excluding 1 MEP that has "not known" as gender	(European Parliament, 2025b) <sup>2</sup>
Political	European Group	European Group of the MEP as of 11 April 2025	(European Parliament, 2025a)
	Political Party	National political party of the MEP as of 11 April 2025	(European Parliament, 2025a)
	Ideology	Classification of the MEP as part of the left, center-right or radical right. MEPs that are not independent were coded based on their political parties, independent MEPs were coded individually	(Hublet, 2024)
	Size of EP group	Large EP group: 2 largest EU groups; Small EP group: Groups with less than 10% of the MEPs and Independents; Medium EP group: all the others	N/A
	Re-elected party (binary)	The political party that elected the MEP in June 2024 was represented in the European Parliament in the outgoing session	(European Parliament, 2024a)
	Re-elected MEP (binary)	MEPs that have been reelected	(European Parliament, 2024b)
Social Media Adoption	Instagram (binary)	MEP registered their Instagram Account on the European Parliament database	(European Parliament, 2025b)
	Facebook (binary)	MEPs registered their Facebook page or Facebook profile on the European Parliament database	(European Parliament, 2025b)
	Twitter/X (binary)	MEPs registered their Twitter/X account on the European Parliament database	(European Parliament, 2025b)

Source: author's own elaboration.

Given the objective of assessing TikTok adoption among MEPs, a manual search was conducted for each of the 719 MEPs using TikTok's internal search field, drawing on official MEP information published on the European Parliament website as of 20 January 2025. The search process involved several query strategies, including the full name, common combinations of first and last names, and the full name combined with keywords such as "MEP" and "Europe." Each resulting account was manually verified based on indicators such as the username, profile photo, and biographical description. Accounts that were private or did not contain any videos featuring the MEP were excluded. Based on this procedure, a database with the subsample of 374 MEPs that had a TikTok account was developed. Such constitutes the subsample employed to answer RQ1 and RQ2. Two coders were involved in data collection and dataset construction. The first coder built the original database of the MEPs demographic, political and social media data, and the second coder confirmed the data collected prior by collecting TikTok-related data for each MEP.

<sup>1</sup> The European Parliament elected 720 MEPs in the 2024 election, but only 719 were present in the official database at the time of data collection.

<sup>2</sup> 118 entries were missing from the database and had to be completed with public information found online

To support the investigation of TikTok usage during the campaign, a common election period was determined. Although each Member State sets its campaign calendar, the elections had to be held between 6th and 9th July 2024. We analyzed the election period established by each Member State to determine a common election period: Portugal and France had the latest start to a formal campaign period, on the 27th May. While the first country to hold the election was the Netherlands, on the 6th of June, its campaign could go on up to that date. In Slovakia, the election was on the 8th June, but the campaign had to end on the 5th, marking that as the last day of the common campaign period. Therefore, a common election period for all Member States ranges from 27 May to 5 June 2024. A first manual analysis identified 242 MEPs who posted at least once on TikTok during the established timeframe.

For these 242 MEPs, TikTok-specific data was collected using Zeeschuimer, a tool that captures platform interface elements and metadata during web browsing. Data collected included the author's nickname and bio, account statistics, video creation time and performance metrics for each TikTok post. For the 242 MEPs, the tool could only identify and collect video information within the established timeframe for 194 MEPs. Therefore, a second subsample was created comprising 194 MEPs who posted at least once on TikTok during 27 May 2024 to 5 June 2024 and for which it was possible to extract TikTok-specific data for that timeframe. This subsample was employed for the analyses related to RQ3 and RQ4. Data was collected between January 20, and February 21, 2025.

#### 4.2. Data analysis

Statistical analyses were conducted using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Analyses related to RQ1 and RQ3 were descriptive, focusing on mapping and characterising the MEPs regarding their TikTok adoption and usage during the common campaign period.

To address RQ2, a binary logistic regression was performed on the full sample of 719 MEPs, using the presence of a TikTok account (yes/no) as the dependent variable, as previously done in other studies of social media adoption variables by political actors (Ferro-Santos *et al.*, 2024a). Before running the regression, some adjustments were made to ensure statistical reliability. Countries with fewer than 1% of total MEPs (Malta, Luxembourg, and Cyprus) were grouped into a single category to avoid sparsity issues. The variable for national political party was excluded from the model due to the high number of categories, many of which had very few representatives, which would have compromised the robustness of the analysis. Multicollinearity tests revealed no significant issues among the independent variables.

The resulting regression models aimed to isolate the demographic, political, and social media-related factors most associated with the likelihood of an MEP adopting TikTok. A final integrated model was constructed based on the significant predictors from each individual category of variables.

To address RQ4, a descriptive analysis was conducted using data collected with the Zeeschuimer<sup>3</sup> tool. This analysis made it possible to identify patterns, frequencies, and relevant characteristics that contribute to understanding politicians' use of TikTok during the campaign period. The analysis of TikTok profiles was carried out through a combined approach, integrating both a general and a specific perspective. In a general dimension, using quantitative variables such as total followers, videos published, and interactions (likes and comments), providing an overall view of the profiles' presence and reach. In parallel, specific analysis focused on more qualitative and targeted aspects, such as the proportion of videos published during the campaign period, thereby offering deeper insight into the positioning strategies adopted.

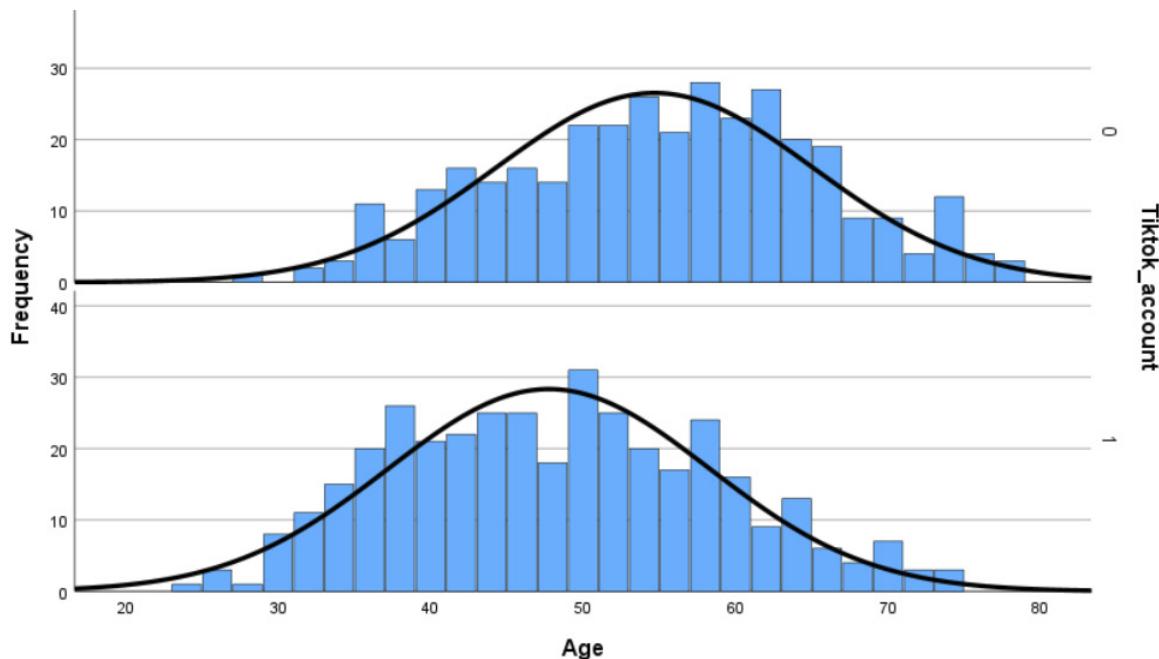
<sup>3</sup> <https://www.digitalmethods.net/Dmi/ToolZeeschuimer>

## 5. Results and discussion

Regarding the first RQ “Who are the MEPs with a TikTok account?”, out of the 719 MEPs in the general sample, over half (52%) have an identifiable and publicly accessible TikTok account. This suggests that TikTok is gaining significant traction among EU legislators who are increasingly adopting it, when compared with the adoption rate of 26% from February and March 2024 (Goujard & Cokelaere, 2024). This growing adoption may be explained by the increase in the platform's overall popularity as TikTok was the most downloaded app and the social media app with the highest average time spent in 2024 (Kemp, 2025), which can make the platform more attractive to the MEPs. TikTok has also incorporated new functionalities, such as TikTok photos and editing with their tool CapCut making it easier to create and post content. Another possible explanation for growing adoption is peer pressure as some MEPs may experience fear of missing out (FOMO). Previous studies have associated FOMO to the use of social media platforms (Fioravanti *et al.*, 2021), including by political actors even when overall adoption is not growing but peers' adoption is (Ferro-Santos *et al.*, 2024b). Finally, as discussed by Castillo (2021), due to the format and language of the platform, some leaders may wait for their opponents to make the first move. Therefore, some MEPs may have been waiting for the reaction of voters to early adopters and have now opted in. These patterns also speak to the broader institutional paradox motivating this study. Despite EU-level cybersecurity warnings and device restrictions, individual legislators appear to interpret TikTok primarily through its communicative payoffs. In Gershon's (2010) terms, institutional media ideologies frame TikTok as risk, whereas MEPs' idioms of practice reframe it as campaign infrastructure and a channel for audience access.

Figure 1 presents a histogram comparing the ages of MEPs with and without TikTok accounts. MEPs on TikTok tend to be younger, with a median age of 47.75, compared to 54.68 for those not on the platform. The generational gradient suggests that TikTok adoption is not merely opportunistic but also shaped by differential familiarity with short-form video vernaculars and personalization norms. This aligns with earlier evidence that younger MEPs are more likely to adopt newer digital channels (Larsson, 2015; Scherpereel *et al.*, 2017).

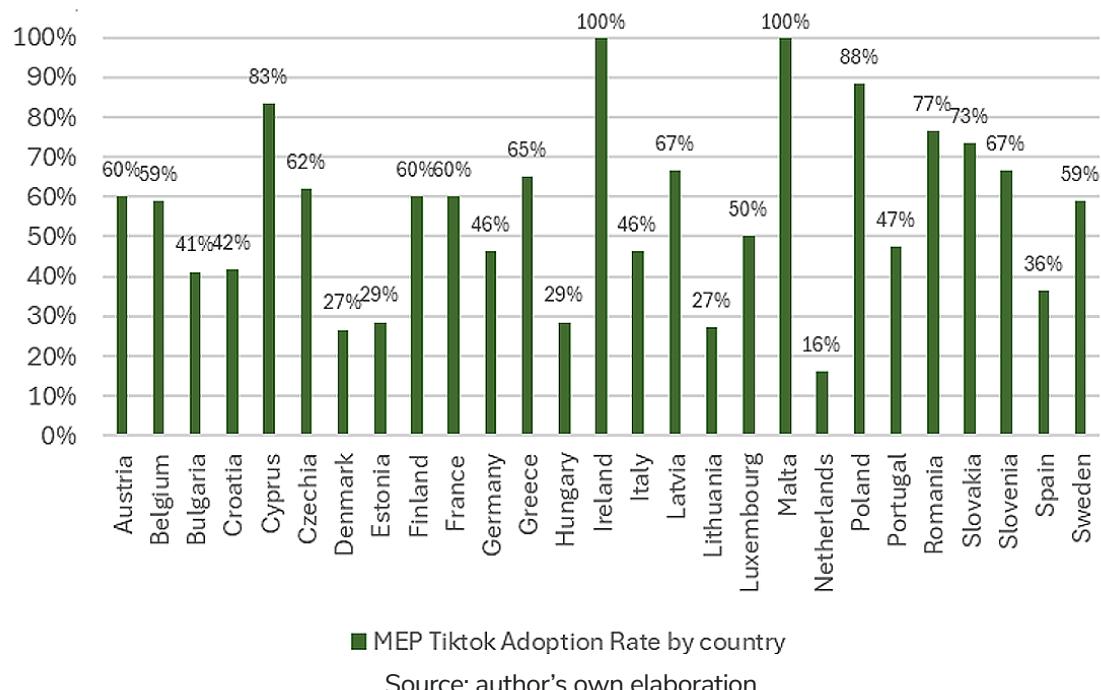
**Figure 1.** Histogram of the MEPs' age with and without a TikTok account (N=719)



Source: author's own elaboration.

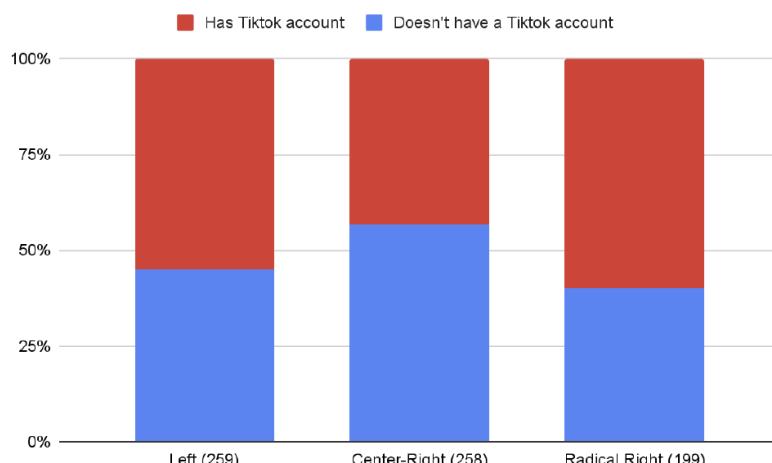
Although, in terms of gender, the sample is predominantly male (61%), TikTok adoption is similar across genders: 53% of female MEPs and 51% of male MEPs have a TikTok account, indicating that platform adoption is not strongly gendered. The statistical significance of gender on social media adoption by MEPs show mixed results (Lappas *et al.*, 2019; Larsson, 2015; Scherpereel *et al.* 2017) making further research on this topic valuable. When decomposing adoption by country, significant disparities emerged. As shown in Figure 2, Ireland and Malta led with a full 100% adoption rate, followed closely by Poland at 88%. In contrast, other countries displayed far lower participation, like the Netherlands (16%), revealing striking national differences in platform adoption by these political actors. Such cross-national variation is consistent with the argument that EU political communication remains strongly mediated by domestic opportunity structures and incentives (Pérez, 2013; Reif & Schmitt, 1980). Even in a supranational parliament, adoption decisions are embedded in national electoral logics, party strategies, and regulatory environments rather than reflecting platform diffusion in the general population alone.

**Figure 2.** MEP adoption rate of TikTok by country (N=719)



Finally, Figure 3 explores TikTok adoption across political ideologies, based on the Hublet (2024) classification. The data shows small, varying levels of engagement among MEPs on the left, center-right, and radical right, with a higher percentage of MEPs from the far-right having a TikTok account. This is aligned with studies on the personalization and performative style of the platform and their effectiveness for far-right movements (Cartes-Barroso *et al.*, 2025; Cervi *et al.*, 2021). However, it is important to distinguish adoption from performance. While descriptive patterns suggest somewhat higher uptake among far-right actors, subsequent models indicate that ideology is not a robust predictor of adoption once other factors are accounted for. This implies that ideology may matter more for stylistic fit and engagement outcomes, through performative and affective repertoires, than for platform entry itself (Cervi *et al.*, 2021; Cartes-Barroso *et al.*, 2025).

**Figure 3.** Prevalence of TikTok adoption by ideology  
(N=716; 3 MEPs didn't have an identifiable political ideology)



Source: author's own elaboration.

Regarding the second RQ “What are the demographic, political and social media variables that impact the MEP TikTok adoption?”, to uncover what drives MEPs to adopt TikTok, a series of binary logistic regression analyses were conducted across three categories: demographic (country, age and gender), political (European group, political party, ideology, size of the EP group, re-elected party and re-elected MP), and social media variables (Instagram, Facebook and Twitter/X). Each category of variables was modelled independently before a final integrated model was developed using only statistically significant predictors.

The first model tested the influence of demographic variables on the likelihood of an MEP having a public and identifiable TikTok account (see Table 2). The model was statistically significant, with a  $\chi^2(27) = 207.943$ ,  $p < .001$ , and explained 33.5% of the variance in TikTok adoption (Nagelkerke  $R^2 = 0.335$ ). Among these predictors, age emerged as a strong and significant factor: younger MEPs were considerably more likely to maintain a TikTok presence ( $B = -0.083$ ,  $p < .001$ ), with each additional year of age reducing the odds of adoption by approximately 8% ( $Exp(B) = 0.92$ ). This result can be explained by younger MEPs being more comfortable adopting the platform's format, language (Castillo, 2021), and audience (Kemp, 2025). This finding reinforces the idea that TikTok adoption is structured by platform-specific communicative norms, where familiarity with short-form, visually driven storytelling becomes politically consequential. It also extends previous evidence on age effects in MEPs' platform adoption to TikTok as a newer, more performative environment (Larsson, 2015; Scherpereel *et al.*, 2017).

The variable gender was not significant overall ( $p=0.95$ ), which is aligned with some of the previous studies on social media adoption by MEPs that included gender in a social-demographic model (Larsson, 2015; Scherpereel *et al.*, 2017). Country of origin proved to be a highly significant predictor ( $p < .001$ ), underscoring the importance of national context in social media behaviour.

**Table 2.** Significance of the demographic variables in predicting TikTok adoption among MEPs (N=719)

Variable	B	C	Wald	df	Sig. (p-value)	Exp(B) (Odds Ratio)
Age	-0.083	0.009	82.572	1	< .001	0.92
Gender (overall)			0.102	2	0.95	
Country (overall)			86.812	24	< .001	

Source: author's own elaboration.

Model  $\chi^2(29) = 207.943$ ,  $p < .001$

Nagelkerke  $R^2 = 0.335$

While this analysis treats “country” as a sociodemographic variable, it can also be viewed as a political factor. National political environments may influence MEPs’ adoption of TikTok independently of general levels of digital engagement in the country. In light of the findings from RQ1 and this consideration, we examined the correlation between TikTok adoption rates among MEPs and those of the general population in each country (Ceci, 2024)<sup>4</sup>. The correlation was not statistically significant ( $N = 19$ ,  $r = 0.346$ ,  $p = .147$ ), suggesting that MEPs’ use of TikTok may be shaped by factors other than the platform’s popularity in their respective countries, potentially including political influences. This strengthens the interpretation of “country” as a proxy for political opportunity structures rather than a simple indicator of national digital culture. Electoral incentives for personalization, party-centred versus candidate-centred campaigning, and regulatory signals around TikTok likely shift the perceived costs and benefits of adoption, as suggested by research on how institutional contexts shape personalization in political communication.

Previous research (Adam & Maier, 2010; Balmas *et al.*, 2012; Karlsen & Skogerbo, 2015) has shown that electoral systems and campaign styles significantly shape the degree and type of personalization in political communication, including among MEPs. The findings indicate that Ireland records the highest adoption of TikTok by MEPs, a pattern consistent with its Single Transferable Vote system, which strongly incentivizes personalized campaigning. In contrast, the Netherlands, with a Closed-List Proportional Representation system that emphasizes parties over individual candidates, shows the lowest adoption rate. National context also appears relevant: while Poland, the second highest adopter, has not restricted TikTok use among officials (Mierzynska, 2023), the Netherlands has banned the platform on government devices (Nos Nieuws, 2023).

Political variables were examined in a second model (see Table 3), which included ideological orientation, size of the political group in the European Parliament (EP), reelection status, and European group affiliation. This model was also statistically significant, with a  $\chi^2(12) = 42.692$ ,  $p < .001$ , although its explanatory power was more modest, accounting for just 8.2% of the variance (Nagelkerke  $R^2 = 0.082$ ). Of the political variables tested, only the size of the EP group reached significance. Independent MEPs and MEPs affiliated with small political groups were more likely to adopt TikTok ( $p = 0.015$ ), suggesting that those with potentially less institutional reach might turn to newer digital platforms to amplify their presence. Other political factors, including ideology, reelection status, and European group affiliation, did not show significant effects on TikTok adoption. This conclusion doesn’t necessarily contradict previous studies (Goujard & Cokelaere, 2024) that highlighted the success of far-right MEPs on the platform, as this is only an analysis of adoption and not popularity. The significance of EP group size is consistent with compensatory dynamics in digital campaigning. Representatives with lower institutional reach may adopt emerging platforms to offset limited visibility in legacy media and in parliamentary communication infrastructures, echoing scholarship on social media as a strategic channel for less resource-rich political actors (Paaetelainen *et al.*, 2022). At the same time, the absence of ideological effects at the adoption stage suggests that platform entry is more strongly shaped by resources and strategic necessity than by doctrine.

**Table 3.** Significance of political variables in predicting TikTok adoption among MEPs (N=719)

Variable	B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig. (p-value)	Exp(B) (Odds Ratio)
Ideology (overall)			3.409	3	0.333	
EP Group Size (overall)			8.377	2	0.015	
Reelected Party	-0.353	0.261	1.819	1	0.177	0.703
Reelected MEP	-0.173	0.164	1.122	1	0.29	0.841
European Group (overall)			7.329	5	0.197	

Source: author’s own elaboration.

Model  $\chi^2(12)=45.692$ ,  $p < .001$

Nagelkerke  $R^2 = 0.082$

<sup>4</sup> In this analysis it did not include the following countries due to lack of data for general population adoption: Cyprus, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Slovakia, Slovenia.

A third regression model explored the role of other social media platforms as predictors of TikTok use (see Table 4). This model was statistically significant ( $\chi^2(3) = 9.510$ ,  $p = 0.023$ ) although it explained only 1.8% of the variance (Nagelkerke  $R^2 = 0.018$ ). Among the variables tested, only Instagram adoption showed a significant relationship with TikTok presence ( $B = 0.443$ ,  $p = 0.032$ ,  $Exp(B) = 1.558$ ). MEPs who were active on Instagram were significantly more likely to also use TikTok, indicating a complementary relationship between visually-oriented social media platforms, probably because part of the effort to create content for one platform can be used on the other. In contrast, the adoption of Facebook and X did not show any significant predictive power. The Instagram effect highlights an inter-platform ecology in which visually oriented communication repertoires travel across services. This supports the interpretation that TikTok adoption is partly driven by transferable production capacities and format synergies rather than by isolated platform choices.

**Table 4.** Significance of social media variables in predicting TikTok adoption among MEPs (N=719)

Variable	B	p-value	Exp(B)
Instagram Adoption	0.443	.032	1.558
Facebook Adoption	0.233	.233	1.263
X Adoption	-0.318	.124	0.728

Source: author's own elaboration.

Model  $\chi^2(3) = 9.510$ ,  $p=0.023$

Nagelkerke  $R^2 = 0.018$

Based on these initial models, a final integrated regression was constructed (see Table 5), including only the variables that were statistically significant in the earlier analyses: age, Instagram adoption, EP group size, and country of origin. This comprehensive model was highly significant,  $\chi^2(28) = 244.708$ ,  $p < .001$ , and demonstrated the strongest explanatory power, accounting for 38.5% of the variance in TikTok adoption (Nagelkerke  $R^2 = 0.385$ ).

**Table 5.** Significance of significant variables from previous models in predicting TikTok adoption among MEPs (N=719)

Variable	B	S.E.	Wald	Sig. (p-value)	Exp(B) (Odds Ratio)	df
Age	-0.077	0.009	69.286	< .001	0.926	
Variable	0.676	0.202	11.199	< .001	1.966	
Variable			32.031	0.001		2
Variable			89.396	< .001		24

Source: author's own elaboration.

Model  $\chi^2(28) = 244.708$ ,  $p<0.001$

Nagelkerke  $R^2 = 0.385$

These findings suggest that the adoption of TikTok among MEPs is not solely a matter of personal preference or ideology but is shaped by a complex interplay of generational, institutional, and national factors. Notably, social media behaviour among MEPs reflects broader structural dynamics within the EP, where newer platforms are leveraged differentially depending on age, political resources, and existing digital presence. Taken together, the integrated model points to a multi-level explanation of adoption: a generational logic (age), a platform-ecology logic (Instagram), an institutional-resources logic (EP group size), and a national-context logic (country). This set of predictors helps move beyond single-factor accounts of adoption and situates MEPs' TikTok presence within broader structural dynamics of EU political communication.

Regarding the third RQ “How to characterise the MEPs that posted on TikTok accounts during the common campaign period?” results showed that while 374 MEPs have a TikTok account, 242 used it

during the established common camping period (27 May 2024 to 5 June 2024). From those, we were able to extract platform profile and usage information for 194 that form the sample for the RQ3 and RQ4.

A Binary Logistic Regression showed that TikTok usage during the common campaign period ( $N = 194$ ) could not be explained by the demographic variables of age, country and gender. However, another binary logistic regression including multiple political variables was statistically significant ( $\chi^2(12) = 37.203$ ,  $p < .001$ , Nagelkerke  $R^2 = .126$ ). Among the predictors, European Group affiliation had a significant overall effect ( $\chi^2(6) = 13.032$ ,  $p = .043$ ), with several groups displaying lower odds of campaign-period TikTok use compared to the reference group. EP Group size was also significant ( $\chi^2(1) = 4.713$ ,  $p = .030$ ), with members of smaller groups being less likely to use TikTok. In addition, affiliation with a re-elected party increased the likelihood of TikTok use during the campaign ( $OR = 2.249$ ,  $p = .016$ ), whereas individually re-elected MEPs were significantly less likely to use the platform ( $OR = .600$ ,  $p = .031$ ). This divergence between predictors of adoption (RQ2) and predictors of campaign-period use (RQ3) indicates that joining TikTok and mobilizing it strategically are governed by distinct logics. Whereas adoption is partly driven by generational, national and cross-platform factors, campaign activation appears to depend more strongly on political structure and party-related incentives (Nulty *et al.*, 2016; Rodríguez & Madariaga, 2016).

## 5.1 Patterns across European Parliament Political Groups on TikTok

As analyzed in the Binary Logistic Regression, “EP Group Size” is a significant variable to predict use of TikTok during the common campaign period by MEPs who had a TikTok account after the election. Table 6 presents the distribution of the analysed profiles according to their EP political group.

**Table 6.** Distribution of profiles by European Group)

European Group	Number of profiles	% of profiles
Europe of Sovereign Nations Group	8	4.12%
European Conservatives and Reformists Group	25	12.89%
Group of the European People’s Party (Christian Democrats)	37	19.07%
Group of the Greens/European Free Alliance	27	13.92%
Group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats in the EP	26	13.40%
Non-attached Members	7	3.61%
Patriots for Europe Group	21	10.82%
Renew Europe Group	17	8.76%
The Left group in the EP - GUE/NGL	26	13.40%

Source: author’s own elaboration.

The Group of the European People’s Party (Christian Democrats) held the largest share of TikTok-active MEPs (19.07%), followed by the Greens/EFA (13.92%), the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats (13.40%), The Left (13.40%), and the European Conservatives and Reformists (12.89%). Smaller shares were observed for Non-attached Members (3.61%) and the Europe of Sovereign Nations Group (4.12%), pointing to a concentration of TikTok adoption among a limited set of political families.

However, when engagement is considered, the Patriots for Europe Group leads in campaign-period likes ( $n=7.07M$ ). This performance suggests an effective mobilisation strategy leveraging

the platform's reach. "The Patriots for Europe Group established itself as a political group in the EP in June 2024. Following the EP elections in June 2024, the Patriots have risen to become the third-largest group in the EP, with 86 MEPs from 14 delegations" (Patriots for Europe, n.d.). This discrepancy between group-level presence and engagement reinforces the distinction between adoption and performance. It also suggests that platform visibility is not evenly distributed across political families, but shaped by the resonance of performative styles and emotionally charged narratives that align with TikTok's attention dynamics (Cartes-Barroso *et al.*, 2025; Cervi *et al.*, 2021). In this sense, TikTok may operate as a selective amplifier rather than a neutral channel.

The data partly explain the indirect impact of TikTok use as a communication tool on election outcomes. The Patriots for Europe Group brings together nationalists, right-wing populists and, notably, Eurosceptics (Chega, Portugal; Fidesz, Hungary; FN / RN, France; FPÖ, Austria; Vox, Spain; Partij voor de Vrijheid, Netherlands; Lega, Italy), having been widely classified as ranging from the right to the far right. Studies have increasingly demonstrated the effective and efficient use of social media by far-right parties in the European context (Domínguez-García *et al.*, 2025; Mutascu *et al.*, 2025).

Non-attached Members also show high averages (n=8,071 likes/video) during the campaign, likely tied to prominent individual personalities within TikTok. Different electoral systems impact the campaign styles, the level and type of personalization (Adam & Maier, 2010; Balmas *et al.*, 2012; Farrell & Scully, 2007; Karlsen & Skogerbø, 2015). Therefore, it is possible to assume that MEPs that ran independent campaigns and were not elected directly into any European Family, may have had less traditional media coverage during their campaign, investing more time in digital social media, and more freedom for individual campaign communication efforts. More traditional and long-established groups, such as the Group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats, recorded a notable increase in attention during the campaign (n=434 likes per campaign-period video), however, remaining below levels achieved by other groups.

These findings confirm that group longevity is less decisive than the capacity and ability to activate resonant political narratives and personalities on TikTok and can even be considered a hindrance when the party, and not the candidate, controls and focuses most of the communication efforts during the campaign. These patterns point to a dual dynamic of equalization and normalization. While smaller groups and non-attached actors may turn to TikTok to compensate for limited institutional reach (an equalization logic), engagement outcomes appear highly centralized, with a small number of actors and narratives capturing disproportionate attention (a normalization logic). The platform may therefore lower barriers to entry but not necessarily redistribute visibility.

## 5.2. Self-Presentation and Political Symbolism on TikTok

The examination of TikTok profiles' biographies revealed that elected MEPs that use TikTok during the campaign common period employed a diverse range of discursive strategies in their "bio". Such could include identification of their position as MEPs, indication of affiliation with parliamentary groups and national parties, and reinforcing their political and institutional legitimacy (e.g. "Member of the European Parliament " or "Europarlamentar@USR").

Other biographies prioritised the promotion of specific causes, such as environmental protection (" Klimatet, naturen och demokratin" / Climate, nature and democracy), human rights ("Defensora de los Derechos Humanos" / Human Rights Defender), anti-corruption efforts ("Gegen Korruption" / Against corruption), or opposition to rival political forces ("Gegen Rechten Hass" / Against far-right hate).

Some actors foreground prior professional experience, leadership roles, or positions of national prominence (e.g., "Bývalý premiér a europoslanc" / Former prime minister and MEP or "President of the European Parliament " ), enhancing their authority among audiences already

acquainted with them beyond the digital sphere. A subset of profiles adopted a more personal and informal tone, referencing hobbies (e.g., “großer Eisfan” / big ice cream fan), personality traits (e.g., “Tutaj z przymrużeniem oka” / Here with a wink), or local attachments (e.g., “Verliefd op Gent!” / In love with Ghent), in an effort to cultivate a direct and more relatable connection with followers.

Across 120 biographies, the presence of emojis was documented. Among the types of emojis identified, “Flags” emerge as the most prevalent, appearing in 96 of biographies. Among the flags, the one for the European Union appeared 93 times, alongside 22 other distinct flags, representing EU member states, and one of the United Nations. The use of such emojis suggests that they operate as visual elements reinforcing political identity and alignment. The predominance of flags, particularly that of the European Union, signals a deliberate intention to affirm belonging to, and commitment towards, the European project, functioning as an institutional positioning (Evans, 2017). By embedding these visual cues in a platform associated with informality, MEPs strategically balance authority with relatability. Emojis here work not as decorative elements but as symbolic markers that make political identity immediately recognisable. This form of symbolic compression is consistent with TikTok’s idioms of practice, where rapid recognition cues and visual shorthand facilitate audience interpretation in fast-scrolling environments (Gershon, 2010). Notably, the frequent use of EU flags suggests that MEPs attempt to translate institutional legitimacy into an informal platform vernacular, balancing authority with relatability.

### 5.3. Audience structures and influence levels

The overall analysis revealed an asymmetric structure regarding the number of followers of MEPs who posted on TikTok during the common campaign period. Table 7 presents the distribution of profiles according to their total number of followers when data was collected. For this analysis, the nomenclature and reference thresholds commonly used to classify influencers based on audience size was adopted (Durmuş Şenyapar, 2024).

**Table 7.** Classification of profiles according to follower count

Typology	Profiles (n=)	Profiles (%=)	Examples
Below Nano influencer (<1.000 followers)	20	10.30	Anna Stürgkh, Catarina Vieira, Caterina Chinnici, Daniel Caspary
Nano influencer (1.000 - <10.000 followers)	101	52.06	Adam Bielan, Anna Cavazzini, Anna Strolenberg, Anna Zalewska
Micro influencer (10.000 - <100.000 followers)	49	25.26	Anna Brylka, Daniel Obajtek, Ivars Ijabs, Petra Steger
Macro influencer (100.000 - <1M followers)	23	11.86	Afroditis Latinopoulou, Alvise Pérez, Andrzej Halicki, Diana Iovanovici Şoşoacă
Country Influencer (1M - <5M followers)	1	0.52	Jordan Bardella

Source: author’s own elaboration.

The distribution revealed that the vast majority of political profiles analysed on TikTok fell within the lower-reach categories: Nano Influencers (over half of the sample, 52.06%) and Micro Influencers (25.26%). Among the profiles analysed, only 11.86% reached the Macro Influencer threshold (100,000 to 1 million followers), and just one profile (0.52%) achieved the Country Influencer scale (over 1 million followers). The fact that 10.30% of profiles fell into the Below Nano category (fewer than 1,000 followers) also highlights the existence of accounts with an almost residual presence, exerting minimal impact on the platform’s visibility and engagement dynamics. These figures indicate that only a small minority of politicians have higher reach to circulate their messages to a broad audience. This suggests

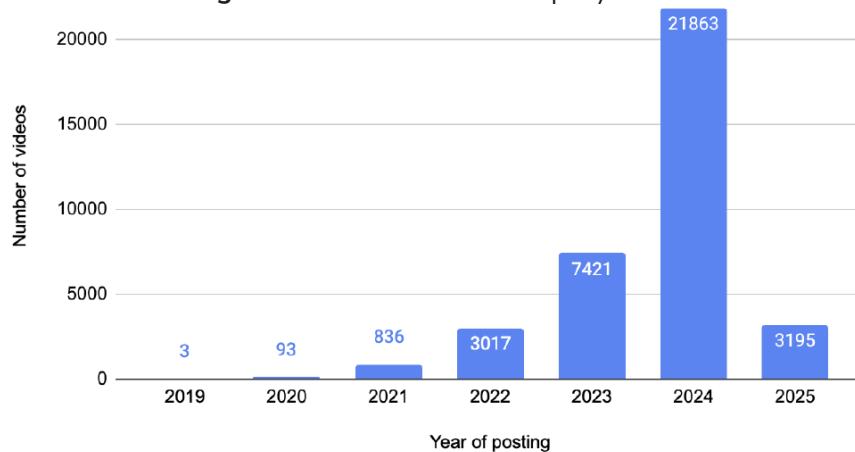
that the political presence on TikTok, within the European political context, remains a space where mass mobilisation power is exceptional and highly centralised. This distribution indicates that most MEPs operate on TikTok within low-reach tiers, which constrains their capacity to shape broader agenda-setting dynamics. It further supports normalization arguments: even when adoption is widespread, influence remains concentrated among a small subset of high-visibility actors.

It is important to note that, although candidates compete for positions of representation at the European level, they remain national figures, representing their respective countries. They are not necessarily affiliated with political parties, nor do they always hold institutional positions or formal public office. This configuration can influence the size and scope of their audiences, which are often limited to local or national networks, impacting their narrative reach.

Regarding the fourth RQ “How are MEPs’ TikTok posting behaviors and engagement patterns characterized during the common campaign period?”, the results show that, in total, the 194 profiles collectively published 36,428 videos since their respective account creation date. While the average indicated that each profile had published 188 videos, this figure concealed considerable variation. A closer analysis revealed that some profiles had posted hundreds or even thousands of videos (e.g. Fidias Panayiotou: 1,327 videos; Isabella Tovaglieri: 1,030 videos; Patryk Jaki: 731 videos; Elio Di Rupo: 692 videos; Claudiu-Richard Târziu: 680 videos). By contrast, other profiles maintained a low publication frequency (e.g. Lynn Boylan: 8 videos; Arkadiusz Mularczyk: 11 videos; Pascale Piera: 14 videos; Maria Walsh: 14 videos; Lúdovít Ódor: 16 videos). Whereas the first group appeared to integrate the platform into an intensive and continuous digital communication strategy, building political and social capital through regular TikTok activity, the second group illustrated a segment of MEPs for whom TikTok was not a primary communication channel, but rather a platform used sporadically. As discussed regarding TikTok adoption, these profiles may not be enthusiastic adopters of the platform, but felt pressured to adopt it, either by their political party, their peers or just to not feel left out.

Figure 4 shows the posting of videos from 2019 (first video registered at the data set) until 2025 (time of data collection). It is possible to see how the posting of content has grown over the years peaking in 2024.

**Figure 4. Distribution of videos per year**



Source: author's own elaboration.

60% of the videos (n=21,863) in the sample were published in 2024 with 10,946 videos (50%) published before the common campaign period (January 1 to May 26), 1,865 videos (8.6%) during the common campaign period (May 27 to June 5), and 9,052 videos (41.4%) after the campaign period (June 7 to December 31). The general analysis of the number of videos published in 2024 indicates a monthly average of 1,822 videos. A detailed month-by-month analysis reveals that from January to May, the number of videos published increased steadily, nearly doubling between April and May, peaking in May with 4,142 videos published in that month.

The data confirms that the electoral campaign was a key driver of TikTok content production. This reinforces the interpretation of TikTok engagement as electorally episodic rather than routine for many actors. In a second-order election context, digital campaigning may spike during short windows of heightened incentive, then recede once the electoral payoff diminishes (Reif & Schmitt, 1980). After May, video output declined by nearly half (n=2,282) and remained low until August, the month with the fewest videos. This drop is likely linked to the summer holiday in Europe and in the EP, a period marked by low political activity. Even without qualitative content analysis, these results allow for a probable conclusion regarding the type of content the MEPs post on their TikTok accounts: mostly work related. From September to December, publication stabilized near the monthly average (1,526 vs. 1,865).

From the results, it is possible to infer that most 2024 activity was tied to the electoral effort rather than to a sustained digital communication strategy. An analysis of publishing profiles shows that 2024 also recorded the highest number of active profiles since 2019, underscoring the strong link to that year’s European elections.

The number of active profiles, those that at least published a video during that year, reached 231, almost doubling compared to 2023 (n=130) and representing the peak of political engagement on the platform. The trend shows a growth from 2019 onwards, but it is only in 2024, the European Election year, that TikTok was massively embraced as a political communication tool by these political actors. As the population in analysis are the elected MEPs, it could be argued that, before the campaign period some of them were not active political actors and, therefore, didn’t require the use of TikTok for political communication. However, the subsequent decline in 2025 (n=106) illustrates the ephemeral nature of their engagement even after election, highlighting that many of the accounts activated during the campaign did not sustain their activity beyond the electoral cycle.

#### **5.4. Engagement dynamics and visibility patterns in the European Electoral context**

Across all 36,428 videos, the dataset records 103.9 million likes, with an average of 4,832 likes per video. Common campaign-period content (n=1,865 videos) generated 7.2 million likes in total, averaging 4,577 likes per video, only slightly below the overall mean. This stability suggests that the European elections did not, in aggregate, boost per-video engagement on TikTok. This finding is consistent with the idea that TikTok is primarily organized around entertainment-oriented consumption rather than sustained political deliberation (Orbegozo-Terradillos *et al.*, 2025). Consequently, electoral communication may face structural limits unless it is translated into platform-native formats that prioritize affect, brevity, and trend alignment (Cervi *et al.*, 2021; Zamora-Medina *et al.*, 2023).

Possible explanations include intensified competition from other political content, audience fatigue towards overtly electoral messaging, or misalignment between posted content and TikTok’s algorithmic and communicative norms. Moreover, as previous research has pointed out (Orbegozo-Terradillos *et al.*, 2025) TikTok works more as an entertainment source than an effective political mobilization tool, which may deter some users from following more serious, politically dense, and less entertaining content. Given the platform inherent media ideologies (Gershon, 2010), effective electoral content may require not only adaptation to TikTok’s dynamics but also sensitivity to the contextual nuances of European elections. If the platform is perceived for entertainment rather than for political deliberation, content that is overly formal, policy-heavy, or disconnected from prevailing trends may struggle to gain traction. Electoral messages may risk being deprioritised by the algorithm and ignored by the audiences once they may be not driven by users preferences (Milli *et al.*, 2025).

For political actors, success on TikTok may therefore depend on their ability to reconcile the platform’s idioms of practice (Gershon, 2010), favouring brevity, visual creativity, and trend alignment, with the demands of electoral communication, without alienating audiences accustomed to its informal, affect-driven style.

Additionally, prior research highlighting a “crisis in European identity” suggests that a weak sense of pan-European belonging (Miconi, 2025) may negatively impact engagement with EU-wide political messaging. This dual challenge of adapting to platform culture while balancing national and European frames emerges as a key factor in digital political communication effectiveness.

The comparison of average likes across non-campaign and campaign periods shows that visibility hierarchies persisted, with figures (e.g. Jordan Bardella, Fidias Panayiotou, Irene Montero, and Marion Marécha) maintaining their dominance. Exceptions (e.g. Ewa Zajączkowska-Hernik, Luis-Vicen!iu Lazarus, and Andrzej Halicki) recorded significant increases, though these were linked to exceptional videos that could be classified as viral, then sustained strategic shifts.

Data also showed that publishing frequency alone was not a predictor of higher average engagement. For example, Isabella Tovaglieri’s average rose from 5,922 likes overall to 8,145 during the campaign despite fewer posts, while Fidias Panayiotou’s average dropped from 7,987 to 5,912 likes despite high output. Similarly, Marta Temido and Daniel Freund increased posting frequency without corresponding engagement gains, suggesting that audience size and content resonance outweigh volume effects.

Finally, engagement on TikTok encompasses not just likes but also comments, shares, saves, and watch time, the latter three being absent from our dataset. Nevertheless, comment data revealed an average of 480 per campaign-period video, with a ratio of roughly 9.5 likes per comment. This asymmetry reflects the lower effort threshold for liking compared to commenting, with comments potentially signalling deeper mobilisation or debate.

Taken together, the results indicate that TikTok adoption among MEPs is shaped by a multi-level set of drivers rather than by ideology alone. Age and Instagram adoption point to a generational and platform-ecology logic, while EP group size and country effects underline that institutional resources and national opportunity structures remain decisive even within a supranational legislature. This helps explain the paradox motivating the study: although EU institutions framed TikTok primarily through a cybersecurity risk lens, many individual legislators approached it through the lens of communicative opportunity, consistent with the divergence between media ideologies and idioms of practice (Gershon, 2010). Importantly, predictors of adoption differ from predictors of campaign-period activation: while adoption is explained by demographic and cross-platform factors, campaign use is more closely tied to political variables. Engagement patterns further reveal a dual dynamic of equalization and normalization: smaller groups and non-attached actors may adopt TikTok as a compensatory channel, yet visibility remains highly centralized, with established attention hierarchies persisting and posting volume alone failing to generate higher average engagement. Finally, the stability of video engagement during the campaign period supports the view that TikTok is structured primarily as an entertainment-oriented environment, implying that electoral communication is unlikely to succeed without adaptation to platform-native vernaculars emphasizing affect, personalization, and trend alignment (Cervi *et al.*, 2021; Orbegozo-Terradillos *et al.*, 2025).

## 6. Conclusion

Building on these integrated findings, the conclusion returns to the four research questions guiding this study with the aim of examining the adoption and campaign-period use of TikTok among MEPs following the 2024 European elections, against a backdrop of EU institutional cybersecurity warnings and device restrictions. The analysis clarifies not only who joins TikTok, but also who mobilizes it during electoral periods and with what engagement outcomes. In doing so, it contributes to the literature on MEPs’ social media adoption (Larsson, 2015; Lappas *et al.*, 2019; Scherpereel *et al.*, 2017) by extending it to a newer platform whose communicative norms are strongly shaped by short-form video, personalization, and entertainment-oriented engagement (Cervi *et al.*, 2021, 2023; Orbegozo-Terradillos *et al.*, 2025).

RQ1 asked which MEPs have a TikTok account. The results showed that TikTok has become a mainstream platform among MEPs: 52% of the 719 elected MEPs had an identifiable accessible account. Adoption is clearly patterned by generation, with TikTok users being younger (median age 47.75) than non-users (median age 54.68), while adoption is not meaningfully gendered. Beyond individual characteristics, national differences are striking: some member states show near-universal uptake among MEPs (e.g. Ireland, Malta or Poland), whereas others display very low presence (e.g. Netherlands). Importantly, the absence of a significant correlation between MEP adoption rates and TikTok adoption in the general population suggests that MEPs’ uptake is not simply a reflection of national diffusion but may be driven by political and institutional conditions.

These cross-national disparities are consistent with scholarship arguing that European political communication remains deeply shaped by domestic opportunity structures and the second-order nature of European elections (Moreno *et al.*, 2024; Pérez, 2013; Reif & Schmitt, 1980).

RQ2 examined which demographic, political, and social media variables predict TikTok adoption. The integrated model indicated that adoption is best explained by a combination of factors. At the individual level, age is the strongest predictor, confirming the generational dimension found in earlier studies of MEPs’ platform adoption (Larsson, 2015; Scherpereel *et al.*, 2017). At the institutional level, EP group size is significant, with independents and MEPs in smaller groups being more likely to adopt TikTok. This pattern is consistent with the view that actors with fewer institutional or legacy-media resources may turn to emerging platforms as compensatory channels to expand visibility (Paaetelainen *et al.*, 2022).

Finally, ideological orientation did not emerge as a robust predictor of adoption once other factors were accounted for, suggesting that ideology may be more consequential for the style and performance of communication on TikTok than for the initial decision to create an account. This distinction helps reconcile adoption-focused analyses with findings that emphasize far-right success on TikTok in terms of reach and engagement rather than simple presence (Cartes-Barroso *et al.*, 2025; Cervi *et al.*, 2021; Goujard & Cokelaere, 2024).

Taken together, the findings of RQ1 and RQ2 illuminate the broader paradox motivating this study: while EU institutions framed TikTok primarily as a cybersecurity risk and recommended its removal from devices linked to institutional systems, a substantial share of individual legislators adopted the platform. This divergence can be understood through the lens of media ideologies and idioms of practice (Gershon, 2010): institutions and individual political actors may interpret the same medium through different normative assumptions about what it is “for.” In this case, institutional logics prioritize risk minimization and organizational security, whereas individual MEPs may prioritize communicative opportunity especially where younger audiences, personalization, and potential virality are seen as electorally advantageous.

These dynamics reflect the broader role of TikTok in digital life. As Kemp (2025) notes, the main motivations for social media use are reading news stories, finding content, and seeing what is being talked about rather than explicitly “learning about politics.” Combined with TikTok’s reputation as an entertainment platform (Orbegozo-Terradillos *et al.*, 2025), this means political actors must adapt content formats to resonate with these motivations and sustain publishing beyond electoral cycles.

RQ3 asked how to characterise the MEPs who posted on TikTok during the common campaign period (27 May–5 June 2024). Among the MEPs with TikTok accounts, only a subset used the platform during the campaign window. Demographic variables did not explain campaign-period use among TikTok adopters. By contrast, political variables were informative: European group affiliation and EP group size were significant predictors, and MEPs from re-elected parties were substantially more likely to post during the campaign period. These results suggest that campaign-period activation is shaped less by sociodemographics than by political group. The prominence of political-group effects further indicates that parties and parliamentary families may shape strategic calculations about whether and how to invest in TikTok within campaign communication portfolios.

RQ4 examined posting behavior and engagement dynamics during the common campaign period. The analysis reveals that TikTok activity among elected MEPs is cyclical and tightly coupled to the electoral calendar. Content production peaked in 2024 and declined markedly in 2025, suggesting that many accounts were activated primarily for campaign purposes rather than integrated into sustained communication strategies. Three ideal-typical usage patterns emerged: (i) intensive and continuous posting, (ii) sporadic and residual posting, and (iii) campaign-peaked posting with limited activity outside elections. Importantly, posting frequency alone did not predict higher average engagement: visibility hierarchies largely persisted across periods, with a small set of high-profile actors maintaining dominance. This indicates that TikTok's political attention economy among MEPs is highly centralized, and that episodic increases in output do not necessarily translate into higher per-post resonance.

These patterns have broader implications for debates on the consequences of social media for political competition. The findings suggest a dual dynamic. On the one hand, the higher adoption among smaller EP groups and independents is compatible with an “equalization” logic, where actors with fewer conventional resources seek to compensate via emerging platforms. On the other hand, the concentration of engagement and the persistence of dominance by already prominent accounts reflects a “normalization” logic in which platform visibility reproduces existing inequalities in attention and communicative capital.

Moreover, the stability of average engagement per video during the campaign period suggests that elections do not automatically generate higher per-post returns on TikTok, potentially due to competition for attention, audience fatigue with overt electoral messaging, or mismatches between campaign communication and TikTok's entertainment-oriented vernacular (Orbegozo-Terradillos *et al.*, 2025). In line with scholarship success on TikTok likely depends on the ability to align with platform-native idioms such as brevity, emotional appeal, authenticity cues, and trend-based formats without undermining credibility (Cervi *et al.*, 2021, 2023; Zamora-Medina *et al.*, 2023).

Finally, this study highlights that political adoption of TikTok among MEP's cannot be reduced to a binary choice between prohibition and embrace. Rather, it reflects a strategy in which communicative opportunity, platform ecologies, institutional resources, and national political contexts interact with reputational and security concerns. In this sense, MEPs' TikTok engagement illustrates how regulatory debates and political practice can coexist in tension: lawmakers may face pressures to restrict a platform while simultaneously finding it advantageous to use it for visibility and mobilization.

## 7. Limitations

As with every research, this study also presents limitations. The first relates with the quantitative nature of the work, letting behind the qualitative analysis of video content. Although considered initially, the language barrier posed an obstacle, and the reliance on translation tools risked losing essential discourse elements and cultural cues. Further work would benefit from qualitative content analysis of politicians' posts.

The second limitation concerned the temporal scope of the research. By concentrating on the common period of campaign among countries, the analysis may not fully capture the campaign phenomenon. However, the choice allowed key comparisons.

The third limitation relates with the data collection tool that, although several attempts, could not retrieve the information from all the MEPs that have posted during the common period of analyses.

Despite these limitations, we believe that the methodological approach and analysis are valid, with the study providing significant conclusions.

## 8. Use of Artificial Intelligence

This article made limited use of ChatGPT (OpenAI, GPT-5, 2025) to assist in drafting sections of text, discussing statistical models and results, and editing references into APA 7th style.

The tool was used to clarify wording, suggest interpretations, and refine presentation but did not perform data collection, statistical analysis, or generate original research findings. All analyses, interpretations, and conclusions are the sole responsibility of the authors.

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## 10. Contributions

Roles	Author 1	Author 2
Conceptualization	x	x
Formal analysis	x	x
Fundraising		
Project management	x	
Research	x	x
Methodology	x	x
Data processing	x	x
Resources		
Software	x	
Supervision	x	
Validation	x	x
Data Visualization	x	
Writing – original draft	x	x
Writing – review and editing	x	x

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