

# **Appropriation of the Social Network X in the Communication between the Prosumer Citizens and Local Government**

*Apropiación de la red social X en la comunicación entre el ciudadano prosumidor y el gobierno local*

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## **Abstract**

This work is part of a broader research on the communication of the prosumer citizen with local governments through hypermediation in X (formerly Twitter). In this sense, the research focuses on studying the appropriation of social network X from the processes of consumption, production and exchange that are generated in the communication of the prosumer citizen with local governments in said social network. In order to understand how these processes occur in reality and how the citizen prosumer participates, qualitative-quantitative research was carried out, based mainly on the operationalization of the methodology proposed by Scolari (2019) to analyze an interface. The results indicate that the communication of the mayor's offices seems to be essentially directed towards leaders and followers who identify with the local government party. Likewise, the issues that are discussed are very much marked by the political agenda. Also, there is a disparity between the topics of conversation between the mayors' offices and the citizens. And even though the potential of the accounts studied for digital conversation is evident, the research suggests the need to deepen a more participatory culture to consolidate the appropriation of the communicative territory.

**Keywords:** communication, local administration, social media.

## **Resumen**

Este trabajo forma parte de una investigación más amplia sobre la comunicación del ciudadano prosumidor con los gobiernos locales a través de la hipermediación en X (antes Twitter). En este sentido, la investigación se centra en estudiar la apropiación de la red social X a partir de los procesos de consumo, producción e intercambio que se generan en la comunicación del ciudadano prosumidor con los gobiernos locales en dicha red social. Con el fin de comprender cómo ocurren estos procesos en la realidad y cómo participa el ciudadano prosumidor, se realizó una investigación cualitativa-cuantitativa, basada principalmente en la operacionalización de la metodología propuesta por Scolari (2019) para analizar una interfaz. Los resultados indican que la comunicación de las alcaldías parece estar esencialmente dirigida hacia líderes y seguidores que se identifican con el partido de gobierno local. Asimismo, los temas que se discuten están muy marcados por la agenda política. Además, existe una disparidad entre los temas de conversación entre las alcaldías y los ciudadanos. Y, si bien el potencial de los relatos estudiados para la conversación digital es evidente, la investigación sugiere la necesidad de profundizar una cultura más participativa para consolidar la apropiación del territorio comunicativo.

**Palabras clave:** comunicación, administración local, medios sociales.

## **Introduction**

Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) have burst into all sectors of society, becoming not only tools for communication, but also promoters of structural changes in all fields of human activity; from private companies to public institutions. We are globally integrated into a digital and interactive society, where technological advances have made the ability to share information a crucial element in defining us not only as a society, but also as actors in it.

This capacity affects everything from our social relationships – such as our daily lives – to the configuration of our subjectivity. We are not simply citizens, workers, entrepreneurs, students, or friends, because each of these

roles is transformed or reconstructed by being protagonists of communicative processes today. Apparently, our subjectivity as creators and re-signified takes on meaning in social networks, to the extent that we participate in the processes of consumption, production and exchange that are carried out through the new social media.

In this context, the opportunities to transmit information have multiplied exponentially, thanks to the fact that new technologies allow greater communication; and, especially, social networks that have contributed to the creation of new spaces for interaction. Therefore, now we are not talking about mere receivers of information, but about producers and consumers.

Likewise, in the field of communication, the term prosumer, contributed in the 80s by Alvin Toffler in the book *The Third Wave*, is used to refer to the new users of information; they are no longer seen only as receivers of the information produced by the media, but take an active part in the process. Government communication does not escape this reality, since participation in the "Web 2.0 Community" implies not only consuming the content, but also sharing it, and responding to or making public comments about it. Thus, citizens take part in decision-making, influence others with their opinions and express their interests.

In this way, it is necessary to understand that new technologies have become catalysts for techno-cultural changes on a global scale, and that this has generated a transformation of social actors, not only in the ways of communicating; also, in their way of understanding communication and their role within it. Realizing these transformations is essential to transfigure the relationship that occurs between local governments and citizens. Especially in societies where more effective communication is urgent; that not only promotes and strengthens citizen participation but also contributes to the satisfaction of the requirements of the communities, which is necessary for the social and human development of the municipalities.

Now, what does that participation look like in practice when it comes to citizens communicating with the governments of the localities where they live? What is the state of the appropriation of social networks by these citizens? What is the content that is disseminated there? How do citizens experience communication with local governments through social networks?

The search for answers to these questions occupies this research work. Therefore, the objective is to study the appropriation of social network X in the communication between the prosumer citizen and the local government through the processes of consumption, production and exchange that are generated. To this end, it has been proposed to describe the participation of the citizen-prosumer in communication with the local government, to determine the state of the appropriation of social networks by the citizen-prosumer when communicating with the local government, and to identify the content that is disseminated in such communication.

However, to study the appropriation of a social network by citizen-prosumers; and, in addition, "how these actors live" communication with the local government, requires defining, in the first place, communication. In this sense, it is useful to understand communication as an interface (Márquez, 2022). This implies not only understanding the interface from the metaphor of the space for interaction, but as the interaction itself.

But, in addition, this definition allows us to appreciate the complexity of communication, which constitutes—as Márquez (2022) puts it, following Scolari (2008 and 2018)—"a network of human and technological actors who exchange information, generating relationships, and shaping the processes that allow them to participate in the construction of knowledge and meaning" (p. 178). In other words, more than a process, communication is a set of processes: production, consumption, circulation and exchange of information; and a set of actors (human and technological). It is also a set of relationships that are established when processes are activated. All these elements (actors, relationships and processes) are linked in the complex fabric that is digital communication.

In this way, precisely, through communication, the subjectivity of the prosumer (producer and consumer) is fostered, which, at the same time, emerges as a social construction in the act of prosumption.

Virtualization, the appropriation of information and the communicative territory – in this case social networks – foster this subjectivity and make it an actor in digital communication. By appropriating the contents, he also appropriates the architecture or space of social networks, re-signifies them and builds his own experience.

For Sosa and Arcila (2013), appropriation refers to the fact that the subject not only consumes the messages, but also lives the media, becomes part of them—as an observer and participant in the stories they transmit. Likewise, it reconfigures these stories or stories "through complex processes of identification and projection that take place in communication" (p. 86). Appropriation is in the uses of objects. In other words, it is a "system of practices" (Martín Barbero, 1998, p. 93); the space between production and consumption, marked by what people do with what they believe and buy; with what he reads and sees, he points out. Appropriation operates in the ways in which the consumer uses products.

Sosa and Arcila (2013) define it as "the indeterminate space where a large part of the communicative process takes place and which is enormously marked by culture, or rather, by cultural matrices, by our biography or life history, our dreams, desires and desires" (p. 86). In other words, the place where interpretations are

summarized, the way-of-doing-things is concretized and being-here-and-now is configured. In this way, the study of appropriation requires an understanding of how the processes of exchange, production, and consumption of information are configured. Therefore, we must stop and look at the space where conflicts occur, hybridizations are formed; and see the ways in which content is used and replicated.

## Methodology

The study is qualitative-quantitative and has as its population the mayor's offices of the state of Táchira, limiting itself to the municipalities with active X accounts during the fieldwork. These are: Cárdenas, Capacho Nuevo, Capacho Viejo, García de Hevia, Guásimos, Jáuregui, Samuel D. Maldonado, San Cristóbal and Seboruco.

Likewise, the study is based on observation and documentary research as research techniques. The actions carried out by the followers of the official accounts of X of the mayor's offices of the state of Táchira are analyzed. To locate them, the Google® search engine was used.

The choice of X is because it is a microblogging platform that facilitates the dissemination of messages and dialogue. In addition, the X social network within Venezuela is mainly used for news, information, trends, events, transit, among others; in short, it focuses on a channel of news and events" (Yi Min Shum, 2020). It is also necessary to add that the study period runs from 09-13-2020 to 02-27-2021. To delimit the sample, a composite week was created.

## Results and discussion

**Table 1**

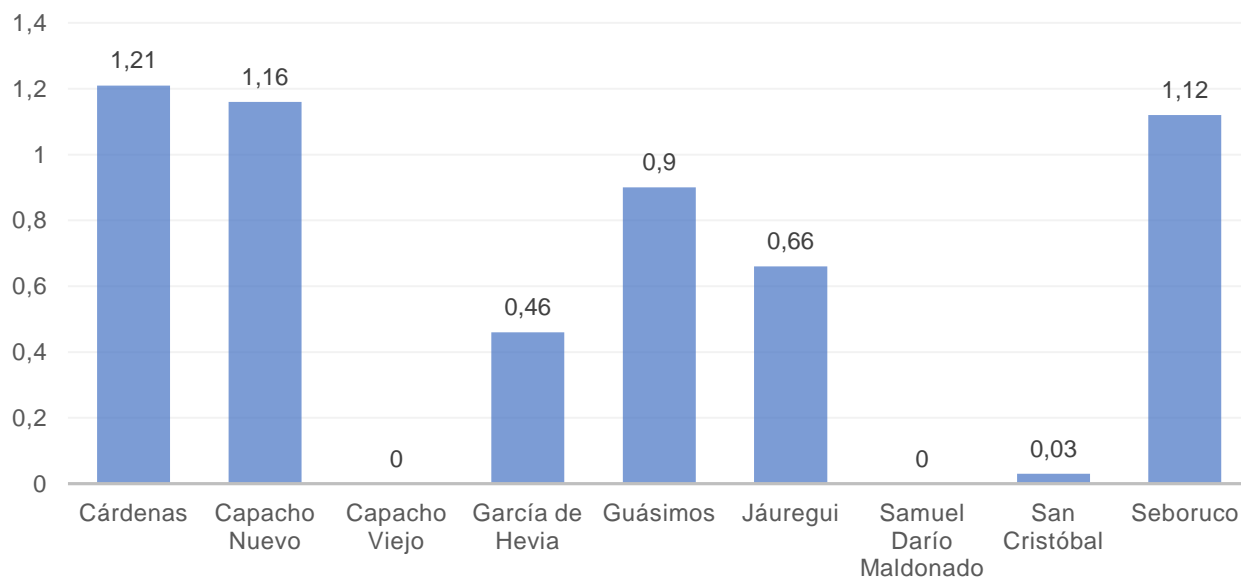
*Average engagement per tweet and interaction rate*

| Municipality        | Number of Followers | Average engagement per tweet in the period analyzed | Engagement rate (%) |
|---------------------|---------------------|---|---------------------|
| Cárdenas            | 921                 | 0.0121  | 1.21 %              |
| Capacho Nuevo       | 344                 | 0.0116  | 1.16 %              |
| Capacho Viejo       | 288                 | No interaction                                      |                     |
| García de Hevia     | 1690                | 0.0046  | 0.46 %              |
| Guásimos            | 787                 | 0.0090  | 0.90 %              |
| Jáuregui            | 246                 | 0.0066  | 0.66 %              |
| Samuel D. Maldonado | 7                   | No interaction                                      |                     |
| San Cristóbal       | 47998               | 0.0003  | 0.03 %              |
| Seboruco            | 558                 | 0.0112  | 1.12 %              |
| <b>Averages</b>     | <b>5871</b>         | <b>0.00615</b>                                      | <b>0.62 %</b>       |

Source: Márquez, R. (2022)

**Figure 1**

*Graph of the interaction rate per tweet*



**Source:** Márquez, R. (2022)

If we consider that, in X, a good interaction rate is equivalent to 2 (Tornos, n.d.), a regular one is at 1, and a low one is below 1, we can see that only three municipalities in the sample have a regular interaction rate. The others have low interaction. This shows that the content published by the accounts studied is distant from the expectations of followers, and from their affinity and interest as citizens. It also shows that the mayor's offices are not generating enough links between users.

However, we must consider that this can be relative, since the interaction rate is influenced by two important aspects: first, the number of tweets that are published; and, secondly, the number of followers. Therefore, there are municipalities that, apparently, have a lot of interaction, but the number of weekly posts is very low, so people have fewer tweets to interact with.

Let us note the data from the mayor's office of Capacho Nuevo in table 1. This account registers a regular interaction rate, which stands at 1.16%, a better figure than that of San Cristóbal. If we are more precise, he has 344 followers and registers an average of 0.5 weekly posts. Now, if we compare the engagement rate to the weekly post rate, we understand that of course the engagement rate throws up that number due to so little being posted. In other words, users interact with the little they publish. This places it among the accounts with the least activity in the sample in terms of publications, but it allows us to see the potential that the account has to generate interaction.

This can be related to what happens in the account of the mayor's office of Jáuregui (see Table 1). It shows an average publication of 0.5 – equal to that of the mayor's office of Capacho Nuevo – but the interaction rate is low, standing at 0.66%, with a total of 246 followers. This does not mean that it has less potential for interaction, but that publications do not promote user activity. This may be due to using the account only as a platform to post links that lead to the institution's Instagram® account.

Let's see what happens with the second aspect: the number of followers. An account that has many followers, such as, for example, the mayor's office of San Cristóbal can have a low interaction rate, because the number of followers is considered to calculate the interaction rate per tweet. The account of this mayor's office has the lowest interaction rate in the sample. But the number of followers is the highest.

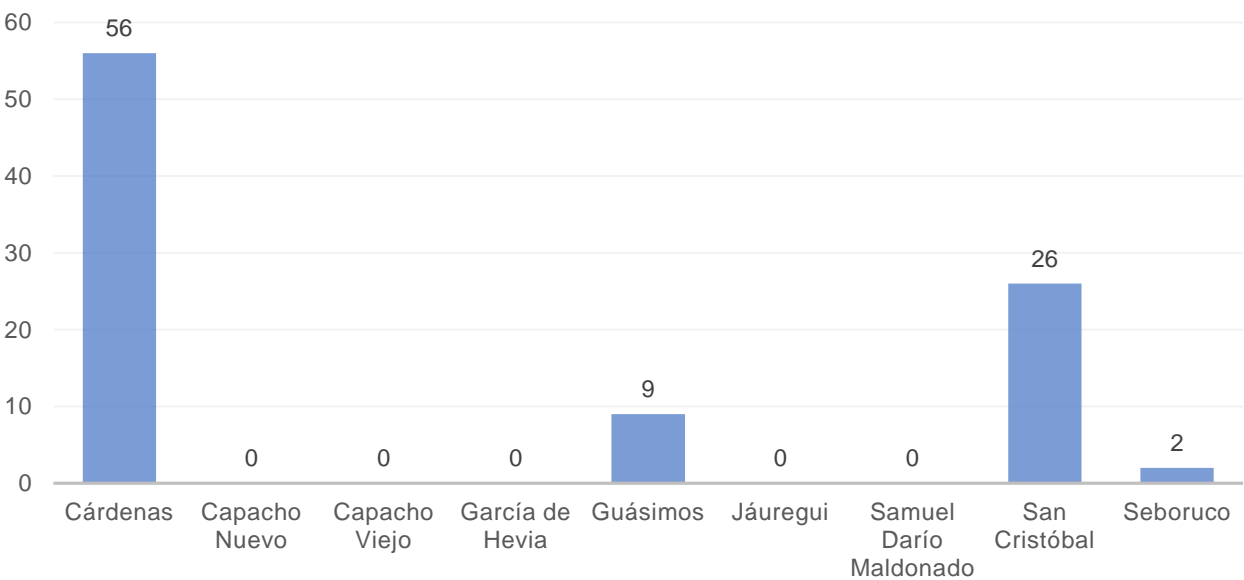
Now, we could assume that such a low engagement rate may be due to the high number of followers; but if we consider the number of daily publications, we see that it is below the weekly average, as it registers 5.17 weekly publications, and 3 tweets on the days in which it registers greater interaction. This allows us to verify that the low interaction has to do with the number of publications made by the account, given that, on the days when it publishes more, the greater the interaction.

**Table 2**  
*User responses*

| Municipality           | User responses |
|------------------------|----------------|
| Cárdenas               | 56             |
| Capacho Nuevo          | 0              |
| Capacho Viejo          | 0              |
| García de Hevia        | 0              |
| Guásimos               | 9              |
| Jáuregui               | 0              |
| Samuel Darío Maldonado | 0              |
| San Cristóbal          | 26             |
| Seboruco               | 2              |

Source: Márquez, R. (2022)

**Figure 2**  
*Graph of the number of responses from X users*



Source: Márquez, R. (2022)

As can be seen in Table 2 and Figure 2, during the period studied, the account with the highest number of responses from users is that of Cárdenas; this is followed by the account of the mayor's office of San Cristóbal. In third place, is the account of the mayor's office of Guásimos; and, fourthly, the account of the mayor's office of Seboruco. The rest of the accounts that make up the sample did not receive comments during the weeks of study.

**What do the followers of the mayoralties talk about in X?**

The users' responses were classified using an inferential process to create ad hoc categories that allowed them to be organized and contextualized. From the observation of the topics that are presented most regularly, the following themes were obtained:

- **Urban Sanitation:** This topic includes the contents related to the urban sanitation service and garbage management. Therefore, it includes the following: information related to the urban sanitation service, complaints of service failures, requests from users for urban sanitation to pass through a certain community, complaints of the presence of solid waste in the streets and avenues.
- **Political propaganda:** Covers all comments associated with the ideology of political parties.
- **Water service:** All content related to aqueducts, drinking water service, as well as complaints about what is popularly known as "water boats" or water leaks are framed in this theme.
- **Repair of roads and public lighting:** All the contents associated with the repair and patching of public roads, lighting of public roads and complaints about poor road conditions are organized here.
- **Domestic gas/CLAP:** We note that information on the sale of domestic gas is regularly related to organizations called CLAP, which are responsible for the reception and distribution of gas cylinders. Likewise, many users request domestic gas and CLAP bags (food bags) in the same comment.
- **Payment of taxes:** Information related to the payment of municipal taxes is included here
- **Pandemic:** In view of the fact that the study period covers four months of 2020 and two months of 2021, it coincides with the pandemic crisis, so it is pertinent to consider this topic, where the most frequent contents related to covid-19 are organized: disinfection of public roads and headquarters of public agencies, prevention measures, requests to take measures to avoid concentrations of people.
- **Others:** Content that is not repeated so regularly, such as disturbance of public order, help for people with malnutrition, repair of internet connection cables, among others.

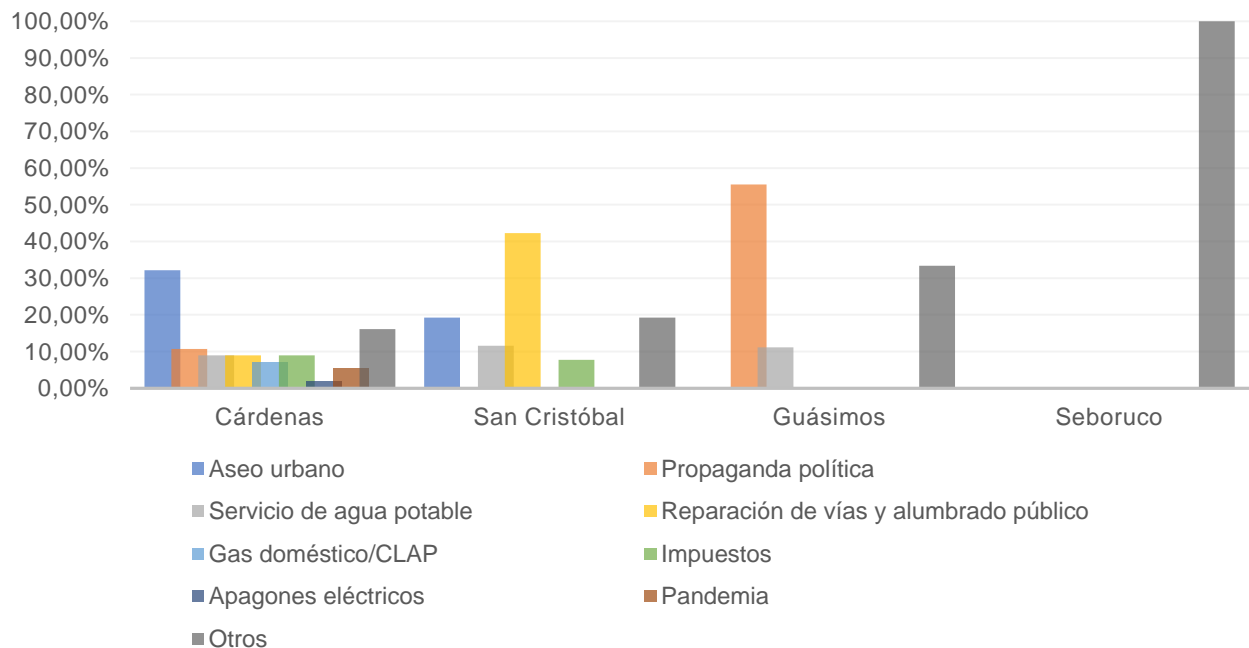
**Table 3**

*What are the supporters of the mayor's offices talking about in X?*

|               | Aseo urbano | Propaganda | Servicio de agua potable | Reparación de vías y alumbrado público | Gas doméstico/CLAP | Impuestos | Apagones eléctricos | Pandemia | Otros  |
|---------------|-------------|------------|--------------------------|--|--------------------|-----------|---------------------|----------|--------|
| Cárdenas      | 32,14%      | 10,71%     | 8,93%                    | 8,93%                                  | 7,14%              | 8,93%     | 1,79%               | 5,36%    | 16,07% |
| San Cristóbal | 19,23%      | 0,00%      | 11,54%                   | 42,30%                                 | 0%                 | 7,70%     | 0%                  | 0%       | 19,23% |
| Guásimos      | 0,00%       | 56%        | 11,11%                   | 0%                                     | 0%                 | 0%        | 0%                  | 0%       | 33,33% |
| Seboruco      | 0%          | 0%         | 0%                       | 0%                                     | 0%                 | 0%        | 0%                  | 0%       | 100%   |

**Source:** Márquez, R. (2022)

**Figure 3**  
*Graph on the topics mentioned by the followers of the mayor's offices in X*



**Source:** Márquez, R. (2022)

Table 3 and Figure 3 show the topics that the followers of the accounts of the municipalities studied prioritize in their conversation. Thus, we note that, in the account of the Mayor's Office of Cárdenas, the comments that are presented most regularly, in 32.14%, are associated with the topic of urban sanitation.

The comments that abound the most after the previous ones are classified as Others, which cover 16.07%, and have to do with requests for repair of cables for internet connection or improving CANTV's telephony; Comments related to disturbance of public order by liquor sales and requests for information about the municipal executive train are also read.

Likewise, it is evident that, although the rest of the topics have a more equitable presence in the conversation of followers, the preeminence of comments related to Political Propaganda stands out, which cover 10.71% of the total. On the other hand, with respect to the account of the mayor's office of San Cristóbal, we can observe that the theme that appears most regularly is the repair and lighting of the road, as it covers 42.30% of the comments. In addition, in this mayor's office there are two themes that manifest a similar frequency in the week of study (19.23%). The first has to do with urban cleaning; the second, Others, includes comments related to two controversial events that coincided with the study: the restructuring of the Civil Registry and the poor state of the Metropolitan Park.

Now, making a comparison between the mayors of Cárdenas and San Cristóbal, it stands out that, while the count of the former shows a significant number of comments on political propaganda, in the mayor's office of San Cristóbal there are no such comments. The same happens with the issues of Domestic Gas/CLAP. On the account of the Mayor's Office of Cárdenas, users comment on this issue, but on the account of the Mayor's Office of San Cristóbal, they do not. On the other hand, when observing in the graph the topics of conversation of the followers of the mayor's office of Guásimos, we notice that the predominant theme is Political propaganda, which covers 56%; followed by Others, with 33.33%; and Drinking Water, with 11.11%.

To be more precise, the other topic of the mayor's office of Guásimos includes mentions of other accounts and a spelling correction made by a user to a publication of the mayor's office. We see that Political Propaganda has the greatest regularity among the topics of conversation, coinciding with the mayor's office of Cárdenas, in which, although it is not the most repeated topic, it does have a considerable presence.

Finally, the account of the Seboruco mayor's office is the one that presents the fewest comments; and, in addition, 100% of the comments are in the other category, because one shows advertising totally unrelated to the



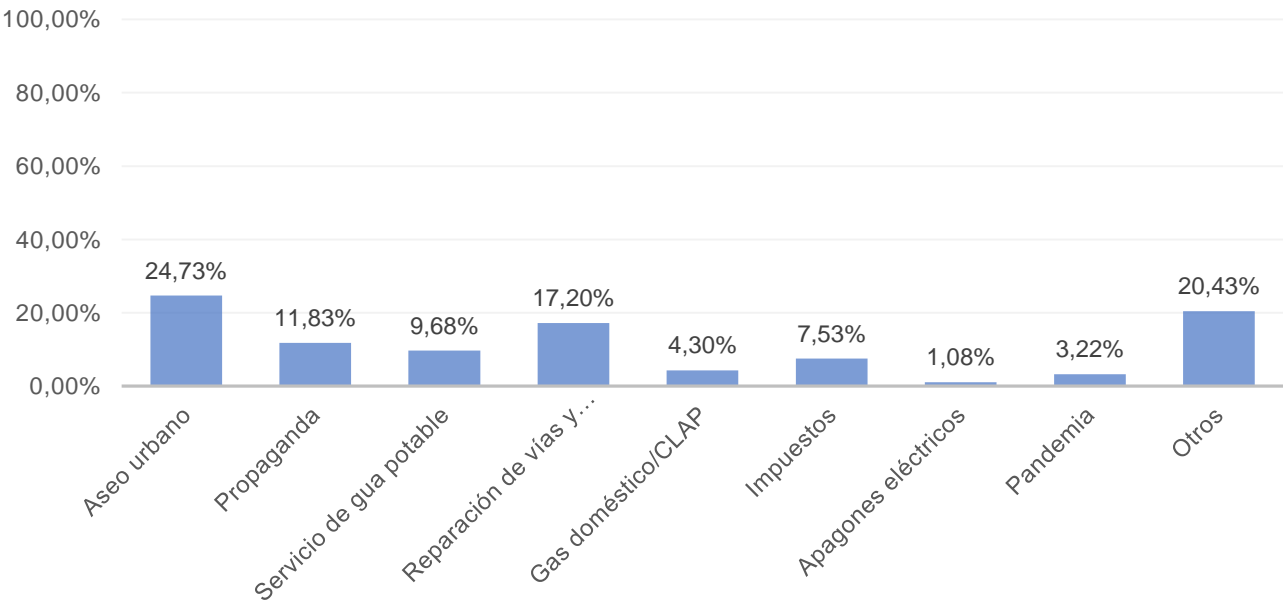
mayor's office, and the second cannot be viewed. The above allows us to verify that most of the topics of interest to users in the conversation with the mayor's offices studied correspond to the municipality's own competencies, established in Article 56 of the Organic Law of the Municipal Public Power (2006).

**Table 4**  
*Topics of interest to users in the conversation with the mayors' offices*

| Temas                                  | Respuestas de los usuarios por tema |
|--|-------------------------------------|
| Aseo urbano                            | 24,73%                              |
| Propaganda                             | 11,83%                              |
| Servicio de gua potable                | 9,68%                               |
| Reparación de vías y alumbrado público | 17,20%                              |
| Gas doméstico/CLAP                     | 4,30%                               |
| Impuestos                              | 7,53%                               |
| Apagones eléctricos                    | 1,08%                               |
| Pandemia                               | 3,22%                               |
| Otros                                  | 20,43%                              |

Source: Márquez, R. (2022)

**Figure 4**  
*Graph of the total topics of interest to users in the conversation with the mayors' offices*



Source: Márquez, R. (2022)

In this sense, as evidenced in Table 4 and Figure 4, the results obtained from the review of all the mayors' offices show that the topics that prevail are Urban Sanitation, which occupies 24.73% of the responses to the comments of all the municipalities; followed by the other category, which encompasses various comments, as we have indicated above. and covers 20.43%. Subsequently, they are followed by *Repair and lighting of public roads*, with 17.20% of the responses; *Political propaganda*, with 11.83%; *Drinking water service*, with 9.68%; and *municipal taxes*, with 7.53%.

The topics with the fewest comments are *domestic gas/CLAP*, which obtained 4.30% of the responses; followed by the topic of *Pandemic*, which registered 3.22% of the comments; and the topic of *Electrical Blackouts*,



which obtained the lowest percentage, with 1.08% of the comments from users. From now on, *Power Blackouts* is included in *Other*, due to the low frequency of their occurrence.

### **Have the powers of the mayors' offices been distorted?**

Although most of the comments from users are related to the formal competencies of mayors' offices, there is also a presence of issues that do not correspond to those functions. For example, in the account of the mayor's office of Cárdenas, comments pertaining to Domestic Gas/CLAP are generated; these are related, above all, to CLAP bags (food bags), which do not concern the competences of the municipal power. Although the number of comments related to this issue is low, occupying only 4.30% of the responses, it is striking that they are present, since this may indicate that the powers of the mayors' offices would be misrepresented.

### **Political propaganda: a topic of conversation for users?**

Similarly, the regularity of comments associated with political propaganda stands out. However, it should be noted that this happens in the accounts of the mayor's offices linked to the political party of the national government. In addition, these comments are regularly generated from political party accounts; or also from popular organizations, such as the Local Committees of Supply and Production (CLAP), belonging to the Great Sovereign Supply Mission, implemented by the Venezuelan State. In some cases, they are generated from personal accounts, whose profile expresses their militancy in parties that support the national government.

It is necessary to dwell on this, due to two aspects that are worth highlighting: The first of them has to do with the use of the conversation space that is generated in the accounts of X of the mayors' offices, to disseminate the ideology of political parties. This would translate into the deepening of despotic relationships, instead of tending to relations between equals. But, in addition, these comments can enclose space for conversation and overshadow the opinions or comments expressed by private citizens, for whom the accounts of mayors on social networks mean a space for participation.

## **Conclusions**

### **The unidirectional model prevails**

. If we make a general comparison between the topics that predominate in the communication of the municipalities studied and those that have greater relevance in the conversation of users, we can observe that, even when there are coincidences in the topics addressed by these actors, there is a disparity in the importance they give them in communication.

It should also be noted that, even though the study is temporarily located in the second half of the pandemic, it is not one of the topics with the greatest presence, although it is more present on the agenda of the mayors' offices than in the conversation of users.

Similarly, the lack of responses from mayors to citizens' comments makes the one-way model of communication they retain remarkable. Even when they transfer their posts to social networks, apparently, they do so "instinctively"; that is, if there is a fashionable social network, we must be there, without considering the capacity of these networks to promote rapprochement with citizens and to promote participation.

### **Presence of propaganda: making known vs. making done**

The other aspect that should be noted is the regularity with which the issue of propaganda is presented, both on the mayor's agenda and in the conversations of users. This prevalence can affect the relationship of citizens with the local government and turn a space for dialogue into a monologue of government management. On the other hand, this scenario can transform communication into a *tool* to unify thoughts that liquidate the other, without considering what is at stake: communication itself, participation and the power to dissent.

In other words, the fact that the space of government communication is full of political propaganda prevents there from being an effective listening to the requirements of citizens, their interests and concerns. Which, in addition, limits the ability to respond to these. But beyond that, this practice weakens and even prevents the consolidation of links between the local government and citizens.

### **The citizen has his own agenda of issues and expresses it in the comments**

On the other hand, when analyzing the aspects that we have considered within production as a process, we observe that the ability that X offers to users to give their opinion or comment on their concerns, allows them to interfere in the communicative practice and make visible their own agenda of important issues.

