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journal

DIGITAL COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES
IN SOLID WASTE MANAGEMENT:
AN ANALYSIS OF EFFECTIVENESS IN
GOVERNMENT SOCIAL MEDIA

ESTRATEGIAS DE COMUNICACIÓN DIGITAL
EN LA GESTIÓN DE RESIDUOS SÓLIDOS:
UN ANÁLISIS DE LA EFECTIVIDAD DE LAS
REDES SOCIALES GUBERNAMENTALES



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DIGITAL COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES IN SOLID WASTE MANAGEMENT: AN ANALYSIS OF EFFECTIVENESS IN GOVERNMENT SOCIAL MEDIA

ESTRATEGIAS DE COMUNICACIÓN DIGITAL EN LA GESTIÓN DE RESIDUOS SÓLIDOS: UN ANÁLISIS DE LA EFECTIVIDAD DE LAS REDES SOCIALES GUBERNAMENTALES

ABSTRACT

The proper management of municipal solid waste represents one of the most pressing environmental challenges in contemporary cities. This study analyzed the effectiveness of the visual dissemination strategies implemented by the municipality of Monterrey, Nuevo Leon, Mexico, through its official *Facebook* page during 2023. Using a qualitative, semiotic approach, 166 images published by the Secretariat of Sustainable Urban Development were evaluated, considering aspects of visual composition, iconicity, cultural symbolism, and the denotation and connotation of messages. The results revealed a predominance of institutional photographs over educational materials, with high iconicity but limited use of cultural symbols that generate an emotional connection with the audience. An irregular publication frequency was identified, with peaks in May and June and significant decreases in January and December. Average engagement showed a positive correlation with publication frequency, although the quality of the visual content and thematic relevance also play a decisive role. It was concluded that, although there are institutional efforts to make municipal actions visible, the strategy requires diversification of formats, strengthening of persuasive narratives with emotional components, and design of interactive mechanisms that transform digital communication into an effective tool to promote sustainable waste management practices.

Keywords: visual communication, digital strategies, citizen participation, solid waste

RESUMEN

La gestión adecuada de los residuos sólidos urbanos representa uno de los desafíos ambientales más apremiantes en las ciudades contemporáneas. El presente estudio analizó la efectividad de las estrategias de difusión visual implementadas por el municipio de Monterrey, Nuevo Leon, Mexico, a través de su página oficial de *Facebook* durante el año 2023. Mediante un enfoque cualitativo de corte semiótico, se evaluaron 166 imágenes publicadas por la Secretaría de Desarrollo Urbano Sostenible, considerando aspectos de composición visual, iconicidad, simbolismo cultural, denotación y connotación de mensajes. Los resultados revelaron un predominio de fotografías institucionales sobre materiales educativos, con alta iconicidad, pero uso limitado de símbolos culturales que generan conexión emocional con la audiencia. Se identificó una frecuencia irregular de publicación, con picos en mayo y junio, y descensos significativos en enero y diciembre. El *engagement* promedio mostró evaluación positiva con la frecuencia de publicación, aunque la calidad del contenido visual y la relevancia temática también influyen determinadamente. Se concluyó que, aunque existen esfuerzos institucionales para visibilizar las acciones municipales, la estrategia requiere diversificación de formatos, fortalecimiento de narrativas persuasivas con componentes emocionales, y diseño de mecanismos interactivos que transformen la comunicación digital en herramienta efectiva para promover prácticas sostenibles de manejo de residuos.

Palabras clave: comunicación visual, estrategias digitales, participación ciudadana, residuos sólidos

1. INTRODUCTION

Proper management of municipal solid waste is one of the most pressing environmental issues in contemporary cities, not only because of its impact on the physical environment, but also because of its social, cultural, and public health implications. In Latin America, and particularly in Mexico, rapid urban growth and population concentration have exacerbated the challenges of waste disposal, recycling, and treatment. Therefore, it is urgent to implement public communication strategies to encourage citizen participation and the adoption of sustainable practices.

In Monterrey, Nuevo Leon, Mexico, this problem takes on significant proportions, as it is the third most populous metropolitan area in the country. The generation of solid urban waste has increased exponentially in recent decades, requiring adequate infrastructure for its management and ensuring that citizens are informed and committed to waste separation, recycling, and reduction practices.

In this context, government communication is a strategic tool for influencing public perception and behavior. Vilchez-Gutarra and Palpán-Guerra (2014) pointed out that communication in public management acts as a cross-cutting component that reduces information asymmetry and strengthens community self-care. It is not just a matter of informing, but of constructing shared meanings that promote a cultural transformation around waste management.

The emergence of digital platforms has radically transformed the dynamics of communication between governments and citizens. In this regard, Crespo et al. (2023) pointed out that:

Social media has emerged as a tool that, while facilitating the dissemination of government information, also allows for more direct and two-way interaction with citizens, thus promising greater transparency, citizen participation, and democratization of the public sphere. (p. 172).

This perspective positions platforms such as *Facebook* as channels of dissemination and potential spaces for building active digital citizenship. The modernization of the state and the effectiveness of its environmental policies are closely linked to its communication capacity. As Armas (2015) argues, building a modern and efficient state requires strategic communication capable of empowering citizens and legitimizing public action in social opinion. This vision positions communication not only as a functional tool, but also as a political and cultural process of mediation between the government and citizens.

In the digital age, the use of technological platforms and social networks represents an invaluable opportunity for public management. Information and communication technologies (ICT) make government actions more transparent, optimize resources, and generate more effective mechanisms for citizen interaction (Ripalda-Yáñez, 2019). Ochoa Chaves et al. (2020) highlighted that ICTs may or may not promote more horizontal government communication in the era of participatory and digital culture. In this regard, they point out that the transition to more participatory communication models depends, to a large extent, on the strategic design of platforms and content.

In this sense, the images used in digital campaigns are not merely visual accompaniments, but signs laden with cultural meaning. Semiotics offers key tools for understanding how images communicate, what emotions they arouse, and what behaviors they can induce. In this sense, a visual perception can only be considered a sign when it is capable of configuring a form valued by the perceiver, which implies a complex cognitive process of encoding and decoding.

Vallverdu-Gordi and Marine-Roig (2023) provided empirical evidence on the role of graphic design semiotics in environmental awareness campaigns, demonstrating that "graphic design semiotics influences public environmental awareness and destination preservation by generating a sensitive, emotional, and cognitive reaction to the campaign in the audience" (p. 1). This finding was fundamental to understanding how visual elements can translate into behavioral changes toward sustainable environmental practices.

Similarly, Barthes (1964) noted that all images are polysemic. In other words, they are open to multiple interpretations, which requires careful consideration of visual elements depending on the target audience. This polysemic condition is particularly relevant in the context of government communication on solid waste, where messages must be clear, persuasive, and culturally relevant in order to achieve the desired behavioral change.

Based on these theoretical approaches, this study evaluated the effectiveness of the visual communication strategies used by the municipality of Monterrey, Mexico, on its social media accounts, particularly on the *Facebook* page of the Secretariat of Sustainable Urban Development, during 2023. The visual elements were analyzed from a semiotic and communicational perspective in order to identify their ability to raise awareness and motivate citizen participation in responsible solid waste management practices.

This study contributed to the field of public and environmental communication, offering concrete recommendations that will enable the municipality to optimize its digital resources, strengthen its ties with citizens, and move toward a more conscious and sustainable urban culture. In the words of Mendoza et al. (2021), a democratic and efficient public administration must weigh the principle of information as a fundamental bridge between public servants and civil society.

2. METHOD OF RESEARCH

This study adopted a qualitative approach aimed at exploring and describing the effectiveness of visual communication strategies implemented by the municipality of Monterrey, Mexico, to promote proper solid waste management through digital platforms. The choice of a qualitative approach was based on the need to gain an in-depth understanding of the meanings, narratives, and representations conveyed through the images published by the municipal government, as well as their potential impact on citizen awareness and participation.

The methodological design corresponded to a case study, focused on the visual content analysis of the publications obtained by the Secretariat of Sustainable Urban Development of the municipality of Monterrey, Mexico, on its official *Facebook* page during the year 2023. This platform was selected due to its public nature, its widespread use among the population, and its relevance as an institutional communication channel.

Data collection consisted of systematically downloading 166 images published between January 1 and December 31, 2023. These images were organized into a database, classified, and subjected to qualitative analysis that revealed both semiotic aspects and visual elements. Categories of analysis were determined related to visual composition, types of images used (photographs, illustrations, infographics, etc.), level of *iconicity*, use of cultural symbols, denotation and connotation of messages, and consistency between image and text.

Following the theoretical model proposed by Vallverdu-Gordi and Marine-Roig (2023), the analytical procedure incorporated the evaluation of the sensory, cognitive, and emotional dimensions of each publication. Structured observation guides were designed to record key indicators such as clarity of message, visual appeal, persuasive potential, frequency of publication, and suitability of content for the target audience. Each image was evaluated on a scale of one to three based on the level of compliance with the established criteria. This made it possible to identify recurring patterns and significant contrasts in the graphic material as a whole.

The semiotic framework served as a theoretical tool for interpreting the signs and meanings present in the images, recognizing their ability to construct meaning and mobilize attitudes. This approach allowed us to explore not only what the images show (denotation), but also how they show it (connotation), what intentions they communicate, and what social representations are activated in the receiver.

In addition, the principles of the analysis model developed by Huang et al. (2025) are applied to evaluate the informational attributes of publications, distinguishing between simple textual content, text accompanied by

images, and text combined with videos. This categorization made it possible to analyze how the informational richness of the content relates to the levels of engagement observed.

The descriptive nature of the study made it possible to examine not only the forms of communication used by the municipality, but also their possible limitations in terms of diversity of formats, cultural symbolism, and communicational effectiveness. Based on the findings, recommendations were made aimed at optimizing the municipality's visual communication strategies, promoting greater clarity in messages, more inclusive design, and a more effective emotional connection with citizens.

3. RESULTS

Qualitative analysis of the 166 images published in 2023 by the Secretariat of Sustainable Urban Development of the municipality of Monterrey, Mexico, on its official *Facebook* page identified various patterns and trends in visual communication strategies aimed at promoting proper solid waste management. These posts were evaluated based on their visual format, frequency, type of content, and use of symbolic and persuasive elements.

Firstly, the frequency of posts related to solid waste was not constant throughout the year. The months with the highest number of posts were January (28), October (20), November (18), and May (18), while the months with the lowest activity were August (seven), June (four), and September (two) (Table 1). This distribution revealed an intermittent strategy, with peaks of intensity possibly linked to specific environmental campaigns or commemorative events, but with low sustainability over time.

Table 1

Number of publications on solid waste per month (January–December 2023)

Month	Number of publications	Percentage
January	28	17%
February	19	12%
March	12	7%
April	25	15%
May	18	11%

Table 1

Number of publications on solid waste per month (January–December 2023)

Month	Number of publications	Percentage
June	4	2%
July	13	8%
August	7	4%
September	2	1%
October	20	12%
November	18	11%
December	0	0%
Total	166	100%

The lack of a sustained editorial strategy over the twelve months limited the reach and retention of key messages about waste management. Furthermore, this irregularity may have a negative impact on the development of habits among the audience, since repetition and consistency are fundamental elements in persuasive communication.

In terms of visual content, two predominant categories were identified: photographs of institutional events and informational graphics. It was found that 65% of the images analyzed were photographs, mostly corresponding to municipal activities such as clean-up days, container deliveries, or environmental fairs. On the other hand, the remaining 35% consisted of infographics and graphic designs with technical information or practical advice on waste separation, collection schedules, or recycling points (Table 2).

Table 2
Types of images used in the dissemination strategy

Image type	Frequency	Percentage
Institutional photographs	108	65%
Informative graphics	58	35%
Total	166	100%

This predominance of documentary images suggests a focus on the visibility of municipal government actions rather than on educating or raising awareness among citizens. Although the photographs are highly iconic, representing reality directly, their persuasive power is limited if they are not accompanied by cultural symbols or narratives that connect emotionally with the audience. In contrast, infographics, although less frequent, showed greater clarity in their messages and better visual structure.

From a semiotic perspective, the analysis revealed a low use of symbolic or identity-related elements, which reduces the possibility that the images evoke shared cultural meanings or reinforce community values. Likewise, the publications rarely included visual resources that appealed to positive emotions (such as pride, hope, or belonging), nor narratives that exemplified behavioral changes in real citizens, which limits the persuasive potential of the campaigns.

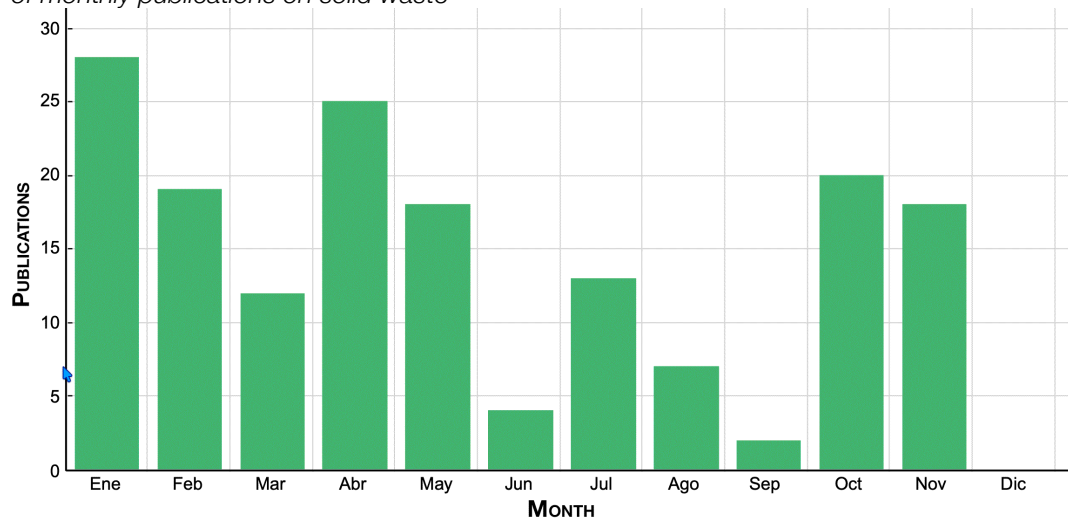
In terms of visual design, the informative images presented a homogeneous color palette, with a predominance of greens and blues, associated with sustainability and the environment. However, several publications were found to have text saturation, excessive use of fonts, or a lack of visual hierarchy, which affected the readability and comprehension of the message..

Low interaction with the audience was identified. Although this study did not include a quantitative analysis of *likes* or comments, it was observed that very few posts were designed to encourage direct citizen participation, such as surveys, calls to action, or interactive stories. Communication was predominantly one-way, with no mechanisms for feedback or dialogue.

In addition to the visual analysis of the images, an exploratory review was conducted of the average level of interaction generated by monthly posts, considering the sum of reactions and comments per post (engagement). Posting activity was highest in January (28) and October (20), with a decline in the middle of the year, especially in June (four) and September (two), and toward the end of the year (zero) (Figure 1).

Figure 1

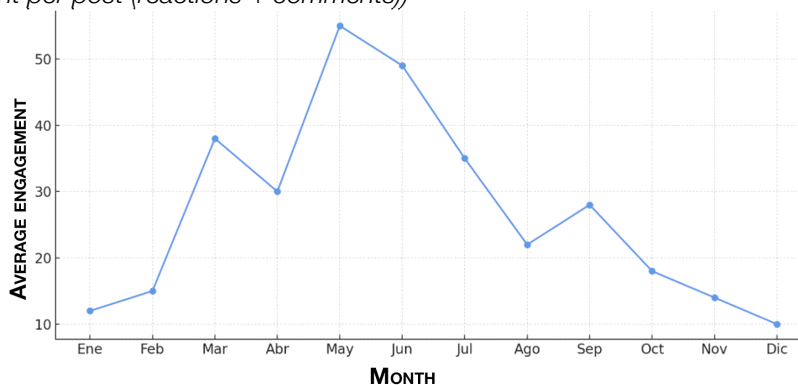
Number of monthly publications on solid waste



The analysis of engagement indicated that the months with the highest interaction were May (55 interactions on average) and June (49), coinciding with the periods with the highest number of publications. In contrast, January, November, and December showed low levels of content production and less citizen response (Figure 2). This suggests a correlation between the frequency of publication and the level of interest or participation of the audience, although other factors such as the specific content of the campaigns or their visual design could also influence this.

Figure 2

Average engagement per post (reactions + comments)



It is worth mentioning that, although May and June stood out for their activity and engagement, in other months such as March or July, where there were also a considerable number of posts, engagement was comparatively lower. This data suggests that not only frequency, but also visual quality, clarity of message, and thematic relevance influence the public's response. The downward trend in the last quarter of the year reflected a loss of continuity in the digital strategy. This represents a missed opportunity to consolidate key messages, especially during high-consumption seasons such as December, when waste issues take on particular relevance.

The results showed that, although the municipality of Monterrey, Mexico, has incorporated social media as a channel for disseminating information on solid waste management, the strategy has significant limitations in terms of continuity, diversity of formats, symbolic construction, and emotional connection. These observations pave the way for discussing possible improvements in visual and narrative strategies that strengthen the link between institutions and citizens in the field of urban environmental management. They also reinforce the need for a more planned, sustained digital strategy tailored to the interests of the public, with an emphasis on visual design, persuasive narrative, and the activation of citizen dialogue to improve both the reach and effectiveness of environmental communication.

4. DISCUSIÓN

The information revealed significant findings that allow for the evaluation of the effectiveness of digital communication strategies related to solid waste management. Taken together, these findings suggest that, although there are institutional efforts to inform and raise awareness of municipal actions, the digital dissemination strategy has substantial weaknesses in terms of continuity, narrative diversity, visual symbolism, and citizen participation.

One of the most obvious aspects was the irregularity in publication frequency, which limits the possibility of consolidating a sustained environmental narrative over time. As suggested by Armas (2015) and Ripalda-Yáñez (2019), strategic public communication must be consistent and coherent in order to generate trust, empowerment, and a sense of belonging among citizens. The lack of editorial planning to ensure a monthly presence is a weakness that can result in a loss of visibility and public disinterest.

In terms of content, the predominance of institutional photographs (65%) over educational materials (35%) indicated that the strategy has prioritized documenting government actions over producing messages aimed at changing attitudes or behaviors. From the semiotic perspective of Vallverdu-Gordi and Marine-Roig (2023), "signs and typography should be simple and easy to identify and recognize. Textual messages should be clear and

concise. Colors should make the text and signs stand out from the rest of the elements" (p. 14). Informative graphics, although less used, showed greater pedagogical potential, highlighting the need to increase their frequency and improve their design.

The limited use of cultural symbols, emotional resources, or citizen narratives reinforced the idea of predominantly one-way communication, focused on the institution rather than the recipient. In this regard, Crespo et al. (2023) provided a crucial perspective by pointing out that "adopting a two-way communication approach, where citizen feedback and opinions are valued and considered in decision-making and policy formulation" (p. 174) is essential for effective management of government social media. The absence of interactive mechanisms in the publications analyzed represents a missed opportunity to build an active community around sustainable waste management practices.

Data related to average engagement per post showed that months with a higher frequency of posts tend to generate more interactions. This coincided with the findings of Mendoza et al. (2021), who stated that the effectiveness of public communication does not lie solely in the volume of messages, but in their relevance and ability to generate value for citizens. The variation in engagement levels between months with similar output suggests that content quality and thematic relevance are determining factors.

The predominance of institutional photographs could be activating mainly peripheral routes, where the authority of the government issuer partially compensates for the limited elaboration of the content. However, to achieve lasting behavioral changes, it is necessary to activate central routes through content that stimulates reflection and deep processing of information. Ochoa Chaves et al. (2020) identified a "transition to more participatory communication: in the design of technological platforms, in the inclusion of ICTs in strategies that combine virtual and face-to-face actions to encourage citizen participation" (p. 19). This transition represents the horizon toward which the communication strategy of the municipality of Monterrey, Mexico, should be oriented, moving beyond the *bulletin board* model to build genuine spaces for citizen dialogue on solid waste management..

5. CONCLUSIONS

The study on digital communication strategies in solid waste management implemented by the municipality of Monterrey, Mexico, revealed significant findings that highlighted both progress and areas of opportunity in environmental government communication. First, there was an irregular frequency of publications during 2023, with greater activity in January, October, and November, and a notable decrease in June, September, and December. This inconsistency in the dissemination of messages limited the ability to generate a lasting impact on public

awareness, as repetition and continuity are essential to encourage behavioral change. As Vallverdu-Gordi and Marine-Roig (2023) pointed out, the success of environmental awareness campaigns depends significantly on sustained planning that allows for the gradual construction of new habits.

In terms of content, photographs of institutional events predominated (65%), which, although they document government actions, lack sufficient persuasive elements to motivate active citizen participation. Informative graphics (35%) demonstrate greater educational potential, although their use was less frequent. A critical aspect was the limited incorporation of cultural symbols or emotional narratives that connect with the audience, which reduces the effectiveness of the messages.

Communication was predominantly one-way, with few mechanisms to encourage interaction or dialogue with citizens, contradicting the participatory potential of social media highlighted by Crespo et al. (2023) and Ochoa Chaves et al. (2020). The absence of calls to action, surveys, or interactive dynamics represents a missed opportunity to build active digital citizenship around waste management practices.

The months with the highest number of posts coincided with an increase in engagement, suggesting that frequency and visibility are important factors. However, the effectiveness of social media communication on waste management also depends on the informational attributes of the content, the types of users, and the thematic characteristics of the messages. Based on these findings, the following recommendations are made to optimize the municipality's digital communication strategy:

- Establish a sustained editorial plan that guarantees constant presence throughout the 12 months of the year, with special attention to high-impact periods such as the end of the year and holiday seasons.
- Diversify content formats, increasing the production of infographics, educational videos, and interactive content that stimulates reflection and deep cognitive processing of information about solid waste.
- Incorporate symbolic and emotional elements into the visual design, including narratives from citizens who have adopted sustainable practices, local cultural symbols, and messages that evoke feelings of pride and community belonging.
- Implement two-way participation mechanisms such as surveys, question-and-answer sessions, and campaigns that invite citizens to share their own experiences with recycling and waste separation.
- Develop differentiated strategies for different audience segments, recognizing that different types of users respond differently to emotional and factual content.

- Combine digital actions with in-person initiatives that reinforce messages and facilitate the adoption of new practices, following the recommendations of Ochoa Chaves et al. (2020) on the effectiveness of multichannel strategies.

We can conclude that, although the municipality of Monterrey, Mexico, has adopted social media as a channel of communication on solid waste management, it is necessary to strengthen the strategy with sustained planning, more educational and emotionally resonant content, and mechanisms that promote active citizen participation. These improvements could transform digital communication into an effective tool for fostering a sustainable and conscious urban culture in solid waste management.

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