


## FROM ORGANIC REACH TO TARGETED COMMUNICATION: content boosting in the political contests for the government of Maranhão

DO ALCANCE ORGÂNICO À COMUNICAÇÃO SEGMENTADA: Impulsão de Conteúdo nas Disputas pelo Governo do Maranhão  
DEL ALCANCE ORGÁNICO A LA COMUNICACIÓN SEGMENTADA: Impulso de Contenido en las Disputas por el Gobierno de Maranhão


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Received on: 03.12.2025.  
Accepted on: 07.16.2025.  
Published on: 12.14.2025.

### ABSTRACT

This article investigates the use of content boosting on Facebook and Instagram during the 2022 electoral campaign for the governorship of Maranhão, Brazil. The research conducts a quantitative and qualitative analysis of 263 sponsored posts from the three most voted candidates: Carlos Brandão, Weverton Rocha, and Lahesio Bonfim. Using Content Analysis methodology, the study explores how boosting integrates with contemporary communication strategies, highlighting audience segmentation and political image construction. Data from Meta's Ad Library is used to measure investments, formats, and dominant themes in the campaigns. The findings underscore the strategic role of paid promotion and its ethical implications, emphasizing the need for more transparent and responsible practices. The study also suggests paths for future research and for strengthening civic engagement on social media.

**KEYWORDS:** Electoral campaigns; Boosting; Social media; Facebook; Instagram.

## Introduction

In recent years, the use of social media has gained prominence in digital election campaigns, transforming the way candidates communicate with the electorate. To keep up with these changes and ensure fair conditions in the contests, the Superior Electoral Court (TSE) constantly monitors the political landscape and implements control mechanisms through minor reforms. Among the tools that have emerged in this context, content boosting stands out - a feature that expands the reach of messages by allowing the hiring of internet application providers such as Facebook and Instagram. In this way, sponsored content reaches more users who might otherwise not access this information. Toledo and Filho (2021) characterize boosting as an important innovation in the use of the internet for electoral propaganda. The regulation of this resource in Brazil made its

debut in the 2018 elections, when the TSE authorized the use of paid posts in digital campaigns.

Starting with the 2016 municipal elections, the reduction in time allocated to the Free Electoral Propaganda Time (HGPE), imposed by the 2015 minor electoral reform, led candidates to explore new spaces to promote their proposals. Although social media was already present, its use remained limited to organic reach, without the possibility of sponsored posts. The 2017 minor reform, regulated by Resolution No. 23,551/2017, introduced a novelty: in the 2018 elections, the broadcasting of boosted content through application providers, including social media, became permitted.

In the state context, Maranhão — located in the Northeast, with 217 municipalities and approximately 6.8 million inhabitants (IBGE, 2022) — presents relevant particularities for the study of digital campaigns. Research such as that by Massuchin et al. (2018) shows that, in the 2016 elections, campaign teams of three candidates in Imperatriz, the second-largest city in the state, adopted professional strategies on their Facebook pages, like those observed in national contests. Although these examples are localized, a statewide analysis allows us to verify whether such practices are replicated or manifest differently across Maranhão's territory.

Given this scenario, this research seeks to understand how content boosting on Facebook and Instagram is used in the campaign strategies of candidates for the Government of Maranhão in the 2022 elections.

In the methodological approach, Content Analysis is employed based on Sampaio and Lycarião (2021), followed by a mixed-methods approach, allowing for the analysis of posts from candidates for the Government of Maranhão in 2022. Although the race for the office involved nine candidates, this research focuses on the three most voted candidates: Carlos Brandão (PSB), re-elected, with 145 boosted posts; Lahesio Bonfim (PSC), with 30; and Weverton Rocha (PDT), with 88. The selection of these candidates is justified by the similarities in their leading positions in the polls.

## **The Use of Facebook and Instagram in Elections**

Social media has transformed electoral campaigns by connecting candidates and voters in real time, enabling the rapid dissemination of information, and mobilizing popular support (Almeida & Almeida, 2020; Souza, 2011). Driven by greater internet access and the pursuit of engagement, this rise has fostered more direct communication, allowing candidates to respond to questions, build relationships, and strengthen ties with the electorate (Bossetta, 2018). Moreover, voters themselves have begun to share

information, express opinions, and organize around political causes, broadening the forms of civic participation (Almeida & Almeida, 2020).

In this context, Facebook and Instagram emerged as central platforms in electoral campaigns. Initially used merely as channels for information dissemination, these networks soon proved to be powerful tools for direct public engagement, the shaping of public opinion, and the consolidation of support for candidates and political causes (Alves & Tavares, 2023). In the early years, Facebook stood out for its extensive user base and diverse features, establishing itself as a versatile platform for electoral strategies (Rossini *et al.*, 2016). Campaigns began creating official candidate pages, sharing multimedia content, and interacting with followers through comments and messages, taking advantage of the platform's potential for organic reach. Moreover, the ability to segment audiences based on demographic data and user interests already made it possible to target specific messages, thereby enhancing the effectiveness of communication.

In addition to Instagram's popularity among Brazilians, the platform was chosen as the research environment due to its emphasis on visual and audiovisual content. Transcending the shift from simple electronic exchanges to immersive simulations, these platforms have redefined strategies within electoral campaigns. The paradigms of political communication have been inexorably adapting to the nuances of voter behavior (Ituassu *et al.*, 2023). This not only enables candidates to disseminate their messages without the mediation of traditional media but also facilitates audience segmentation, allowing specific messages to be directed toward distinct groups based on demographic and behavioral data. In summary, the historical progression of digital marketing strategies reflects the continuous evolution of both the Internet and society (Braga, 2019). This perspective allows us to understand that the essence of digital marketing strategies lies in their constant adaptation and reinvention, aiming to connect organizations and audiences within an ever-evolving digital ecosystem.

### **Boosting of Electoral Content**

Considering the new profile of electoral campaigns, characterized by the intensive use of social media, campaign teams and agencies have begun to rely on social media specialists: professionals with extensive experience in strategic planning, audience knowledge, and mastery of tools that optimize posts and increase visibility on platforms. Content boosting, by expanding the reach of political messages, allows candidates and

parties to reach larger and more diverse audiences, overcoming the limitations of traditional media. Thus, it constitutes an important tool in securing votes.

As a paid service, the use of content boosting depends on contracting with the providing company. In digital marketing, a distinction is made between organic (unpaid) and non-organic (paid) content. Strategies based on managing organic content face limitations imposed by the platforms themselves. According to Facebook, the organic reach of posts has decreased in recent years.

According to the company, two main reasons explain this reduction. The first refers to the exponential increase in the volume of content generated and shared daily, intensified by the widespread use of smartphones, which allow users to share experiences, news, photos, and videos with just a few taps. The second reason is related to the functioning of the platform's algorithm. The News Feed does not display all available content: out of approximately 1,500 potential posts a user could see with each access, Facebook shows about 300. To determine which content will be displayed, the algorithm ranks posts based on several individual factors, aiming to present what it considers most relevant to each user (Facebook, 2022).

In the context of electoral campaigns, content boosting has become an essential component of contemporary strategies, involving financial investment in advertisements and posts targeted at a broader and often segmented audience. Until the 2016 elections in Brazil, political parties primarily used the internet in an organic manner. With the 2017 Electoral Mini-Reform, the use of paid content promotion was authorized, regulated by the Superior Electoral Court (TSE), and applied for the first time in the 2018 elections. These new digital tools allow candidates to expand the reach of their messages and foster greater voter engagement, enabling a more direct connection between voters and campaigns. In this regard, previous studies, such as that by Alves, Bueno, and Martins (2023), provide an overview of research on electoral campaigns on social media between 2017 and 2021. This state-of-the-art review reveals significant growth in academic production, with particular emphasis on the 2018 and 2020 elections, and highlights the role of the evangelical community as an important social actor in digital political disputes.

## Methodological Procedures

This study employs Content Analysis as its methodological approach, as proposed by Sampaio and Lycarião (2021). The quantitative component of the analysis enables the precise measurement of usage frequencies, investment ranges, and periods of greatest activity throughout the campaign, providing a comprehensive and structured overview of the strategies adopted. Conversely, the qualitative component allows for a deeper and more nuanced understanding of the promoted content, making it possible to identify the themes and subcategories addressed, as well as the strategies candidates employ to influence the electorate.

## Data Collection

The first stage of data collection consists of extracting the boosted posts made by the candidates. To access the necessary information, the research relies on Meta's Ad Library, which provides data on the content of advertisements, the platforms used, investment ranges, and the number of impressions. This tool serves as a relevant primary source for understanding the scope and nature of content promotion strategies adopted during the campaign. The data collection period is limited to the official campaign period for the 2022 Maranhão gubernatorial elections, spanning from August 16 to September 30, 2022. Given the high number of candidates, the research corpus comprises the three most-voted candidates: Carlos Brandão (PSB), re-elected governor with 1,769,187 votes (51.29%); Lahesio Bonfim (PSC), with 857,744 votes (24.87%); and Weverton Rocha (PDT), with 714,352 votes (20.71%). The selection of these candidates is justified by their leading positions in the electoral polls registered with the Superior Electoral Court (TSE).

**Figure 1**  
*Meta Ad Library Report*



Source: Facebook (2025).

In the 2022 elections, the Maranhão electorate consisted of 4,390,766 individuals, who had nine candidates for the office of state governor, along with their respective running mates. The results are as follows:

After tabulating and exporting the collected data, the analysis begins, which, by cross-referencing the information obtained from the platform, examines the format of the boosted content. For this purpose, posts are categorized into video-based posts, static image posts (considering a single image), and carousel posts, which allow the publication of multiple images within the same post on the selected platforms. This analysis provides insights into the visual and stylistic strategies employed by the candidates. Categorical Structure: Thematic Classification

### Metacampaign Category

In the Metacampaign category, presented in Table 1, are included posts related to the electoral campaign itself. Albuquerque (1999) argues that Metacampaign segments address the progress of the campaign. This category can demonstrate, through the campaign, greater voter engagement.

**Table 1**  
*Subcategories of the Metacampaign*

Subcategories	Example of Content
Agenda	Invitations to Campaign Events

Debate and Candidate Forum	Participation in Debate and Candidate Forum Programs
Campaign Coverage	Neighborhood visits, campaign walks, motorcycle rallies, motorcades, and meetings with specific social groups.
Electoral Polling	Results of a Published Poll
Accountability / Financial Reporting	Mention and/or detailing of activities already carried out by the candidates during the campaign or in previous administrations.
Other – Metacampaign	Does not fit into any of the subcategories above

Source: Silva (2022) – Adapted by the authors.

In addition to the categories above, the image component is also analyzed, as detailed in the table below:

**Table 2**  
*Image Subcategories*

Subthemes	Example of Content
Candidate Image	Content aimed at building or reinforcing a favorable perception of the candidate
Political Support	Demonstration of prestige/support by other social and political actors to endorse the candidacies.
Opponent Image	Criticism of the Opponent   Negative Image
Image – Other	Does not fit into any of the options above

Source: Silva (2022) – Adapted by the authors.

Furthermore, the use of policy proposals as themes in the sponsored campaign was also analyzed. The subcategories are presented below:

**Table 3**  
*Subcategories of Policy Proposals*

Subthemes	Example of Content
Menu	The candidate presents more than one Public Policy
Economy/Employment	Economic Promotion and Job Creation
Education	Solutions and New Proposals for Education
Sports/Culture/Leisure	Creation of Spaces / Events
Infrastructure and Development	Reforms   Asphalt Implementation   New Spaces   Basic Sanitation
Health	Benefits   Solutions   New Healthcare Facilities
Public Safety	Solutions   Infrastructure   Maintenance of Law and Order

Transportation	Paving of Roads – Availability of Transportation
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Source: Silva (2022) – Adapted by the author.

To ensure a rigorous and consistent analysis, a systematic coding process is implemented. Code groups, in turn, are organized into categories, that is, analytical units that materialize the issues to be examined (Sampaio & Lycarião, 2021, p. 45). A developed coding scheme assists in outlining the specific criteria for assigning posts to each thematic and format category. These are detailed in the table below:

**Table 4**  
*Codebook*

Nº	Item	Description	Generated Data
01	Link do IC	Boost Link	Created by the author
02	COD ID IC	Boosting Code	Automatic
03	Candidate	Candidate Name	Automatic
04	IC Plan	Scheduled post date	Automatic
05	IC Date	Day of the week the post was scheduled	Created by the author
06	IC Inicial	Boosted post start date	Automatic
07	IC Initial Date	Day of the Week the Post Started	Created by the author
08	IC Ending	Post Distribution End Date	Automatic
09	IC Ending DATE	Boost End Day of the Week	Created by the author
10	Days IC	Number of days boosted	Created by the author
11	SEM	Week of the boosted campaign	Created by the author
12	Month	Month of the boosted campaign	Created by the author
13	Caption	Post caption	Automatic
14	Platform	Boosted social network	Automatic
15	Repeated	Number of times the boost was repeated	Created by the author
16	Format	Photo or video	Created by the author
17	Theme	Metacampaign   Image   Public Policies	Created by the author
18	Subtopics	According to the three themes above	Created by the author
20	Estimated Audience	When boosting, the estimated audience to see the post	Automatic
21	Impressions	Overall post reach	Automatic



22	Investment	Average amount invested	Automatic
23	Comments	Space to add any information	Created by the author

Source: Prepared by authors (2024).

## Analysis

After the search for the analysis, the first indications are reached. Carlos Brandão, who is seeking re-election, invests R\$ 339,977.00, which represents approximately 5% of his total expenditures. Weverton Rocha, on the other hand, allocates R\$ 106,596.00, corresponding to only 1% of his expenditures. Lahesio Bonfim, in turn, allocates R\$ 109,948.00, a significantly larger percentage: 10.05% of his total budget. These percentage variations demonstrate that each candidate assigns different degrees of importance to paid digital outreach on Instagram and Facebook in their campaign strategies.

In terms of the number of promotional actions, Brandão is the one who uses the tool the most, with 145 boosted publications, indicating a constant and active presence on social media. Weverton Rocha carries out 88 actions, while Lahesio Bonfim opts for a smaller number, with 30 paid advertisements. This difference reflects distinct campaign philosophies: Brandão prioritizes frequency, while Rocha and Bonfim focus on more specific actions.

Based on the data in the Table above, the efficiency of investment in paid advertisements in relation to the total campaign expenditure is also evaluated. Although Weverton Rocha is the candidate with the highest overall expenditure, in relation to sponsored posts, he is the one who invests the least (0.85%), with 88 posts. Lahesio Bonfim, with fewer promotional actions (30), allocates the largest percentage of his budget to boosting (10.05%), also surpassing Carlos Brandão (4.61%).

The Table provides a valuable starting point for understanding campaign strategies in the digital environment. Based on this initial analysis, it becomes possible to deepen the investigation by exploring other available data. The joint analysis of these elements allows for a more complete and accurate assessment of the use of the tool in the 2022 Maranhão gubernatorial elections, providing relevant insights for future campaigns. The following Table details the distribution of boosted posts by value range

**Table 1**  
*Boosting by Value Range*

Ranges	Carlos Brandão	Lahesio Bonfim	Weverton Rocha	Subtotal
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0 - 99	0	1	20	21
100 - 199	43	0	16	59
200 - 299	1	0	8	9
300 - 399	4	1	5	10
400 - 499	1	1	4	6
500 - 599	2	0	10	12
600 - 699	1	0	0	1
700 - 799	0	1	0	1
900 - 999	0	0	4	4
1000 - 1499	8	3	5	16
1500 - 1999	6	2	5	13
2000 - 2499	10	4	5	19
2500 - 2999	5	4	1	10
3000 - 3499	21	1	1	23
3500 - 3999	5	3	1	9
4000 - 4499	5	0	1	6
4500 - 4999	4	0	1	5
5000 - 5999	10	4	0	14
6000 - 6999	0	1	0	1
7000 - 7999	16	0	0	16
8000 - 8999	2	1	0	3
9000 - 9999	0	1	1	2
10000 - 14999	1	1	0	2
15000 - 19999	0	1	0	1
<b>Total Geral</b>	<b>145</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>88</b>	<b>263</b>

Source: Facebook (2022) Adapted by the authors.

When analyzing the distribution of Carlos Brandão's investments by value range, a concentration is noted in three specific ranges: R\$ 100–199 (43 occurrences), R\$ 3000–3499 (21 occurrences), and R\$ 7000–7999 (16 occurrences). This combination of investments in both lower and higher ranges suggest a multifaceted strategy, which seeks to reach many voters with lower-cost ads as well as segment specific groups with more targeted campaigns.

The R\$ 100–199 range can be used to broaden the general reach of the candidate's message, while the R\$ 3000–3499 and R\$ 7000–7999 ranges may be aimed at voters with higher potential for engagement or influence. In the case of Lahesio Bonfim, the distribution of investments by range presents a more balanced profile, without concentrations as evident as Brandão's. The R\$ 2000–2499, R\$ 2500–2999, and R\$ 5000–5999 ranges stand out with 4 occurrences each, followed by R\$ 1000–1499, with 3. This approach reflects a communication strategy more focused on specific niches of the electorate, with more targeted and personalized investments. Weverton Rocha, in turn, concentrates his investments in the lower value ranges: R\$ 0–99 (20 occurrences) and R\$ 100–199 (16 occurrences). This strategy suggests prioritizing massive reach, seeking to reach the largest possible number of voters with low-cost ads.

**Figure 2**  
*The two most expensive boosted posts among candidates*



Source: Meta Ad Library (2022).

Lahesio Bonfim was the one who boosted the most expensive quota of the campaign, R\$ 15,000 to R\$ 20,000, and Carlos Brandão the second most expensive, R\$ 10,000 - R\$ 15,000. The common point is that the content of both posts is linked to introducing themselves/their platforms to those who are unfamiliar with them.

### Days of Boosting

The Table below presents data on the number of boosted publications per day of the week, offering a detailed overview of how each candidate seeks to maximize their visibility and influence in the digital environment for political communication and winning votes. The objective of this analysis is to identify the busiest days for each candidate and explore possible motivations behind these choices.

**Table 2**  
*Days of Boosting*

Day	Carlos Brandão		Lahesio Bonfim		Weverton Rocha		Quantity per Day
	Q	%	Q	%	Q	%	
Monday	12	8,3%	-	-	6	6,8%	18
Tuesday	23	15,9%	6	20,0%	11	12,5%	40
Wednesday	23	15,9%	8	26,7%	4	4,5%	35
Thursday	59	40,7%	14	46,7%	8	9,1%	81
Friday	15	10,3%	1	3,3%	32	36,4%	48

Saturday	8	5,5%	1	3,3%	24	27,3%	33
Sunday	5	3,4%	0	0,0%	3	3,4%	8
<b>Total</b>	<b>145</b>		<b>30</b>		<b>88</b>		<b>263</b>

Source: Facebook (2022). Adapted by the authors.

This strategic choice may be linked to the perception of online voter behavior, the occurrence of relevant events, or an attempt to target a specific audience. Carlos Brandão demonstrates a clear preference for Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays, concentrating his highest frequency on Thursdays: 40.7% (59) boostings, while on Tuesdays and Wednesdays he employs 15.9% (23) on each day. This strategy indicates a possible perception that Thursdays are days of higher political engagement on social media, either due to the proximity to the weekend or to prominent events or discussions. Lahesio Bonfim's behavior is like Brandão's, concentrating his promotional efforts on Thursdays, with 46.7% (14) boostings; on Tuesdays, 20% (6); and on Wednesdays, 26.7% (8) paid actions.

Weverton Rocha, in turn, presents a more balanced distribution of boostings throughout the week, with a slight predominance on Fridays, with 36.4% (32) actions, and on Saturdays, with 27.3% (24) sponsored occurrences. This strategy reflects an attempt to reach voters during leisure and relaxation moments on the weekend, when attention is less focused on professional commitments and more open to informative and entertainment content.

The comparative analysis reveals that Carlos Brandão and Lahesio Bonfim show similar behaviors, with a preference for mid-week working days (Tuesday to Thursday), a calculated approach possibly based on analytical data about the digital audience. Weverton Rocha, on the other hand, demonstrates a slight inclination towards Fridays and Saturdays. This divergence may reflect distinct perceptions of online voter behavior and the most opportune moments to influence decisions. The candidates' strategic choices relate to audience segmentation, the occurrence of relevant events, or an attempt to strengthen their image and present proposals more effectively, demonstrating that each candidate adopts their own approach to reach the electorate.

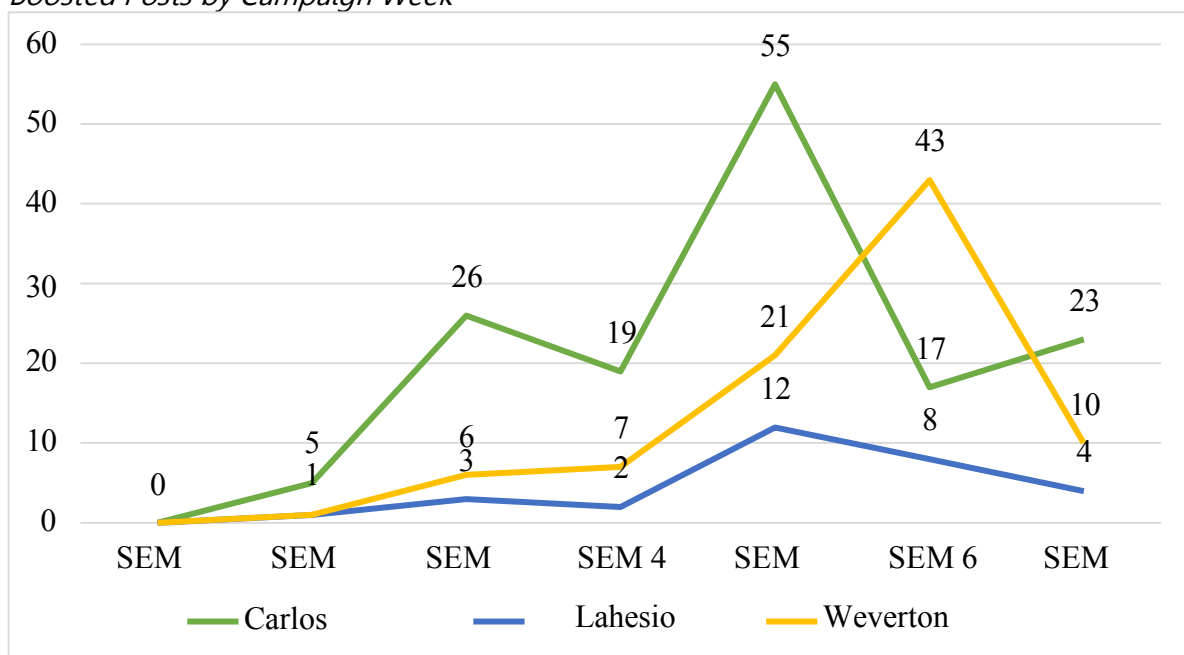
Furthermore, Thursdays can be seen as a strategic moment to boost content, as they precede the weekend, when many voters have more time to inform themselves. By prioritizing Thursdays, both candidates seek to broaden the reach and impact of their communication, taking advantage of a moment when the public is more receptive to political information.

In synthesis, the analysis of the busiest weekdays for the candidates for the government of Maranhão in the 2022 elections reveals that each one adopts specific strategies to maximize visibility and engagement on the Facebook and Instagram platforms. The predominance of Thursdays for Carlos Brandão and Lahesio Bonfim, and Weverton Rocha's inclination towards Saturdays, reflect distinct perceptions of the online electorate and the most effective moments to influence it, showing that each candidate follows their own strategy.

### Campaign Week

The frequency with which each candidate uses this tool throughout the seven weeks of the campaign reflects the dynamics and priorities of their digital strategies, indicating how they seek to segment electoral reach through financial investments. Understanding the evolution of the intensity of promotional actions over time allows for the identification of the moments considered most strategic for each candidate, as well as the opportunities possibly neglected. In this analysis, it is worth noting that the data, extracted from the Meta Ad Library, is organized in Microsoft Excel, with the objective of aggregating expenditures by week, allowing for a chronological view of resource allocation during the campaign.

**Figure 1**  
*Boosted Posts by Campaign Week*



Source: Author's own elaboration (2025).

According to Figure 01, the initial absence of sponsored posts raises questions, possibly linked to the internal organization of the campaigns or the prioritization of organic outreach. Carlos Brandão, Weverton Rocha, and Lahesio Bonfim begin their campaigns with distinct approaches, reflecting their conditions and objectives. Brandão, the candidate for re-election, has greater visibility and resources; Rocha, as an opponent, seeks to strengthen his image; and Bonfim, being less known, focuses on other channels. The initial dynamic demonstrates the importance of analyzing investments in online advertising as part of a broad strategy.

In the second week, a slight increase in online investments is observed: Brandão and Rocha boost 5 and 1 ads, respectively, while Bonfim also starts with 1. This behavior suggests a testing phase, where the candidates assess the reach and return of formats and segmentations. The low intensity indicates caution, with the candidates avoiding high expenditures before validating strategies. It is noted that the strategies adjust throughout the campaign.

In the third week, there is a considerable increase in boosting, led by Brandão with 26 advertisements. This move may indicate an attempt to consolidate his image and reinforce his positioning. Rocha also expands his efforts, with 6 boostings, possibly seeking to keep pace with Brandão in the public debate. Bonfim maintains a more discreet pace, with 3 advertisements, which reflects a focus on alternative channels or more economical actions. The growth in investments marks a new phase in the race for voter attention.

In the fourth week, a stabilization is observed: Brandão maintains 19 advertisements, Rocha 7, and Bonfim 2. This stability suggests a search for resource optimization, avoiding peaks that could compromise financial sustainability. The analysis of this moment indicates a maturation of strategies and a possible definition of digital communication lines.

The fifth week stands out as the moment of highest intensity: Brandão peaks with 55 advertisements, demonstrating an offensive on social media. Rocha boosts 21 actions and Bonfim increases to 12. This movement may be linked to the proximity of the voter's decision, with a focus on reinforcing messages and consolidating votes. It is likely that campaigns invested in higher-impact advertisements to broaden their reach. The peak highlights the relevance of this period in the strategies.

In the following weeks, there is a reduction in boostings by Brandão (17) and Bonfim (8) in the sixth week. Rocha, however, intensifies his efforts and reaches 43

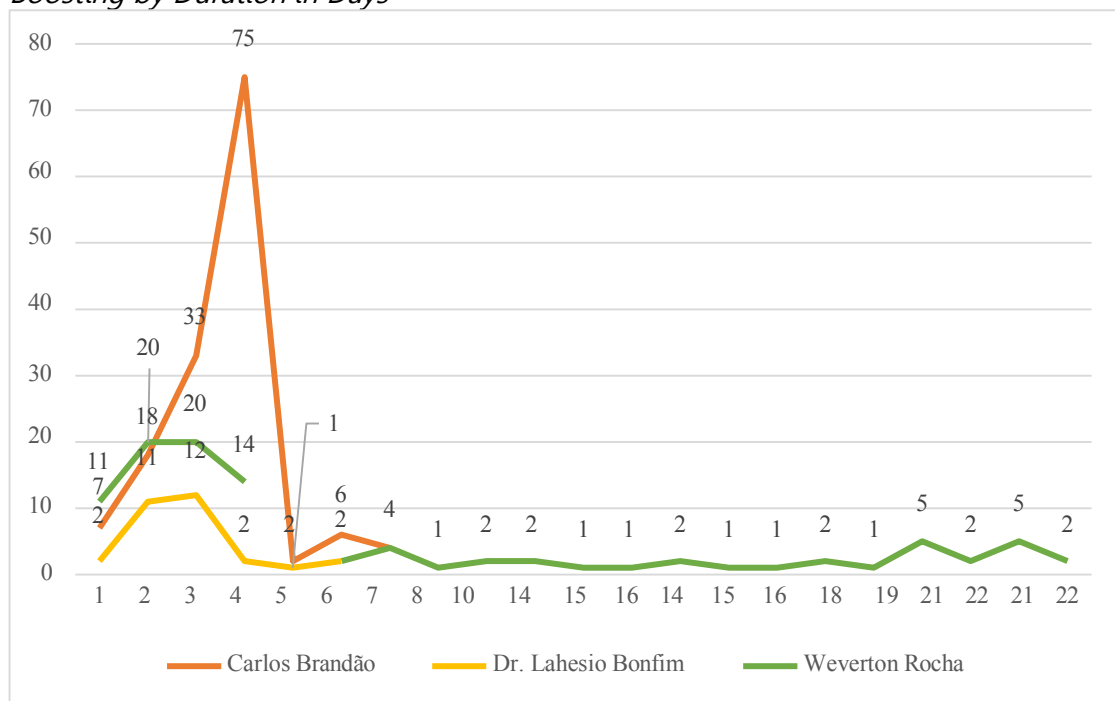
actions, suggesting a change in strategy to take advantage of the final moment of the campaign and broaden communication with the electorate.

In the seventh week, investments decrease again, marking a phase of vote consolidation. The variations in boostings reveal the dynamics and adaptation of the campaigns to circumstances. In synthesis, the analysis of paid investments exposes distinct strategies: Brandão leads the investments and concentrates efforts in key moments; Rocha better distributes his boostings; Bonfim focuses on the fifth week. Understanding these dynamics allows for a more complete view of the use of content promotion in the 2022 elections and its influence on the electorate.

### Duration of Boostings

Unlike aggregated information directly available in the Meta Ad Library, the data presented here is obtained by calculating the difference between the start and end dates of each boosting. This methodology allows for a more granular and precise view of the duration of individual campaigns, revealing each candidate's specific strategies regarding the time of ad exposure on social media.

**Figure 2**  
*Boosting by Duration in Days*



Source: Developed by the author (2025).

The analysis of the duration of the boostings reveals distinct strategies among the candidates for the government of Maranhão in 2022. Carlos Brandão demonstrates a preference for advertisements lasting between 2 and 4 days, totaling 86.9% of his actions, suggesting a high-frequency strategy to keep the electorate engaged. Lahesio Bonfim, although also adopting short-duration boostings, presents a lower intensity, concentrating efforts on 2- and 3-day posts, which correspond to 23 paid posts (76.7%), demonstrating a more conservative approach focused on specific messages. The choices of Brandão and Bonfim reflect their campaign conditions and objectives, with Brandão seeking to constantly occupy the digital space and Bonfim prioritizing other communication channels.

Weverton Rocha, in turn, adopts a more diversified strategy, with a balanced distribution across periods of 1 to 4 days, totaling 65 boostings (73.9%). Furthermore, Rocha stands out as the only candidate to invest in posts with longer durations, reaching up to 22 days. This positioning suggests a combination of tactics, seeking both rapid dissemination of information and continuous maintenance of themes and messages in the electorate's mind. The diversity in the duration of Rocha's advertisements reflects a campaign strategy focused on different segments of the electorate and adaptation to circumstances. Finally, the analysis of the content of the propaganda actions, together with the duration data, could reveal specific patterns and strategies for each candidate.

### Figure 3

#### *Two Longest-Duration Boostings Among the 03 Candidates - 22 days*

The figure displays two screenshots of Facebook advertisements for Weverton Rocha, showing campaign details and video content.

**Left Ad:**

- Status: Inativo
- Identificação da biblioteca: 1279524586122952
- Período: 1 de set de 2022 a 22 de set de 2022
- Plataformas: Facebook, Instagram
- Tamanho estimado do público: 50 mil a 100 mil
- Valor gasto (BRL): R\$300 a R\$399
- Impressões: 25 mil a 30 mil
- Conteúdo: "Como governador, vou olhar com atenção a Saúde de Caxias. Ampliar o atendimento da UPA, melhorar o hospital macrorregional e trabalhar junto com a prefeitura na construção do aterro sanitário. Cuidar das pessoas e gerar oportunidades são prioridades do nosso plano de governo."
- Imagem: Weverton Rocha speaking, with text "AMPLIAR ATENDIMENTO DA UPA" and "WEVERTON 12 GOVERNADOR e melhorando o Hospital Macrorregional."

**Right Ad:**

- Status: Inativo
- Identificação da biblioteca: 650929352782150
- Período: 1 de set de 2022 a 22 de set de 2022
- Plataformas: Facebook, Instagram
- Tamanho estimado do público: 100 mil a 500 mil
- Valor gasto (BRL): R\$900 a R\$999
- Impressões: 70 mil a 80 mil
- Conteúdo: "Como senador, enviei recursos para custeio da saúde e trouxe o Hospital de Amor para Imperatriz para tratamento e prevenção do câncer em mulheres. O hospital e mais duas carretas atendem cerca de 70 municípios e já salvaram milhares de vidas."
- Imagem: Weverton Rocha standing in front of a modern building, with text "WEVERTON 12" and "de retribuir à minha cidade."

Source: Meta Ad Library (2022) / Adapted by the author.



Concisely, the analysis of the table reveals the complexity and diversity of digital advertising strategies used by the candidates for the government of Maranhão in the 2022 elections. The combination of post duration, content, segmentation, and interaction allows for a deeper understanding of the role of digital advertising in contemporary electoral dynamics and the influence of social media on shaping the public opinion of different segments of the electorate.

### Targeting by Platform: Individualized or Integrated

By combining quantitative and percentage distribution data, it is possible to identify the different approaches adopted for using the Facebook and Instagram platforms, either jointly or individually. This data can help reflect on the priorities and objectives of each campaign in relation to the posting dynamic, whether individualized and/or integrated.

**Table 3**  
*Boosting by Platforms*

Candidates	Carlos Brandão		Lahesio Bonfim		Weverton Rocha		Grand Total	%
	QTD	%	QTD	%	QTD	%		
<i>Facebook e Instagram</i>	69	48%	30	100%	88	100%	187	71%
<i>Instagram</i>	41	28%	-	-	-	-	41	16%
<i>Facebook</i>	35	24%	-	-	-	-	35	13%
<b>Total</b>	<b>145</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>88</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>263</b>	<b>100%</b>

Source: Meta Ad Library (2022). Adapted by the author.

The consolidated data in the table demonstrates a predominance of integrated campaigns, representing 71% of the total (187 campaigns). This modality combines Facebook and Instagram (Meta group) as a single medium, maximizing simultaneous reach. Individual boostings showed a lower proportion: 16% on Instagram (41 campaigns) and 13% on Facebook (35 campaigns). This distribution reflects the relevance of the integrated model, although diversification across individual platforms still plays a role in some strategies.

Carlos Brandão was the only candidate to diversify his campaigns across the three modalities. There were 145 actions, of which 48% were in the integrated modality (69 campaigns), 28% on Instagram, and 24% on Facebook. This fragmentation suggests a

broad strategy, combining the impact of joint reach with the precision of individual segmentation. In contrast, Lahesio Bonfim and Weverton Rocha concentrated 100% of their actions in the integrated modality, with 30 and 88 campaigns, respectively. This centralization can be seen as a choice for strategic simplification, maximizing the combined impact of the two networks.

Although integrated posting, with 71% of the boostings, presents advantages such as message uniformity and greater simultaneous reach, it also brings challenges. Integration tends to be less specific in segmentation, making it difficult to meet the demands of isolated groups. This model favors operational efficiency and reduces costs, but it can limit the impact of targeted campaigns. In contrast, individual campaigns, such as Brandão's, illustrate the potential of segmentation. Instagram, with 28% of the efforts, appeals to a younger audience, while Facebook, with 24%, reaches broader audiences, both geographically and demographically. However, this model requires greater planning and budget, which may justify its lower use among the candidates.

### Age Range and Gender

The data collected from the digital campaigns of candidates Carlos Brandão, Lahesio Bonfim, and Weverton Rocha reveal peculiar trends in audience reach by age group and gender. They show who viewed the promoted content on Facebook and Instagram, allowing for reflections on algorithmic dispersion and not necessarily on the strategies planned by the teams. This distinction is important because the actual audience reached may diverge from the idealized target audience of the candidates. It is worth noting that gender is attributed in the following Table as female audience, male audience, and users who did not declare gender.

**Table 4**  
*Percentage by Age Group and Gender - Per Candidate*

Age Group	Carlos Brandão				Lahesio Bonfim				Weverton Rocha			
	FEM	MAS	DES	TOT	FEM	MAS	DES	TOT	FEM	MAS	DES	TOT
13 - 17	5,67	4,15	0,02	9,84	0,02	0,2	0,02	0,24	5,15	4,28	0,03	9,46
18 - 24	9,99	11,45	0,06	21,50	19,57	14,69	0,12	34,38	8,85	10,92	0,05	19,82
25 - 34	14,87	13,66	0,04	28,57	18,24	14,69	0,05	32,98	13,1	13,54	0,03	26,67
35 - 44	10,93	10,2	0,02	21,15	11,14	7,17	0,02	18,33	11,38	10,74	0,02	22,14
45 - 54	6,26	5,26	0,02	11,54	5,55	3,12	0,01	8,68	7,27	4,86	0,01	12,14
55 - 64	4,06	2,69	0,005	6,76	3,06	1,51	0,003	4,57	4,6	2,43	0,01	7,04
65 +	1,57	0,96	0,002	2,53	1,36	0,67	0,36	2,39	1,62	0,86	0,003	2,483

Source: Meta Ad Library (2022) / Adapted by the authors (2025).

According to the Table above, Lahesio Bonfim achieves the highest percentage in the 18 to 24 age group (34.38%), with a highlight on the female audience (19.57%) and the male audience (14.69%). Carlos Brandão obtains 21.50% in this range, with 9.99% female and 11.45% male, and Weverton Rocha reaches 19.82%. Bonfim also stands out in the 25 to 34 age group, with 32.98%, mainly in the female audience (18.24%). This indicates a greater resonance of his campaign among voters aged 18 to 34, whether due to the message or greater algorithmic interaction. In the 45-54 and 55-64 age groups, Brandão shows a higher concentration (21.15% and 11.54%) compared to Rocha (12.14% and 7.04%) and Bonfim (8.68% and 4.57%), possibly reflecting alignment with stable or retired groups. This predominance may be linked to Brandão's strategy focused on Facebook; a platform popular among the 45-64 age group.

By gender, the smallest share belongs to those who do not declare, below 0.03%. Segmentation by age and gender allows for the identification of audiences with a greater propensity to interact, although data limitations prevent assuring that these results stem from deliberate choices by the candidates, as platform algorithms influence the dispersion of advertisements.

Rocha concentrates his efforts in the intermediate age groups (25-44 years), with 26.67% between 25-34 years and 22.14% between 35-44 years, indicating a focus on economically active voters. The young age group (13-17 years) has a low impact, below 6% for all, reflecting a possible algorithmic limitation or political disinterest.

The female predominance in Bonfim's campaigns in the 18-24 (19.57%) and 25-34 (18.24%) age groups suggests an affinity between his proposals and this audience, while Brandão presents a more uniform distribution across various age groups. Algorithms may favor content that generates greater engagement within the most active segments of each group.

In summary, the analysis highlights trends and differences in the audiences reached, showing the impact of algorithms and the challenges of directly controlling reach on social media, in addition to the need to better understand these dynamics in the political field.

## Formats

It is perceived that the choice of content format, whether carousel, single image, or video, is a strategic decision that can significantly influence how the message is received and assimilated by the electorate.

**Table 5**  
*Boosted Content Format*

CANDIDATES	Carlos Brandão		Lahesio Bonfim		Weverton Rocha		Grand Total	%
	Q	%	Q	%	Q	%		
Video	139	96%	19	63%	84	95%	242	92%
Single Image	3	2%	8	27%	3	3%	14	5%
Carousel	3	2%	3	10%	1	1%	7	3%
<b>Total</b>	<b>145</b>		<b>30</b>		<b>88</b>		<b>263</b>	<b>100%</b>

Source: Meta Ad Library (2022). Adapted by the author (2025).

The analysis of content formats in the 2022 Maranhão gubernatorial campaigns reveals a clear predominance of the video format, accounting for 92% (242) of the candidates' strategies. This preference reflects the video's ability to convey messages in a dynamic and engaging manner, leveraging visual and auditory resources that capture the electorate's attention more effectively than other formats, in line with social media consumption patterns. This initial analysis is essential for understanding how candidates sought to engage and influence the public on social networks, serving as a foundation for more in-depth investigations into the reach and impact of each format.

### Categories of themes and subthemes

The 263 identified records were categorized into three main themes: Meta-campaign, Image, and Proposals, subdivided into 17 subthemes. This structure allows for the examination of how each candidate sought to influence the electorate.

**Table 6**  
*Categorization of Themes and Subthemes of Boosted Posts*

Candidates		Carlos Brandão		Lahesio Bonfim		Weverton Rocha		Total	
Themes and Subthemes		QTD	%	QTD	%	QTD	%	QTD	%
Meta-campaign	Agenda	2	4%	0	0%	0	0%	2	2%
	Debate and Interview	7	14%	1	13%	7	18%	15	16%
	Campaign Coverage	12	24%	0	0%	26	68%	38	40%
	Opinion Poll	2	4%	0	0%	1	3%	3	3%
	Accountability	17	35%	7	88%	3	8%	27	28%

	Other - Meta-campaign	9	18%	0	0%	1	3%	10	11%
	Subtotals - Meta-campaign	49	-	8	-	38	-	95	-
Image	Personal Image	14	16%	5	33%	1	9%	20	17%
	Political Support	75	84%	0	0%	9	82%	84	73%
	Opponent's Image	0	0%	10	67%	1	9%	11	10%
	Subtotals - Image	89		15		11		115	
Proposals	Menu	0	0%	2	29%	27	69%	29	55%
	Economy/Employment	2	1%	0	0%	3	8%	5	9%
	Education	2	1%	0	0%	0	0%	2	4%
	Sports/Culture/Leisure	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
	Infrastructure and Development	0	0%	0	0%	2	5%	2	4%
	Health	1	1%	3	43%	6	15%	10	19%
	Public Security	2	1%	2	29%	0	0%	4	8%
	Transportation	0	0%	0	0%	1	3%	1	2%
	Subtotals - Proposals	7		7		39		53	
<b>Total per Candidate</b>		<b>145</b>	<b>55%</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>11%</b>	<b>88</b>	<b>33%</b>	<b>263</b>	

Source: Meta Ad Library (2022) / Adapted by the authors.

The analysis of the table reveals a significant disparity in the quantity and nature of boostings carried out by the candidates for the government of Maranhão in 2022, clearly reflecting the different strategies and priorities adopted by each campaign. Carlos Brandão appears as the absolute leader in the volume of paid posts, with 55% of the mentions, while Weverton Rocha follows with 33% and Laesio Bonfim finishes with 11%. These numbers suggest distinct campaign profiles, both in the allocation of resources and in the definition of target audiences and messages to be conveyed.

Brandão, the incumbent governor at the time, invested heavily in increasing his digital visibility, using online marketing as a primary tool to consolidate his image of administrative continuity. In contrast, Rocha sought to optimize his reach, employing a more focused and selective strategy, and Bonfim adopted a segmented approach, concentrating on specific niches and critical messages.

In the context of the Meta-campaign, which encompasses actions focused on managing the political image and campaign narrative, Brandão stood out with 49

boosted posts, surpassing Rocha, with 38, and Bonfim, with only 8. The Accountability subcategory received the most attention from Brandão, with 17 promoted posts. This emphasis suggests a clear concern with transparency and the legitimation of the political project, reinforcing the narrative of continuity for the Flávio Dino government, whom Brandão succeeded. The Campaign Coverage subcategory was also explored, with 12 boosted posts, indicating an effort to keep the electorate constantly informed and engaged with the candidate's activities and appearances.

The importance of the Meta-campaign in the digital electoral landscape of Maranhão is notable, demonstrating how image management and narrative control have become central to electoral success. The online environment enhances the capacity to shape public perception and influence political debate, making continuous and strategic presence essential.

Weverton Rocha stood out in campaign coverage, with 26 boosted posts, especially in weeks five and six of the campaign, when he carried out several motorcades through cities in the Maranhão lowlands. He extensively used videos of these events to promote his candidacy within the Meta-campaign category. This is corroborated by the weekly boosting chart, which points to a significant peak in these weeks, with 21 and 43 promotions, respectively, demonstrating a moment of greater intensity and effort in his digital communication.

In the Image category, Carlos Brandão easily dominates, accounting for 89 mentions, far above Rocha's 11 and Bonfim's 15. The Political Support subtheme is the most relevant in this category, with 75 posts from Brandão, reflecting his strategy of associating his image with influential political figures such as former Governor Flávio Dino and former President Lula, who was running for president in the same election. A short 17-second video with a statement by Lula, in which he expresses support for Brandão, was boosted 42 times, becoming the most promoted content in the governor's digital campaign. This strong presence in the Image category demonstrates Brandão's deliberate effort to consolidate his position and reinforce his political base through association with prominent leaders.

Weverton Rocha also invested in building his personal image, although on a smaller scale, with nine boostings related to political support. He relied on the support of local mayors, such as Eduardo Braide, mayor of São Luís, who recorded videos declaring support for his candidacy, helping to create a charismatic image close to the population.

The attack strategy was led by Lahesio Bonfim, who dedicated 10 of his 33 boosted posts to the Opponent's Image subcategory. His campaign adopted a critical stance, denouncing failures in the Flávio Dino administration and establishing a clear opposition to Carlos Brandão, highlighting himself as an alternative for the state. Bonfim used videos and static images, but did not boost content related to political support, differentiating himself from the other candidates by not promoting visible alliances on social media.

In the Proposals category, Weverton Rocha leads with 39 mentions, demonstrating an attempt to differentiate himself through the presentation of a more detailed and segmented government plan. Brandão and Bonfim obtained only 7 mentions each in this category. The Menu subtheme was the most expressive for Rocha, with 27 posts. He directed his discourse to various cities, mentioning specific actions, such as sending resources to hospitals, in addition to presenting proposals for health, job creation, and social programs. Among these proposals, the Second Chance Program, focused on the insertion of women into the labor market, and the exemption of the IPVA (motor vehicle property tax), as well as the incentive for the establishment of a pharmaceutical industry to foster local employability, stand out.

The comparison between the Image and Proposals categories highlights clear strategic differences: Brandão prioritized the consolidation of his political image and the reputation built during his administration; Rocha balanced investments between image and proposals, seeking a more programmatic discourse; while Bonfim opted for a more segmented and critical communication, with lower investment in both categories.

In the Health subtheme, Weverton Rocha stood out with six posts, addressing initiatives such as telemedicine and public-private partnerships to ensure the supply of medicines in public units. Bonfim also mentioned telemedicine, but with less intensity, limiting himself to boosting single images. Brandão, in turn, dedicated little space to Health or Infrastructure themes, focusing on more traditional areas such as Public Security and Economy/Employment.

Themes such as Sports, Culture, and Leisure were little explored by the candidates, which reveals restricted thematic priorities and a more conservative view of what is considered relevant to the electorate. Subthemes like Transportation, Infrastructure, and Education received marginal attention, with few records, indicating a potential missed opportunity to discuss actions that directly impact the daily lives of citizens.

In summary, the analysis shows that the campaigns prioritized image-strengthening actions, especially Brandão and Bonfim, who underutilized proposals in favor of narratives of political engagement and direct disputes. This trend is not exclusive to Maranhão, reflecting a contemporary pattern in the use of social media for electoral campaigns, where the construction and defense of the narrative prevail over the detailed presentation of governmental plans.

## Conclusion

This material investigated the use of paid advertisements in electoral campaigns. Focusing on the three most-voted candidates — Carlos Brandão (PSB), Lahesio Bonfim (PSC), and Weverton Rocha (PDT) — the study gains relevance given the current political scenario, where social media exerts a strong influence on the electorate. The adopted methodology combined content analysis with a mixed approach, using data from the Meta Ad Library. The quantitative analysis identified patterns in the strategies, such as the frequency, spending, and duration of the advertisements. The qualitative analysis focused on the themes and formats of the promoted content, seeking to understand the messages transmitted. This combination allowed for a comprehensive analysis of the strategies, revealing not only the candidates' actions but also their motivations. The methodology ensured rigor, objectivity, and validity for the obtained results.

The results show that content promotion was used in a diversified manner. The analysis of the weekdays of the promotions revealed different perceptions about online electorate behavior. Regarding the distribution of posts, the majority opted for integrated posting on the Facebook and Instagram platforms. The promotion tool proved to be strategic for disseminating messages and influencing opinions, although it is only one of many factors that impact electoral results.

The comparative analysis highlighted notable differences in strategies. The variations reflect distinct communication priorities and styles. The study emphasizes that the effectiveness of the investment, in relation to the campaign's total expenditure, is determinant for success, underscoring the importance of strategic resource allocation.

The video format stood out in the strategies of all three candidates, due to its capacity to convey dynamic messages. Brandão focused on Meta-campaign and Image, with emphasis on Accountability and Political Support. Rocha prioritized Proposals, especially the Menu subtheme. Bonfim concentrated on the Opponent's Image subtheme, criticizing shortcomings of the incumbent government. These thematic choices reflect strategies and perceptions about relevance to the electorate, influencing



the candidates' evaluation. It is possible that future campaigns will evolve with the impact of new technologies, such as artificial intelligence and virtual reality, or changes in platforms.

Paid promotion raises ethical issues, such as transparency in identifying advertisements and the responsible use of personal data. It is crucial that voters recognize paid advertisements and that candidates adopt ethical practices in data usage. Lack of transparency and improper use can compromise electoral integrity and public trust. Specific regulations are necessary, although the constantly changing digital environment poses challenges that require a balance between freedom of expression, transparency, and responsibility.

The study demonstrates that paid promotion is a powerful tool, but its impact depends on a well-defined strategy. The results have practical implications for future campaigns, guiding candidates and teams to use promotion effectively. Furthermore, knowledge of these strategies can empower citizens to be more critical and informed regarding political messages, thus strengthening democracy.

This research is expected to foster an informed debate about the role of social media and stimulate ethical and effective strategies. The 2022 elections demonstrated the relevance of social media, demanding responsibility in the use of these tools to promote a more conscious and participatory electorate. The study reinforces the importance of critical civic engagement, allowing citizens to evaluate political messages and make informed decisions about their representatives.

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**RESUMO**

O artigo investiga o uso do impulsionamento de conteúdo no Facebook e *Instagram* durante a campanha eleitoral de 2022 para o Governo do Maranhão. A pesquisa analisa quantitativa e qualitativamente 263 postagens patrocinadas dos três candidatos mais votados: Carlos Brandão, Weverton Rocha e Lahesio Bonfim. A partir da metodologia de Análise de Conteúdo, identifica-se como o impulsionamento se insere nas estratégias comunicacionais contemporâneas, com destaque para a segmentação do público e a construção da imagem política. O estudo utiliza dados da Biblioteca de Anúncios da Meta para mensurar investimentos, formatos e temáticas predominantes nas campanhas. As conclusões destacam o papel estratégico da divulgação paga e seus desdobramentos éticos, reforçando a importância de práticas transparentes e responsáveis. O estudo também aponta caminhos para futuras pesquisas e para o fortalecimento do engajamento cívico nas mídias sociais.

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE:** Campanhas eleitorais; Impulsionamento; Redes sociais; Facebook; *Instagram*.

**RESUMEN**

El artículo investiga el uso del impulso de contenido en Facebook e Instagram durante la campaña electoral de 2022 para el Gobierno del estado de Maranhão, Brasil. La investigación analiza, de forma cuantitativa y cualitativa, 263 publicaciones patrocinadas de los tres candidatos más votados: Carlos Brandão, Weverton Rocha y Lahesio Bonfim. A partir de la metodología de Análisis de Contenido, el estudio examina cómo el impulso se integra a las estrategias comunicacionales contemporâneas, con énfasis en la segmentación del público y en la construcción de la imagen política. Los datos, extraídos de la Biblioteca de Anuncios de Meta, permiten medir las inversiones, los formatos y las temáticas predominantes en las campañas. Las conclusiones destacan el papel estratégico de la promoción pagada y sus implicaciones éticas, subrayando la importancia de prácticas más transparentes y responsables. El estudio también señala caminos para futuras investigaciones y para el fortalecimiento del compromiso cívico en las redes sociales.

**PALABRAS CLAVES:** Campañas electorales; Impulso; Redes sociales; Facebook; *Instagram*.