



Narrativas de transformación personal en Instagram: análisis de contenido asistido por IA del reto “Cambio Físico” de Ibai Llanos

Personal Transformation Narratives on Instagram: An AI-Assisted Content Analysis of Ibai Llanos’s “Physical Change” Challenge

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KEYWORDS

Ibai Llanos
Instagram
Physical change
Influencers
Content analysis
Digital narrative

ABSTRACT

This study examines how Ibai Llanos constructs and narrates his personal transformation through the “Physical Change” challenge on Instagram, focusing on the discursive, visual and narrative elements that shape this process. A qualitative content analysis was conducted on a sample of 70 reels posted between 26 June and 26 October 2024. The coding was initially carried out by three researchers and was subsequently compared through a complementary AI-assisted analysis, following a methodological protocol based on prompt registration, data preprocessing, traceability and reliability assessment. In addition, a longitudinal narrative analysis was applied to reconstruct the evolution of the story over time. The findings show that exercise is the dominant thematic axis, while self-discovery, weight change, nutrition and community interaction provide emotional depth and verifiability to the process. The narrative is organised into five recurring moments: initial situation, action, evaluation, resolution and future projection. The study concludes that the “Physical Change” challenge is not merely a record of workout routines, but a serialised narrative of physical, emotional and social transformation based on vulnerability, authenticity and community support.

PALABRAS CLAVE

Ibai Llanos
Instagram
Cambio físico
Influencers; análisis de contenido
Narrativa digital

RESUMEN

Este estudio analiza cómo Ibai Llanos construye y narra su proceso de transformación personal a través del reto “Cambio Físico” en Instagram, atendiendo a los elementos discursivos, visuales y narrativos que articulan su relato. Para ello, se realizó un análisis de contenido cualitativo sobre un corpus de 70 reels publicados entre el 26 de junio y el 26 de octubre de 2024. La codificación fue desarrollada inicialmente por tres investigadores y posteriormente contrastada mediante una fase complementaria de análisis asistido por inteligencia artificial, siguiendo un protocolo de trazabilidad, registro de prompts, preprocesamiento y evaluación de fiabilidad. Además, se aplicó un análisis narrativo longitudinal para reconstruir la evolución del relato. Los resultados muestran que el ejercicio constituye el eje temático dominante, mientras que el autodescubrimiento, el cambio de peso, la nutrición y la relación con la comunidad aportan profundidad emocional y verificabilidad al proceso. La narrativa se organiza en cinco momentos: situación inicial, acción, evaluación, resolución y proyección futura. Se concluye que el reto no se limita a documentar rutinas deportivas, sino que configura una narrativa seriada de transformación física, emocional y social basada en la vulnerabilidad, la autenticidad y el acompañamiento comunitario.

RECIBIDO: 16/06/2026
ACEPTADO: 23/09/2026

How to cite this article / Standard reference: (APA 7th edition)

Bustos Díaz, J., Gil-Ibañez, M., Martin-Vicario, L.(2026). Personal Transformation Narratives on Instagram: An AI-Assisted Content Analysis of Ibai Llanos’s “Physical Change” Challenge. *Prisma Social revista de ciencias sociales*, 55, 1-14.
<https://doi.org/10.65598/rps.6286>

1. Introduction

Obesity is one of the most significant problems of the 21st century, with the World Health Organisation (WHO) declaring it a non-infectious pandemic. According to WHO figures, since 1990, adult obesity has doubled globally, while adolescent obesity has quadrupled (WHO, 2024). Consequently, we are witnessing a scenario in which obesity has become a public health problem, as it is associated with a multitude of chronic diseases such as heart failure, vascular disease, atrial fibrillation and chronic kidney disease (Conde et al., 2024) and is even linked to long COVID (Fernández-García et al., 2025).

While healthy eating and physical activity are two essential elements to combat obesity, they only account for between 3% and 5% of the expected weight reduction and are frequently not sustained in the long term (Sagredo and Allo, 2025). Furthermore, it has been widely covered in the media, featuring increasingly prominently in the news since 2000 (Martín-Vicario et al., 2024). At this point, narrative communication about health can be a determining factor in achieving lasting, healthy lifestyle changes (Okuhara et al., 2025). In short, the aim is to replace data and statistics with life stories, offering a more engaging message that can effectively influence health-related behaviours (Bálint and Bilandzic, 2017).

Previous literature on the subject has established that success stories are a determining factor in ensuring that weight-loss changes are sustained over time, especially those shared in online communities, due to their ability to provide social support and motivation (Manuvinkurike et al., 2014; Wang and Willis, 2018). In this respect, social media plays a crucial role in retaining and engaging people who want to lose weight (Chang et al., 2013; Lozano-Chacon, 2021).

In addition, Willoughby et al. (2024) explain that social media influencers who create content related to the fitness world can generate enough motivation for their followers to have a healthier lifestyle. Along these lines, we also find the work of Bak et al. (2023). In both cases, however, a number of factors were identified that could have a negative impact on users in that showing perfect bodies on Instagram can generate insecurity or cause bad habits among users (Bak et al., 2023, Willoughby et al., 2024). Consequently, self-efficacy expectations or perceived self-efficacy (Bandura, 1995)—understood as a person’s confidence in their ability to carry out an action and achieve the desired results—is a highly significant factor when considering the way in which influencers present their life stories.

However, although previous studies addressing weight loss through the life stories of fitness influencers or online communities have been published, it is rare for an influencer with obesity to narrate their success story, sharing their experiences and challenges and showing their day-to-day life. This is the case of Ibai Llanos, one of the most prominent Spanish streamers, esports presenters and YouTubers in the Spanish-speaking world. His weight loss success story was shared by Ibai himself through the “Physical Change” challenge, which began on 28 June 2024 on Instagram, where he has a total of 10.6 million followers.

Therefore, the aim of this study is to analyse how Ibai Llanos constructs and narrates his personal transformation process through the “Physical Change” challenge on Instagram, paying attention to the discursive, visual and narrative elements that articulate his story on this platform.

2. Theoretical framework

Costello (1997) argued that medical education, the health service delivery system or the doctor-patient interaction required the implementation of elements from the world of communication and media relations. Along these lines, Kreps (1988) defines health communication as the “central social process in the provision of health care services and the promotion of public health” (Kreps, 1988, p. 238) and, in later work, establishes that communication is an essential factor in access to health information (Kreps and Neuhauser, 2015) and an essential component in increasing awareness among the population (Gebbers et al., 2017). Recently, and in more general terms, the Society

for Health Communication defines this field of research as “the science and art of using communication to improve the health and well-being of individuals and populations” (SHC, 2017).

In this regard, health communication plays a central role today and can help in the fight against obesity (Holmes et al., 2019). Previous literature on the subject provides a number of key concepts for understanding the evolution and implementation of today’s health communication. Key elements emerge here, such as e-health and telehealth (Suder and Durucu, 2013) and mobile health (mHealth), which, in short, consists of the use of smartphones to facilitate communication and the prevention and promotion of diseases, as well as helping with the monitoring of some ailments (Huang et al., 2016; Portz et al., 2024). Another key element in the digital transformation of health communication is mobile applications; however, recent studies have shown that the apps currently available in the Android App Store have often been developed with purely commercial interests and without the support of the medical community (Martín-Vicario et al., 2023).

2.1 The transformation 2.0 of health communication

At this stage of digital transformation in health communication, not only is the technology itself considered but also the different transformations and impact that the implementation of technology entails in this area (Noriega et al., 2026). For example, Lewis et al. (2011) observe that when people with obesity use the Internet for health issues, they do so to look for solutions. More than half of the participants in their study specifically search for websites with commercial diets, while a quarter of the participants search for information related to the risks and preventive measures of obesity. Finally, another group of participants use the Internet to find communities that help them feel socially accepted and to improve their sense of personal worth and self-esteem. Indeed, some people specifically seek this when they feel “disengaged from their healthcare provider” (p. 364).

Thus, in the study by Prochaska and Velicer (1997), which examines the transtheoretical model of health behaviour change, one of the most relevant findings identified is that these results are observed when interactivity is facilitated through the use of computers. Along these lines, Manuvinakurike et al. (2014) observed that personal stories of health behaviour change that can be found in Internet forums can positively influence participants; indeed, they can positively change attitudes such as self-efficacy (Bandura, 1995).

2.2 From communicator to fitness influencer: the importance of narrative

In this regard, another aspect that also improves and promotes interactivity among forum participants is not the life stories per se, but rather that they are success stories (Wang and Wills, 2018). Therefore, the role that the protagonist of the life story plays is crucial in predicting the impact that the story will have on the public. When a person with obesity succeeds in their weight loss journey, it generates greater empathy with the public than cases where the protagonist does not achieve their goal. Consequently, the personal characteristics of each individual play a role in the construction of the narrative and in the impact it may have on the audience, arousing greater or lesser interest, and more importantly, generating more or less support in obesity-related attitudes (Thibodeau et al., 2017; Wang and Wills, 2016). As Dahlstrom et al. (2017) indicate, one of the key features of life stories is that they are monolithic units. In this respect, the study authors refer to the large number of life stories that exist and how they can provoke emotions and reflections in the public. In the specific case of weight loss narratives, factors such as personal barriers and specific needs, as well as the results obtained, play a role (Johson et al., 2018). It is important to highlight another variable that makes narratives relevant when forming part of the health communication process and that is the persuasive capacity they provide compared to other types of communication possibilities (Dahlstrom et al., 2017).

In this scenario of technological evolution and connectivity in health communication, another key element today is determined by social media (Bak et al., 2023). Among the benefits they offer for health communication are: more available, shared and personalised information, greater accessibility and expanded access to health information, peer/social/emotional support, public

health surveillance and potential to influence health policies, among others (Moorhead et al., 2013).

Studies such as that of Chang et al. (2013) already argued that social media were becoming promising complements to controlling weight loss, as well as a key element to promote good healthy behaviours (Zhou and Krishnan, 2019). For their part, Lee et al. (2022) found two relevant aspects of health communication on social media: firstly, the authenticity shown by the communicator has an impact on the ability to persuade the public and, secondly, the use of a social media channel gives it greater credibility than a mass media outlet.

More recent studies do not address the figure of the communicator as such but focus on health influencers and their ability to positively or negatively influence those who want to lose weight. In this regard, several studies show that fitness influencers can have a positive effect on users in terms of encouraging healthy behaviours, such as social support or motivation to exercise, among others (Kaňková et al., 2024; Willoughby et al., 2024). Finally, these studies, which focus specifically on fitness influencers, also warn that there are a number of negative effects that this type of communication can have on health, such as the transmission of unhealthy body image ideas (Bak et al., 2023).

3. Methodology

One of the characteristics associated with fame is that the public pays attention not only to the activity that has generated a person's notoriety but also to their daily life, habits and behaviours (Archer and Robb, 2024). Based on this premise, this work analyses the “Physical Change” challenge of Ibai Llanos on Instagram, selected for his relevance as an entertainment communicator in the Spanish-speaking world (Gutiérrez Lozano and Cuartero, 2022) and for his ability to build closeness and intimacy with his followers (Aguilera-García, 2023). The interest of the case lies in the fact that the physical change is communicated from personal experience and not from a professional health or journalistic perspective. Therefore, this study examines how Ibai narrates his process of physical, emotional and social transformation and what discursive, visual and narrative elements structure this story.

3.1 Analysis unit and sample

The unit of analysis consists of the reels posted as part of the challenge, defined as short audiovisual pieces that integrate visual, oral and textual content. The analysis covers the period from 26 June 2024 to 26 October 2024. The start date coincides with the first post related to the challenge, while the end date corresponds to video number 70 in which Ibai himself indicates having reached approximately 90% of his initial goal. The final sample consisted of 70 videos.

Three dimensions were analysed for each video: the audiovisual content of the reel, the text posted by Ibai Llanos that accompanies it and the comments from users with verified accounts. The inclusion of verified comments followed a filtering criterion aimed at reducing the presence of potentially automated or fraudulent interactions.

3.2 Analysis process

The study was carried out using content analysis, a technique suitable for systematically examining recorded communication units (Krippendorff, 1990). A qualitative approach was adopted, aimed at exploring the meanings, patterns and discursive structures present in the sample (Cook and Reichardt, 1986). The procedure combined deductive and inductive logic. First, categories were used from previous studies on social media communication, influencers and health. Subsequently, these categories were compared with the units of analysis, which allowed them to be adapted to the particularities of the case and to generate specific categories when there was no clear equivalence in the literature.

The initial coding was performed by three researchers who applied the codebook to the sample. Discrepancies were reviewed by consensus to ensure the internal consistency of the instrument and to refine the operational definitions of each category.

3.3 Analysis categories

The codebook combines descriptive, visual, thematic and narrative categories. Previous studies on health communication and social media influencers were used as a reference for constructing the variables. Specifically, the work of González et al. (2020) was used to define descriptive aspects of the sample, while that of Martínez-Sanz and Fernández (2018) was used to guide the visual analysis. In both cases, the original categories were adapted to the typology of the content analysed.

From the visualisation and examination of the sample, specific categories were also generated to capture the specific narrative of the “Physical Change” challenge. The main thematic categories were: Exercise, Sports Culture, Physical and Mental Health Advice, Self-Discovery, Weight Change and Nutrition. These categories made it possible to identify both the explicit content of the challenge and the emotional, reflective and bodily dimensions that structure the narrative. In addition, variables related to the use of humour and the emotional state of the protagonist were included. The analysis of humour was based on the typology proposed by Mazurkiewicz et al. (2021), while the identification of emotions was included due to their possible relationship with processes of emotional contagion and observational learning, in line with Bandura’s approach (2021). These variables made it possible to analyse not only what is communicated but also how the narrative of physical change is emotionally constructed.

3.4 Validation and reliability of the process: complementary use of AI

With the aim of strengthening the traceability and reliability of the coding process, a complementary phase of analysis assisted by artificial intelligence was included following the methodological protocol of Goyanes and De-Marcos (2025). This protocol establishes the need to record the prompts used, specify the version of ChatGPT used, detail the data preprocessing, clearly define the codebook, align the instructions given to the AI with the criteria of the human coders, and subsequently evaluate the reliability of the inferences obtained. In this study, AI was used after the coding was performed by the three human researchers. Therefore, it did not replace the researchers’ judgment, but rather served as a complementary tool for comparison, systematisation and validation. A structured matrix was created in Excel, the names of the categories was standardised and the qualitative column “Having seen the video, analyse it qualitatively” was used as the textual basis without semantically altering the original content. Additionally, the prompts used were documented and the version of ChatGPT used was specified: GPT-5.5 Thinking.

Table 1

Results of content analysis

Category	Appearances according to authors	Appearances according to AI	Cohen's Kappa
Exercise	62	54	0.508
Self-Discovery	23	22	0.574
Weight Change	7	9	0.577
Physical and Mental Health Advice	5	1	-0.024
Nutrition	2	7	0.419
Sports Culture	1	1	1.000

Source(s): Author.

The AI was trained using a few-shot learning procedure, incorporating real-world examples from the sample and, in low-frequency categories, synthetic examples derived from the operational definitions in the codebook. This strategy made it possible to reduce ambiguities between related categories, especially between Self-Discovery, Physical and Mental Health Advice, and Weight Change. Once the AI-assisted coding was completed, its results were compared with the human coding using Cohen's Kappa coefficient, used to assess the degree of agreement between coders beyond chance (Goyanes and Piñeiro-Naval, 2024).

3.5 Longitudinal narrative analysis

A longitudinal narrative analysis was conducted to reconstruct the progression of the “Physical Change” storyline across the 70 videos. This analysis drew on the tradition of structural and narrative analysis of storytelling, with particular emphasis on the organisation, sequencing and construction of meaning in narratives (Barthes et al., 1982; Riessman, 2002, 2007).

From the continued observation of the sample, five recurring analytical moments were identified: initial situation, action, evaluation, resolution and future projection. These phases were not applied as closed categories from a previous model but emerged inductively from the analysis of the videos and functioned as an interpretive tool to order the narrative evolution of the challenge. The initial situation encompasses the recognition of the problem and the commitment to change; action includes the efforts, routines and obstacles; evaluation includes the moments of reflection, learning and self-interpretation; resolution includes the episodes in which progress becomes verifiable through sizes, weight, measurements or body tests; and future projection includes the future projection of the story. This procedure allowed the thematic coding to be complemented with a longitudinal reading of the process, paying attention not only to the themes present but also to how these are related and acquire meaning over time.

4. Results

The analysis of the 70 videos that make up the “Physical Change” challenge reveals that the content is not limited to documenting a succession of sports routines, but rather articulates a progressive narrative of physical, emotional and social transformation. The results show a combination of manifest content, routines, training, mentions of weight, food or sports scenarios and narrative content such as reflections, learning, humour, vulnerability and relationship with the community. This dual dimension allows the challenge to be interpreted as a short audiovisual series in which each video functions autonomously but also as part of a larger sequence.

4.1 Results of content analysis

Content analysis shows that the dominant category is Exercise and is present in most of the sample. This category structures the challenge and gives continuity to the series, since most of the videos are organised around training, routines, walks, gym sessions, swimming, strength exercises or activities related to later objectives, such as the Camino de Santiago. Physical exercise serves both as the main thematic axis and the narrative engine of the story. Each video records a new activity, a new effort or a new physical challenge.

The second most relevant category is Self-Discovery, which appears when Ibai reflects on his own process, his progress, his difficulties, his discipline, his mental health or his previous failed attempts. This dimension is especially important because the content goes beyond a simple display of physical activity and becomes a narrative of personal learning. The physical change is not presented solely as a bodily modification but as an internal review process in which the protagonist interprets what is happening to him, evaluates his progress and verbalises the emotional effects of the challenge.

The Weight Change category appears associated with specific moments in which progress becomes measurable or verifiable. These videos include references to weight, clothing sizes or body composition. Its function within the sample is not constant but remains relevant, as it introduces objective evidence of the process and allows the viewer to verify that the narrative of transformation corresponds to material indicators. These episodes function as milestones that reinforce the credibility of the change.

The Nutrition category has a smaller presence, although it provides relevant information on the broader themes of the challenge. When it does appear, it is associated with daily food intake, analysing what he eats, and specific products such as protein shakes. Its appearance indicates that the story of physical change is not limited to training, although exercise remains the dominant axis. Nutrition operates as a complementary dimension in the process, but—as can be seen from its scarce appearance—physical activity continues to be the protagonist of the narrative.

Meanwhile, the categories Physical and Mental Health Advice and Sports Culture are less common. The former appears when the discourse is directed at the audience through recommendations, warnings or messages of support. Its low frequency shows that Ibai does not build the challenge from a prescriptive or expert position but from personal experience. The latter appears in videos in which the content relates to specific sports practices, sports environments or collaborations that introduce codes that are external to the usual training. Their limited presence confirms that the core of the challenge is not the sporting culture in a broad sense but their individual process of change.

Overall, the content analysis reveals a clear hierarchy of themes: Exercise supports the daily structure of the challenge; Self-Discovery provides emotional depth; Weight Change introduces verifiability; Nutrition serves as a complement; and the categories Advice and Sports Culture appear as peripheral dimensions. This distribution reveals that the narrative focuses on the practice of physical activity, marking milestones with concrete evidence of progress. However, there is still room for introspection and personal reflection on the process.

4.2 Narrative structure of the change process

Beyond the content of the posts, the longitudinal analysis allows us to identify a narrative structure organised into five recurring moments: (1) initial situation; (2) action; (3) evaluation; (4) resolution; and (5) future projection. Although these phases do not always appear in a linear fashion or with the same intensity in all videos, they allow us to reconstruct the general arc of the story and understand how the content transforms throughout the sample.

The first phase corresponds to the Initial Situation, characterised by the admission of the problem and the formulation of the commitment. In the first videos, Ibai establishes the starting point of the

challenge by mentioning issues such as weight, apnoea, accumulated fatigue and the absence of consolidated healthy habits. This phase builds a framework of vulnerability from which the protagonist presents himself as someone who starts from a position of difficulty.

The second phase, Action, constitutes the largest part of the sample. It includes intense physical activity routines, strength training, walks, swimming, high-intensity exercises and the difficulties associated with adhering to the challenge. In relation to the latter, obstacles also arise from fatigue, travel, discomfort from performing his routines in crowded spaces or the need to juggle physical activity with his work schedule. This phase gives the story continuity and realism, since his physical change is represented as a sustained, repetitive practice that is affected by everyday difficulties. In this same phase, humour takes on a central role. Jokes about his own body, exaggeration of clumsiness or expressions like “fat mode, me mode” (Llanos, 2024) help to relieve the tension of the effort and prevent the narrative from adopting an excessively disciplinary tone. Humour not only functions as an expressive resource but also as a strategy of proximity that allows vulnerability to be transformed into a recognisable, shareable element for the audience.

The third phase corresponds to Evaluation, which appears distributed throughout the entire sample. At these moments, Ibai interprets his own process, verbalises what he has learned, acknowledges frustrations, expresses gratitude for the community’s support and reflects on discipline, mental health or previous failed attempts. This phase is especially important because it transforms the challenge into a narrative of self-understanding. The protagonist does not limit himself to showing what he does but explains how he experiences what he does. In this way, the physical change is also articulated as an emotional and cognitive process.

The fourth phase, Resolution, is manifested in those videos in which progress becomes tangible. Size comparisons, weight data or body measurements introduce moments of objective validation into the narrative. These episodes serve as partial milestones that allow us to verify the progress achieved, although they are not presented as definitive conclusions. Rather, they act as points of confirmation within a process that remains open.

Finally, the fifth phase, Future Projection, appears in the later videos of the sample when Ibai projects the challenge into the future. The will to continue, the announcement of new goals such as the Camino de Santiago and the affirmation that he will continue to share the process, even if it loses virality, indicate that the challenge is no longer presented as a one-off experience but has become a form of narrated life. In this phase, the audience also appears as part of the meaning of the process, since Ibai recognises that his content can support or motivate other people who are going through similar experiences.

4.3 Recurring narrative motifs

In addition to this longitudinal structure, the analysis allows us to identify several narrative motifs that give cohesion to the story. The first is the struggle against himself, visible in the references to his own limitations, to tiredness, to failed attempts and to the need to not compare himself with others. In other words, for Ibai, it is not about external competition; rather, he constructs his transformation as a confrontation with habits, inertia and personal difficulties. The second motif is the support he receives from the community. Throughout the sample, there are acknowledgments, mentions of the comments received and references to the effect the challenge has on other people. The audience does not just observe but functions as a space for validation, support and motivation. This makes the story a partially collective process in which interaction with followers helps to sustain the continuity of the challenge.

A third motif is the body as evidence of progress. The body appears as a place of suffering, change and verification. He suffers when fatigue, clumsiness or difficulty in the exercises is shown; he changes when improvements in strength, endurance or size are evident; and he verifies the story when measurable data on weight or body composition are included. This triple function makes the body the main narrative support of change.

Finally, humour emerges as a coping tool. It softens the effort, generates empathy, reduces the risk of moralising and allows vulnerability to be presented in a relatable way. Instead of constructing a solemn narrative of sacrifice, Ibai combines effort and humour, which reinforces the accessibility of the story and favours identification with a wide audience.

5. Discussion

The aim of this study was to analyse how Ibai Llanos constructs and narrates his personal transformation process through the “Physical Change” challenge on Instagram, paying attention to the discursive, visual and narrative elements that articulate his story on this platform. The results allow us to affirm that the challenge is not configured solely as a succession of videos about training or weight loss but as a serial narrative of transformation in which three main dimensions converge: the body, emotion and the community.

Firstly, the analysis shows that exercise functions as the backbone of the story. The Exercise category appears the most frequently in the sample and acts as a driver of continuity between the videos. Repeating routines, workouts, walks, gym sessions or physical tests allows a sense of sustained process over time to be constructed. However, this repetition does not result in a monotonous narrative, as each video introduces a variation: a new exercise, a difficulty, a collaboration, a different scenario, a comparison with the previous state or a subsequent reflection. In this way, physical practice not only documents the change but also organises the narrative progression of the challenge. Secondly, the study shows that the story is based on a recognisable narrative structure composed of five moments: initial situation, action, evaluation, resolution and future projection. The initial situation establishes the problem and the commitment to change; action focuses on routines, obstacles and daily effort; evaluation introduces personal reflection and interpretation of the process; resolution provides evidence of progress through data, measurements or body tests; and future projection opens the narrative towards new objectives. This organisation allows us to understand the challenge as a developing narrative, not as an isolated sum of posts.

One of the most relevant findings is that Ibai Llanos builds his transformation from a position of vulnerability and not from an expert authority. Unlike professional discourses on health, nutrition or training, his story is articulated from lived experience, the showing of mistakes, the verbalisation of tiredness and the acceptance of failure. This way of talking is especially relevant because it shifts authority from technical knowledge to perceived authenticity. Ibai does not present himself as a prescribing expert but as someone who shares an ongoing personal journey, which minimises the potential adverse effects of (over)exposure to “perfect” bodies in the fitness world (Bak et al., 2023; Willoughby et al., 2024). This position explains why the categories of Physical and Mental Health Advice and Sports Culture appear less frequently: the focus of the narrative is not instruction or general sports culture but the individual experience shared with his followers, which makes it possible to achieve a greater connection with the audience (Bálint and Bilandzic, 2017).

The community also emerges as a structuring element. Acknowledgments, replies to comments and recognition that his videos can support others make the audience an active part of the narrative. While Wang and Willis (2018) observed that interactions with life stories increased more with success stories, in Ibai Llanos’s case it can be seen that this support is given throughout the story, including in those contents that do not necessarily show a success. The challenge is not built solely from the posting of content but from a two-way relationship in which followers validate, encourage and sustain the process. This interaction reinforces the social dimension of physical change and allows us to interpret Instagram not only as a broadcast platform but as a space for narrative accompaniment. This is relevant because, according to Social Cognitive Theory (e.g., Bandura, 1995), it would mean that both the one who creates the story—Ibai Llanos—and those who consume it—his followers—benefit from it. In other words, in the case of Ibai Llanos, the interaction with users makes him feel socially supported and encourages him to continue with his experience; for his part, Ibai’s narration represents an instance of social learning by narrating the barriers and facilitators (Johnson et al., 2018) and, with this, promoting lifestyle change.

Taken together, the results suggest that the communicative success of the “Physical Change” challenge is not solely due to Ibai Llanos’ prior notoriety, but rather to the way he articulates a narrative of personal transformation based on authenticity, vulnerability, humour and continuity. While this capacity for influence had already been observed in fitness influencers (e.g.: Kaňková et al., 2024; Willoughby et al., 2024), the results of this study support the use of personalities not related to that world as valid testimonials to encourage habit change. Instagram thus becomes a space in which physical change is narrated as an open, emotionally shared and socially supported process.

6. Conclusions

Finally, the future projection summarises the key findings of the study, highlighting its contribution to the advancement of knowledge in the field. It proposes specific recommendations for future practice, policy or research. This section highlights the added value of the study, encouraging reflection on possible future directions that research could take based on the results and discussions presented.

This study analyses how Ibai Llanos builds and narrates his personal transformation process through the “Physical Change” challenge on Instagram. The results show that the story is organised as a serial narrative in which each video functions as an autonomous unit and, at the same time, as part of a larger sequence of change.

The main conclusion is that the challenge is not limited to documenting training routines, but rather builds a complex narrative in which exercise acts as the central axis, self-discovery provides emotional depth, weight change introduces verifiability and the digital community helps sustain the process. This combination allows the content to transcend the logic of the physical challenge and become a story of personal transformation.

Furthermore, the longitudinal analysis allows a narrative structure composed of five moments to be identified: initial situation, action, evaluation, resolution and future projection. This structure helps to understand how the story evolves from the recognition of an initial problem to the consolidation of new objectives. The future projection phase is especially relevant, as it shows that the challenge is not a one-off experience but continues as a narrated lifestyle.

Another interesting aspect is that Ibai Llanos constructs his discursive position from a place of closeness rather than expert authority. His communicative legitimacy stems from explaining the process, accepting his limitations and interacting with his followers. This position explains why the content is persuasive without adopting a prescriptive tone: Ibai does not present himself as a health professional but as a subject who shares a personal experience of change.

Finally, from a methodological point of view, the study confirms the usefulness of combining human coding, AI-assisted analysis and longitudinal narrative analysis. AI helped to systematise the coding and strengthen the traceability of the process, although the final interpretation required human supervision, especially in the more contextual categories.

The main limitation is that the study focuses on a single case and a single platform, which prevents generalising the results to other creators or social media. Future research could compare these types of narratives with other influencers, analyse audience reception in more depth or study how these stories evolve when the physical change extends beyond the initial period of high visibility.

In conclusion, Ibai Llanos’ “Physical Change” challenge shows how a platform like Instagram can become a space for personal storytelling, body transformation and community support. Its communicative value lies precisely in the articulation between effort, emotion, humour, evidence and narrative continuity.

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AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS, FUNDING AND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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Funding: This research did not receive external funding.

Conflict of interest: None