Citizenship or political?
The Twitter accounts that the Media
and their Directors started to follow
¿Ciudadanas o políticas?
Las cuentas de Twitter que los medios
y sus directores comenzaron a seguir

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Keywords

Palabras clave

Abstract

Digital platforms have transformed the influence streams among media, journalists, politicians and the citizenship, as well as concerning gatekeeping and agenda setting (Guo and Vargo, 2017; Wallace, 2018; Casero-Ripollés, 2021). Nonetheless, homophilic tendencies among power groups continue to be reproduced *online* (McPherson, Smith-Lovin and Cook, 2001; Maares, Lind and Greussing, 2021). With the objective of contributing to the deepening of the understanding of the dynamics and influence flows *online* among power elites, we analyzed via a machine learning Software, the 50 accounts that the network of the most followed Media Directors in Spain began following and compared them with the accounts that the Media they manage started following. We categorized them in Types of accounts, Location and Gender, and analyzed the repetitions between the accounts they began to follow to subsequently work with data visualization methods in order to find trends and tendencies (Bail, 2014; Batrinca and Treleaven, 2015). The results of this research indicate that some patterns of behavior differ between both networks, such as the gender and types of accounts they began following, whereas the location presented similar trends. The year where we can see the highest similarities corresponds to 2018, an electoral year in Spain, where both networks started following a majority of Spanish male politicians.

Resumen

Las plataformas digitales han introducido nuevas lógicas en las relaciones y en los flujos de influencia entre los medios, periodistas, políticos y la ciudadanía, así como en lo que respecta al *gatekeeping* y el establecimiento de la agenda político-mediática (Guo and Vargo, 2017; Wallace, 2018; Casero-Ripollés, 2021). No obstante, los grupos de poder siguen reproduciendo tendencias homofílicas en el mundo digital (McPherson, Smith-Lovin and Cook, 2001; Maares, Lind and Greussing, 2021). Con el objetivo de contribuir con la profundización de la comprensión de las dinámicas y flujos de influencia *online* entre las élites de poder, analizamos a través de un software de *machine learning*, las 50 cuentas que la red de los directores de medios más seguidos en España comenzó a seguir, y las comparamos con las cuentas que comenzaron a seguir los medios que dirigen. Las categorizamos en tipos de cuentas, ubicación y género, y analizamos las repeticiones entre las cuentas que comenzaron a seguir, para luego trabajar con métodos de visualización de datos en busca de tendencias y patrones (Bail, 2014; Batrinca and Treleaven, 2015). Los resultados de esta investigación indican que algunos patrones de comportamiento difieren entre ambas redes, como el género y los tipos de cuentas que comenzaron a seguir, mientras que presentaron tendencias similares con respecto a la ubicación de las cuentas. El año en el que se aprecian mayores similitudes corresponde a 2018, año electoral en España, donde ambas redes comenzaron a seguir mayoritariamente a políticos españoles varones.

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1. Introduction and theoretical background

Along with the emergence of digital and social platforms came various views about the impact of these new media in power dynamics and influence streams between the media, politicians and citizens (Meraz, 2009; Tran, 2014; Guo and Vargo, 2017; Casero-Ripollés, 2021). On one hand, numerous researchers state that these platforms offer technological infrastructures that empower the citizenship to have a more active role regarding the information they access to and their involvement in the *online* news setting (Tran, 2014; Feezell, 2018). This is so, that authors introduced the terms produsers and prosumers (García Galera and Valdivia, 2014) to describe the new role of the citizenship in selecting, sharing and even producing information (Feezell, 2018). What is more, some authors conceptualize Social Media as emancipatory tools that can be understood as freedom enhancers (Shirky, 2008). However, Morozov (2011) points out that having a more democratic access to the news and information, does not imply a social-wise democratization.

Contrastingly, other studies show how politicians and media, who were traditionally the main agenda-setters (McCombs and Shaw, 1972) still have power and influence the agenda setting development (Tran, 2014; Harder, Sevenans and Van Aelst, 2017). Furthermore, previous research indicate that social media (specially Twitter) operate as an echo chamber of those in power positions and the elites (Bruns and Highfield, 2013) as politicians and media show a tendency to be the main receptors of politicians´ messages, reproducing the characteristic stratified attention of the capitalist society (Dubois and Gaffney, 2014). Individuals´ social networks tend to homophily, being similarity one of the main connectors between people (McPherson, Smith-Lovin and Cook, 2001). This behavior seems to be replicated on social media and digital networks (Colleoni, Rozza and Arvidsson, 2014), where users may choose contents that reinforce their beliefs as opposed to consuming contents that could postulate new perspectives. Moreover, the attention is homophilic among the elites (Wu *et al.*, 2011; Maares, Lind and Greussing, 2021). Studies show how journalists tend to interact with colleagues (Molyneux, 2015) or leaders (McGregor and Molyneux, 2018), and what is more, male journalists present a tendency to interact with, and broadcast, nearly solely other male journalists (Usher, Holcomb and Littman, 2018).

In this same line, media research has documented a long tradition of media's misrepresentation, trivialization and stereotyping of women in media contents and news (Shor *et al.*, 2015). Previous research show that journalists and media have also used more men as sources than women, which reinforces men as leaders and authority figures (Zoch and Van Slyke Turk, 1998; Armstrong and Gao, 2011), all of which impacts in women's symbolic annihilation (Tuchman, 1978).

Gatekeeping, which used to be exercised by media, politicians and power elites (McCombs and Shaw, 1972) has also undergone changes with digital platforms and *online* media (Meraz, 2009) as these provide the infrastructure for converting any person with a smart device and internet into an informer, and any content has the potential to reach other citizens and even becoming viral, without the traditional mediatic filters (McCombs and Shaw, 1972). However, digital platforms are software systems, that introduce changes with their own policies, interfaces, algorithms and data usage, which operate as filters and shapers impacting the contents and information each person accesses to (Martínez Figuerola and Marzo, 2016; Finn, 2017). This has led some researchers to characterize social media and digital platforms as the gatekeepers of the XXI century (Wallace, 2018).

Twitter is considered the most relevant informational and political network (Verweij, 2012; Colleoni, Rozza and Arvidsson, 2014; Harder, Sevenans and Van Aelst, 2017; Hu and Kearney, 2020). It is widely used by opinion leaders (Smith, 2020), as well as by the media, who use it to disseminate information (Engesser and Humprecht, 2015). Journalists are also considered heavy users of this platform and use it mainly with work purposes to interact with other journalists, to broadcast their own work and their colleagues´ contents (Molyneux, 2015; Arrabal-Sánchez and De-Aguilera-Moyano, 2016), as well as to find informacional sources (Verweij, 2012). Journalists´ use of Twitter is considered to have an effect on the voices and messages that become part of the social discussion and the news agenda (McGregor and Molyneux, 2018). It has an effect on the contents and news that other users read, on Twitter journalists are considered curators (Molyneux, 2015). Who each user follows on their social media is determinant on the contents they will be exposed to (Hawley, 2019), as social media platforms tailor the contents and accounts they suggest via recommendation algorithms (Gupta *et al.*, 2013; Finn, 2017; Twitter, 2019). In this research, we are focusing on who the Media Directors and the Media they manage started following as who elites follow have an impact on the rest of the users, especially when we are talking about the most followed Media accounts. On one hand, this is due to the fact that Media and journalists are considered curators as stated above (Molyneux, 2015), but also, because Twitter´s algorithmic recommendations of who to follow tend to recommend accounts followed by the accounts you follow (Twitter, 2019). This means that the accounts that the most followed elites start following tend to be more suggested to other users by Twitter´s algorithm. In addition to pursuing to identify the accounts followed by two media elites, the most followed media directors in Spain and the media they manage, in this study we seek to know whether the media and their directors tend to follow the same accounts, which would reinforce the echo chamber effect in case there were indeed similarities in the accounts that began to follow both networks.

2. Objective

In this context, we ask ourselves who the most followed Media Directors from Spain began to follow and who did the Media they manage, seeking to understand if we can see the characteristics of the digital environment reflected in these accounts and at the same time comprehend if the organizational behavior of the media is related to the behavior of their directors in terms of the characteristics of the accounts they started to follow.

3. Methodology

This research is the culmination of a study in which we analyze the behavior and influence flows among journalists, media, politicians and the citizenship. In a previous phase we analyzed the group of Spanish media executives with the most followers on Twitter. In this final instance, we seek to compare the accounts the group of Media Directors began to follow, with the accounts of the Media they manage, in order to understand whether individual and organizational behaviors go in similar directions, and to understand the *online* influence dynamics among the media elites.

In the first stage of the research we studied the 50 most followed Media Directors from Spain and analyzed the 50 accounts they started to follow as a network, from 2017 to 2019 (Israel-Turim and Micó-Sanz, 2021). We categorized these accounts and proceeded to do a quantitative data analysis as we crossed different variables of the data we collected and used visualization tools in the search for possible repetitions that could signify patterns or trends (Mahrt and Scharkow, 2013; Bail, 2014; Batrinca and Treleaven, 2015). We melded data analysis techniques combining computational and manual methods to preserve contextual implications while obtaining as much information and knowledge from the data (Lewis, Zamith and Hermida, 2013). The results of this analysis are the ones to be contrasted in this final phase.

In the present study we created a new sample constituted by the media institutions where these top 50 media directors work and have incidence. This new sample is constituted by 36 media, as some of the Media Directors and executives work in the same media organizations. Once the sample of this study was determined, we created a new context to extract the top 50 accounts they began following as a group. We analyzed 50 accounts as this number provides substantial data without generating a high dispersion.

The data, which includes the top 50 media directors accounts from Spain with more followers on Twitter, the group of media they manage and the 50 accounts both networks started to follow from 2017 to 2019, was extracted from a big data analysis software developed for the project "Influencers in Political Communica-

tion in Spain. Analysis of the Relationships Between Opinion Leaders 2.0, Media, Parties, Institutions, and Audiences in the Digital Environment" named *Contexto. io*. This software organizes contexts of information around Twitter accounts using their digital public footprints. The composition of a context consists of a group of people and/or organizations that interact creating an ecosystem. They are created with a selection of Twitter accounts that are algorithmically sorted by the software taking into account their relevance in the context by analyzing the accounts digital trace. In order to determine the sample we worked with datasets that contained the Spanish Media and Media Directors accounts on Twitter. The software contains a section named *Metrics* where we could visualize information regarding the number and variation of *followees, followers, tweets* and *favorites* of the accounts of a context. In this section searched for the Media Director´s accounts with the highest numbers of followers. We extracted the most followed ones and created a new context, in order to analyze them as network. Afterwards, we searched for the media institutions they direct and created a new context with these media, which was constituted by 36 media, as some of the Media Directors had high directive positions in the same media. Therefore, we created two new contexts, one with the most followed Media Directors in Spain, and another one with the 36 media accounts they managed, in order to proceed to their comparison. The software organizes the accounts into graphs utilizing a set of parameters in order to determine the nodes sizes and distances, such as Relations between the accounts, Communication, Common organizations and Predicted links. The resulting networks were the following:

Figure 1. Samples networks: Media Directors and the Media they manage
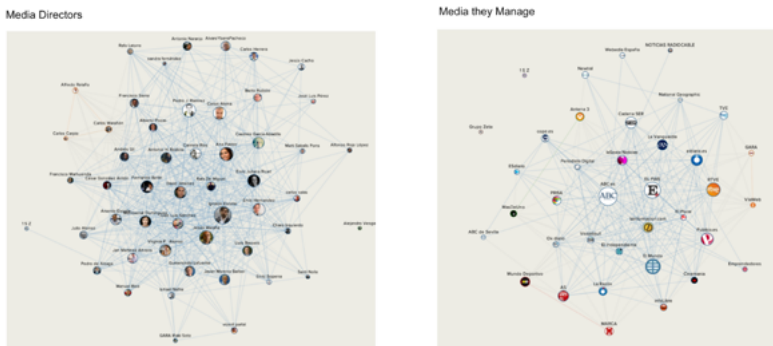
Once we had the two samples, we proceeded to search for the 50 accounts each network started to follow in 2017, 2018 and 2019. To do so, we also worked with the *Contexto.io* software, as through a section named *Expand* we could visualize the accounts that the contexts started to follow as groups. This section provides the possibility of selecting specific periods to analyze, the capability of including or excluding the members of the samples and it presents the accounts that the networks started following in order of popularity, calculated by the percentage of the sample´s members that started following those accounts. For the present research, we selected to visualize the accounts that the sample began to follow taking into account the ones in- and out-of-network.

After collecting the data of the samples and of the accounts they started following, we categorized the accounts the sample began to follow in the same way as in the previous phase which is: Types of accounts, Location and Gender; and added a new category that analyses whether the accounts the networks began to follow are the exact same ones. The categories are defined as follows:

Types of accounts

> We categorized the accounts in three types: Political, Media and Citizenship.

> The Political accounts include politicians, political parties and public institutions. Public institutions have been considered political devices (Thoenig, 2003), reason why we integrated Public institutions in this category. The way a public institution works might answer to political agendas. Therefore, a user deciding to follow or not a public institution may denote a certain political opinion or preference taking into account both, the cognitive dissonance theory (Festinger, 1957) which states that individuals tend to elude news and information that is not in line with their beliefs, and homophily on social media, through which users choose contents that reinforce their beliefs (McPherson, Smith-Lovin and Cook, 2001). However, users, and specially media, journalists and popular users can decide to follow accounts beyond whether it aligns with their beliefs for public relations purposes.

> The media category is composed by Media institutions and Journalists and the citizenship category contains Users (entrepreneurs, scholars, artists, celebrities, activists, etc.) and Civil Institutions (companies, NGOs, civilian associations, among others).

Accounts repetition

> We analyzed if the exact accounts the sample started following every year were also began to be followed by the network of top media directors in that same period.

Location

> We labeled the accounts according to the precedence or location of the Twitter account, taken from the user´s Twitter location or their bio, and in case this information has not been detailed by the account, we searched for the person/institution to find it.

Gender

> Within the accounts that did not belong to Institutions, we categorized the accounts in Men, Women and Non-binary (Butler, 1988) in order to analyze possible gender balance trends, as media studies have shown a tradition of gender disbalances in media representations (Zoch and Van Slyke Turk, 1998; Armstrong and Gao, 2011), which has been related to the fact that men are also over-represented in power positions (Carli and Eagly, 2002; Kubu, 2017). The way to determine the gender of the accounts was by analyzing the Twitter profiles. Firstly, through the users' "bio", taking as a reference the way in which each user refers to themselves. In cases where there was no bio nor self-gender references, we used the name and image of the user and added a search of web pages, interviews, etc. where information about the gender identification of that person could be found.

4. Results

4.1. Types of accounts

In 2017 the analyzed media began to follow a clear majority of citizenship accounts, while the Media Directors began to follow a minority of this type of account; 42% in the case of the Media they manage and 22% the Media Directors. In that same year, the percentage of political accounts was similar between both samples, with a 4% difference, whereas there was a higher difference in the Media accounts as the Media Directors began to follow a 50% of Media, while the Media they manage, a 34% of this type of account.

The year 2018 is the one in which we can find the most similar behavior among the networks in terms of the types of accounts they started following. Both samples started to follow a majority of political accounts and the percentage distribution by category was similar: Political accounts (46% the Media Directors and 42% the Media they manage), Media (38-32%) and Citizenship (16-26%).

In 2019 we can see how the Media began to follow relatively similar percentages of each type of account: 38% Media, 32% citizenship and 30% political, while the Media directors began to follow equal numbers of Political and Media accounts and a minority of Citizenship (20%).

Figure 2. Types of accounts the Media Directors and the Media they manage started following
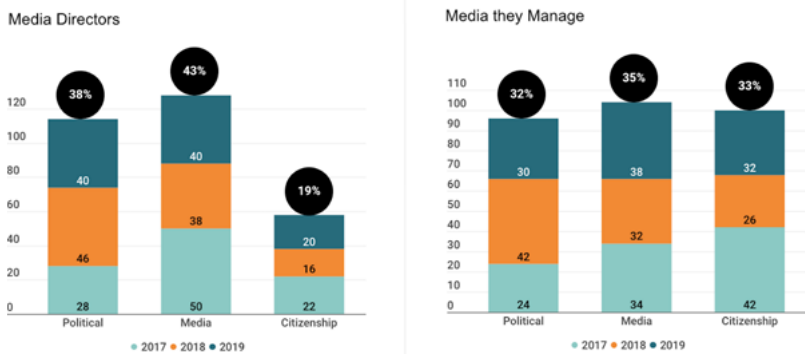

Overall, the analyzed media presented a similar distribution between the categories over the years, while their directors began to follow a majority of Media accounts and Political accounts in second place, and a smaller percentage of Citizenship accounts.

4.2. Accounts repetition

During the first year of this study, only 8% of the accounts were followed by the analyzed media and the Media Directors. In 2018 the number of accounts followed by both networks increased to its highest point with the 36% of the accounts and in 2019 it decreased but to the 34%.

Figure 3. Percentage of repetition of the accounts that the Media Directors and the Media they manage started following
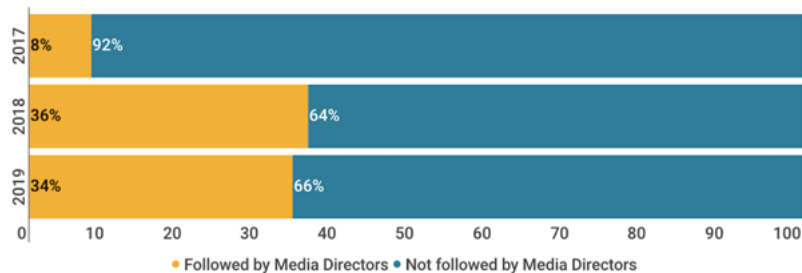
**Figure 4.** Percentage of types of accounts within the repeated accounts.
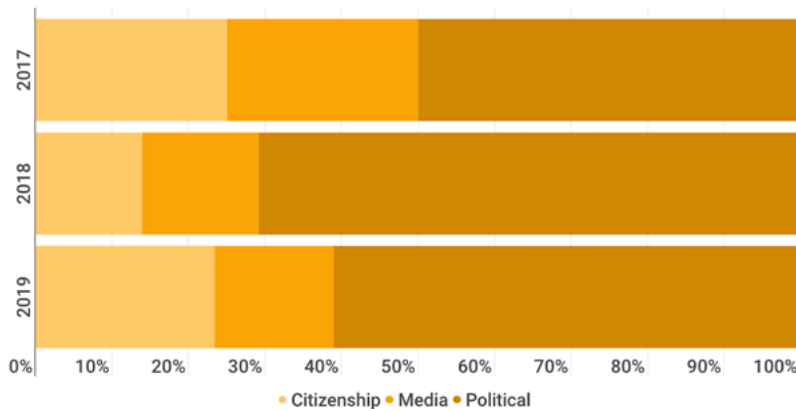
When analyzing the percentages of types of accounts within the accounts that both networks started following, we can see how the majority of coincidences happen in the political sphere. This percentage was higher in 2018, a fact that we can associate with the electoral context of the country, as 2018 was an electoral year in Spain.

4.3. Location

The overall tendency regarding the location of the accounts they began to follow is similar in terms of maintaining a majority of Spanish accounts the three years of the study, and also in the patterns' variations.

Figure 5. Location of the accounts that the Media Directors and the Media they manage started following
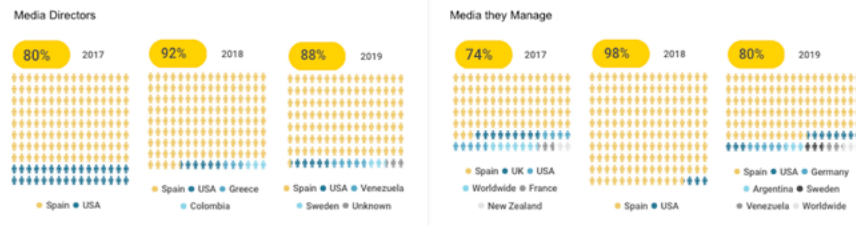
The first year of this study was in both cases the year where they began to follow a smaller percentage of Spanish accounts, 80% the Media Directors and 74% the Media they manage. 2018 was in both cases the year with the highest percentages of Spanish accounts, 92% in the case of the Media Directors and 98% the Media they manage. The third analyzed year presented a descensus in the Spanish location percentage, which was still higher than the first year, corresponding to 88% and 80% of the accounts.

Both networks presented differences regarding the rest of the countries of the accounts they began following. In 2017, the Media directors began to follow only accounts from the United States, being an election year in that country, and in particular the year in which Donald Trump assumed the presidency. Once again, the political context seems to influence the accounts that the Media Directors decide to follow on Twitter. Meanwhile, the Media they manage began to follow accounts from several countries including, in addition to the United States, the United Kingdom, New Zealand, France and global accounts. Among the accounts of the UK, we can find The Metropolitan Police and Greater Manchester Police. We believe this finds its root in the fact that Manchester and Barcelona were the setting of two terrorist attacks in Europe that year (Statista, 2017). In 2018, the year in which both networks began following the highest percentages of Spanish accounts, we can observe how the Media Directors began following accounts from three more countries: United States of America, Greece and Colombia, whereas the Media they manage only began following one account from USA. In 2019, repeating the pattern of 2017, the Media began following accounts from a wider variety of locations in comparison to their directors. Nonetheless, both networks began to follow accounts from the same countries: Venezuela, Sweden and the United States.

When we compare the Spanish and non-Spanish accounts, we can see how both networks have a different behavior regarding the number of followers of the accounts they began following. When following Spanish accounts, Media Directors began following a majority of accounts with 10-100K followers, while the Media they manage a majority of 100K-1 million followers. Meanwhile, the accounts they began following from other countries are majorly accounts with more than a million followers in the case of both analyzed groups. It seems that when following accounts from outside of their own country, they choose to follow those accounts that present a high relevance in terms of reach/number of followers, public figures and accounts followed by many other users.

Figure 6. Number of followers percentage comparison of Spanish and non-Spanish accounts.
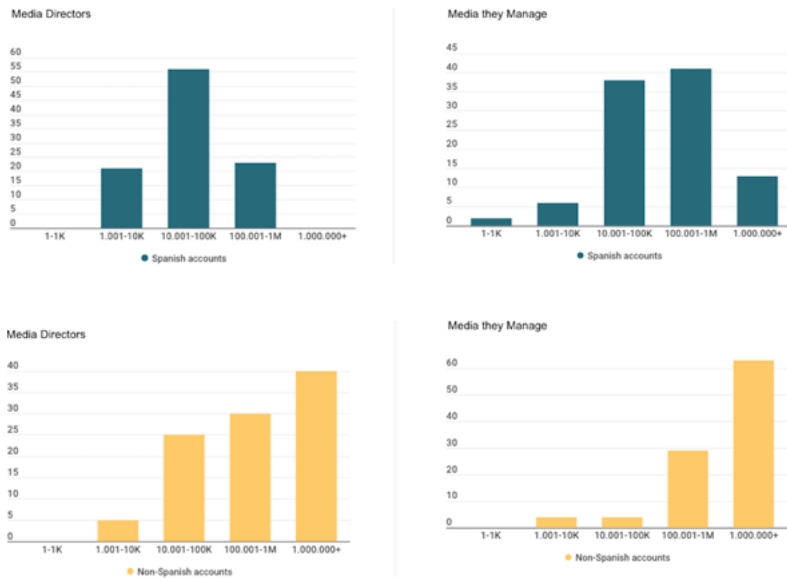
4.4. Gender

While the Media Directors presented a men-women balanced percentage in the accounts they started following, we can observe how the Media they manage began to follow more accounts that belong to men. 2017 was the year in which the gap was larger, with a close to a 70-30 distribution. The difference decreased every year, arriving at 63-37% in 2019. We could not identify any non-binary accounts amongst the accounts any of the networks began to follow and there was one account where the gender was unknown.

Figure 7. Gender of the users of the accounts the Media Directors and the Media they manage started following
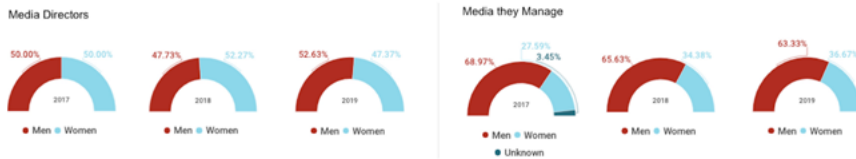
Figure 8. Percentage of types of accounts per gender
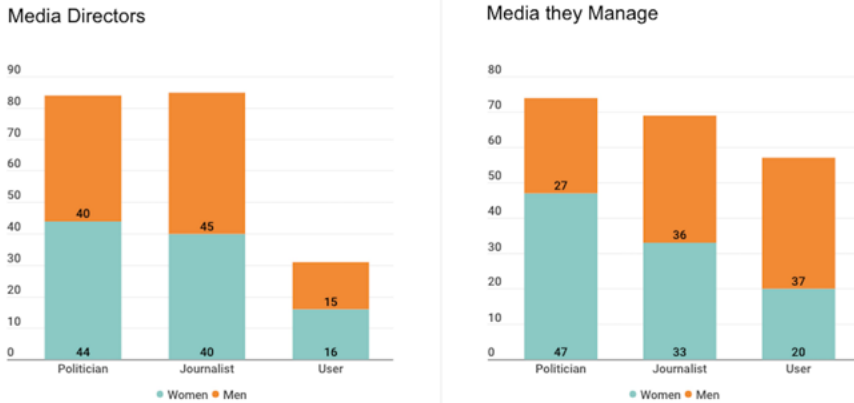
In the case of the types of accounts they began following per gender, the Media Directors and the Media they manage presented different patterns. In the case of the Media Directors, where there was a more gender balanced distribution between men and women, there also was a more gender balance distribution per category. They started following more women politicians and more men journalists, but in similar percentages, and the users were the least followed type of account for both genders. Meanwhile, the Media they managed presented an inverse tendency by following a majority of female politicians with a 47%, a 33% of female journalists and a 20% of female users. Contrarily, they began following a majority of male users, a 37%, a 36% of journalists and minority of male politicians. It seems like the gender disbalance in the case of the analyzed media is not only in a distribution level between gender, but also regarding the roles they have. The fact that the ac-

counts that the media began following that belong to women corresponded mainly to politicians or journalists, contrasting to the accounts that belong to men that were mainly from users, which include entrepreneurs, scholars, celebrities, and influencers among others, could show that the media chooses to follow women's accounts when they have a recognized political or media role. These results provide evidence for the documented gender disbalanced representations perpetuated by the media (Armstrong, 2004; Shor *et al.*, 2015).

5. Discussion

The Media Directors and the Media they Managed presented both similarities and differences between the accounts they began following on Twitter from 2017 to 2019. Regarding the types of accounts, the media directed by the 50 most followed media directors on Twitter in Spain started to follow similar percentages of Media, Citizenship and Political accounts (close to 33% each when adding the three years of the study). This was not the case among their Media Directors, who began following a majority of Media accounts (43%) and Political accounts (38%), while they started following the Citizenship to a lesser extent (19%). Both networks shared the fact that the most followed type of accounts were those of the Media. Nonetheless, in the case of the Media Directors it was a more pronounced majority than in the Media they manage, where we can appreciate a similar distribution between all the categories (See Figure 2). These results seem to provide support for theories about homophily in social networks (Lazarsfeld and Merton, 1954; McPherson, Smith-Lovin and Cook, 2001; Katz *et al.*, 2004) and particularly in power groups (Colleoni, Rozza and Arvidsson, 2014). We can see how both, the Media Directors, who are mainly journalists, and the Media they manage, tended to follow mostly accounts of other media and journalists, and in the case of the Media Directors, accounts of politicians in the second place. These results highlight a tendency from the analyzed media and their directors to use Twitter as a platform for peer-to-peer exchange among those who have traditionally been the agenda-setters (McCombs and Shaw, 1972). Various authors have dedicated their research to understanding if social and digital media encourage the development of a diversified and democratic public sphere, or whether it operates in the other way, deepening filter bubbles (Pariser, 2011), homophilic echo-chambers (McPherson, Smith-Lovin and Cook, 2001; Bruns and Highfield, 2013; Colleoni, Rozza and Arvidsson, 2014) and polarization (Terren and Borge, 2021). Even though digital media have been conceived as platforms that enable the citizenship to partake in a more active way in the public debate (Feenstra and Casero-Ripollés, 2014), the analyzed mediatic elites have shown the tendency to interact with other members of the media and political elite, reinforcing the theories that conceptualize Twitter as an echo chamber among the power elites (Bruns and Highfield, 2013; Molyneux and Mourão, 2019), where politicians and media are the main sources, agenda set-

ters and receptors of each other (McCombs and Shaw, 1972; Tran, 2014; Harder, Sevenans and Van Aelst, 2017), as opposed to theories that conceptualize social media platforms as emancipators from long standing power dynamics (Shirky, 2008). Social media does provide the possibility of a space where information and communication between the citizenship is freer and more accessible, which would go in line with the Habermasian (1962) public sphere vision, but for this potential to be reached, there should be an exchange of diverse opinions and an ongoing healthy debate (Terren and Borge, 2021). "While the Internet has facilitated broader public discussion, in many regards its 'virtual public sphere' still mirrors existing social structures" (Ausserhofer and Maireder, 2013) p. 292. So, what does it imply that the media elite has begun to follow more media and political accounts than those of the citizenry? We can interpret that they do not seek to use social media networks to promote social discussion and public debate, but rather to interact with other elites, co-creating the political debate from an agenda-setting perspective (McCombs, 2006; Amaral *et al.*, 2016). We consider that it would be interesting to delve into other types of digital interactions by the analyzed elites in future research, for example by analyzing what types of accounts they tend to endorse (through likes and retweets).

The analyzed Media started following in 2017 more than a 90% of accounts different from the ones followed that same year by their directors, while in 2018 and 2019 more than 30% of the accounts coincided with the accounts followed by the Media Directors. 2018 is also the year in which these directors started following a higher percentage of accounts identical to the Media they manage (see Figure 3), with Political accounts being the most repeated accounts both in that year and in all the studied periods (Figure 4). We wonder if they began to follow the same political accounts as they were the most relevant at the time and in the context, accounts that became relevant on Twitter at the time, or if it could elucidate that the media follow the political lines of their directors. We believe this could constitute a relevant aspect to investigate in future research.

The studied Media started following a majority of Spanish accounts in the three years of the study, in the same line with their Directors, presenting homophilous tendencies regarding their location, supporting theories that postulate the tendency of Twitter users to follow accounts from the same or close regions (Shiori Hironaka; Mitsuo Yoshida; Kyoji Umemura, 2021). Twitter´s platform has a global scale, and one of the reasons why it has been considered as a democratization enhancer (Shirky, 2008) is that it dissolves geographical boundaries (Anduiza, Cantijoch and Gallego, 2009). Nonetheless, the vast majority of the accounts that the analyzed media elites started following were national, showing that proximity at the geographic level plays a role in the connections also *online*. There are many studies that show that even on digital platforms, users tend to share and interact in geographically local networks (Ausserhofer and Maireder, 2013), and that proxi-

mity to the center of political power conditions the structure of the digital political debate (Casero-Ripollés, 2021). In line with these postulates, in this study we can see how the homophilic dimension of geographic proximity is reproduced by the analyzed elites.

The variations in the percentages of Spanish and other origins varied in a similar way every year, as observed in Figure 5, being 2017 the year with the lowest percentages, which still represented over 70% of the accounts. 2018 was the year with the highest percentage of Spanish accounts in both studies that even presented similar numbers; 92% from the Media Directors and 98% from the Media they manage. The accounts that both networks started following that are from outside Spain present the particularity that they are mostly accounts with more than one million followers, unlike the accounts located in Spain (see Figure 6). The most followed Spanish media directors and the Media they manage seem to opt to follow accounts from outside Spain when these have a massive number of followers. This could respond to their *online* popularity (Cha *et al.*, 2010), algorithmic authority (Campbell, 2011) or responding to the social platforms automated recommendations (Gupta *et al.*, 2013). We believe this constitutes an interesting line to investigate in future research.

The year 2018 which was an electoral year in Spain, presented peculiarities such as being the year in which both groups started following a majority of Political accounts, the year with more Spanish accounts and the one in which more accounts coincided. The results of this exploratory study indicate that the political context has an impact on the accounts followed by the Media and their Directors. There seems to be a correlation between the political setting and the actions of the media elite on social platforms, specifically on Twitter, a concept we consider relevant to further explore in future investigations.

Regarding the gender of the accounts they began to follow, the Media Directors presented a men-women balance in the accounts they began following. This results propose, at least regarding followship, a difference with previous research that stated that male journalists tend to interact almost exclusively with other male journalists (Usher, Holcomb and Littman, 2018). Meanwhile, the Media they manage began following a majority of men, as presented in Figure 7, following long known patterns of mis and underrepresentation of women in Media (Zoch and Van Slyke Turk, 1998; Armstrong and Gao, 2011). Moreover, the gender imbalance observed in the analyzed media shows two levels: on the one hand, the number of accounts that belong to women and men, on the other, the type of accounts, and therefore the social roles from those women and men. As can be perceived in Figure 8, the analyzed media tended to follow more women politicians and journalists, and more male users (entrepreneurs, scholars, celebrities, etc.). This fact could indicate that, similarly to the case of the accounts that are not from Spain, which presented the characteristic of having a much higher number of followers, the media follows

women's accounts when they have a recognizable political or mediatic position, which may propose that the media elites reproduce patterns of gender inequality when following women on Twitter outside of the political and media elites. The women the analyzed elites started following earned their reputation because of institutional political or mediatic positions, meaning they themselves where part of these elites, as they had an established role in relevant institutions (Wedel, 2017), being in the position to make decisions of social impact (Mills, 1956). Therefore, the most followed Spanish media directors on Twitter, as well as the media they manage, chose to follow women when they were in positions that make up the traditional elites, and not so much women for their *online* relevance or algorithmic authority (Cheong, 2013; Campbell, 2020), not giving the same space to citizen women voices as they gave to citizen men, following the media tradition of making a biased representation of women (Zoch and Van Slyke Turk, 1998; Tuchman, 2000; Armstrong, 2004; Armstrong and Nelson, 2005; Shor *et al.*, 2015). However, we highlight that the Media Directors started to follow a balanced percentage of women and men, even taking into account that they were women in positions within the elites, considering that the sample itself is constituted by 90% men and 10% women, and previous studies had shown that male journalists tended to interact almost exclusively with other male journalists (Usher, Holcomb and Littman, 2018). None of the analyzed media networks began following any non-binary accounts, which constitutes more evidence of the disbalanced representations perpetuated by the media in relation to gender roles (Armstrong, 2004; Shor *et al.*, 2015).

In conclusion, the elite of most followed media directors in Spain and the media they manage presented both, similarities and differences regarding the accounts they started following between 2017 and 2019. Both networks presented a homophilic behavior (McPherson et al., 2001) by starting to follow a majority of accounts that belong, like them, to the Media and located in Spain. Nonetheless, the Media Directors began following a higher percentage of Media accounts, along with Political accounts, suggesting a use of Twitter as an echo-chamber of the power elites (Bruns & Highfield, 2013), whereas the Media they manage presented similar percentages of Media, Political and Citizenship accounts.

The period in which we can find more similitudes was during the year 2018, year in which there were parliamentary elections in Spain. During this period, the greatest coincidences were found in the exact accounts they started following, as well as in the distribution of the type of accounts they started to follow. Moreover, most of the accounts that both networks began following that year were political accounts from Spain. The political context seems to influence the behavior of the media elites regarding the accounts they follow on social networks.

Meanwhile, the analyzed networks presented differences in terms of the gender of the accounts they started following. The Media Directors presented a men-women balance in the accounts they began to follow, while the Media they manage began

to follow a majority of men, and none of the networks started following non-binary accounts, perpetuating gender disbalances in media representations (Armstrong, 2004; Shor et al., 2015).

The fact that there were differences is interesting because although at some points, the media elites seem to use Twitter in an homophilous way, which can be interpreted as them using it as an echo chamber, the fact that we can observe some differences shows that the media directives do not have such a preponderant influence on the accounts the media they manage follow, giving space for the media to have their own profiles, and therefore the media elite as a whole does not appear as such an homogeneous block. This could give space to diverse voices within the media-politicians-citizenship ecosystem on Twitter. We believe that it would be relevant to delve deeper into this issue in future research, for example through a qualitative analysis of the discourse of media directors and of the people who manage the media accounts, in order to understand in greater depth the dynamics between them.

Analyzing different previous studies on social media and public sphere we can see how on digital social networks both, the promotion of public debate (Anduiza et al., 2009; Ausserhofer & Maireder, 2013; Puigbò et al., 2014; Terren and Borge, 2021), as well as the strengthening of homophilic groups (Ausserhofer & Maireder, 2013; Bruns & Highfield, 2013; Colleoni, Rozza and Arvidsson, 2014; McPherson et al., 2001) coexist. Hence, it can be said that digital social media may be understood within this duality. The present research shows how this dichotomy can be observed regarding the analyzed Spanish media elite, as they presented both homophilic behaviors, as in the case of the types of accounts they followed, mostly media and political in the case of the Media Directors, following mostly Spanish accounts, behavior observed in both samples, or in the fact of the intensification of the account repetition during the electoral period. On the other hand, we found trends where they followed different accounts, and gave space to populations traditionally relegated by the media, as in the case of citizenship in the media sample and the case of women by the media directors.

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