

Political Journalism on *Twitter*: the election coverage in #CBAVota (Argentina, 2011)

Periodismo político en *Twitter*: la cobertura electoral en #CBAVota (Argentina, 2011)

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ABSTRACT

We analyzed the production routines of Córdoba's most influential journalists on *Twitter* during the municipal elections in Córdoba, Argentina on September 2011 in order to understand newsworthiness criteria, modes of gatekeeping and specific characteristics that separate the non-professional user from the journalists. By applying the virtual ethnography method and a semi-structured survey to a sample of 45 professionals, we concluded that *Twitter* reflects some features of conventional media information production routines, albeit within the frame of distinctive appropriations, as behaviors of self-promotion and self-reference, greater informality and also an interaction primarily implemented between colleagues.

Keywords: journalism 3.0, social networks, information routines, *Twitter*, elections, newsworthiness, gatekeeping, Argentina.

RESUMEN

Se analizan las rutinas de producción de los periodistas cordobeses más influyentes en *Twitter* durante las elecciones municipales realizadas en Córdoba, Argentina, en septiembre de 2011, con el objeto de comprender criterios de noticiabilidad, modos de *gatekeeping* y ciertas características identitarias que distinguen al periodista del usuario no profesional. Aplicando el método de la etnografía virtual y una encuesta semiestructurada a una muestra integrada por 45 profesionales, se advierte que en *Twitter* se reflejan características de las rutinas informativas propias de los medios convencionales, aunque en el marco de apropiaciones distintivas, como comportamientos de autopromoción y autorreferencialidad, mayor informalidad y una interacción prioritariamente desplegada entre colegas.

Palabras clave: periodismo 3.0, redes sociales, rutinas informativas, *Twitter*, elecciones, noticiabilidad, gatekeeping, Argentina.

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INTRODUCTION

In the context of the information society, where the processes of generation and transmission of information become sources of productivity and power (Castells, 2005), there are two phenomena which study is crucial in the understanding of the current conditions of the exercise of journalism: the mediatization of society and the new media ecosystem.

On the one hand, the mediatization of the processes of social mediation has become a process through which man internalizes culture, performing two functions: the construction of the individuality and the inclusion within society. In this sense, mediation is made via information and communication technologies (ICTs) that “are, on the one hand, both physical and psychological instruments, and on the other, tool and interactive pair, thus becoming instrumental and social meters” (Pardo Abril, 2009, p. 55), under which mediation has been transformed into media coverage. In societies where interaction usually occurs mediated by technology, the reality is constituted and re-elaborated from the mass communication media, while technological changes reconfigure their symbolic bases, re-signifying institutions and practices in the social change from one technology to another.

In the same vein, Hjarvard (2008) establishes that the influence of mass media in the intersubjective experience encompasses not only their ability to be located in the center of society and its institutional relationships, but also its “range of interpretive positions that give meaning to the social world” (Hjarvard, 28, p. 128). Mass media describe the world and provide categorical basic frameworks to apprehend it. And it is in this context that mediatization emerges as a global process, which includes but goes beyond the effects of mass media (Paz García, 2011). Thus appears the phenomenon of hyper information in a de-massified social media era, where information does not come only from journalists; a multipoint-multipoint, multidirectional and symmetrical model has emerged (Orihuela, 2002), in which users have access to servers where lies the information and communicate with each other using the same system with which they access the media.

As a consequence of the above, the new media ecosystem is currently deployed as part of an internal contradiction. Audiences have access to information through unlimited channels and from around the world

via the Internet, a meta-media, but in turn segmentation powers to unsuspected limits, since it is the user who creates its own media ecosystem. As stated by Castells (2005), “although media are interconnected on a global scale and the programs and messages circulate in the global network, we are not living in a global village, but in individual chalets, globally produced and distributed locally” (p. 374). In this context of mediatization and transformation of social communication, the widespread use of social networks has expanded as a new way of socializing, consuming information and entertainment, becoming one of the main factors of change, rupture, and evolution in the field of digital journalism. Considering online social networks as “services based on the web that allow their users to interact, share information, coordinate actions and, in general, keep in touch” (Orihuela, 2008, p. 2), from the perspective of the present work it is important to distinguish the English term “social media” from the term “social network”, a concept that in Spanish has a polysemic character and greater sociological load. In this field, social structure, connectivity and communication appear as concomitant issues with the possibility of integrating virtual communities called “social networks”. Thus, “being in a technologically more developed social network but without the friends/contacts means nothing, because the power in this case lies in its users, in information, and not in the social network” (Díaz Gandasegui, 2011, p. 8). Social networks are the places where people build their identity (Cavallin, 2009), satisfying needs of encounter and representing spaces where they can share and distribute information in different formats, and favoring the collective construction of content. In this regard, at least two justifications emerge on the motives to interact in them (Bowman & Willis, 2003): on the one hand stands the need to belong and be part, creating communities; on the other hand, people also participate to obtain social recognition and approval.

While social networks have so many utilities and functions as the user gives them, for this research the relevant fact is that today they operate significantly as conveying channels of journalistic information generated and obtained from other sources and media, both traditional and digital. In this sense, we can observe that currently “the media need to create contexts where their audiences can interact with the

environment and other users, where people feel the space as theirs, as a place of belonging and of community and personal reference” (Said Hung, Serrano Tellería, García de Torres, Yezerska & Calderón, 2013, p. 75). So much so that for Varela (2005), journalism enters a stage marked by the socialization of information, resembling a highly dynamic conversation during which the message changes. In the same vein, Noguera Vivo (2013) analyzes the ambient journalism around social networks, understood as the social environment where the news are a collective process rather than a product, in the framework of activities of citizens and journalists that today challenge the traditional experience of journalism.

POLITICS AND POLITICAL JOURNALISM IN SOCIAL NETWORKS

As contemporary expansion of the Internet and new information and communication technologies (NICTs) challenge the modalities of existing knowledge, interaction, and human agency, its gravitation in public space necessarily leads to discuss its impact on the forms that take both political power and social communication, in the framework of contemporary democracies.

On the one hand, social networks join the contemporary media ecosystem more as a complementary circuit to the news offered by mass media than an alternative one. The social impact of the messages broadcasted on these networks is effective when they are reproduced by mass media, considering at least three circumstances by which traditional (conventional) media and their digital versions continue to maintain their hegemony. In first place, and considering that social networks face barriers of technology access (educational and economic) for a broad social penetration, the massive remains an almost exclusive condition of television, radio and printed or digital media with larger population reach. Second, information posted on social networks in an informal or custom mode precise a systematic check-up and deep research, both professional journalism tools that remain crucial to ensure their reliability. Third, the quality of the contents published in mass media would have a lower degree of fragmentation and its editing process would ensure superior information quality, with the possibility of bringing added value within the framework of social processes of formation of opinion and agenda.

Specifically in the case of *Twitter*, De la Torre and Dillón (2012) note that this social network boom in Argentina occurred on 2010, as “the support that had more impact on journalistic and political fields” (p. 66). In a contemporary research based on semi-structured interviews to a dozen of Argentinean journalists of the national’s largest-circulation media, specialized in political issues, the authors include brevity, instantaneity, multiplicity of broadcasters and interactivity as significant advantages of *Twitter* compared to another popular social network like Facebook, which—as said by the interviewed professionals— “is not a source of daily information”, as it is confined to more intimate interpersonal ties, which respond to “another profile of people” and other uses (p. 67). At the same time, and as a strong criticism of the informative potential of *Twitter*, they indicate the “unidirectional” condition in which messages are reproduced within this network, considering that “an ordinary citizen follows a politician or a journalist, but the politician and the journalist do not follow ordinary citizens” (p. 67). This breaks the illusions of horizontality and democratization of communication between experts and amateurs, from content that is often essentially propaganda.

On the other hand, and regarding the influence of these new platforms of communication in the existing forms of political participation, the concentrated use of *Twitter* by a sector of high socioeconomic status in the context of a lack of interest by the daily monitoring of policy issues, would question the extent of its impact: “access is not synonymous with use—point of De La Torre & Dillón (2012)—: there are few users who use social networks to participate politically” (p. 69). However, social networks “generate conversations and function as resonance boxes on various topics” and when facing political processes such as an election, “interact, share and promote various dynamics, according to the type of voters and their level of participation in traditional public spaces”, say Meyer, Cortés, Ahuactzin and Ríos (2013, p. 93, note 1, referring to a 2012 Warkentin column). Promptly in the case of *Twitter*, this network brings public visibility to themes and political actors, altering the condition of exclusivity that news scoops had before its existence, although without challenging the vertical flow of social production of information propitiated both from political discourse and the journalistic field.

However, in the same way that the journalist is not a mere intermediary between information and the audience, and must assume a professional interpretative position facing political reality, the phenomenon of social communication exceeds the journalistic function. In the political field, never exempt from ideological conflicts, social networks could play a “virtuous” function of public broadcasting of issues relevant to individuals or different social groups: regarding *Twitter* in particular, Fernández Torres & Paniagua Rojano (2014) observe how “aware of the viral ability of this network, planetary leaders possess official accounts and many social movements have profiles on that net” (p. 9). However and from a critical perspective of this virtual participation, social networks impose specific languages, formats and rhythms that inevitably influence the expression of political ideas. Thus, Trejo Delarbre (2012) warns how argument, a basic requirement of an ideas discussion, does not find adequate space within the *Twitter* format, while the diffusion of messages occurs in an unequal way: even when every user has the same opportunity to post messages, the amount of followers finally determines the possibility of being read. In this disparity, the author acknowledges a structural feature of mass media, equally manifest in conventional media.

Finally, and turning specifically to the impact of the expansion of social networks on contemporary journalistic routines, it is also worth mentioning the redefinition of codes, times and spaces of everyday interaction spaces that involves the assumption of these new communication formats. On the one hand, the market demand is directed toward a profile of journalist “with versatile technological specialization in multimedia” (Túñez López, Martínez Solana & Abejón Mendoza, 2010, p. 92), demanded more than in the past to incorporate on a daily basis participatory feedback offered by diverse audiences (consumers, experts, competition, among others). On the other hand, while the agenda topics are updated in increasingly shorter cycles, the journalist is forced to produce messages at the same speed as his audiences, while retaining the professional criteria to decide what news is. In this selective task, political editors are aware that nowadays “monitoring the contents of social networks (especially *Twitter*) becomes an essential part of the work routine” (Humanes,

Humanes, Martínez Nicolás & Saperas Lapiedra, 2013, p. 727). Thus, it is warned how transformations enabled in consumers from the possibilities offered by NICTs and social networks run in parallel to the emerging professional changes in the field of journalism, being both spaces –altogether and in their feedback relationship– which require an evolution of the news content.

@JOURNALISTS Y #NEWS: THE CHALLENGE OF FORMING AUDIENCE BY INTEGRATING COMMUNITIES

Nine years¹ after its inception, *Twitter* has generated a communicative model that responds to the parameters established by the web 2.0 and social networks, which could be defined from four characteristics: simplicity, speed, mobility and community. Simplicity manifests itself, first, on the fact that the *Twitter* site is simple and intuitive to use, with few functions: writing messages, including the possibility of responding to tweets, retweet² others content and follow users. In addition, this simplicity translates into concision. Users have a maximum of 140 characters³ to synthesize the idea, information or feeling they wish to communicate, but may extend this intervention through the use of hashtags and links. A second feature that turned *Twitter* into a powerful media is its speed, typical of a fast culture (Cavallin, 2009) making its communicative model synchronic, since it works under a temporality where publication and reading times tend to coincide. While this turns it into a viral environment that facilitates rapid circulation and multiplication of messages, it should be pointed out that these contents are fleeting and, if not stored, their presence is limited to the followers’ timeline, which usually does not exceed some seconds.

On the other hand, *Twitter* is a social network platform, i.e. “an application with which you can interact from messaging clients, email, SMS, web browsers and their extensions, desktop computers, laptops, netbooks, tablets, mobile phones and social networks” (Orihuela, 2002, p. 33). Thus, the most faithful –and consistent with the characteristics and the spirit of this social network– use is the one performed from the mobility both in production and consumption, through the articulation between messaging and website environment.

Another feature of this network is its community character, in which the form of communication is set within the framework of “a set of communities and relationships defined by each user” (Orihuela, 2002, p. 33). Unlike most social networks, *Twitter* model is asymmetric, since a user’s consent is not necessary to be able to follow him. Also, and because of that, there is no predetermination about content or publishable genres, on *Twitter* each user understands its utility to its own measure, according to the virtual world that he creates. So, *Twitter* has become of strategic use in the communication of news and information and journalists have appropriated it in the framework of the routines of the media where they work.

While *Twitter* also represents a ludic platform and that doubts about the reliability of the information place in it have aroused, “more and more journalists are using *Twitter* as part of their news gathering process (...) and there are many people who embrace it because they know that it connects them with their audience and offers them clues and tips that often overtake wires” (Brewer, 2009, cited in Cobos, 2010).

However, considering the characteristics that give origin and structure to those social networks where information and entertainment are permanently mixed to the user’s desire, the participants of the network built their own mechanism for following-up information flows. So, it is the community that every user creates which will determine the experience that he will get from the social network: “the key to *Twitter* is not only limited to achieve a large number of followers, but from following the right people (...) with which information comes to us” (Crucianelli, 2010, cited in Cobos, 2010, p. 5-6). On the other hand, in this social network it is possible to be in contact with multiple sources, find out before traditional mass media of certain early alerts, conduct interviews and consultations in a direct way to different personalities and capture in real time multiple coverage. Also, its use by journalists transcends the production and communication of information: any professional can build his profile and public image, create a brand and gain adherents, outside the scope of the media in which he works. As a result, the journalist can leverage *Twitter* as a platform to present information or topics that cannot be treated where he works.

Within the social network, the journalist has the challenge of generating a distinctive brand, beyond

“the global ability to post that anyone with connection to Internet has in the web 2.0 or literacy web” (Lara Padilla, 2010, p. 98). In a “remix culture” users “do things with things”, entering into dialogue with the information they receive, and so, the opportunity of “happen telling” produces a double phenomenon: in addition to reporting, journalists open their private life to social networks, while “not journalists” use them both for telling details of their intimate life and transmitting information. In this regard, Lara Padilla observes “an effort within the personal self-representations to look professional, as happens in the field of personal branding, while professional is disguised of personal to look closer, more direct, more credible and more independent” (p. 98). Within the new media ecosystem, the journalist is forced to abandon his role of equidistant mediator “to be an actor that oscillates between the invisibility of the pit and the drama on stage” (p. 87). As a result, both their news production routines and the editor or gatekeeper, among other functions, accuse the impact of these transformations.

The extended use of networks in general, and of *Twitter* in particular, leads to a reformulation of the media landscape and the way of consuming information. At the same time that social networks are incorporated into the information routine of an important part of the population, that relies on the criterion of selection of the community with which they identify, the media are forced to acquire the logic of social networks not only by entering them, building profiles and forming community, but also making their websites friendly to them –the incorporation of Facebook and *Twitter* buttons in every story of news websites clearly illustrates this convergence to which the media were compelled. Thus, the impact of social networks in the information field would mark the beginning of a new stage of “journalism 3.0 as a news production paradigm, which will without doubt materialize both in the introduction of new journalistic routines and in the adjustment or reconfiguration of existing practices.

In the described context and for this work, the theory of newsmaking as a socio-communicative perspective attentive to the conditions that make an event becomes news recovers effectiveness, highlighting the impact of factors both internal and external to the work of journalists, which operate by defining newsworthiness values. Within news production routines, these crite-

ria function as standards of professional reference and commercial competition, in addition to become guides for the selection of the available material and the way of presenting it (Balbín, 2008). In the specific case of *Twitter*, derivations of the newsmaking theory, such as studies of gatekeeping, allow to recognize the permanence of certain structures of hierarchy and authority in the selection process that crosses both the search and dissemination of news information. For example, tracking hashtags and retweet of messages from the users might be a second level of filtering, after journalists and media selection criteria (Canavilhas, 2011). This way, users have a second gatekeeping based on the content that their communities recommend, under parameters that do not necessarily coincide with previous editorial criteria.

Finally, and agreeing with Orihuela (2002) that if in the future *Twitter* disappeared its social impact would remain, since “it has changed the way we understand and practice the network communication” (p. 22), the following question arises: How were the municipal elections of September 18, 2011 covered by the most influential journalists in the city of Córdoba via *Twitter*? Based on this question, two specific objectives are set:

- a) Identifying the characteristic of the cordovan journalist influential on *Twitter* and his/her news production. Recognizing those professional identity features that distinguish him/her from the amateur user.
- b) Understanding the criteria of newsworthiness on *Twitter* and how the process of gatekeeping within this social network is produced, recognizing similarities and differences regarding the traditional journalistic production routines.

METHODOLOGY

Between existing social networks, *Twitter* was chosen considering that its communicative model entails important changes within the journalistic world. As discussed previously, it is observed that appropriation made by mass media, and particularly by journalists, of *Twitter* is producing a radical change in the communicative-informative industry.

First of all, *Twitter* is public, since anyone can read posts by any user; you don't need to follow

someone to gain access to their information and, in fact, it is not necessary to own a registered account to be able to read what a user says. Second, studies performed on journalists and media workers⁴ have concluded that these professionals prefer *Twitter* over Facebook to perform tasks in their daily work, such as contact sources, monitor trends, get quotation of personalities or characters, interact with the audience and publish content. Another reason why *Twitter* was selected is that in this micro blogging network were firstly announced many of the most relevant news facts in the world⁵, providing it with journalistic importance as source of scoops and latest information.

On the other hand, it should be noted that this research work is based on the production of Cordovan journalists posted in their personal *Twitter* accounts. This decision was taken since most of the tweets published by the media that use *Twitter* are their news headlines with the link to their website, which shows that their presence on *Twitter* occurs mainly to pull traffic to their respective web pages. In contrast, journalists on *Twitter* generate a new way of doing journalism using it as a place to contact sources, detect problems or trends, tell about the development of a story, make real time coverage of various events, among other functions. So, *Twitter* offers the possibility of integrating environments where “journalists and citizens who inform and get informed coexist, in an eternal conflict between the personal and the professional, and in parallel, between the private and the public” (Lara Padilla, 2010, p. 98).

THE POPULATION AND PRACTICES OBJECT OF STUDY

This research focused on the production of those professionals who, during the period considered (September 2011), comply with certain specific criteria that would make them subjects of the studied population. To do this, we started with a total of 272 *Twitter* accounts collected from different sources, such as public and private rankings of Córdoba users, Córdoba media lists, etc.; and on this initial group was neatly applied a sequence of cutbacks. Thus, to constitute the specific subset of the more influential Cordovan journalists on *Twitter*, the participants shared the following attributes: self-identify as journalists, working in the city

of Córdoba to local mass media in general or political information and be influential in the social network. Below is the specific content of each distinctive axis:

- **Self-identification as journalists:** since *Twitter* is home to journalists and people who have other occupations, activities and communicative interest, but which also share information, we selected only those users who in their *Twitter* account bio⁶ self-define as such.
- **From Córdoba:** *Twitter* is a global media, so journalists from all over the world can be found. To be able to assess local routines we chose those accounts of journalists whose location (within their account profile) specified they lived in Córdoba, Argentina, or those whose bio expressed working for a mass media of this city.
- **Working in local mass media:** considering that the case of analysis is the election coverage conducted by local journalists on *Twitter*, aiming to distinguish their professionalized activities of other users during a political event of high visibility as it is a municipal election, we selected accounts of journalists who in their bio said to work to some Córdoba mass media in order to observe how is the performance on *Twitter* of professionals who carry out similar activities in conventional media and assess the impact of different institutional memberships in the news production within that network.
- **Dedicated to political or general information:** to meet this criterion, it was necessary to resort to some indirect indicators, since not all journalists specified in their *Twitter* profiles to work in these areas (assuming them almost tacitly as naturalized objects of the profession), but they did delimit other areas of professional intervention. As a result, we adopted a supplementary criterion, discarding those journalists who in their bios stated to work in an informative area different from politics, general interest, citizens or sections/segments of coverage of the election campaign.
- **With influence:** considering this social network characteristics that determine who is influential and who is not, those journalists who could be influential by exogenous criteria, such as, for example, seniority in the profession, or the public or insti-

tutional recognition of their local career do not constitute subjects for this research. Thus, the criterion of influence was determined strategically, valuing together three criteria: first, a Klout index score of approximated 40 points, to include a reliable measure and a lower degree of arbitrariness which could be interpreted in a complementary way with previously established criteria; second, a historic volume of tweets registered at the time of field work not less than 400; and third, over 200 followers, as parameters that would be evaluated again in relation to the previous selection criteria.

It is important to point out that Klout is an external application to *Twitter* that measures the influence of each user in the network, through a scoring system consisting of a scale that ranges from 1 to 100. It is a complex formula made up of a series of algorithms that assess different parameters, such as the number of followers (and whether they are real or inactive accounts or spam), the reciprocity with people that is followed, the influence of those who retweet the messages, and so on. In this ranking, average users often reach a value below 40 points, while public figures get higher scores. Even though today there are alternative tools (eg. Tweetgrader, Twitalyzer, Kred, among others), attempting to overcome certain criticisms received by Klout –focused on the relative effectiveness of any attempt to measure a human and social phenomenon such as “influence”– at the time of fieldwork for this research (2011) Klout was considered the most prestigious and easily accessible free service of this type. Among its advantages there is still the possibility of obtaining a clear and well defined map of influence along with the feasibility of integrating this service with other web applications and a permanent search for methodological evolution from new strategies of evaluation of real extent, probability of amplification and ability to motivate others to action.

After applying the explained criteria, the target population was 45 journalists (16.54% of the total collected *Twitter* accounts), belonging to different local media companies, in order to provide certain heterogeneity to this sample composition. Likewise and regarding the two phases of the research process, that will be explained in detail in the following section, during the first stage of virtual ethnography it was possible to reach 100% of this target population, complying with

the analysis of the public *Twitter* profiles of the 45 listed professionals, while during the second phase, corresponding to the population survey, this rate decreased to 66.67%, considering that only 30 of the 45 selected cases answered it.

PERIOD AND CORPUS OF ANALYSIS

The media coverage was retrieved from the tweets published by the more influential Cordovan journalists on *Twitter*, during the municipal elections in the city of Córdoba, occurred in September 2011. In this context, it should be noted that the different electoral processes⁷ that occurred in the same year were the first political events to reach massive coverage on *Twitter* since this became a fairly massive social network in Argentina⁸.

On the other hand, the work focused on municipal elections⁹, with the idea of establishing an effective territorial basis for an in-depth analysis, since if national or provincial processes were selected it would have been necessary to identify journalists from all regions, generating a corpus too extensive and complex to approach. These municipal elections took place on September 18, 2011, resulting winner the formula Ramón Javier Mestre – Marcelo Cossar, of Unión Cívica Radical, with 36% of the votes, beating Olga Ruitort (Alianza Fuerza de la Gente) and Héctor Campana (Unión por Córdoba), which obtained the second and third place, respectively.

As a temporary framework to observe electoral press coverage we chose the weeks preceding and following the day of the elections. This decision derived from previous studies (Paz García & González, 2011; Paz García, 2013) where it is verified that those fifteen days involve the greatest amount of news related to this political event. Almost uniformly, in these studies was corroborated a correspondence between this two weeks and editions with the highest density in number of words used in headlines, headings, and first paragraphs. Also, whereas the present is an exploratory research, we consider the possibility of finding differences in the extent and pace of this intensive phase in the case of *Twitter*, since in previous studies media coverage was addressed based on the press, whose media logic certainly presents particularities that distinguish it from social networks.

COLLECTION TECHNIQUES AND DATA ANALYSIS

In this research we opted for the development of an analytical triangulation strategy, using complementary more than one technique for the collection and information analysis, in order to capture different dimensions of the researched problem and provide the results obtained with precision and depth. Thus, we decided on a mixed research design “mixing simultaneous or parallel qualitative and quantitative approaches throughout all phases” (Rodríguez Sabiote, Pozo Llorente & Gutiérrez Pérez, 2006, p. 294). Based on a situational and descriptive study of communicative routines and public profiles of selected journalists, the analysis is then moved to the characteristics of its coverage on *Twitter* during the electoral process, incorporating their individual responses to a survey applied to a deepening or second initiation of the investigation.

In a first stage, using the method of virtual ethnography, we observed attributes and properties shared by the selected group in quantitative terms, to then delve into the interpretive analysis of the election tweets produced by them, seeking to understand how *Twitter* was used in a journalistic level, how they interacted with other users and how they used the tools provided by the network. Although traditionally the newsmaking studies used a participant observation technique (López, Blanco, Scandroglio & Rasskin Gutman, 2010), it should be noted that, in the case studied, the presence of the researcher in a newsroom would have little use. *Twitter* is characterized by the possibility they users have of carrying out journalistic coverage and announce news at all hours, added to the fact that most of the tweets that are part of the corpus of this research often were performed outside of the newsroom and regular working hours of the journalists. For this reason, virtual ethnography as a specific scientific tool is adopted to address web phenomena.

Ethnography is a method of research which, within the framework of cultural anthropology, focuses on the analytical description of scenery and cultural groups. This technique, applied to the Internet, has been used to study different types of communities through the involvement of the researcher in them, as a method whose “goal is not only to study the uses of the Internet, but also social practices online and

how these practices are significant for the people” (Ardèvol, Bertrán, Callén & Pérez, 2003, p. 73). Thus, one of its main characteristics is that technological mediation is present during the entire process, both in participant observation and registration and construction of the data, i.e., “there is no apparent distance or transformation between behavior and its registration, as they both are made of textual interaction” (Ardèvol et al. 2003, p. 76). In this regard, the object of study of this work is neither in the text that we see on screen, nor behind it, being drawn from a heuristic feedback between the research experience and the systematic recording of practices on *Twitter* of the journalists studied during the stipulated period of election coverage. In this regard, there are not prior categories that guide the observation of hypothetical-deductive mode, but on the contrary, a process of inductive interpretive research and based in the constant comparative method (Sarlé, 2005) used as a strategy for recording and analysis in accordance with the foundations of the theory founded on data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, in Soneira, 2006). Under this logic of inquiry, we proceed to the identification of substantive categories and to an open coding of their fundamental properties, seeking for a “theoretical saturation” point as an indication of significant regularities.

In a second phase we applied a population survey built on the basis of the information accumulated from the previous stage, in order to bring accuracy to the analysis considering how journalists described and interpreted individually their communication on *Twitter*. The survey consisted of four sections – personal data, information about connectivity and Internet use, *Twitter* employment data and opinion about the journalistic use of *Twitter* during a period of election coverage– and consisted of a text file sent directly to the email accounts of the selected journalists, involving commitment to download it, complete it and forward it by the participants, along with the maintenance of their responses under conditions of confidentiality and anonymity as the obligation of the researcher. Thus, evaluating the individual perceptions of 30 of the 45 members of the objective population that responded to this instrument on the journalistic-electoral using of *Twitter*, it was possible to deepen the analysis of certain differences and sig-

nificant similarities regarding traditional information routines.

RESULTS

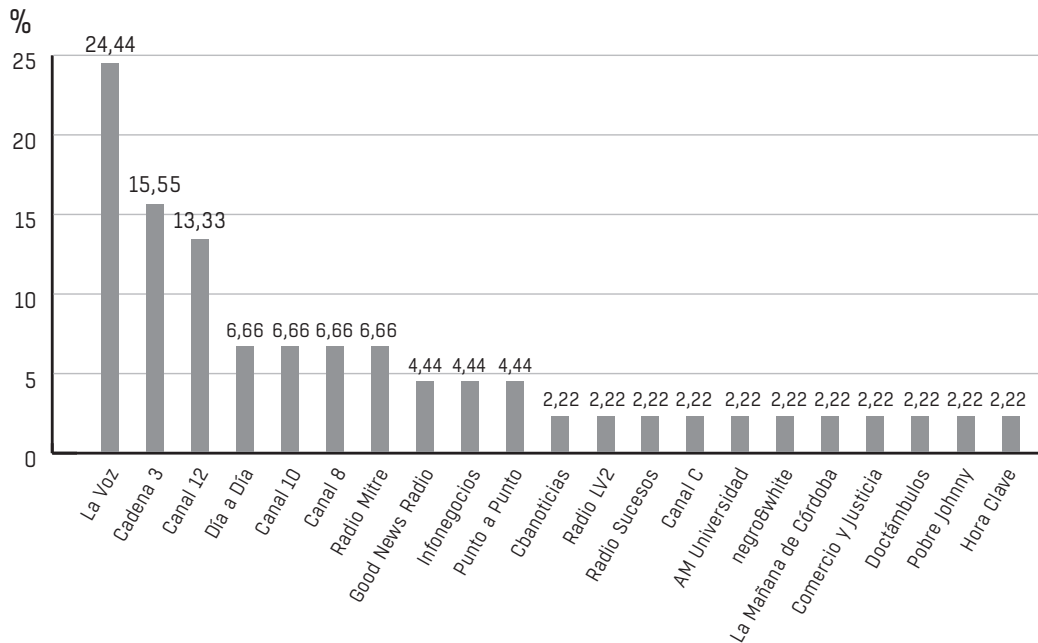
The following is a synthesis of the main results of research on the profile and the evident routines on *Twitter* of the studied journalists. In this regard and for a more orderly reading of the collected data, we reversed the chronological order of the fieldwork phases (ethnography-survey), beginning with a general description of the socio-demographic profile of the participants in the first section (“Profile of the cordovan journalist...”), to then advance in the specifics of their way to interact and communicate during election coverage within the last two sections (“Criteria of newsworthiness...”, and Gatekeeping in *Twitter*...).

PROFILE OF THE CORDOVAN JOURNALIST ON TWITTER

Regarding their socio-demographic profile, based on the process of surveys we established that among the studied Cordovan journalists dominate men, in their thirty-something, with university studies, singles, who tend to remain online¹⁰ and work in only one media, generally dominant or leader of the local market, considering that –as it can be seen in chart 1– 66.64% works in companies corporately related to the Clarín Group (such is the case of the newspaper La Voz del Interior and Día a Día, the television signal Canal 12 and AM radio frequencies Cadena 3 and Mitre).

Considering that 75.55% of the most influential on *Twitter* Cordovan journalists are men, two possible readings are imposed based on these data. In the first place, it would be male journalists who to a greater extent or more often turn over their work in this social network, managing to achieve greater influence. Second, this male predominance might indicate that certain asymmetric structural patterns of the journalism job market are reproduced on *Twitter*. According to the project for monitoring global media (Proyecto de Monitoreo Global de Medios, 2010), in the year 2010 women journalists made 37% of the news spread in the world and occupied 34.4% of the jobs in the areas of production and newspaper design. In the same direction¹¹, the global report on the status of women in the media made by International Women’s Media Foundation in 2011 says that men

Chart 1. Local media companies where most influential on *Twitter* Cordovan journalists devoted to political information work



Source: Own elaboration.

occupy 74.1% of the senior management positions and 71.3% of the intermediate hierarchy positions in journalistic enterprises, while in the professional technical area women have only 26.8% of the jobs. In Argentina, the project for monitoring global media 2010, national report, stipulates that hard subjects are presented or treated by men journalists: they are in charge of 60% of the news of politics and government, 71% of economy and 61% of those referring to crimes and violence. Also, news sources are men in 65% of cases. On the proportion of gender in media, the graphic format is the more egalitarian, by having 49% of women, while television is the most unequal, with just 17%¹².

Also, expanding the analysis of the institutional membership of the studied journalists and recalling that three-quarters of them demonstrated to perform work in only one media, it is interesting to contextualize this data with the average time in their work: between five and ten years for 48.28% and more than one decade for 34.48%. This, in principle, would indirectly indicate that these pro-

fessionals have journalistic production routines already incorporated into their daily work, considering that the continuity of several years in their jobs gives them the possibility to both apprehend them and generate them in the context of their respective roles and tasks.

On the other hand, even though none of the reporters was defined as “digital”, there was a presence of characteristics and professional routines where Internet is confirmed as a fundamental and essential part of their journalistic work. Thus 80% of the studied professional connects every day to the Internet –both from their work as in their home– as 43.33% do so throughout the day, using the web as the main tool of production and dissemination of information, meeting the three phases of the news production theory (news-gathering, newsmaking and newsreporting). Also, while half of the professionals say that they have learned to use *Twitter* without any course or aid –appropriating this social network and other new technologies instinctively and self-taught–, seven out of ten participated in the election coverage using a smartphone and thus fulfilling one of the central features of this social network, “mobility” (Orihuela, 2002, w/p).

Finally, and regarding the use of *Twitter* within routines of work fulfilled on a daily basis, between the conventions forming part of this negotiated order corresponding to the production area in the journalistic field, it was possible to recognize the validity of some guidelines adapted and incorporated as external standards (Pereira, 2010). Thus, it is possible to observe how, in the new construction or upgrading of informational routines that occurs within the social networks and because of its effect, this role is fulfilled by some regulations for using *Twitter* set by traditional mass media, in relation to their *Twitter* active journalists. In the case of Córdoba, only three companies imposed this type of guidelines: Cadena 3, La Voz del Interior and Día a Día, although only some of the journalists working in these local media reported so. Within the framework of these rules, there are policies to engage with other *Twitter* users –as trying to avoid confrontations– and behaviors related to the news as substantial journalistic product –such as the guideline that the scoops obtained in working hours should be communicated through official media account rather than the personal. Regarding this situation of regulation or attempt to control the social performance of their journalists by some media companies and the possible implications around the involvement of personal rights, even though globally this type of rules generates controversy, locally all respondents Cordovan journalists who indicated that their media stipulated rules for using *Twitter* were in favor of their establishment.

In addition, and on the use of this social network further than the journalistic field, journalists considered that *Twitter* is insufficient to be of great importance for the society in general, for different reasons. On the one hand, some respondents referred that the use of this network would not be sufficiently extended in our country, which contradicts with 2011 previously referenced data: Argentina is the third Latin American country with more *Twitter* accounts and the seventh in the world with greater scope of population online, even when this access only affects 18% of population. On the other hand, journalists pointed out that the usefulness of *Twitter* in our country would be reserved to a professional medium or high class, consistent with local investigations (Paz García, 2011), which found that

the use of Internet for political information shows a greater scope within the Latin American region as the level of education or socio-economic level of the audiences increases.

CRITERIA OF NEWSWORTHINESS: SELF-REFERENTIAL SELECTIVITY

From the point of view of its influence on *Twitter*, studied journalists presented a typically informer profile, replicating the characteristic of the more traditional or conventional mass media unidirectional model. In this regard and on the basis of the data summarized in table 1, we observed that 82.22% of these professionals have more followers than people they follow. In this context, through the process of virtual ethnography, we observe that they devote greater amount of tweets to send information than to interact with other users, answering more questions than asking them and displaying themselves as resources or authority over different issues.

Also, and particularly in the case of table 1, we can see that in the operation of the selection criteria set out in the previous methodological section, three cases (28, 37 and 45) of Cordovan journalists not amounting to a Klout score of 40 points were included, although they did meet the remaining parameters: amount of followers, tweets volume, self-definition, institutional belonging to local mass media, etc. It should be noted that simultaneous consideration of this multiple set of criteria for selecting the sample allowed to include very different cases of journalistic behavior within *Twitter*: while some journalists with most experience of intense use of the network and possessors of the highest Kscore recorded a number of followers lower than the average (for example, see case 2), there were other professionals with a more moderate trajectory, also with high Kscore, although in the context of a much more significant number of followers (such is the case of the user number 10, which has a volume of followers six times higher than the average).

Secondly and in connection with the multimedia character tacitly assumed by nearly 50% of the surveyed journalists (regarding the behavior of staying connected all day and recognizing Internet as a main tool of their work, issues mentioned in the previous

Table 1. Twitter production data of journalists selected during the analyzed election coverage

Nº	User	Entry date	Historical tweets	Klout Score	Followers	Followed	Tweets during the coverage	
							Total	Electoral
1	maximotell	28-10-2009	35980	69	2768	2182	624	5
2	gron	06-07-2007	15144	57	1353	346	380	2
3	DEMIANEDIAZ	02-04-2010	11514	60	893	739	836	6
4	jperotti	08-05-2008	7525	61	3698	1004	245	51
5	MJVillalobo	31-10-2010	7432	60	798	479	423	5
6	pablogvaldes	05-03-2010	7172	52	836	650	258	14
7	fcocenteno	23-09-2010	6902	51	930	325	273	56
8	MjimeD	22-05-2009	6545	49	899	318	167	1
9	canquismith	01-06-2010	6251	51	620	949	347	0
10	latessio	02-09-2010	6243	67	12466	355	305	0
11	robleddiego	23-09-2010	5924	51	1185	556	350	44
12	DiegoMarconetti	04-06-2009	5829	52	1475	550	175	59
13	elpepereyna	02-06-2010	5551	54	1374	1489	241	54
14	MaxDelupi	10-07-2007	4979	56	2605	1253	132	5
15	chatran	11-04-2007	4866	46	1499	604	63	4
16	pabloirossi	28-06-2009	4781	63	8695	661	90	1
17	Lisandrocordoba	20-02-2009	4407	45	1777	634	42	17
18	gdelupi	29-09-2008	4082	42	1302	625	116	3
19	JMGonzalez30	02-06-2010	4077	51	1049	253	185	74
20	vickyferreyra	20-06-2010	4047	49	989	199	152	3
21	Agustinavivanco	15-04-2010	3540	48	859	383	123	14
22	ftolchinsky	06-07-2009	3361	53	2526	226	133	43
23	GerardoLopez	16-09-2008	2999	57	4748	76	124	9
24	andres_oliva	28-05-2010	2953	47	729	933	213	3
25	JoseBusaniche	15-08-2007	2744	43	630	247	130	12
26	juancsimo	31-10-2008	2649	43	1339	724	39	2
27	danicurtino	15-10-2010	2628	39	325	89	11	0
28	MarianoNievas	17-09-2010	2256	47	802	716	67	8
29	FLAVIALOCUTORA	15-07-2010	1889	52	1966	361	151	4
30	silviaperezruiz	20-06-2010	1568	45	1207	307	70	6
31	ssuppo	05-06-2009	1486	54	2373	554	93	41
32	pamelamolero	14-01-2010	1421	44	280	459	200	0
33	battaglino	25-06-2009	1358	61	2719	530	34	19
34	JuanTurello	25-06-2009	1158	40	2433	323	38	2
35	mmcardarelli	15-04-2009	1109	42	641	478	52	0
36	chinososa	26-09-2008	1103	45	377	346	41	0
37	CaioLamberti	12-02-2011	1027	40	211	446	46	15
38	juanpgcba	28-07-2010	887	39	414	89	48	1
39	plaulanmartinez	17-02-2011	832	54	795	919	93	36
40	VeronicaSuppo	21-05-2010	800	52	1516	573	207	88
41	PabloVottero	28-04-2011	730	40	76	168	91	1
42	fredybustos	07-12-2009	683	52	308	188	130	9
43	julicanias	04-10-2010	562	47	963	457	32	12
44	jpviola2000	25-07-2009	500	43	525	187	29	3
45	pablodlv	22-10-2008	412	32	216	335	16	0
Cantidades Totales			199906				7615	732
Cantidades Promedio				46,89	1693,09	539,67	169,22	16,27
<i>Fuente: Elaboración propia.</i>								

Figure 1. Example of electoral *Tweet* with a photo taken by the journalist

Fuente: Corpus de tuits recolectado en fase intensiva de la cobertura electoral municipal.

section), within the corpus of tweets it is observed that only 15.55% of the produced messages corresponded with a 'multimedia' journalistic attitude, as it is taking photographs of an event to instantly upload them to the social network. While such messages represent a minority within the corpus, this behavior stands as an attitude of digital journalist's coverage, in the sense of the example of treatment presented in figure 1.

Also and before beginning to describe what were the criteria of newsworthiness retrieved from *Twitter* by this research, is noteworthy that only 9.6% of the messages (732 from a total of 7.615 according to data reported in table 1) issued by journalists during the intensive phase of coverage were "election tweets" in the strict sense, i.e. tweets that made explicit, formal or informal, reference to the electoral act, the campaign, politicians, election coverage, voting, counting, among other specific issues related to the theme of the 2011 municipal elections. This figure illustrates the reduced space that this event had at the *Twitter* agenda, where the prevailing criteria was the self-reference, shown in

the marked disposition of the media discourse to refer to itself or to the competition, in a context of journalistic production where transmitter and referent tend to coincide on circular themes that even relegate to the background the conventional media agenda issues, as in the studied case. In this sense, media "adopt as a reference of communication communication itself, to the point of setting up a media reality, artificial, autonomous and oversized, with broad resonance in the modes of knowing, feel or imagine" (Barranquero Carretero, 2012, p. 244). This self-reference was observed at least in three main ways.

First, this condition manifested in the operation of a network of contacts among colleagues who know and trust each other, allowing them to interact professional and informally in simultaneous. Proof of this is that 47.10% of the mentions that studied actors performed was to other journalists, frequently aimed at adding curious notes, relax and joke with colleagues, as shown in the following example, where two journalists are informally interacting in a relax way in Figure 2.

Figure 2. Ejemplo de tuit autorreferente de carácter informal



Source: Tweets corpus collected during the intensive phase of municipal election coverage.

Second, we detected that journalists in traditional media were the main sources of information mentioned. In this regard, it was observed that retweet was the most common interaction between journalists –69.79% of retweets was made to journalists, 21.48% to general public and 8.72% to media accounts–, demonstrating an important level of trust in their colleagues information or analysis, to the point of appropriating them by using the formula “via @user” to quote a journalist, media or program.

Third, it should be noted that nine out of every ten links published by the journalists studied belonged to a local mass media, which shows that, like the average user, journalists choose conventional media as a source of priority information. In this context, newspapers would continue being more effective agenda setters in the field of political news, taking into account that LaVoz.com.ar was the most referred website: of the 63 shared links, nine of the eleven that were replicated by more than one journalist belonged to the online version of that newspaper.

Finally, self-reference was also evident in the fact that journalism and journalists themselves became topics of agenda. The relieved corpus shows that journalists speak constantly of journalists and journalism, both formally and informally: for example, during election coverage journalists set as an important theme the backstage of their work, even adding

photographs. I.e., they and their work became a subject worthy to share communally, in a most dedicated way than the one given to political or electoral news issues. This confirms that in social networks what is important is to happen telling and that, in that sense, journalism seeks to personalize the information and introduced itself socially, showing what formerly was reserved to those who had access to the news “kitchen”. Local access to *Twitter* keeps actors and privileged relations between followers and followed, although receiving some share of spontaneity and immediacy in shared messages. I.e. the agenda of themes opens while still keeping within an area controlled by the journalistic and political elites, both favorite users of this community, at least in Argentina (De la Torre & Dillón, 2012).

On the other hand, regarding the content of the news we can observe that, as happens with the press election coverage (Paz García & González, 2011), candidates most often mentioned in the corpus match which were at the top of the polls and voting intention polls. In addition, we detected that the other candidates were only named by a particular fact –such is the case of the curious intervention of Jorge Agüero¹³ in the debate– in contrast to characters and organizations that took over much of the news, monopolizing the *Twitter* media agenda of 2011 elections. It is seen how neophytes on the

Figure 3. "Official" hashtag of the local election coverage on Twitter



Source: Tweets corpus collected during the intensive phase of municipal election coverage.

political stage manage to become news (Valderrama, 2006) by making themselves noteworthy by a more or less public act.

GATEKEEPING ON TWITTER: PERSONALISM AND INSTITUTIONAL IDEOLOGY

In relation to gatekeeping, we can observe that even though the journalist is the owner of what he publishes in his tweets, information also passes through the dissemination and publication of people's different hierarchical levels which play the role of gatekeepers. Such is the case of those who tweet on behalf of the media where they work and are governed by the guidelines that they set regarding the use of the social network. In accordance with 46.67% of respondents than in the previous phase pointed out that they send messages on their behalf or "on behalf of their media" depending on what tweet it is, the use of hashtags during coverage as tweeting guidelines of the informational content identified by the community as significant or important messages should be noted. The most commonly used hashtag was #CBAVota, since 91.67% of professionals who used this tool opted to accompany their tweets with it. It should be noted that most (77.27%) used it only on the day of the election and none did so the following days. The example below shows that one journalist of the sample published a tweet indicating that #CBAVota would be the "official" hashtag of elections, showing that there was some level of coordination among journalists to use the same hashtag, then used by other members of the social network.

In addition to #CBAVota there was not another hashtag repeated with the same intensity, although it was possible to identify themes within which

other hashtags used by journalists, such as #Elecciones, #Eleccionescba or #Córdoba can be included. Some of these professionals also added hashtags to their tweets to express anger, disapproval, or make a claim, and to make ironic comments or jokes related to the elections.

It should be noted that, in addition, in this research we observed that journalists used *Twitter* developing functions that they did not verbalize at the survey. Among them, as shown in the examples below, are self-promotion and advertising their journalistic production and presence in programs or media, within the framework of the same self-referential dynamics referred to in the criteria of newsworthiness: self-referential selectivity section.

Both these tweets refer to the journalists work in their media: the first says that the guest for a program is already on the studio, to be interviewed by the journalist, and the second is a link to the journalist's column in his newspaper.

However, media professionals seem to not be aware of this situation, given that on the results of the survey they did not recognize using this social network to transmit data on their work or the backstage of their own tasks. Also, the corpus analysis shows that journalists broadcast analysis and opinions about the campaign or the election results as a regular situation, which was not explicitly warned by these professionals when they were consulted on this aspect in the survey. Another evident contradiction was that surveyed journalists reported that *Twitter* works as a useful media to capture complaints from citizens about the electoral process, but this could not be verified in the analysis of their production during the coverage.

Figure 4. Examples of formal self-promotion tweets



Source: Tweets corpus collected during the intensive phase of municipal election coverage.

CONCLUSIONS (A NON-CLOSURE)

As outlined, in general terms, in the journalistic use of *Twitter* at the local level we have seen a replica of the journalistic model of traditional media for the coverage of fundamental political events, such as electoral processes. Applications and functions, both highlighted by Cordovan journalists as observed in the messages produced by them in that network, could be summarized in the following:

- Communicate or find out about last minute themes.
- Maintain contact and interaction with colleagues.
- Work as a source of information network.
- Perform live coverage and follow the minute-by-minute of events (thanks to *Twitter* synchronic model where time in which events happen coincides with the publication and reading).
- Transmit curious data of an event.
- Transmit specific and changing data, function represented in the case of the elections by the evolution of the voting results.

- Capturing information and keep in touch with the audience, being useful to monitor the climate of public opinion during the elections.
- To reproduce news from media they work at.
- Use hashtags to track specific topics.

Although many respondents envisioned *Twitter* as a space to work freely without the fetters of traditional media, in contrast and as stated in the presented results, there is an evident reproductive relationship between coverage finally developed by Cordovan journalists within the social network and the conventional work within the framework of journalism 1.0. Even though most of the journalists consulted considered that in that social network they could do journalism from the moment of newsgathering to newsreporting stage, they also warned that its credibility as a workspace depends on people followed and, in this sense, they valued the check of circulating information in the same way as professional practices require it with any other provider of jour-

nalistic information sources. Thus, in the framework of the local case analyzed, it was possible to observe that *Twitter* is part of the daily work of the journalists, impacting on their production routines. While, at a stage prior to the expansion of social networks, certain journalistic routines corresponded with the professionals of a particular media company, they now seem to build and cement among professionals of different media, within a working space that *Twitter* amplifies and reconfigures, introducing new work patterns. An example of this is the agreement that occurred around the hashtag used to communicate about the 2011 municipal elections in Córdoba (#CBAVota), which was used by nine of every ten journalists tweeted about the development of the local political event.

Finally, it is interesting to note that although *Twitter* could be considered as a space where journalists can

express themselves transposing censorship and ideological or commercial pressures from the media and institutions they work for, it seems that such restrictions are maintained in the routines of professional production, with significant differences between what is published in their personal tweets and the content of the media links they post. It is not possible to establish if this depends on an internalization of certain implied rules or code-sharing of journalistic work that translates into the use of the social network, or whether it is due to the existence of direct or indirect pressure from hierarchical control of the corresponding media. However, it is a strategic issue to resume in future research on the consequences that these practices of self-censorship could have in the field of professional ethics.

FOOTNOTES

1. The first tweet was published in March 2006, as the social network says on its page. See <https://about.twitter.com/milestones>.
2. To retweet means to publish the message made by another user in one's profile.
3. In 2011, this feature incorporated *Twitter* into the micro blogging social network category, being the most important of this kind, with 100 million active users. In this regard, cfr. "The new figures behind *Twitter*", 25-10-2011, available in <http://www.clasesdeperiodismo.com> [consulted 08/12/2013].
4. See "Un 69% de periodistas usa *Twitter* para reportear", 21/11/2011 and "*Twitter* es más usada que *Facebook* por periodistas y bloggers", 20/01/2012, journalistic reports available online: <http://www.clasesdeperiodismo.com>
5. Significant examples are the notice given by a passenger on a ferry on the plane accident in the Hudson River in New York, or the man who unknowingly tweeted the step by step of the detention and murder of Osama Bin Laden.
6. Every *Twitter* account has a section called profile. Each user can add there: name, picture (called avatar), city and country of location, and write a bio (biography or description about who he/she is) of up to 160 characters.
7. Four instances of vote were attended by Cordovans that year (2011): simultaneous and mandatory open primaries, provincial elections, municipal elections and national elections.
8. During 2011, in Argentina grew 80 use of smartphones (smart cell phones that have Internet access). Approximately 3.3 million units of these phones have data plan that allows them to access to the web (Cfr. "80 grew the number of smartphones in the country last year," *Infobae*, 17-10-2011, available at <http://www.infobae.com>). In 2012, Argentina is first in the world ranking of use of social networks (Cfr. "Argentina is the country where most commonly used social networks", *Clarín*, 26-12-12, available at <http://www.clarin.com>) and seventh in the ranking of the ten countries where *Twitter* has the greatest reach among the population in line, with a penetration of the 18 ("Los 10 países más adictos a *Twitter* en el mundo", 29-04-2011, disponible en <http://alt1040.com/2011/04/los-10-paises-mas-adictos-a-twitter/>).
9. According to the Electoral Code of Argentina (Law No. 19945), the city of Córdoba, in its condition of capital Department of the province, for electoral purposes constitutes a "section" within the national system.
10. Around the 64 studied journalists it had between 30 and 39 years old at the time of the study, had with University studies, single marital status and possessed a middle (C1)-high socioeconomic level or protection (C2). In the section of socio demographic information composed by questions of alternative fixed to the inside of the applied population

survey, the socio-economic level was measured by an index that looks into the relationship between amount of people contributing revenue and members of the household, the educational level of the main breadwinner of the household, occupation, health coverage and indicators of poverty (cf. "NSE 2006. Background, conceptual framework, methodology and fortresses", 2006, Commission of link institutional AAM-SAIMO-CEIM, available online at <http://www.saimo.org.ar>)

11. Both reports can be consulted in <http://bit.ly/RZkDft>

12. The full report can be downloaded at <http://bit.ly/1oPabpr>

13. It is the candidate of the party Concentración Popular. Journalists who mentioned him did it in an informal and humorous way to allude to a comment he made during the debate organized by the National University of Cordoba (UNC), when he called Cordovans to "make love before and after voting". An example: Roberto Battaglini (La Voz del Interior) issued the following tweet: "Agüero had 1.430 votes. Have they all fulfilled the candidate's request of voting after sexual intercourse"? (<https://twitter.com/battaglini/status/115607934205042688>).

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