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Professional activism in journalism and education in gender equality through Twitter

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ABSTRACT

This article analyses professional activism by women journalists' organisations which, through their Twitter accounts, contribute to extend the value of equality between men and women, which is activism that embodies the ethical or deontological codes of this profession. The tweets of these groups not only propose improvements in the expression and writing of news, after reporting biased, stereotypical or denigrating uses of language by large Spanish media, but also recognise and applaud contents that dignify women or place them in the public sphere that they deserve. A content analysis methodology was followed by applying both quantitative and qualitative analyses to a sample of 7,424 tweets. To interpret the language, not only linguistic and visual, but also ethical criteria, were applied in accordance with the fundamental democratic citizenship values. The results indicate that communication professionals insufficiently apply the value of equality to their social task of informing and educating from a gender perspective. This lack of professional self-demand and citizen commitment is especially observed in the media with greater circulation and outreach. Thus we conclude about the need for self-regulation and professional dialogue practices like those herein presented.

SUMMARY

This article analyses professional activism by women journalists' organisations which, through their Twitter accounts, contribute to extend the value of equality between men and women, which is activism that embodies the ethical or deontological codes of this profession. A content analysis methodology was used by applying both quantitative and qualitative analyses to a sample of 7,424 tweets. To interpret the language, not only linguistic and visual, but also ethical criteria, were applied in accordance with the fundamental democratic citizenship values. The results indicate that communication professionals insufficiently apply the value of equality to their social task of informing and educating from a gender perspective. Thus we conclude about the need for self-regulation and professional dialogue practices like those herein presented.

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Introduction and state of the matter: professional deontology and a gender and communication study

All professional groups perform a task to legitimitise them in society. The journalism task is vital for democracy to properly operate; that is, a plural society presided by civic liberties and other values, such as equality, in its different meanings and dialogue by respecting minority groups. Journalism, as a professional activity based on "free speech", is necessary so that citizens can exercise their rights from informed participation, which is key for creating deliberative and weighted public opinion. The set of tasks that journalism performs in democratic societies, and in liberal and social Rule of Laws, is what authors like Alasdair MacIntyre (2013, 230) call "internal goods of the profession"; that is, the goods that society receives and expects from professional action, tasks by which professionals are socially acknowledged, and other "external goods" like salaries and the reputation of feeling personal satisfaction with a job well done.

In line with the theme under study, internal goods of the journalism profession help to outline the purposes and ethical principles that have to govern or guide the work of those performing such social activity: activity that is ethically legitimate and fulfils social requirements through good professional practices (Fackson Banda 2013; Josep Lluís Gómez-Mompart, Juan Francisco Gutiérrez-Lozano and Dolors Palau-Sampio 2013).

The purposes and principles of journalism basically constitute the ethical core of the deontological codes that its professionals employ to regulate and improve their work, and documents that help to overcome ethical problems or dilemmas deriving from commercial and political threats. This was the encouragement that inspired the first codes, such as that drawn up by the Syndicat National des Journalistes 1918 in France, or the International Federation of Journalists in 1952 (Vicent Gozálvez and J. Félix Lozano 2004).

Activism, deontology and promotion of gender equality in journalism

In free democratic societies, the joint action and commitment of any professional group are key elements to not only revitalise civil society, but to examine democracy in-depth from its own roots (Adela Cortina 2008). In the professional journalism field, the participative action of people committed to their profession helps to build this critical activism, which is essential for the ethical self-regulation of journalism, and also for its internal goods to materialise: Thishis professional activism, presided by regulatory and democratic ideals, contributes in such a way that deontological codes of journalism are not merely a worthless piece of paper insofar as its principles are lived out from within, and result in the work of real men and women who strive towards this profession: its jurisdiction is not external, rather internal because ethics is not lawfulness, instead the reflexive experience of rules and actions taken from conviction, from personal commitment. This is not a matter imposed by judges, lawmakers or experts in deontology (Hugo Aznar 2010), but is essentially an internal and, in parallel, a collective self-regulation matter through dialogued, agreed and official actions (Stephen Ward and Herman Wasserman 2010).

Professional ethics calls to the autonomy of those who work towards journalism in both the moral autonomy sense (personal) and the deliberative and active autonomy sense of journalists. This is precisely the seed of activism and the committed self-

regulation that is the object of our study (Elena Real-Rodríguez 2010; José Luis González-Esteban et al. 2011; Juan Carlos Suárez-Villegas 2015).

As part of the professional activism of journalism, we are interested in that managed from social media, especially Twitter, that in which everyone acts as a valid interlocutor without having to follow guidelines that vertically originate from an external authority. Nevertheless, it is necessary to firstly observe the difficulties that the Twitter social network poses for the ethical revitalization of journalism. For example, in her review on the state of the matter related to Twitter's impact on journalism, Amparo López Meri (2015, 36) underlines the enhanced subjectivity of professionals in journalism and its "increasingly fuzzier limits between what is professional and personal, and among journalists, and political and public stakeholders", who are often left to one side in professional deontology.

The media in their Twitter accounts seek «clickbait» by promoting an option for tabloidisation with anecdotic and curious contents (Dolors Palau-Sampio 2016). This is framed within the lack of self-regulation context on the Internet. Most countries, including those in which the self-regulation tradition is more deeply rooted like the USA and France, "have not amended their codes to adapt them to the Internet and ICT" (Jesús Díaz-Campo and Francisco Segado-Boj 2015, 741).

Without denying such difficulties, and by acknowledging the potential of networks to build professional journalistic activism, the main object of the present research work is to analyse and make known the actions of different organisations and associations formed by Spanish female communicators with a feminist conscience. By means of Twitter, these groups report "media violence" (Ana Bernal Triviño 2019a, 707) and sexism in language as "forms of gender violence" (Hector Levi 2019, 94) that the media exercise. The former refers to news that contradict the good practice of preventing, raising awareness and defending the human rights, freedom and dignity of female victims of violence along with their children, as set out in the Law on Integral Protection Measures for Gender Violence, 1 / 2004, and in other legislative and institutional recommendations. The latter refers to ideological and misogynist expressions in Spanish, expressions that either transmit or reproduce stereotypes or directly go against gender equality (Marta Bach et al. 2000, Bernal-Triviño 2019b). Apart from these, we also include the news worthiness of fake news against women, which reinforce their discrimination and discredit the feminist movement (Bernal-Triviño 2019c, 22–23; Carlos Ruiz, Pere Masip and Josep Lluís Micó 2007)

Therefore, attention is paid to journalistic, textual and visual language as a means by which women's dignity in both the public space (Remei Castelló and Anna Gimeno 2018; Amanda Haraldsson and Lena Wängnerud 2019) and the private domain is expressed or not. Along these lines, groups also applaud those informative contents that contribute to feminism.

Reporting sexist language in journalism and its educator potential for democratic citizenship

What might be understood by inclusive language and how can it be promoted? This is a serious challenge that the Hispano-speaking community presently faces, as do all those languages whose grammar generally distinguishes between two genders. In the communication and journalism domain, the journalistic organizations that are the study object on Twitter report about the construction of expressions published in the media that clearly or

subtly place women at a different or inferior level to men in society or the public space. They also criticise use of the grammatical masculine gender when not used generically or inclusively by media, which hence implies an inadequate "semantic leap" in language (Álvaro García-Meseguer 1994). In line with this, and as part of a critical hermeneutic methodology (Jesús Conill 2010), it is worth explaining the conceptual and interpretative framework that helps to detect sexism in language. To start with, social sexism should not be confused with linguistic sexism. The expression "Honorable women at home and men out at work" is observed as social patent and flagrant social sexism (chauvinism), but does not contain linguistic sexism. This occurs after "improper use of language, inadequate discursive organisation, and a violation of constitutive factors of communicative action, which discriminate women" (Aguas Vivas Catalá and Enriqueta García-Pascual 2019, 115). Feminist studies have recurrently argued that sexist language can have real consequences for gender relations (Lera Boroditsky 2009; Dagmar Stahlberg et al. 2007). Today's empirical works (Jennifer Prewit-Freilino, T. Andrew Caswell and Emmi K. Laakso 2012; Sabine Sczesny, Franziska Moser and Wendy Wood 2015; Efren O. Pérez and Margit Tavits 2019) conclude that those countries with a neutral linguistic gender evidence psychologically positive attitudes towards gender between men and women.

By means of this social network, the professional associations that are our study object bring to light both social and linguistic sexism to evidently counteract and fight against them. The interpretation of the Critical Feminist Theory (Aguas Vivas Catalá and Enriqueta García-Pascual 1987; Celia Amorós 1997, 2005; Seyla Benhabib 2005; Seyla Benhabib 2005; Amelia Valcárcel 2008; Ignacio Roca 2013; Mercedes Bengoechea 2015) helps to detect such sexist and, thus, questionable uses of journalistic language. The indicators published by UNESCO (Alton Grizzle 2012) are also a benchmark to evaluate and interpret the communication actions performed by the media from the gender equality perspective.

This work forms part of gender and communication studies, which have increased in recent decades. These studies commenced in the 1970s when the gender perspective was institutionalised in most social and human disciplines as an evolution of feminist thinking (Marcela Lagarde 1996). It was during the 1995 Beijing Conference when more international visibility was conferred to the theme of inequalities between men and women in all walks of life as a problem of rights. It was identified as a fundamental element and one that brought about these causes, and also for women's limited access to the media and information technologies in both representation and employment terms (Florencia Rovetto 2013).

According to Juan F. Plaza and Carmen Delgado (2007), the gender perspective in communication implies intervening in reality in order to improve it by incorporating a different point of view into the hegemonic one, which is that which presents ideological reconstructions in which the concentration of power and the control of world order lie in men's hands. Indeed what is masculine appears to be over-represented as opposed to darkening what is feminine, which assiduously becomes a simple fetish of consumption.

The interpretative background herein presented can be extended to many initiatives in this sense, and the activism of these professional feminist female organisations which, through Twitter, attempt to define, fine-tune, recommend, applaud, or report the use of journalistic language, also entails a healthy educational task; that is, they convert the microblogging network into a public interactive platform for peer learning (in the professional sphere), and also for social reflection, while contributing to informally educate

citizens in a series of fundamental values of democracy (Vicent Gozálvez and Paloma Contreras-Pulido 2014). So indeed (1) education is produced in our media setting through the information and communication technologies (Alba Torrego-González and Alfonso Gutiérrez-Martín 2016) and (2), therefore, not everything that takes place in social networks, specifically in Twitter, adapts to discourse, which is empoverished and manipulated if not directly false despite the force of such communication practices (Soroush Vosoughi, Deb Roy and Sinan Aral 2018). Our challenge lies in acquiring all the educational, civic, and training potentials of new social media (David Buckingham 2014). As social networks like Twitter act as platforms which, beyond fraudulent and civically questionable uses, facilitate citizen mobilization in democracy (Joseph Kahne, Nam-Jim Lee and Jessica T. Feezell 2012; Young Min Baek 2015; Geo Saura et al. 2017), it is worth looking closely at this potentiality of networks from both formal and informal education (Dustin Harp, Josh Grimm and Jaime Loke 2018; Vicent Gozálvez, Luis Romero and Camilo Larrea 2019) and, in our case, at diffusing the actions performed for this purpose from ethical professionalism.

Citizenship is a condition that which has to develop at a media level part from legal, political, social or economic levels. With this in mind, initiatives like those we herein define fulfil this social role of training citizens in the good use and interpretation of the media (journalism), but either from or by resorting to social media (Twitter). Obviously one of the axiological keys of democratic citizenship is living the value of equality, and with it gender equality, a value that has to be promoted from different fronts, and not just from formal education at schools and in Secondary or Higher Education centres.

Citizen training at the media level cannot be carried out without stimulating the critical competence, the capacity to think from different points of view with smartly managed empathy and, of course, by acquiring a reflection and dialogue habit based on good arguments. This is how the media help to shape a democratic character or ethos that is turned over and applied to the media's discourse. Hence the civic and training relevance of the activism that is herein investigated for its potential to regulate journalistic communication in a process of clear professional autonomy. It helps to enrich open social and completely up-to-date debate, deliberation about sexist language, social sexism (to poorly egalitarian and socially rooted customs), and the need to look in-depth at journalism language as a means of reflection and public debate about gender equality.

Material and methods

This research is based on searching the bibliography, interpreting and theoretically reflecting on not only the theme being addressed, but also the the subsequent application of an empirical content analysis-based research methodology (Laurence Bardin 1986). It is supplemented with a discourse analysis to combine qualitative and quantitative analysis strategies (Sebastian Sayago 2014). Our research of the Twitter social network particularly takes into account the pragmatic dimension of language in order to understand and comprehend the extent of actions of speech (digital) and images in its social, political and professional contexts with the complex network of interactions that help to critically interpret the sense of messages, photographs, exhortations, reports, recommendations, acknowledgments, etc., in social networks (Aurora González-Teruel 2015; Teun A. Van Dijk 2008a, 2015). It is a matter of combining the analysis of specific images and contents

(expressed and published in Twitter) with a hermeneutic and discourse analysis that considers contextual and pragmatic aspects of both verbal and iconic language because images have their own logos, their own ways of shaping what is real (Ana Garcia Varas 2011). What we have attempted to do with all this is to critically analyse and interpret both the contents of the initial sample and those making up the refined sample.

In our empirical research, we collected and analysed a sample of 7,424 tweets (not including retweets) that were published from 1 May 2018 to 1 May 2019 on the accounts of 14 professional women's associations from the communication field that represent the regional diversity of Spain, namely: Asamblea de Mujeres Periodistas de Sevilla (@Periodistas_M); Asociación de Periodistas por la Igualdad (@apfeministas); Asociación de Periodistas Feministas CyL (@apfcyl); Colombine, Plataforma de Mujeres Periodistas Feministas de la Región de Murcia (@PColombineRM); Periodistes Feministes (@PeriodistesFem); Xornalistas Galegas (@asxornalistas); Les Beatrius. Xarxa de dones professionals valencianes per un periodisme feminista (@lesbeatrius); Vivas. Asociación Canaria de Mujeres de la Comunicación (@VivasComunican); Xarxa de comunicació feminista de les Balears (@ComfemIB); Plumas Moradas (@PlumasMoradas); Comunicadoras 8M (@comunicadoras8m); Red Internacional de Mujeres Periodistas y Comunicadoras (@redperiodistasM); Mujeres RTVE (@MujeresRTVE) y CIMA. -Asociación de Mujeres Cineastas y de Medios Audiovisuales (@CIMAcineastas).

Most of these platforms were set up following the feminist strike held on 8 March 2018 after hundreds of journalists raised awareness as a group running a process with which to communicate individual experiences (Lucía Caro-Castaño 2015) on the Telegram channel 'Feminist Communicators'. This movement, initially known as #lasperiodistasparamos ((#femalejournalistsstop; Maria Iranzo-Cabrera 2020), resulted in groups being formed in different Spanish Autonomous Communities, which coordinately work in the Telegram group 'State network of feminist communicators', come from a lobby group in the State domain (Comunicadoras 8 M), and also derive from a group of working women from the media, such as Radiotelevisión Española (Spanish Radio-TV).

The only women to form part of these organizations are those with different professions in the communication domain, such as journalists, camerawomen, scriptwriters, producers, etc. As defined in their last joint manifesto (2020), devised for the 8 March event in 2020, "we all raise our voices to stop chauvinism in the media." These groups are not answerable to trade unions and associations for professionals, except for the Asamblea de Mujeres Periodistas de Sevilla, which was set up at the core of the Seville Press Association in 2008. The majority are organisations with no legal entity, with horizontal structures whose main internal communication channel is Telegram, their key decision-making takes place during the meetings that are physically held in appointed places, and whose main outward communication channel is Twitter.

In order to obtain the initial sample, we used an open-code programming tool that compiles all the tweets published by the Twitter accounts indicated during the study period. We arranged information in a CSV file with the following columns: account name, date, text, number of retweets, number of favorites, mentions, hashtags and URL. Our study applied a content analysis methodology, supplemented with a critical hermeneutic analysis (Conill 2010) and a critical discourse analysis (Van Dijk 2015), to examine the tweets in our sample one by one in order to evaluate and interpret the purposes of the published contents based on qualitative categories. After this first analysis, we refined our

sample and selected those tweets whose objective was professional activism linked with professionals' self-regulation (Figure 1). We ruled out the tweets that referred to agendas of events, journalism benchmarks, etc. This process provided a refined sample with 565 tweets (only 7.61% of the initial sample). It more specifically adapted to our research objectives as far as reports of abusive power relations, sexist uses, or applauded inclusive uses of journalistic language are concerned. Of these, the appealed medium was quantitatively analysed (type, name, section), as were the journalist's gender, type of content, type of discourse, theme and if the medium had, or not, a Gender or Equality section. In qualitative terms, we identified suggestions for improvements and determined whether or not there was a response from the addressed media and/or journalists.

As we can read in the tweets included in our refined sample refined sample, the objective of these associations was to demand the editorial staff of the media to preserve the social tasks that they must fulfil in democratic societies, and to incorporate values of people's equality, equity and freedom into their editorial line. «This involves taking a convincing and compromising position in information about any kind of female discrimination by particularly looking at news items on violence and trading their bodies», as indicated in the manifesto published on the Communicators 8 M website (http://bit.ly/2nk1udS).

The level of awareness about this need was such that in May 2018 the Spanish newspaper El País created a Gender Correspondent post, for which Pilar Álvarez was responsible. This initiative was followed in September of the same year by eldiario.es which appointed Ana Requena as female Editor-in-Chief of Gender. The following month, Alicia G. Montano[1] and Paloma Zamorano were selected as Equality Editors to monitor equality contents on Spanish TV and Radio, respectively. This was why we chose the study period for the published tweets to lie between May 2018 and May 2019 so we could also verify if the creation of these job posts had influenced the contents in their media.

Analysis and results

By applying inferential statistics to our sample, our research revealed three main actions that these groups perform on Twitter: visibilising feminism-related activities in the real space; diffusing courses to train in equality journalism; self-regulation. Of the 14 associations that we include, the following stand out for the frequency of their self-regulatory tweets: @comunicadoras8M (65% of its tweets are about this use), @MujeresRTVE, @apfeministas and @lesbeatrius (49% of its tweets are about this use).

By paying attention to this control of ethical and deontological values in journalism, we found that 73% of the reported communication companies (N = 302) came from the main Spanish mass media. They were specifically reference newspapers given their circulation and outreach in the Spanish communication ecosystem: Spanish newspapers El Mundo (33), ABC (20) and El País (17; it has a Gender Correspondent post), which received more negative criticisms during our study period. Three in every 10 reports involved an audiovisual medium, and the group Radiotelevisión Española (50) was the most criticised for lacking deontological values. It is worth pointing out that one of these associations is formed by female workers from this public corporation. It is followed by Antena 3, with 15 reports.
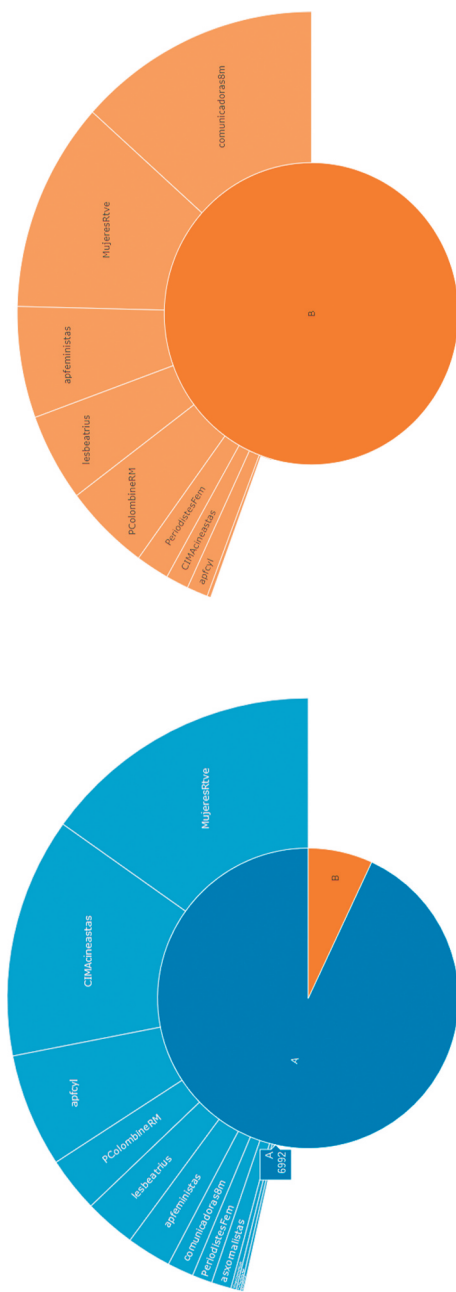
Figure 1. Dynamic graph, created in Potly, showing the number of self-regulation tweets per analysed account.

Dealing with chauvinistic violence, using sexist language and encouraging stereotypes

Lack of a gender perspective is mostly evidenced when dealing with gender violence (25%), using sexist language (10%), and encouraging stereotypes (8%) in the 51 themes compiled from the placed reports. The request that feminist communicator groups most frequently make is that gender violence news put the spotlight on the batterer and not on the victim. So they claim using verbs that evidence violence, rather than "to die," and ask for the criminal to come over as a subject of the sentence in order to emphasise the responsibility of facts. Another repeated suggestion involves not speculating with the reasons for attacks (http://bit.ly/32Y3OXq) and to avoid providing harsh details, which only make information morbid and can harm the sensitivity of the victim and/or her family relations and friends. They also insist on avoiding testimonies that normalise the batterer's attitude or stress the positive aspects of his personality. They recommend excluding the narcotic effect of presenting such aggression as "just another case." Hence they demand fewer details and more context through testimonies made by professionals and female survivors, and an explanation of the criminal consequences of such action.

The discriminatory use of language is particularly observed in headlines, which do not visibilise the names of the women who are the protagonists of journalistic information, but are presented by describing attributes (Figure 2). One more aspect that they recommend is to avoid taking chauvinistic attitudes as positive. Another condemned fact is to act as loudspeakers of the chauvinistic views of those being interviewed or of those who collaborate. The main complaint made about stereotypes and prejudices that encourage inequality between sexes lies in the items in which women are not the subject, but the object of information, and information focuses on their physical features or personal conditions, such

Figure 2. Images of tweets that discredit data based on the racial aspects of female protagonists (http://bit.ly/31LP1yO and http://bit.ly/356zqMg).
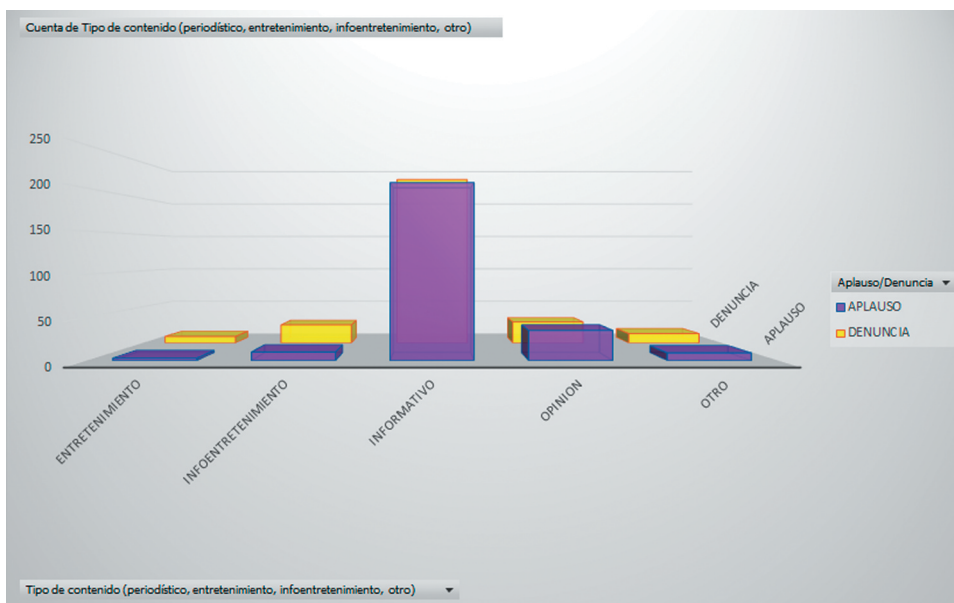
Figure 3. Graph showing the number of reports and applauses according to the type of content in items.

as maternity. This prejudice is particularly detected in sports and society sections. Another point is «lacking stereotype» (Bach et al. 2000), especially in opinions sections, as in the campaign carried out by the group As Xornalistas Galegas ìn April 2019 with the written press in Galicia: «The proportion of women with opinions never exceeded 20% on any of the four Sundays in April [...], 167 men and 34 women (http://bit.ly/2pH9YwJ).

The reports that we analysed refer, on 76% of all occasions, to informative items (Figure 3), and the reason for placing reports lies in the written language, generally in headlines and subheadings, where we detected typical tabloid press characteristics.

Gender sections encourage new perspectives

Four in every 10 tweets are positive acknowledgments, and 80% of these applauses refer to informative items whose main theme is the justification of feminism and measures against gender violence. They include words of experts from different areas or women's perspective for subjects like female priests or immigration. The most applauded media are those with female Equality Editors: eg, RTVE (http://bit.ly/2w9T11f), El País (http://bit.ly/3ci3Z5q) and eldiario.es (https://bit.ly/34Ulwyy).

Learning is no gender matter

When we examined the sex of those who signed the reported items, save those whose authorship was unknown, 34% had been written by a man, 28% by a woman and 9% by both sexes together (Figure 4). What struck us was that in items on gender violence and

stereotypes, reported items were signed by slightly more female authors, which evidences general lack of awareness in the profession, while more males signed items criticised for chauvinism or for lack of deontological values (#periodigno is the hashtag that these associations use; perio from journalism, digno from dignified). Along these lines, most unknown items were generally taken from the front page, which are not normally signed, or from news items obtained from teletypes. Hence news agencies shoulder considerable responsibility: if we look at the applauded items with a recognized author (N = 205), 80.5% had been written by women, 16.5% by men, and 3% by both together.

Another of our study objectives was to analyse the reactions aroused by mentions being made to media and/or journalists. Only three generalist newspapers actually considered the expected correction: El País (Figure 4), 20 Minutos and La Vanguardia. 20 Minutos was the only medium that answered these tweets, and accepted and acknowledged suggestions. Two other newspapers with journalists responsible for the presented information, namely El Periódico (https://bit.ly/37XrfFL) and La Vanguardia, (https://bit.ly/3nXPfxT) reacted by justifying the reason for their decisions and acknowledged debate. We point out that the vast majority of reported contents can be accessed on the Internet.

Figure 4. Images of criticism of a headline in El País and this newspaper's subsequent correction (http://bit.ly/2pJ3eP4 and http://bit.ly/2VbtnS9).
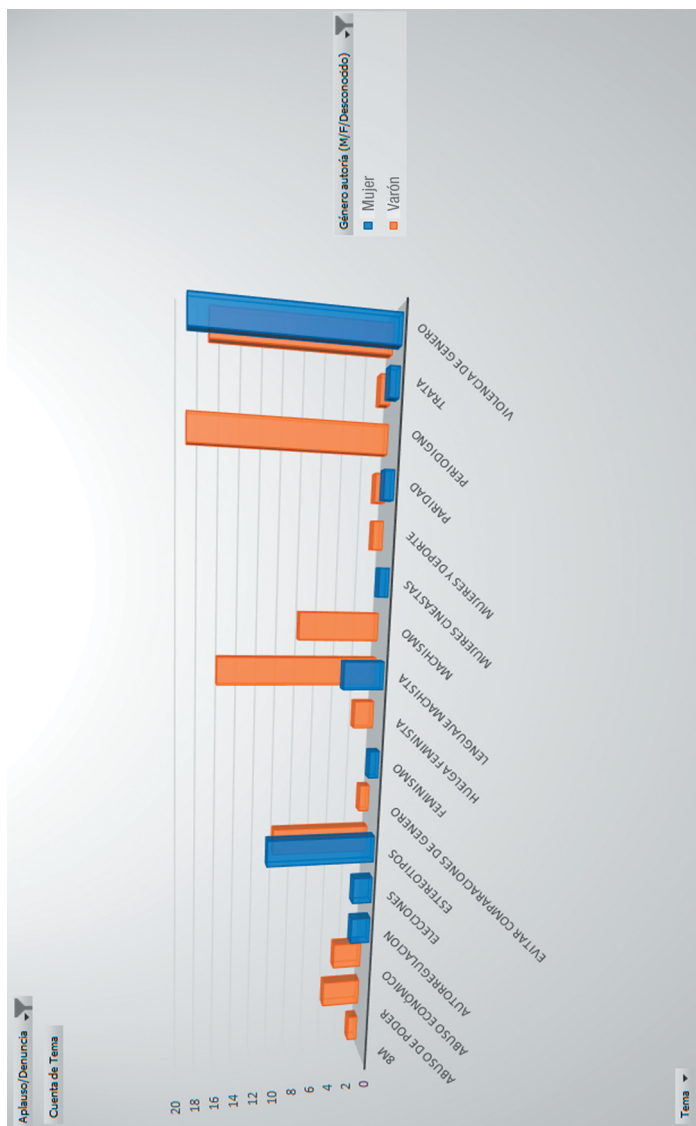
Figure 5. Graph showing the number of items that had been reported per theme and per journalist's sex.

Discussion and conclusions

This research work verified that the ethical values that should control professional journalistic practice and communication are not sufficiently applied to their social commitment to educate and inform from a gender perspective. After following a hermeneutic and critical methodology herein (Conill 2010), and by supporting our work with content (verbal and iconic language) and critical discourse (Van Dijk 2015) analyses, we conclude that this lack of professional self-discipline and greater citizen commitment come over mostly in those media with greater circulation and outreach, which are the media that generate views with a stronger impact on mass society. Moreover, most reports are about informative gender items; that is, those in which the selection and processing of information should be carried out in accordance with rules on professional evaluation and interpretation. However, the search for «clickbait» in the digital editions of these newspapers did not contemplate respecting people's equality.

Despite creating new sections to ensure that the gender perspective encourages information with womens' views being published, they are not free of deontological mistakes. The main problem lies in the conservative dimension of language, which comes over as being sexist and promotes stereotypes. The process by which women access the labor world has brought about a series of changes in society that are not reflected in a way that can be considered egalitarian and fair in male/female communication professionals' language.

Style codes, manuals and books of recent creation (Llibre d'estil de la Corporació Valenciana de Mitjans de Comunicació 2017; Guía para el tratamiento informativo de la violencia de género de Castilla y León 2017) or those that have been revised (like the deontological code of the Col·legi de Periodistes de Catalunya (2016): http://bit.ly/2ldmsKP) have progressively presented two novelties. On the one hand, and as a result of the Declaration of Brussels that emphasizes the importance of the journalism profession when improving informative quality and the contribution of media to eradicate chauvinistic violence, paying special attention to specific information on this matter, and protecting infancy, youth and immigration. On the other hand, civil society groups and organizations participating in writing information and are indirectly related to the media, but play a role in ensuring values for minority groups.

This is why dealing with information about chauvinistic violence is a very serious matter. Despite the numerous indications on this, lack of awareness about the repercussion of the language used in such information is evidenced, which can affect the victim and society alike.

These ethical challenges can first call the whole education system to make an effort to reactivate democratic citizenship. In Higher Education and Journalism Faculties, syllabi should be promoted to guarantee knowledge about the legal framework and the professional deontology sense based on dialogue and shared reflection about good practices. Moreover, although the profession must adhere to certain basic precepts, it is necessary to revise ethical obligations in accordance with how society develops; hence self-regulation needs to be dynamic and up-to-date.

In order to ensure that these principles are honored, certain structures have been set up, such as Information Boards, Editorial Boards, defenders of readers/TV spectators, or committees like Arbitration Boards, Complaints and Deontology of Federation of Spanish Journalists' Associations (FAPE). To all this, we add the opportunity offered by the Internet, specifically the Twitter social network, as a public space that favors professional dialogue,

where verified and weighted interpretations of right and wrong practices are posted that permit nuances and alternative perspectives (Gozálvez et al. 2019). This is precisely the role that these female communicator associations play, which have put into practice peer learning dynamics. Directly mentioning the medium or the male/female author responsible for an item confers certain moral repair to the harm caused to affected persons, women in this case, and more quickly and at a lower cost. As they are public reports and applauses, digital society can witness and learn from such dialogic ethics (Jürgen Habermas 1984; Cortina 2008), and in such a way that journalism is regulated by a collective interaction.

This inter-peer self-regulatory action falls in line with a UNESCO recommendation (Grizzle 2012), which proposes the periodic and/or constant internal monitoring of media content to measure efficiency and to evaluate the results of equality-sensitive codes of ethics. The digital feminist activism task is performed by the investigated professional platforms made up of female journalists trained in the gender perspective. They also guarantee the public a forum on which to place claims and make criticisms, as this research work has verified, because their claims have sometimes been noted by critical citizenship. Nevertheless, building this online and open media ethics will only materialise if it is based on principles of tolerance, respect, and self-reflection (Ward and Wasserman 2010).

From peer to peer, self-regulation through Twitter is an option that supplements other structures. Apart from the effect on the Internet being more immediate, it allows access to weblogs and confidentials that do not fulfil the beed to process information from a gender perspective. In parallel, the reports issued by other self-regulation organizations, which are more bureaucratic and conventional, can act as arguments to prioritise matters of general interest that may affect deontology (Suárez-Villegas 2015).

As such, the sanctioning efficiency of law should be reserved for the most serious cases. According to Aznar (2010), the task of ethics is not to claim that law comes from assisting it, but quite the opposite; that is, making law as of least necessary as possible. The immediate objective is to attempt to correct those attitudes and routines that lack harmful intentionality, but negatively affect the excellence challenge as a profession (Gómez-Mompart, Gutiérrez-Lozano and Palau 2013) and as a democratic society. Enhancing the leading role of the democratic and civic culture in Spain is a pressing matter. With this purpose in mind, the media must act as active agents of change (Castelló and Gimeno 2018) in the use of language, and also in equal treatment and opportunities between men and women as a plural and nonstereotyped image of both genders.

Note

1. Alicia G. Montano died in January 2020 and her substitute is journalist Carolina Pecharroman.

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Notes on contributors

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