Roles and digital identities on *Twitter* and *Instagram*: An ethnographic study of Chilean journalists

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Abstract

On the basis of a digital ethnography and in-depth interviews with Chilean journalists, this study analyzes how news professionals reinterpret and redefine their professional roles on *Twitter* and *Instagram* through their practices and discourse, building different digital identities. The results of our analyses show that *Twitter* and *Instagram* strengthen and render a more complex construction of journalists' digital selves, allowing them to build a multi-dimensional identity that goes beyond the framework defined by the media in which they work through the performance of emerging and more traditional roles: (1) the service role becomes a resource for creating community-oriented identities and for helping to resolve individuals' everyday challenges; (2) the celebrity role supports the construction of an identity that plays with distances and social status, distinguishing and differentiating the journalist from others; (3) the promoter role allows them to promote their work and that of their media outlets as well as products and services, which generates a material benefit and gives the practices an instrumental meaning; and (4) the joker role allows them to entertain the audience and engage in a playful and critical way of observing the world through humor, irony, and sarcasm. Journalists make these roles compatible and decide which they want to use depending on their target audience and the specific platform used, validating certain practices and media strategies. In the case of *Twitter*, we observe a reinterpretation of traditional practices, and on *Instagram* we found a clearer redefinition of journalistic roles.

Keywords

Twitter; *Instagram*; Social media; Social networks; Journalism; Journalists; Journalistic roles; Digital identity; Journalistic identity; Promoter; Celebrity; Joker.

1. Introduction

Over the past decade, research has theoretically and empirically analyzed how different forces shape journalistic performance through various traditional media, news beats, and social environments (See, for example, **Hallin**; **Mellado**, 2018; **Márquez-Ramírez** *et al.*, 2020; **Mellado**, 2021; **Stępińska** *et al.*, 201). Scholars also have focused on digital news platforms and on how traditional media have incorporated social media into their newsrooms (e.g., **Hermida**, 2010; **Newman**; **Dutton**; **Blank**, 2012; **Noguera-Vivo**, 2013). While these two lines of research focus on an institutional level of analysis, another area of inquiry has moved toward an individual level, examining how journalists develop different digital identities and perform multiple roles on different media platforms and spaces (e.g., **Brems** *et al.*, 2017; **Hedman**; **Djerf-Pierre**, 2013; **Klaß**; **Wellbrock**, 2019; **Lasorsa**; **Lewis**; **Holton**, 2012; **Mellado**; **Hermida**, 2021, 2022a; **Molyneux**; **Holton**; **Lewis**, 2018; **Pérez-Díaz**; **Planes-Pedreño**, 2021; **Xia** *et al.*, 2020).

The study of journalistic cultures in digital media is undoubtedly a topic of interest for both academics and industry professionals owing to the mediatization of society, the way in which the platformization of the news has gained a dominant presence among audiences (**Hermida**; **Mellado**, 2020; **Molyneux**; **McGregor**, 2021; **Nielsen**; **Ganter**, 2018; **Van-Dijck**; **Poell**, 2013; **Westlund**; **Ekström**, 2018), and the tensions that can emerge between traditional journalistic norms and practices and the media logics of social platforms (**Mellado**, 2022; **Sacco**; **Bossio**, 2017; **Tandoc**; **Cabañes**; **Cayabyab**, 2019).

Participation in digital platforms is a reality of modern daily life. Most media outlets publish their content on social media in an effort to engage with increasingly segmented audiences, and journalists do so as well. As a result, norms, routines, and professional practices have become blurred and liquid (**Negreira-Rey**; **Vázquez-Herrero**; **López-García**, 2022). While the stability of the profession's institutional spaces released most journalists from actively questioning who they are and why they do what they do (**Deuze**; **Witschge**, 2020, p. 6), that is no longer the case, particularly given that journalistic identities and cultures depend on specific practices, and journalistic practices have changed significantly (**Mellado**, 2021). One important aspect of these changes has been the weakening of journalism's institutional authority (**Carlson**; **Lewis**, 2015).

Despite the important studies conducted on journalistic roles in the digital world and journalist identity formation on social media, there are various limitations that should be considered. Studies have tended to focus on a single platform, generally *Twitter* (**Canter**; **Brookes**, 2016; **Hermida**, 2013; **Pérez-Díaz**; **Planes-Pedreño**, 2021), analyzing isolated indicators with an approach that is closer to news production (**Broesma**; **Graham**, 2013).

Furthermore, they have focused on interaction between journalists and politicians, reducing their frame of action to specific topics (**David**, 2009); analyzed users' use of and interaction on social media platforms from the perspective of audience studies and not journalism studies (**Gil de Zúñiga**; **Diehl**; **Ardèvol-Abreu**, 2016; **Westerman**; **Spence**; **Van-Der-Heide**, 2014); or have focused on textual analyses of specific events like catastrophes or occurrences that are not part of regular daily life (**Hermida**; **Lewis**; **Zamith**, 2014). Most studies that focus on *Instagram* concentrate on fashion/beauty/influencers/bloggers (**Khamis**; **Ang**; **Welling**, 2016; **Maares**; **Hanusch**, 2020; **Marshall**, 2010; **Smith**; **Sanderson**, 2015) or politicians' use of the platform for presidential campaigns (**Filimonov**; **Russmann**; **Svensson**, 2016; **Lego-Muñoz**; **Towner**, 2017). Finally, most of these studies have focused on Western countries with cultural, political, and social characteristics that are difficult to transfer to other realities.

In an effort to help overcome those limitations, this study is based on a qualitative methodological design that consists of a digital ethnography of Chilean journalists focused on understanding how information professionals reinterpret and redefine their roles on *Twitter* and *Instagram*, building different types of digital identities.

2. Journalism and digital identity

As a construct, social identity is related to the way in which individuals and other social entities acquire a recognizable form within society. One fundamental aspect of understanding the formation of these identities in today's world is the instability caused by fast-paced societal changes.

In the past, individuals had limited agency over the construction of their social identities. As a result, these tended to be assigned. Today, by contrast, social identity is a complex construction that requires a great deal of dedication and creativity (**Howard**, 2000). Various authors, particularly social psychologists, have argued that identity is always in a process of construction and reformulation in a constant dialogue between the subject and their social environment (**Lynch**, 2007). As such, people must engage in individual management of the impressions that they generate in others (**Goffman**, 1981). This *performative* nature of identity leads us to define all identities as "inventions." One's own identity is the result of a reflexive process that operates as a project of constructing a personal narrative (**Giddens**, 1998) that also establishes a dialogue and negotiation with the collective for the construction of a social identity (**Brewer**, 2001).

This is particularly important for observing how content is generated on journalists' social media accounts, which stands in contrast to their work on traditional media, where what is produced cannot be attributed to a single individual, but is understood as a collective result (**Mellado**, 2015; 2021).

In this context, we will understand digital identity

> "as aspects of digital technology as a mediator in the experience of the identity built by people and conditioned by social factors (**Castañeda**; **Camacho**, 2012, p. 354, our translation).

More specifically, in the case of journalists, we will focus on the digital platforms that display their identity and the organizational context from which they come.

Social identities in digital environments tend to present fragmented forms of the individual, creating a narrative that emerges from the dialogue between the various platforms and relationships that it establishes. This refers to the capacity of individuals to 'target' their content and activity to digital spaces differentiated by audience, technical characteristics and expected behaviors in the context of the same. In this study, we focus on two digital platforms that share mechanisms through which users communicate but offer different objective qualities in terms of the characteristics of their form of narrative, textual-visual logic and audience approach: *Twitter* and *Instagram* (**Hayes**; **Carr**; **Wohn**, 2016; **Hermida**; **Mellado**, 2020).

Identities can also be understood as formations that articulate two temporalities. Identity has a synchronous nature in terms of the process of making and in the present. This is expressed in performativity, which refers to the contingent action between different agents that interact, communicate with one another and produce impressions in others. That synchronicity is fleeting and temporary and acquires a more stable meaning over time, or a diachronic axis that operates as a narrative that ties together ways of being and links the different points that the synchrony left behind.

Social identities are often translated into professional identities. Journalistic roles are a fundamental aspect of the construction of a professional identity in that they connect practical exercise with social expectations of what these journalists should be, which is discursively linked to expectations about what journalism is (**Zelizer**, 1993).

Journalists from around the world are typically socialized through a set of ideals that express an understanding of their professional roles. These roles are essential components of journalistic culture and fundamental elements for defining journalism as a profession. Journalistic cultures represent the cultural capital that journalists share. Professional roles are complex constructs that are manifested at both the perceptual level (which functions are important to the profession) and the level of performance (**Mellado**, 2021). The performance of professional roles focuses on journalism as a social practice and on the interaction between the structure, agency and political economy of media platforms, allowing for observation of journalistic ideals and their materialization.

Since the internet was created, various studies have analyzed the degree to which information technologies shape traditional journalistic practices (e.g., **Jenkins**, 2006; **Steensen**, 2011; **Deuze**, 2007). Several of these studies have found that while tools like hypertext, multimedia and the opportunity to interact with the user change how information is delivered, journalists adopt the same professional roles rather than modifying their practices. Over the past few years, however, a great deal has changed in the digital media ecosystem, particularly due to the appearance of social media (**Casero-Ripollés**; **Feenstra**; **Tormey**, 2016; **Negreira-Rey**; **Vázquez-Herrero**; **López-García**, 2022) , raising questions regarding the degree to which journalists' work changes as a result of said transformations and how all of that impacts the creation of different digital "selves."

For example, **Hermida** (2013) argues that social media and "microblogging" generate new ways of practicing journalism using different logics, showing paths that allow the profession itself to be redefined. Later, **Hermida** and **Mellado** (2020) discussed the different media logics that differentiate digital platforms and influence the content generated on them.

Social media platforms privilege the construction of public persona with multiple audiences and contexts. The way in which journalists negotiate their roles and identities under the social media umbrella offers important information about how they position themselves in the new digital public sphere, particularly given that "private" and "public" and "personal" and "professional" coexist on these platforms.

The journalist is no longer the person who signs a news article or the visible and yet distant face of a radio or audiovisual platform. Today, journalists are potentially accessible people with whom one can develop a relationship mediated by social media (**Hedman**, 2016). For example, **Lomborg** (2013) has coined the term "broadcasting the self" to refer to the way in which identities are produced and circulate on social media. For journalists, thus, digital environments are new sources for building professional identities (**Ferrucci**; **Vos**, 2017).

Although they are not the only digital platforms used today, *Twitter* and *Instagram* offer journalists an important platform for improving their central position in public debate. Beyond the impact of their work, these platforms allow them to increase their social influence and gain new digital followers (**Mellado**; **Hermida**, 2022b). Furthermore, it may favor their independence from attempts of control of any kind. In this sense, recent research has addressed the possibility that in addition to the reinterpretation of certain traditional professional roles, these platforms are generating new functions (**Tandoc**; **Vos**, 2016) and building different digital identities (**Hedman**, 2016; **Bossio**, 2021).

The intrinsic capacity of social media to deinstitutionalize communication through parallel channels can become a key element for implementing different roles within journalism (**Mellado**; **Ovando**, 2021). Professional roles can evolve and be redefined –in discourse and in practice– as their appearance and development have an historical and contextual component and a strong connection to the logics that journalists use to communicate with the public and the expectations of different reference groups (**Mellado**, 2021).

In this sense, some authors have identified a certain rupture in journalists' traditional professional identity that emerges in the form of a lack of clarity and blend of their public and private identities as well as a positive attitude towards the personal brand generated through these social media platforms (**Brems** *et al.*, 2017; **Canter**, 2014; **Hedman**, 2016; **Mellado**, 2022).

3. Journalistic roles in the digital environment

The way in which journalists build their identity has a direct influence on the performance of their roles. In traditional media, information professionals are expected to follow the norms and practices created and perpetuated in the field as a means of maintaining autonomy and professional authority. Although journalism mainly operates within commercial structures, the cornerstone of that autonomy and authority has been the separation between journalists' editorial work and the commercial activities of news organizations. By contrast, social media spaces exist outside of those institutional limits and serve as spaces of connection, interaction, publication and amplification between the audience and individual journalists (**Mellado**; **Hermida**, 2022a).

From there, it is possible to deduce that the rules are not fixed, are not equal on all platforms and do not translate into the same practices. As such, journalists can generate new forms of acting in the context of social media (**Duffy**; **Knight**, 2019; **Hedman**; **Djerf-Pierre**, 2013). This does not mean that traditional journalistic roles associated with offline media cannot be practiced in social media spaces, but it does suggest that journalists are developing new identities and emergent roles on those platforms. While journalists report on a story on traditional media platforms, they are also part of the story on social media, becoming a topic (**Mellado**; **Hermida**, 2022a).

In the context of traditional media, cross-national studies have analyzed the degree to which journalists around the world are closer –through their practices and ideals– to different professional roles depending on different domains or spheres of action (**Mellado**, 2015; 2021).

- One of these is connected to the relationships that exist between journalists and those in power. Journalists can see themselves as watchdogs who observe those in power (**Márquez-Ramírez** *et al.*, 2020). They also may see their role as closer to the idea of being loyal facilitators to those in power or to the country to which they belong (**Donsbach**, 1995; **Pasti**, 2005).
- A second space is linked to the way in which journalists approach audiences. On the one hand, they can approach audiences as clients and perform a service role associated with providing information and advice in order to support them in their day to day lives and provide personal assistance (**Eide**; **Knight**, 1999). They also can play a civic role, viewing the audience as a group of citizens who should have a voice, be empowered and be educated on complex political issues (**Rosen**, 1996). Finally, they may view the audience as a spectator that needs to be approached using narrative and stylistic tools linked to the info-entertainment role (**Mellado**, 2015).
- A third domain is linked to the journalistic voice, that is, the presence of the journalist's voice in the content that reaches the public (**Donsbach**; **Patterson**, 2004). The more present it is, the greater the presence of an interventionist role. The less present it is, the greater the presence of a disseminator role.

More recently, and taking the domain of the "journalistic ego" as a point of departure to analyze journalistic practices on digital platforms, **Mellado** and **Hermida** (2021) operationalized three roles on social media: promoter, celebrity and joker.

The promoter role is practiced by journalists on social media when they develop their own "brand," promoting their work or media outlet as well as different products and services. These aspects are connected to the relationship between the journalist and their news organization –whether from a personal or a professional perspective– or the relationship between the journalist and external commercial forces (**Holton**; **Molyneux**, 2017).

The celebrity role emerges when journalists strive for fame or become stars due to their social media activity, gaining social and economic capital (**Olausson**, 2018). The main elements that define this role on social media are the presence of reflected fame (that is developed when journalists repost or retweet or share screenshots of material about them published by others); the use of "fame by association" (journalists mentioning, tagging or publishing photographs or videos in which they are seen interacting with celebrities); showing a luxurious lifestyle; elements of daily life; and the use of their own hashtag.

The joker, for its part, is present on social media when journalists use humor when commenting on their work, workplace, colleagues or sources. Previous studies have shown that news professionals can use different logics of platforms to engage in humor at the professional and personal levels (**Holton**; **Lewis**, 2011). The main practices that this role deploys are trying to be funny, the use of deliberate jokes, making fun of themselves or others, and generating fun responses to potential comments from followers.

4. Methodology

We carried out a digital ethnography that allowed us to conduct in-depth observations of the materialization of different traditional and emerging roles in the digital practices of ten Chilean journalists on *Twitter* and *Instagram*.

Digital ethnography involves producing descriptions and interpretations of behavior with enough density to delve into social practices and meanings (**Hine**, 2000) through immersion in the work of those who participate in digital spaces, paying attention to their forms of exchange and the contents produced and reproduced *in situ*. This involves recording the activity that occurs alongside its production without intermediaries (**López-Rocha**, 2010).

Research on digital technologies has established that the lines between online and offline life are sometimes strictly drawn but can also be blended and interwoven to the point that it is impossible to differentiate between the two spheres (**Airoldi**, 2018).

4.1. Sample

Ten journalists were intentionally chosen from a database generated during previous quantitative stages by the research team responsible for this study, comprised of all Chilean journalists working for Chilean media outlets with active *Twitter* and *Instagram* accounts (**Mellado**, 2019; 2022). Our sample based on the following criteria: 1) journalists with public accounts on both *Twitter* and *Instagram*; 2) journalists with an active daily digital life on both platforms; 3) journalists who work for different types of media outlets (see Table 1).

Table 1. Sample Characteristics

	Media type	Age	Gender	Position/Beat	Number of followers (*Twitter*)	Activity level (*Twitter*)[1]	Number of followers (*Instagram*)	Activity level (*Instagram*)[*]
Journalist #1	Radio	50-55	Female	News anchor/Political commentator	260,000 - 270,000	Very high	90,000 - 100,000	Moderate
Journalist #2	TV	31-35	Female	Reporter/ Unspecified beat	3,000 - 4,000	Moderate	2,000 - 3,000	High
Journalist #3	Print	25-30	Male	Reporter/ Entertainment	7,000 - 8,000	Moderate	1,000 - 2,000	Moderate
Journalist #4	TV	35-40	Male	Editor/Sports	80,000 - 90,000	High	50,000 - 60,000	Low
Journalist #5	TV	45-50	Male	News anchor/ Sports	220,000 - 230,000	High	190,000 - 200,000	Very high
Journalist #6	TV	45-50	Female	News anchor/ National	1,960,000 - 1,970,000	Moderate	340,000 - 350,000	High
Journalist #7	Radio	40-45	Female	News anchor/ National	360,000 - 370,000	High	270,000 - 280,000	Moderate
Journalist #8	Radio	40-45	Male	News anchor/ National	25,000 - 30,000	Very high	25,000 - 30,000	High
Journalist #9	Online	31-35	Male	Reporter and Editor/	17,000 - 18,000	High	2,000 - 3,000	Low
Journalist #10	Online	25-30	Male	Reporter/ Science and technology	5,000 - 6,000	High	Under 1,000	Moderate

* The level of activity on *Twitter* and *Instagram* was based on the intensity –none, very low, low, medium, high or very high– with which the journalist published content on each social media platform.

For each *Twitter* and *Instagram* account of the journalists selected, a calendar was built for observation and recording to provide a broad overview of their activity on these platforms. This consistency was not meant generate a sample of posts but to structure observation cycles.

Given that the media logics of *Twitter* and *Instagram* are different (**Hermida**; **Mellado**, 2020), our research team used slightly different strategies for observing and recording activities.

Four complete non-consecutive weeks in 2021 (Monday through Sunday) were used to analyze the *Twitter* accounts of the selected journalists. A similar procedure was used to analyze *Instagram* accounts, but including a total of eight weeks of material. This difference is based on previous studies conducted by the same research team that showed that journalists' *Twitter* content production far exceeds their *Instagram* production (**Mellado**, 2021, 2022). As such, a longer period was required to obtain a similar amount of content from the latter platform. A total of 962 posts were obtained, 535 from *Instagram* and 427 from *Twitter* (Table 2).[1]

Table 2. Number of posts recorded and analyzed per journalist

Journalist	*Instagram*	*Twitter*
1	32	22
2	25	49
3	43	23
4	104	21
5	108	25
6	42	42
7	62	57
8	34	128
9	47	39
10	38	21
Total	535	427

4.2. Fieldwork

A rating grid was developed as a field journal to efficiently record the posts and allow for group and individual analysis and reflection. The grid allowed us to record information on the types of posts, the platform used, publication date, the text and visual content, post type and other data. It also included a space for research notes, allowing for better interpretations and contributing to the final analysis. Based on the operationalization and definition of each role (see the subsection below), both the text and (audio)visual content of each post was analyzed as well as its relationship to the material published on each timeline, the relationship between synchronous and asynchronous content (see the subsections below) and between the content posted and interaction with the audience. Table 3 presents the general observation guidelines.

Table 3. Ethnographic observation guidelines

Record dimensions
General characteristics
Item number Publication type: post/tweet, story, reel, other Journalist's name Date of post Time of post Actual text of the post
Contents produced
Image: Screen shot of the full post including text and image Engagement: list of the most important interactions with followers Description: Narrative description of the various types of roles involved in the post, the relationship between synchronous and asynchronous content and the existence of audience engagement.
Analytical-interpretive axis
Memo: The observer records their interpretations and impressions of the material observed. Questions, hypotheses and ideas based on the material are noted in this space that can be recovered later to contribute to subsequent interpretations.

4.3. Categories of analysis

In order to observe the configuration of journalists' digital identities through the implementation of different professional roles, we based on the operationalizations proposed by **Mellado** (2015; 2021) and **Mellado** and **Hermida** (2021) –previously discussed in the conceptual section of this article– to observe the journalistic performance of traditional and emerging roles on social media. Our team considered both the definition and operationalization of those roles, but not in an effort to quantify their presence. The goal was instead to analyze how those roles are produced and reproduced on the *Twitter* and *Instagram* accounts of the news professionals analyzed, in a qualitative and exemplifying manner.

We explored the performance of the watchdog, interventionist, loyal-facilitator, service, infotainment and civic roles at the level of traditional roles. In regard to roles more closely associated with digital practices, we analyzed the performance of the promoter, celebrity and joker roles (see **Mellado**, 2015; 2021; **Mellado**; **Hermida**, 2021 for more information on the operationalization of each role).

4.4. Data collection

Both platforms have contents that can be classified in two categories based on their temporality. The first consists of "live videos", "stories," and other materials that designed to be seen and commented on simultaneously, that is, to follow the user in a synchronous manner (S). The second type of content is generally known as a post or tweet. This may contain texts and videos or images or solely text on *Twitter*. *Instagram* posts generally include an image or video accompanied by text. This type of content is organized in a continuous temporal manner in what is generally called a wall or timeline, and it can be visited and revisited asynchronously (A).

This analysis included three moments organized by week. The first consisted of observing and recording synchronous activities (S). The second was organized around the observation and record of asynchronous contents (A). The third featured triangulation (T) meetings in which the team discussed the material, notes and interpretations that emerged from each process. Once the third moment ended, the cycle began again (Figure 1).
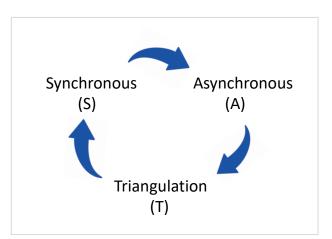

Figure 1. Cycle of analysis of the material

In order to organize the ethnographic field, a work calendar was developed as described below and executed over 12 weeks between January 4 and March 28, 2021. The ethnography was planned to take 12 weeks and was organized as shown in Table 4.

Table 4. Structure of observations

Week	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
Twitter	S	A	T	S	A	T						
Instagram	S	A	T	S	A	T	S	A	T	S	A	T

Latin America, and particularly Chile, offers an adequate context for the study of digital social identity and journalistic roles in social media due to the fact that social media platforms are important news sources. A recent national study found that 9 out of every 10 journalists who work for national media outlets have an active *Twitter* or *Instagram* account, and eight out of 10 have active and public accounts on both (**Mellado**; **Ovando**, 2021). This suggests a high level of penetration among members of this professional group similar to the rates reported for most developed countries (**Willnat**; **Weaver**, 2018).

5. Results and discussion

The digital ethnography identified the performance of various journalistic roles through diverse practices that model the digital social identities of the Chilean journalists studied.

These practices range from resources close to each of the emergent roles identified by **Mellado** and **Hermida** (2021) to more traditional journalistic roles broadly analyzed in comparative studies (**Mellado**, 2021). However, it is important to note that although we included journalists with different profiles and from different news beats in the digital ethnography (see Table 1), the presence of traditional journalism roles at the level of practices was only represented through the service role and, to some degree, through the infotainment role. The presence of other roles broadly practiced in traditional media such as the watchdog or civic role, for example, was significantly lower and in some cases non-existent. As such, our results and analysis are limited to the roles that stand out in the practice of journalists on their social media accounts.
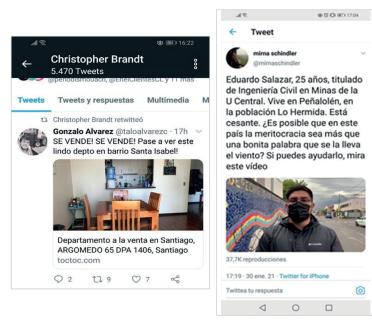
5.1. Digital identity and the service role

An initial practice observed by our study is the performance of the service role. The journalists who practice this role on their social media accounts position themselves as public figures to gain more followers or support a certain cause or specific case that requires community assistance. At the same time, in cases in which an authority or legal agencies could have an impact, the goal is to call the attention of the corresponding entities/officials to a specific case in order to address the specific needs that people have in their daily lives.

Our ethnographic work revealed that the service role manifests on two levels. The first is related to specific needs that are shared or directly impact people. For example, one journalist published a call to donate plasma on *Instagram* in order to support efforts to treat

Images 1 and 2. Screenshots from *Instagram* and *Twitter*: Service role practices

Images 3 and 4. Screenshots from *Twitter*: Service role practices

a person sick with Covid-19. This connects individual need to the issue of public health. Another journalist shared information about a campaign to donate computers to students without such devices so that they could continue to attend school (virtually) during the pandemic. While this role is more present on the accounts analyzed on *Instagram*, journalists do publish similar posts on *Twitter* (Images 1 and 2).

A second level addresses the service role as a form of helping others with an inclination to support individual causes in which the beneficiary of the assistance is very specific. Image 3 shows efforts to promote the sale of a department in a specific sector of the city. Image 4 features a call to pay attention to unequal opportunities in Chile by asking for support for a young journalist who is looking for a job.

5.2. Digital identity and the celebrity role

The practice of the celebrity role is much more complex than simply "being famous." It involves knowledge of current trends and may focus on a specific group. One resource used in the practice of this role, and particularly among female journalists, is a lifestyle trend characterized by positioning oneself on social media as a person who lives a certain lifestyle, enjoying experiences and high quality products that tend to be inaccessible to most people. Journalists publish content on their travels; exclusive, healthy or particularly well-made meals; beverages; and other activities and products. While brands or specific services are observed as a clear sign of endorsement –closer to the promoter role (see below)–, this

is not fundamental to the identity construction of the celebrity role. Here the key element is showing a certain lifestyle and not necessarily promoting a brand for business purposes. This strengthens "distinction" in the sense developed by Bourdieu, that is, differentiation of prestige within society (**Bourdieu**, 1984). In that way, journalists can draw a line between themselves and the audience, reinforcing their elite position. Taking advantage of such position, journalists also include lifestyle content that creates a bridge between their followers and their exclusive experience.
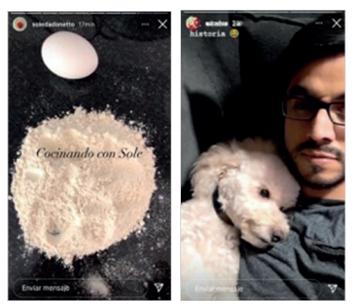
They might also show backstage footage, opening a window onto a world that is not known by but is of interest to their followers. That window positions journalists as bridges between their workplace – which they access along with a small elite– and an audience that is far from it. As such, showing the celebrity world of the media to their followers deploys a game linked to social distances from power where the journalist can use their social media to acquire a form of prestige. For example, some journalists show images of themselves with famous people who are inaccessible to most audience members as part of what has been defined as celebrification (**Mellado**; **Hermida**, 2022b; **Olausson**, 2018).

In Image 5, a sports journalist publishes a photo of himself on *Instagram* in which he appears on the set of his TV program with other well-known professionals from Chile. In Image 6, we see another sports journalist taking a selfie with a famous soccer player and coach who is now a sports commentator. This association aligns with scholars' observations of *Twitter* activity regarding efforts to connect with others in specific contexts in order to put the journalist in a position of being part of a group (**Lomborg**, 2013).
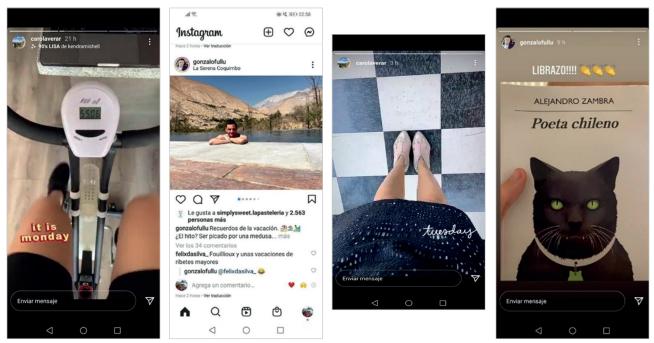
Journalists' performance of the celebrity role also has a specific variant that moves away from ostentation and luxury. Journalists publish content related to their daily lives, showing themselves to be a person just like everyone else. This is especially common on *Instagram* and occurs only marginally on *Twitter*.

Images 5 and 6. Screenshots from *Instagram*: Celebrity role practices

Images 7 and 8. Screenshots from *Instagram*: Celebrity role practices

Images 9- 12. Screenshots from *Instagram*: Celebrity role practices

This approach does not consist of full access to their intimate lives, but rather small signs of desirable aspects from the day to day that allow them to get attention and grow closer to their followers. This sort of content includes daily activities like cooking, watering plants or playing with children. Image 7, a photograph posted by a journalist on *Instagram*, shows flour and an egg as part of meal preparation. This form of openness does not necessarily require a filter, but it does need to be thought out and curated. The post must be designed to reach the other in an organized, pleasant and friendly context. Image 8 shows a journalist taking a selfie with no filter of himself resting on the couch with his dog after work.

This form of identity construction reveals the awareness of participating in a game in which an intentional image is built. This is not gratuitous, as it relates to the openness of the personal with the constant questioning of one's own identity (Images 9-12).
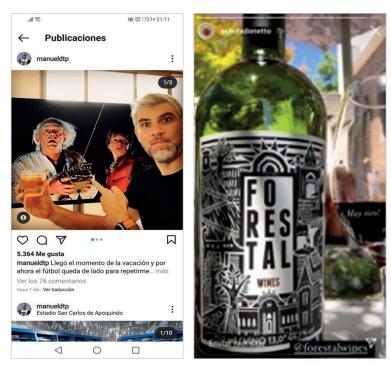
5.3. Digital identity and the promoter role

The role that is most present in journalistic practices on *Instagram* and *Twitter* is the promoter role, specifically two of its variants: advertising products and professional branding.

The social media platforms analyzed effectively serve the purpose of disseminating advertising messages. Some journalists systematically promote products and services through contracts that yield benefits ranging from small perks to higher income sponsorship agreements.

The ethnographic analysis shows that journalists approach the promoter role differently depending on the platform used. In the cases analyzed, this objective is pursued almost exclusively through their *Instagram* accounts. *Twitter* accounts tend to be used for goals more closely linked to their personal brand and professional position. As such, they are not part of strategies for direct commercial gain (or at least not those linked to promoting products and services).

Furthermore, journalists who do advertise products and services use various approaches when it comes to labeling the brands with which they have commercial agreements. Some focus on transparency, adding the

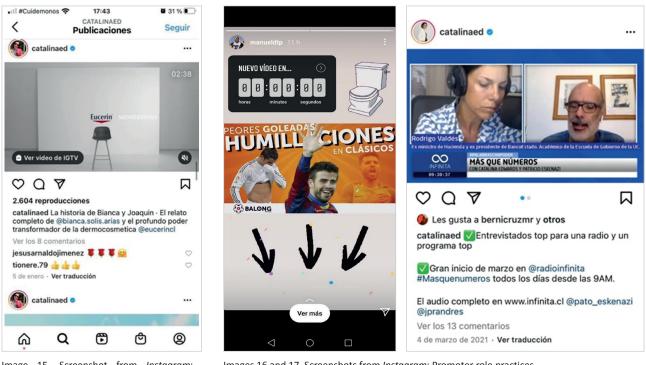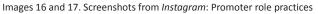Images 13 and 14. Screenshots from *Instagram*: Promoter role practices

Image 15. Screenshot from *Instagram*: Promoter role practices

Images 16 and 17. Screenshots from *Instagram*: Promoter role practices

hashtag #advertising to the paid posts that they publish (Image 13). Others do so indirectly or in a more "camouflaged" way even when it is clear that there is a commercial exchange with the brand because they consistently tag it.

The business exchanges that are displayed in the journalists' posts tend to be accompanied by the attributes of a product or brand in which one can appreciate a formal relationship between the journalist and a third party. This can be due to the detailed and specific nature of the description, the length of the post or the work that can be perceived behind its publication, or due to the use of images from the brand itself (Image 15).

In the analysis of the audience response to journalists' posts, it is clear that the interaction that they generate with their followers is a key factor for the commercial goal. From the outset, brands consider the number of followers that each influencer has as the target audience that they could reach. At the same time, social media platforms like *Instagram* allow certain actions only after a certain number of followers is reached. This is the case of the swipe up for story option and account verification.

This offers a benefit independent of the direct interaction of the journalist in the comments. Some never respond to comments and others do so only infrequently, limiting their engagement to people they know.

Another purpose of the promoter role is the construction of mid- and long-term prestige. This refers to the development of journalists' "brand," where they differentiate themselves from others and become different types of figures. For example, in one *Instagram* story, a journalist promotes a new "live" that will appear on their *YouTube* channel. There is a clock counting down to the release of the video and a link in the story. If the user swipes up, the video opens and the journalist can promote their work (Image 16). In another post, a journalist promotes her radio program with an image of her in the studio interviewing a guest (Image 17).

An important difference is produced on this level in which some journalists conceive of their work as excluding the possibility of engaging in publicity or representing brands, as these actions weaken their credibility and neutrality.

Those who focus their digital identity on building a reliable image in journalistic terms and extol their professional work must also carefully manage their social media in order to avoid losing the prestige that they have gained.
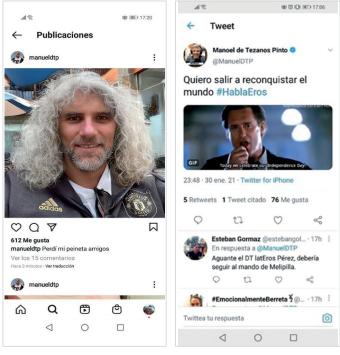
5.4. Digital identity and the joker role

On both social media platforms, and particularly on the accounts of the male journalists analyzed, humor and especially irony emerge as communication practices used across the board. This strategy nurtures interaction with audiences in that followers actively seek out humor (Images 18 and 19).

However, it is interesting that journalists who practice the joker role do not tend to include elements of celebrity in the posts in which they use humor. This result aligns with the findings of the content analyses conducted by the author of this study (**Mellado**; **Hermida**, 2022b).

Humor contributes to the construction of a narrative of themselves marked by feelings, which places journalists on a register close to the role of infotainment, but with nuances. It is possible to see that the presence of the joker role is very

coherent and fluid for journalists who cover issues like entertainment or sports, as they are under less pressure to maintain a serious and structured image. However, humor may be present transversally without necessarily reaching the level of a pure expression of the joker role. Indeed, the presence of the joker is much more closely linked to irony and political critiques on *Twitter*, while *Instagram* allows for self-expression and for journalists to play, wearing costumes or creating parodies of themselves and others (Image 20).

Social media interaction can operate under the logic of a transaction in which certain practices operate as currency. The ethnographic analysis showed that there is a clear difference between forms of interaction on *Twitter* and *Instagram* (**López-Rabadán**; **Mellado**, 2019). Journalists' interaction on *Twitter* seems to take on greater importance. The journalists' target audience on this social media platform is a subject who consumes and produces a great deal of textual content. Journalists respond to their followers using fun and/or ironic approaches to generate more conversation and reactions from the audience. As other scholars have noted, *Twitter*'s functioning is based on interaction (**Lomborg**, 2013). This interaction can be collaborative or more open to conflict and confrontation.

Images 18 and 19. Screenshots from *Instagram* and *Twitter*: Joker role practices

6. Final reflections

This study analyzed how Chilean journalists reinterpret and redefine their roles on *Twitter* and *Instagram* through their daily digital practices, building different types of identity on social media.

Through a digital ethnographic analysis we observed that social media platforms allow journalists to maintain a relationship with audiences that is not episodic or restricted to their appearances in the media or the publication of their work. The interaction that they achieve with their followers on social media is important when it comes to performing various roles, especially those linked to social and economic capital, like the promoter and celebrity roles.

Second, our study supports the idea that the performance of certain roles operates as an important resource in the construction of digital identities (**Brems** *et al.*, 2017; **Mellado**; **Hermida**, 2022a; **Pérez-Díaz**; **Planes-Pedreño**, 2021). The service role is a resource for shaping identities oriented towards the community and help resolving people's daily problems. The celebrity role supports the construction of an identity that plays with distances or the journalist's differentiated social status. It brings the followers closer to the lifestyle of elites while marking the privileged position of the journalist within society. In other words, it articulates the need for the journalist to be close and far away at the same time (**Olausson**, 2018).

Parallel to this, journalists' identity on social media may approach the role of the promoter. Driven by celebrity status, it promotes the work of journalists and

Image 20. Screenshot from *Twitter*: Joker role practices

their media outlets while promoting products and services, which produces a clear material benefit and gives an instrumental meaning to their practices (**Molyneux**; **Holton**, 2015). In other words, it reveals that journalistic identity on digital platforms may not be limited to serving personal narcissism but may be linked to a form of generating concrete material value.

At the same time, the journalist's identity can be directly linked to the practice of the joker role as an expression of continuity of the provision of entertainment and as a playful and critical way of observing the world through humor, irony and sarcasm (**Holton**; **Lewis**, 2011; **Molyneux**, 2015).

Third, our results show that digital identities are built through the implementation of roles that are not mutually exclusive, but that co-occur on an ongoing basis and change over time or depending on the context. Journalists align and

choose the type of resources that they use depending on the target audience and the purpose of their posts. Digital identity is comprised of various fragments that bring together experience, daily life, intimacy, preferences and other forms of expression. Journalists build a narrative about themselves through their use of those roles in their practices, often creating their own editorial line on each social media platform. While some journalists maintain a single narrative on *Twitter* and *Instagram*, others build differentiated discourses for each platform.

Fourth, *Twitter* and *Instagram* strengthen and make more complex the construction of journalists' digital identity in that it generates important differences in the way that they materialize certain roles and, in doing so, build their identities. Both platforms operate as a network with a potential for professional development. That authorizes the expression of various practices and aspects of professional work, giving these professionals an individual voice and allowing them to build a multidimensional identity that goes beyond the framework defined by the news organizations in which they work.

Finally, our study shows that journalists' digital practices tend to operate as resources for building identities with various purposes, and that *Twitter* and *Instagram* participate in that identity construction in a complementary manner. Each platform privileges certain media strategies and digital practices. *Twitter* tends to serve a role more closely linked to the daily work of a newsroom. For its part, *Instagram* can satisfy the journalist's digital identity in terms of their personal life, or at least their life outside of work in the newsroom. In this sense, *Instagram* seems to operate as a window onto the intimate lives of information professionals, contributing to the construction of trust. Daily life experiences such as interaction with family and friends, pets, hobbies, practices associated with lifestyles (meals, athletics, clothing, vacation, etc.), consumer culture (books, films, TV series, etc.), and other personal activities show that these are individuals that are more than the general image that they project through the media. In that way, the results of this digital ethnography triangulate the findings of previous studies that examine journalistic performance on social media through content analysis (**Mellado**, 2022; **Bossio**, 2021; **Negreira-Rey**; **Vázquez-Herrero**; **López-García**, 2022).

While this finding represents the general overview, it is also possible to observe in the activities of the journalists analyzed that the public and private spheres are not completely separate on social media. Rather, they articulate and dialogue with the journalist's "complete self." Although they use their social media separately, audiences have access to their various "identities" and can create their own global vision of them based on a combination of those contents. *Instagram* and *Twitter* thus help journalists to go beyond the limits imposed by their news beat on traditional media platforms.

This research contributes to the understanding of how journalists build their digital social identity in digital environments from a qualitative perspective. However, it presents various limitations that should be recognized, as well as avenues for future studies.

First, the qualitative approach of this study calls for caution in regard to generalizing its conclusions to the Chilean professional collective. More specifically, the roles analyzed through the digital ethnography of the accounts of ten Chilean journalists attest to a framework of practices that have been outlined in other studies but are identified only initially here among the digital culture characteristics of Chilean journalists. Future studies should thus replicate this study using larger samples of journalists and with journalists who present more diverse characteristics, such as regional journalists or professionals who work for independent media outlets.

Second, while our study analyzes the daily practices of journalists in their social media activity, it does not compare those practices to the discursive construction of digital identity by these media professionals. It is therefore important for future studies to analyze the degree to which journalists can recognize their own practices and the gap between their narration of their activity and what is reflected on their social media accounts.

Third, future studies should analyze both journalists' posts and the content of their profiles in order to understand how they play their role on different platforms from a different perspective and the degree to which their actions are influenced by the guidelines of their news organizations.

Finally, this study is limited to the qualitative observation of certain traditional and emerging journalistic roles that were operationalized previously by specific authors on *Twitter* and *Instagram*. However, there is a wide variety of potential roles not included in this research that could be addressed in future studies. This is also true of other social media platforms that are becoming more important for journalistic work. In this context, new studies could engage in an analysis of more roles and platforms in order to identify different variations in the construction of digital identities.

7. Note

1. *Twitter* threads are considered a single post in our count of posts analyzed. *Instagram* stories comprised of one or more slides are also considered a single post if they address a single thematic unit of content.

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