FULL LENGTH ARTICLE

Platform Matters

Political Opinion Expression on Social Media

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ABSTRACT

This study examines political opinion expression on four social media platforms in Argentina (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and WhatsApp). Drawing on in-depth interviews (N=158) and a survey (N= 700), it examines divergent dynamics of political conversation across platforms, and finds that respondents use platforms in different ways to talk about current affairs. Political discussion practices vary according to shared understandings regarding the content perceived as appropriate and level of privacy attributed to each platform, but not according to socio demographic characteristics. This comparative cross-platform approach indicates that political talk on social media is shaped by: a) the political context; b) each platform's uptake; and, c) the overlapping of private and public, non-political and political content in a single space. Combining interviews with a survey allows this research to account for both differences in the level of political talk across platforms and the interpretation that underlie these differences.. In the polarized Argentine context, online incivility is perceived to be common, and users employ diverging strategies to talk about politics on different platforms. We draw upon these findings to reflect on how varying user practices contribute to understanding social media platforms as culturally distinct spaces.

1   Introduction

Scholarship has focused on the role of discussion in an informed and active citizenry, stressing the role of interpersonal communication within the political process (Katz & Lazarsfeld, 2017; Habermas, 1989; Manin, 1987). Through everyday political conversation, citizens build their identities (Kim & Kim, 2008; Ekström & Östman, 2015), acquire information (Scheufele, 2000), achieve mutual understanding (Moy & Gastil, 2006; Pingree, 2007), and produce public reasoning and knowledge (Bennet, Flickinger & Rhine, 2000; Eveland & Hively, 2009). Research has established the value of citizens' conversations about public issues as a necessary condition for the healthy functioning of democratic societies (Dewey, 1927; Katz & Lazarsfeld, 2017; Bennet, Flickinger, & Rhine, 2000).

Informal political talk—defined as non-purposive, spontaneous conversations around political issues that are free from any formal procedural rule and predetermined agenda (Habermas, 1984)—has been considered an important component of democracy since everyday political talk is a key aspect of the deliberative system (Mansbridge, 1999; Conover & Searing, 2005; Kim & Kim, 2008; Fraser, 1990; Valenzuela, Kim, & Gil de Zúñiga, 2012; Gil de Zúñiga, Valenzuela, & Weeks, 2016). Social media have become a critical tool towards this end because they furnish "citizens with opportunities to express themselves and openly share their ideas, opinions and viewpoints" (Gil de Zuñiga, Huber, & Strauss, 2018, p. 1173).

Scholarship on political discussion on social media has either tended to subsume all platforms under the general "social media category" (Gil de Zúñiga, Weeks, & Ardèvol-Abreu, 2017) or conduct research on one platform and assume that findings are valid across different channels (Gil de Zuniga, Huber, & Strauss, 2018; Pingree, 2007). However, notable exceptions to this scholarly trend indicate that political discussion on these platforms depends on user motivations, technological affordances, network structure, and dominant communicative practices (Duffy, Pruchniewska, & Scolere, 2017; Skoric, Zhu, & Pang, 2015; Valenzuela, Kim, & Gil de Zúñiga, 2012; Settle, 2018; Yarchi, Baden, & Kligler-Vilenchik, 2020). Our paper draws theories of polymedia and context collapse (Costa 2017; Davis & Jurgenson, 2014; Miller & Madianou, 2012; Marwick & Boyd, 2011) to examine how users of different social media platforms engage or fail to participate in political discussion. Drawing upon survey and interview data, we analyze how people in Argentina perceive and communicate on Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, and Instagram.

As Kessler et al. (2020) propose, studies on social dynamics in polarizing contexts are limited by their reliance on either surveys or in-depth interviews. For this reason, this study combines both methods to shed light on the differences

and similarities of political conversations on social media platforms in a country marked by widespread polarization since 2008 (De Luca & Malamud, 2010).

Our findings show the existence of divergent dynamics of political conversation across platforms. The interviews indicate that users locate Facebook at the intersection between private life and public life, expecting lower levels of anonymity; perceive Twitter as a relatively anonymous space for the discussion of mostly public affairs; use Instagram, where they expect their contacts to recognize them, mostly for non-political content; and experience WhatsApp as a platform for management of their everyday life where they expect their contacts to know who they are. Furthermore, the survey finds that, while the use of Facebook and Twitter was positively associated with posting political opinions on social media, the same pattern was not present for WhatsApp and Instagram. Perceptions of political talk and engagement in discussion vary according to the platform on which they take place, but not in relation to users' demographic characteristics. We draw on these findings to reflect on how varying user practices contribute to understanding social media platforms as culturally distinct spaces, and what this means for the role of socially mediated political talk in contemporary societies.

2   Theoretical considerations

2.1 Online political talk and incivility: personal and political dimensions

The online environment has enabled new forms of political participation (Jung, Kim, & De Zúñiga, 2011; Valenzuela, Kim, & Gil de Zúñiga, 2012; Boulianne, 2015; Bennett & Segerberg, 2012; Gil de Zúñiga, Molyneux, & Zheng, 2014; Gil de Zúñiga, Weeks, & Ardèvol-Abreu, 2017; Pingree, 2007; Kim, Hsu, & de Zúñiga, 2013; Kushin & Yamamoto, 2010). Research shows a mainly positive link between digital media use and political participation (Boulianne, 2015, 2018), where political expression is an important antecedent of political participation (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012), as "political talk precedes political action" (Gil de Zúñiga, Huber, & Strauss, 2018, P. 1174).

Regarding the political dimension, civil political discourse is generally thought to be central to a well-functioning democracy (Hopp & Vargo, 2017). Scholarship on Latin America suggests that there is a relationship between polarization and a growing erosion of democracy (Kessler et al., 2020; Lupu Oliveros, & Schiumerini, 2020). De Luca and Malamud (2010, p. 174) propose that that, beginning in 2008, Argentina experienced the highest degree of social and political polarization since the first presidency of Juan Perón (1946-1955).

In 2018 the government decided to raise taxes on agricultural exports, thus unleashing long-lasting conflict between then-president Cristina Fernández de Kirchner and the agricultural producers—and, by extension between Kirchnerists and non-Kirchnerists. Indeed, since 2008, the Kirchnerist administrations (2003-2015) publicly confronted the main Argentine media group, Clarín, which they identified as one of the actors in the opposition (Kitzberger, 2012).

Polarization might be intensified by the propensity of people to accept information that coincides with their pre-existing views, and that this new information should strengthen these views (Birch, 2020). Indeed, the massification of networks, consolidated during the 2010s, intensified a pre-existing political polarization (Baldoni & Schuliaquer, 2020). For instance, in Aruguete & Calvo (2018) analysis of the coverage on Twitter of #Tarifazo protests in Argentina—a political crisis triggered by the decision of Mauricio Macri's administration (2015-2019) to increase public utility rates by 400%—the messages delivered by pro- and anti-government users were activated in different regions of the network, with scant information crossing to the opposite camp. Studies also indicate that polarization has potentially limiting effects on the scope of political conversations (Eliasoph, 1998; Mutz, 2002; Lee et al., 2014; Yarchi, Baden, & Kligler-Vilenchik, 2020; Huckfeldt et al., 2004). Therefore, research about online discussions suggests that exposure to uncivil comments, understood as "features of discussion that convey an unnecessarily disrespectful tone toward the discussion forum, its participants, or its topics" (Coe, Kenski, & Rains, 2014, p. 660), have negative political and personal consequences.

Vis-à-vis the personal dimension, dangerous discussions (Eveland & Hively, 2009) and online incivility may elicit anger, aversion, guilt, aggression, and/or anti-deliberative attitudes (Anderson et al., 2018; Goyanes, Borah, & Zúñiga, 2021; Coe, Kenski, & Rains, 2014). In this sense, social media sites constantly collapse multiple social contexts (Davis & Jurgenson, 2014) potentially resulting in self-censorship behaviors, as individuals selectively self-present through these platforms (Velasquez & Rojas, 2017; Sibona, 2014). For instance, Goyanes, Borah and Zúñiga (2021) find that people who discuss online about politics in an uncivil manner are more prone to filter or block the users they follow or are in contact with. Likewise, Lee and Choi (2020) conclude that individuals within heterogeneous social media environments who engage more often in political discussion have more polarized opinions than those who seldom participate in political talk.

Moreover, scholarship indicates that not all citizens are equally likely to engage in political opinion expression. Research shows that the mean for online expression is lower than that for offline political talk (Bode et al., 2014). Young adults are more likely than their older counterparts to express their political opinions on social media, including voicing support for a candidate, sharing news articles, and discussing politics with other users (Rainie et al., 2012; Smith & Duggan, 2012; Yamamoto, Kushin, & Dalisay, 2015). Besides, more

educated and wealthy citizens are more inclined to engage in civic activities than their less educated and less welloff counterparts (Verba, Schlozman, & Brady, 1995; Zukin et al., 2006). For instance, Portney and O'Leary (2007) find that people with higher levels of educational attainment and income tend to engage more frequently in online political discussions. In addition, while women have made considerable gains in wielding political influence, research indicates that they engage less than men in political discussions (Huckfeldt & Sprague, 1995; Wen, Xiaoming, & George, 2013; Vochocová, Štětka, & Mazák, 2 016).

2.2 Various uses of platforms

In relation to political and personal aspects, polymedia theory (Costa, 2017; de Bruin, 2017; Miller & Madianou, 2012; Peng, 2016; Renninger, 2015; Zhou, Liang, & Zhang,, 2015) proposes that social actors privilege relational and emotional matters when selecting communication channels rather than technological affordances. Madianou (2014) argue that emphasis should be made "on how users exploit the affordances within the composite structure of polymedia in order to manage their emotions and relationship (p. 671). The affordances of social media platforms invite different types of user interactions and promote the emergence of distinct networks and practices (Papacharissi, 2009; Zhang & Wang, 2010). Platforms enable parties, candidates, and politicians to directly reach out to citizens, mobilize supporters, and seek to influence the public agenda. Through social media, they can bring their message to the public faster, posting on recent events before they are interpreted by news media (Stieglitz & Dang-Xuan, 2012). Due to the various architectures of social media platforms, politicians use different platforms in diverse ways (Stier et al., 2018), and thus, sentiment and conversation styles differ across platforms (Lin & Qiu, 2013; Hsu & Park, 2012; Caton, Hall, & Weinhardt,, 2015).

Studies about political expression on social media have found important differences across platforms (Becker & Copeland, 2016; Lu & Myrick, 2016; Vaccari et al., 2015; Yamamoto, Kushin, & Dalisay, 2015). Valeriani and Vaccari (2018) find that platform affordances have relevant implications on the types of users favoring political expression and conversation. In fact, following Schmidt´s analytical framework (2007), we can recognize, two types of rules regarding exposure of users and type of content of posts. First, regarding the personal aspect, the exposure spectrum refers to the scale of privacy users expect on social media platforms, ranging from exposure to anonymity. Second, on the political dimension, there is a continuum with respect the kind of content related to either private life or public affairs. In the next paragraphs we present some differences found by the literature on the respective uses and perceptions of Twitter, Facebook, WhatsApp and Instagram.

An increasing number of studies have focused on the role of Twitter in politics. Twitter's unique design and its capability to disseminate information have attracted considerable research interest (Hsu & Park, 2012). Yang and Counts (2010) discussed Twitter's critical role in information diffusion and other studies found that conversations are often structured by political hashtags (Bruns & Burgess, 2011; Boynton, 2013) around which ad hoc publics (Bruns & Burgess, 2011; Vaccari & Valeriani, 2018) emerge. Moreover, "super-participants", who tend to work in politics, hold important positions in discussion networks (Larsson & Moe, 2012). Marwick and Boyd (2011) show that some regular Twitter users with public accounts imagined their audience to be a general public, while others imagined it to be friends, family, or interested parties. Usher, Holcomb and Littman (2018) found that male journalists are more likely to have a verified Twitter account as a sign they are a "public figure," to have more followers and to tweet more often.

Scholarship has found that Facebook is perceived as a less anonymous space (Boczkowski, Mitchelstein, & Matassi, 2018; Semaan et al., 2014; Hampton, Lee & Her, 2011; Ellison, Steinfield, & Lampe, 2011). Halpern and Gibbs (2013) have analyzed interactions on the Facebook and YouTube channels of the White House, finding that the greater anonymity of YouTube debates leads to more flaming and impoliteness than Facebook. Popular public pages of news outlets, politicians, activist groups, and celebrities often host political threads involving previously unconnected strangers, anchoring political discussions in pre-existing networks (Vaccari & Valeriani, 2018).

Research shows that users perceive Instagram as part of a broader context of 'political talk' where images are "not the displays of the rulers, but rather, the rhetoric of subaltern counter publics" (Mahoney & Tang, 2016). Although research on Instagram as a venue for political expression is scarce, Trevisan et al. (2019) found that in Italy before the European Elections of May 2019 a small group of users actively participated in discussions and reply to other comments, aiming at influencing the online political debate.

In contrast, WhatsApp is used mainly to maintain connections with family members, friends, and acquaintances, and to chat within small groups in private settings, rather than discussing political topics with larger groups (O'Hara et al., 2014; Matassi, Boczkowski, & Mitchelstein, 2019; Marwick & Boyd, 2011; Karapanos Teixeira, & Gouveia, 2016; Valenzuela, Bachmann, & Bargsted, 2021).

As mentioned above, Argentina is a fruitful setting to examine political talk in a polarized context for two main reasons. First, the 2015 presidential election was one of the most polarized in history (Lupu, 2016; Rodriguez & Smallman, 2016). National and international observers labeled the division between the two main parties, Peronist Frente de Todos (Kircherismo) and Cambiemos (Macrismo) as "la grieta" or, "the chasm" (Lupu, Oliveros, & Schiumerini, 2020). Second, Argentina has a high proportion of social media users, over 70 percent

(Freedom House, 2018). Filer and Fredheim state: "the attention that Argentine politicians pay to social media suggests that they recognize the widespread use of these online platforms in Argentina, particularly among the youngest segment of the newly expanded electorate" (2017, p. 261). Use of social media varies by platform. According to the 2018 Reuters Digital News Report, 80% of survey respondents used Facebook and WhatsApp, compared to 42% who were on Instagram, and 29% on Twitter (Levy, Newman, & Fletcher, 2018)

2.3 Research questions and hypothesis

Informed by scholarship discussed in the previous section, we start our research with two-part quantitative hypothesis:

\   H1a: Younger people post more personal opinions about politics, economics, and current affairs on social media platforms than older respondents.

\   H1b: Men post more personal opinions about politics, economics, and current affairs on social media platforms than women.

\   H1c: People with higher levels of education post more personal opinions about politics, economics, and current affairs on social media platforms.

\   H1d: People of higher socioeconomic status post more personal opinions about politics, economics, and current affairs on social media platforms.

\   H2: Twitter users post more personal opinions about politics, economics, and current affairs than Facebook, Instagram and WhatsApp users.

To explore how users engage in political talk on different social media platforms we then pose two research questions:

\   RQ 1: How do users make sense of varying opinion expression practices in different social media platforms?

\   RQ 2: How do users engage in opinion expression practices?

3   Methodology

This comparative cross-platform study combines in-depth interviews with a survey to examine the socio-demographic factors that explain opinion expression on varying social media platforms, and the interpretations and experiences tied to that expression.

First, this paper draws on a 2016 survey of 700 people from the Greater Buenos Aires area, which comprises 37% of the Argentina population (INDEC, 2010), to analyze how the use of different social media platforms is related to online political expression in Argentina. The survey was conducted face-to-face during October 2016. The sample consists of a diverse group regarding gender, age, and socioeconomic status. Households were selected according to a probabilistic multi-stage sample design, and respondents were selected to complete age and gender quotas. Of the 700, 175 were 18- to 29-years-old, 175 were 30–44, 175 were 45–60, and 175 were 60 or older. While the average age of the Argentine population as of the 2010 National Census is 29 years old, the average age of the sample, which does not include persons under 18 years of age, is 44.94 years (INDEC, 2010). Half of the sample was female, and the survey response rate was 19%. Their mean age was forty.

The dependent variable is the frequency with which respondents posted personal opinions about politics, economics, and current affairs in general on social media. The survey question was "Could you tell me whether you use social media to post personal opinions about politics, economics and current affairs, and how often?" and the variable is ranged from 1 (never) to 8 (several times a day). The independent variables are social media frequency of use for Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and WhatsApp (variables were dichotomized as 1 if respondents use the platforms constantly or several times a day and 0 if respondents they use it once a day or less). We also include gender, age, education attainment, and socioeconomic status.

Second, the research also draws on one-hundred-and-fifty-eight semi-structured interviews—56.33% female and 43.67% male—conducted face-to-face by a team of research assistants in the Greater Buenos Aires Area, and the provinces of Córdoba, Santa Fe and Salta, between March 2016 and December 2017. All interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed in their entirety, lasting an average of approximately 33 minutes. In most cases, the recruitment of interviewees started by inviting a handful of distant contacts of each interviewer to be interviewed. These contacts were a diverse group in terms of gender, age group, and socio-economic status. At the end of the interview, each interviewee was requested names of three to five of their acquaintances who were diverse in terms of gender, age group, occupation, and socioeconomic level. The interviewer also requested permission to contact these acquaintances for the purposes of this study. Using a grounded theory approach (Corbin & Strauss, 2008), the interviews were analyzed through two rounds of coding by the authors. The quotes included in this paper were translated from Spanish into English by the authors. To protect the privacy of participants, we anonymized quotes and used pseudonyms.

Method triangulation (Denzin, 1978) was used to validate findings and their interpretation. Combining in-depth interviews with a survey allowed this research to examine the differences in relation to perceptions and practices about

political opinion expression across different platforms and to establish quantitative differences among populations and platforms.

4   Findings

4.1 Survey findings: sociodemographic characteristics and platform use

To estimate the relationship between users' political expression, sociodemographic characteristics and use of social media platforms, this study specified a linear regression model, (Table 1). Regarding H1a, age is not significantly associated to the frequency of posting personal opinions about politics, economics, and current affairs on social media platforms, and thus, this hypothesis is rejected. Regarding H1b, gender is not significantly associated to the frequency of posting personal opinions on social media platforms, and thus, this hypothesis is rejected. Regarding H1c, level of education is negatively related with posting personal opinions about politics, economics, and current affairs on social media platforms, and thus, this hypothesis is also rejected. Contrary to our hypothesis, people with a higher level of education post fewer opinions on social networks and its coefficient is statistically significant. Regarding H1d, socioeconomic status is not significantly associated with frequency of posting personal opinions on public affairs, and thus, is hypothesis is also rejected.

Regarding H2, Twitter and Facebook use were positively associated with posting opinions, controlling for demographic and media use variables. Going from using Twitter once a day or less to regularly, increases posting personal opinions online by an average of 1,497 on the scale of 1 (never) to 8 (several times a day). In the case of Facebook, its use also increases posting personal opinions in 1.132 on the same scale. While the uses of Instagram and WhatsApp are also positively related to posting personal opinions, these coefficients are not statistically significant. Taking into account the differences among coefficients, the null hypothesis can be rejected. This means that there is a statistically significant

difference between being a frequent Twitter user and posting more personal opinions about politics, economics, and current affairs on social networks.

Table 1: Linear regression of "post personal opinions about politics, economics and current affairs" on gender (base case: female), age, socioeconomic status, educational attainment, and Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and WhatsApp frequencies of use.

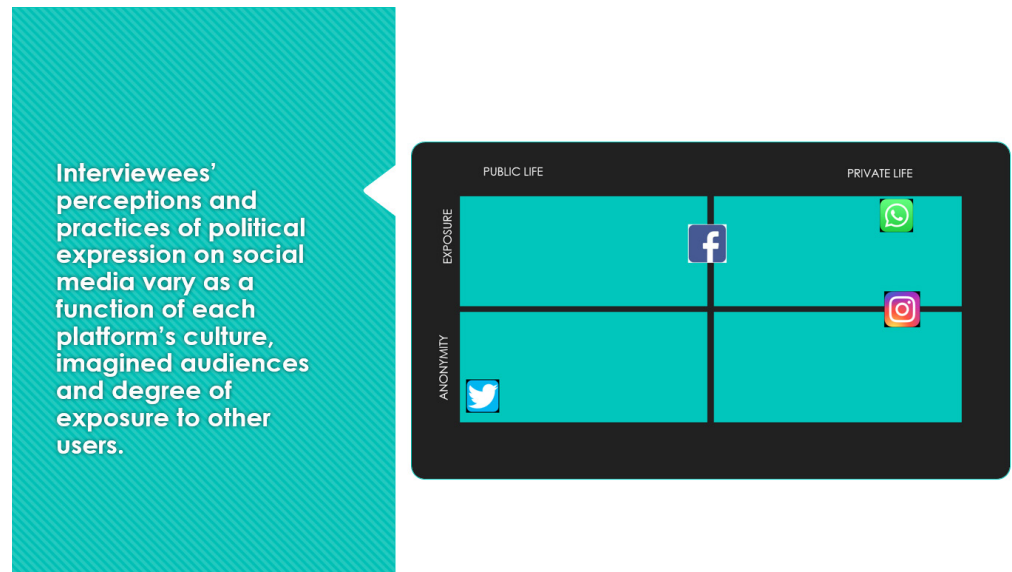| Measure	Posting personal opinions about politics, economics and current affairs
Age	0.000264
	(0.110)
Male	-0.114
	(0.201)
Socioeconomic status	0.0241
	(0.0880)
Educational attainment	-0.182***
	(0.0545)
Facebook frequency of use	1.132***
	(0.244)
Twitter frequency of use	1.497***
	(0.292)
Instagram frequency of use	0.106
	(0.288)
WhatsApp frequency of use	0.0977
	(0.365)
Constant	2.475***
	(0.590)
Observations	476
R-squared	0.160

** significant at the p < .05 level
* significant at the p < .1 level

4.2 Qualitative findings: personal and political dimensions

Interviewees' perceptions and practices of political expression of social media vary as a function of each platform's culture, imagined audiences, and degree of connection to other users. We analyze these matters on each platform on the personal and political dimensions and, in that sense, Figure 1 is the aggregate result of the users' perceptions that emerged from the in-depth interviews. First, regarding the personal dimension, we focus on the scale of privacy of users on social media platforms expressed as a continuum that goes from exposure to anonymity. Second, at the political dimension, we look at the type of content prevalent on the platforms, whether it is predominantly related to either private life or public affairs (Figure 1). Facebook is located at the intersection between public life and private life, with low levels of expected

anonymity; Twitter is in the lower left quadrant, with high levels of anonymity and more content about public affairs; Instagram is on the right side of the matrix, and at the intersection between closeness-anonymity and low levels of political discussion; and WhatsApp is in the lower-righte quadrant, with low almost no expectation and anonymity and low levels of current affairs talk.

Figure 1: Matrix on type of content (political level) and level of privacy (personal level) on social media platforms.

Interviewees' perceptions and practices of political expression on social media vary as a function of each platform's culture, imagined audiences and degree of exposure to other users.

4.3 Personal dimension: anonymity and exposure

Regarding the privacy of users on social media platforms expressed as a continuum from exposure to anonymity, interviewees consider WhatsApp to be a private platform for sharing content about domestic and logistic issues with a close circle of people. Users have the greatest exposure because they know everyone on the platform that is used mostly as a messaging service. Thus, it belongs mostly to the domestic sphere, and interviewees feel they know personally all their contacts and they are known by them. Cecilia, a 32-year-old physical education teacher, said: "I use it a lot at work level, to organize pilates schedules."[1] María, a 46-year-old teaching assistant, added: "I am in the group of parents, I tell you there are two hundred thousand groups, groups of catechesis, groups of everything."[2] Similar to WhatsApp, Instagram interviewees see this network as a relatively private platform, tied to enjoyment and visual content rather than to everyday logistics. It is in the midpoint on the privacy continuum because it is seen as an entertaining, frivolous, and personal space. Respondents share content about topics that they are interested in, which for the most part are related to domestic life issues like cooking,

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[1] Interview12/06/2017.

[2] Interview 08/07/2017.

clothing, sports and health. Sofia, the 24-year-old student, explained: "It is more personal and not just anyone joins ... you can control it a little more."[3]

WhatsApp is seen as a means to be connected and as a more personal and private space to discuss issues with family and friends. Marta, a 59-year-old housewife said "I have groups with my friends, and we also comment the news"[4] Víctor, a 23-year-old college student, commented: "I have so many people on Facebook that I prefer that... I do not like people to know what I am seeing, what I am reading, what my interests are ... but I prefer if I can share it with my friends, send it by WhatsApp to my particular friends or whoever I want to see that news."[5] However, for other users, the closeness of the ties on WhatsApp makes it preferable to express their opinions face-to-face. Andrea, a 77-year-old retired teacher, said: "I don't like being in a WhatsApp group talking about politics, for example, I don't like it because it's like the goal is to have the best reply, beat the other person (…) if I were face to face with that person, I could interpret their body language, and prevent them from saying something outrageous."[6] Natalia, a 31-years old-photographer, stated: "When I agree and when I don't, I do not want receive those (political) messages on WhatsApp. The phone seems more intimate."[7]

In contrast to WhatsApp and Instagram, Twitter is perceived as a platform for information consumption, and it appears to be less permeated by other kinds of content either generated or shared by known friends. It is a space to discuss public affairs topics with people who might or might not know them. Flavia, a 49-year-old software analyst, comments: "Twitter I use it more to read the news (…) because it seems to me that Twitter is used more for that, people post more news, yes, they don't post so much of their private life and of their personal stories."[8] Thus, we place Twitter at the lower end of the exposure-anonymity axis because it is perceived as a more anonymous space where people are able to consume public information frequently. Sofia, a 24-year-old student, says "Twitter has concise information, which is key when you don't have time to inform yourself, so you read more or less the information on Twitter and more or less you get an idea. Even if it's not in depth, you know what is going on."[9] Interviews also perceive that sharing views on Twitter is practical. For instance, Juan, 27-year-old accounting assistant, explains: "although you

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[3]   Interview 04/28/2016.

[4]   Interview 09/30/2017.

[5]   Interview 08/15/2016.

[6]   Interview 03/22/2017.

[7]   Interview 06/05/2017.

[8]   Interview 07/14/2017.

[9]   Interview 04/28/2016.

are limited in what you can say, by the (number of) characters, it is more practical to share what other users write."[10]

In the case of Facebook, due to the high level of perceived exposure respondents tend to be more careful on that platform, while on Twitter they express their opinions on politics more freely. On WhatsApp sharing political opinions is associated with trust in other participants; by contrast on Instagram, there seems to be little debate around current issues. In contrast, for the interviewees, Facebook is a source of information, in addition to enabling social connections. Pablo, a 24-years-old sales representative, said that "the news feed shows stories that people share [and posted by] local newspapers. I read the headline, if I'm interested I click on it."[11]

On this matter, respondents consider Facebook as a mixture of all the others since it includes social-affective, entertainment and informational aspects, and is seen by interviewees as the oldest, most versatile and complete platform. Marcelo, a 51-year-old security guard said "I am on Facebook for family reasons, I have been on Facebook for years and that will not change."[12] Melina, a 19-year-old student explained "Facebook covers more topics [than other social media]: politics, entertainment, food videos."[13] In this sense, users highlighted the various affordances of this platform. Mario, a 30-year-old account manager said "I use Facebook a lot to see my friends' stories, and that is a little boring, but I [also] use it as a source of information. [Facebook] includes the things I'm interested in, it is a mix of everything."[14] Respondents also mentioned that Facebook allows them to stay in contact with family, old friends of school and college. Mirta, a 48-year-old accounting assistant, stated: "I like [Facebook] because I am in contact with people I haven't seen in a long time and I used to work in a school cafeteria (…) so I got in touch the janitors, the teachers, you know." The imagined audiences are more diverse on Facebook than in the other networks. Federico, 27-year-old motorsports driver says, "On Facebook, since it is older, I have more friends, contacts, followers or whatever they are called, than I have on Instagram or Twitter."[15]

Regarding the dimensions of type of content and level of exposure, in Figure 1 Facebook is located in area with low levels of expected anonymity while Twitter is in the lower left quadrant, with high levels of anonymity and more content about public affairs; and Instagram and WhatsApp is in the lower-right quadrant, with low almost no expectation and anonymity.

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[10]   Interview 04/01/2017

[11]   Interview 07/07/2017.

[12]   Interview 11/28/2017.

[13]   Interview 04/17/2016.

[14]   Interview 08/01/2017.

[15]   Interview 09/10/2017.

4.4 Political dimension: content about public and private topics

With respect to the type of content prevalent on the platforms about private life or public affairs, interviewees explain that when news about public affairs is shared on WhatsApp, it is between close acquaintances. Martina, a 22-year-old economist, explained: "for example, when Obama came: Did you see that tomorrow Obama is coming (to Argentina)? Did you see all the mess downtown about Obama?"[16] Elsa, a 66-year-old retiree, described: "I have groups of friendly people, and then, also, we comment on the news, they send you information, that comes from Facebook, that comes from different newspapers, and well, and so on."[17]

Similarly, Instagram users perceive this platform as a space for entertainment and aesthetics where political content was absent. Santiago, a 19-year-old student, remarked that "Instagram is not so politicized,"[18] and Martin, a 32-year-old insurance producer said: "Instagram, although I don't use it much, occasionally I upload something and it's more entertainment than anything else."[19] The platform is perceived as more frivolous, with less space to post about public affairs. Maria, a 22-year-old university student, said: "I see that Instagram is more for the moment or maybe there are more beautiful photos. On the other hand, on Facebook, although photos are shared, you can write more and expand and put whatever you like, but not on Instagram"[20]. German, a 30-year-old lawyer, comments: "Instagram is something completely more… empty, so to speak, you post photos and nothing else and see photos, I don't know, it is even more self-centered than what we are used to, is to see and show what you are doing"[21]. Micaela, a 21-communication student, said: "on Instagram I follow accounts that are interesting to me, such as clothes, or clothing brands, but also bloggers, fashion bloggers, food, travel, and then every so often I see a picture of someone I know."[22] For this reason, Instagram and WhatsApp are on the right side of the matrix, both with low levels of current affairs talk.

Twitter is in the lower left quadrant, with high levels of anonymity and more content about public affairs. Some interviewees saw Twitter as a space for political discussion, where people post opinions and discuss ideas without having to be careful. María, 22-year-old student explained: "(People use it) to insult, you post insults (on Twitter) like it was nothing because as there are so

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[16] Interview 03/26/2016.

[17] Interview12/30/2016.

[18] Interview10/13/2016.

[19] Interview 03/01/2017.

[20] Interview 06/24/2016.

[21] Interview12/05/2016.

[22] Interview 05/30/2016.

few characters maybe you can't argue or justify why you say it and the truth is that I don't like the idea very much."[23] In this sense, this platform is perceived as a space where people can say whatever they want, due to the character limit and the perceived aggressiveness of its culture. Isabel, a 24-year-old student, said: "Twitter seems to me the devil... Because the 140-character format is to vomit any thoughts you have."[24] However, others perceive this platform as an adequate place to exchange opinions in a relaxing way. Facundo, a 20-year-old student, reflected: "Twitter I really use it to see jokes, in addition to watching news and retweeting serious things, I also retweet football things."[25] Twitter is also seen as useful to escape the mainstream media's political alignment, due to the greater diversity of sources. Francisco, a 32-year-old worker in tourism and insurance services, analyzed: "Twitter is the social media platforms that allows you to inform yourself and see different opinions, right? Because you can see, not only a medium that has a given political focus but also a diversity of opinions and how news is covered from different viewpoints."[26]

In relation to the level of exposure seen on the personal axis, in terms of public-private content, Facebook is located at the intersection between public life and private life. Interviews indicate more caution, as users think their reputation is at stake when discussing political issues. Juana, a 20-year-old student, stated: "I will never ever comment on Facebook, or posting things that generate controversy... like football, politics, like that I avoid it because ... it generates problems, usually."[27] Luciano, a 24-year-old actor, explained: "I try not to have a very strong political profile on Facebook because political exchanges in our society are not often conducted in the best way, and not with the best arguments."[28] Users report sharing content that generates a lot of interest to them or could be useful to others and take time to craft their opinions carefully. Silvia, a 41-year-old psychologist, said: "maybe I comment when it's something very specific. But I don't do it all the time. Like the news, I don't comment all the time."[29] Likewise, Malena, a 21-year-old student, analyzed: "on Facebook I have friends, family, teachers, classmates, that is, it is very broad. On the one hand you have to take care of what you publish but on the other hand it is also personal."[30]

Thus, platforms are not equal or equally polarized. Some interviewees reported feeling overwhelmed by political discussions on social media. Agustina, a 33-years-old accountant, refrained from posting opinions altogether: "I do not

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23   Interview 06/24/2016.

24   Interview 04/26/2016.

25   Interview 06/01/2017.

26   Interview 03/01/2017.

27   Interview 03/30/2016.

28   Interview 07/05/2016.

29   Interview 10/27/2016.

30   Interview 05/18/2016.

usually share on social media because in recent years it seemed to me that sharing any news was a breeding ground for a lot of aggression. And… I didn't like to comment or share anything."[31] Many respondents emphasize that they do not like aggressions on Facebook in relation to political content. Rosario, 32-year-old physical education professor complained "Somebody posts something in favor of Macristas and a Kirchnerist comments and they start fighting. That made me delete people from Facebook because I don't like confrontations. A lot of fighting, and, like I say are family, that they are friends and that they fight like this? No, I don't like it."[32] On the contrary, respondents do not report being cautious on Twitter. For those who feel comfortable with the format, Twitter is mainly used to comment on news, reality shows, football games and other topics. Micaela, a 21-year-old graphic design student, described: "I follow a radio's or a journalist's Twitter account and if in the morning I see that they are talking about something that interests me, they have a guest that I know or so, there I post."[33] Sandra, a 48-year-old market research company analyst, said: "on Twitter I share current affairs news that interest me (…) because I also follow many well-known journalists, I follow those people and retweet or put I like."[34] Melisa, a 21-year-old student, concurred: "Twitter is like the most politicized space I have it in my life. I follow journalists, politicians, academics who talk about politics... I don't follow many people I know personally".[35]

In sum, political discussion practices on social media vary according to evolving and shared notions of the type of content and levels of exposure on different platforms. Twitter offers anonymity while Facebook gathers diverse but potentially known audiences. Users are more cautious in their use of Facebook to maintain their own reputation. On WhatsApp or Instagram users do not need to take care their profiles in a political sense because the relationship with other users is associated with either entertainment or communication with close and familiar people, both localized in private-closeness part of the table.

5   Discussion

Our analysis shows different dynamics of political conversation across social media (Becker & Copeland 2016; Boczkowski, Matassi, & Mitchelstein, 2018; Lu & Myrick, 2016, Vaccari et al., 2015; Yamamoto, Kushin, & Dalisay 2015). We find that respondents in Argentina use platforms in diverse ways to talk about politics, economics, and current affairs. Political discussion practices

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[31]   Interview 05/30/2017.

[32]   Interview 06/12/2017.

[33]   Interview 05/30/2016.

[34]   Interview 08/25/2017.

[35]   Interview 30/3/2016.

vary according to shared understandings regarding the type of content and level of exposure on each platform (Schmidt, 2007), rather than according to age, gender and socio-economic status. This study indicates that political talk on social media is shaped by the political context, but also by each platform's uptake and the overlapping of private and public, non-political, and political content in a single space (Shehata, Ekström, & Olsson, 2016). Combining in-depth interviews with a survey allows us to account both for differences in the level of political talk across platforms and for the interpretation that underlie these differences, and the practices that reify them. In the polarized Argentine context (De Luca & Malamud, 2010; Lupu et al., 2020), users employ divergent strategies to talk about politics—and refrain from doing so—on different platforms. For instance, in line with the context collapse theory (Davis & Jurgenson, 2014; Marwick & Boyd, 2014), given a perceived high level of exposure on Facebook, users tend to be more cautious, while on Twitter they express their opinions on politics more freely.

Interviewees use different social media platforms for different purposes, weighing relational and emotional matters when they select content to post on each social media platform. Consistent with Yarchi et al.'s findings in Israel (2020), another country with high levels of political polarization, users perceived Facebook as a heterogenous space, and consequently refrained from expression of political views. The link between perceived political heterogeneity and decreased political expression mirrors echoes findings by Mutz (2002) and Eveland and Hively (2009) that individuals in more heterogeneous networks are less likely to engage in public affairs.

However, network heterogeneity does not provide the full picture: some of the same respondents who chose not to talk politics on Facebook did so on Twitter. This could be explained in part by the platforms' different affordances—for instance, Facebook requires a full name while Twitter does not—but also to their political culture. By contrast, although Instagram does not require full name registration, political talk appeared to be out of place in that platform. Finally, even though interviewees felt exposed on WhatsApp, where they tend to discuss everyday topics with friends and family, reactions to political talk varied: while some of them felt safer discussing public affairs in a relatively closed space, others felt the intrusion of politics as a violation of a private space.

These findings suggest that users focus on relational matters, rather than solely on technological affordances, to select different channels of communication. As Boczkowski proposes, individuals use diverse types of technology not in isolation but in relation to each other (2021). Thus, the fear of context collapse is different on each of the platforms. Dangerous discussion (Eveland & Hively, 2009) or incivility (Goyanes, Borah, & Zúñiga, 2021; Coe, Kenski & Rains, 2014) might not be related solely to network heterogeneity, but also to the level of exposure individuals experience when discussing politics. Whereas users appear to experience context collapse on Facebook; Twitter, Instagram and WhatsApp

were perceived, for different reasons, as distinct contexts with different rules—spirited and occasionally aggressive political discussion on Twitter, no politics at all on Instagram, and cautious talk with close contacts on WhatsApp.

Our research has at least two limitations. First, although it was conducted in a polarized political context, neither the survey nor the interviews collected any information on participants or their networks' level of polarization. Second, it relies on self-reported measures rather than on analysis of the political content posted by participants on social media. However, their perceptions of different social media platforms are valuable in and of themselves. In their study of levels of polarization on Facebook, Twitter, and WhatsApp, Yarchi and co-authors propose, "political polarization on social media cannot be conceptualized as a unified phenomenon" (2020, p. 2). Our paper indicates that political discussion on social media cannot be considered as a unified phenomenon either. Conceptualizing platforms as different spaces with varying cultures is key to understanding the interplay between engagement in political talk, perceived audiences, and political polarization. We hope this research is a fruitful step in that direction.

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