Celebrities, Advertising Endorsement, and Political Marketing in Spain: The Popular Party's April 2019 Election Campaign.

Jorge David Fernández Gómez
Antonio Pineda
Maria-Teresa Gordillo-Rodriguez
(Universidad de Sevilla)

Abstract. One of political marketing's theoretical tenets is the translation of commercial advertising techniques to politics. This paper focuses on celebrity endorsement as a commercial technique which is translated into political campaigning. Celebrity endorsement relates directly to celebrity politics, that is, the result of celebrity culture getting in touch with politics, as a way of revitalizing the offering of parties and candidates. In this context, our study analyzes the representation and use of celebrity politicians in Spain by the conservative Popular Party (PP) during the April 2019 national election. In order to shed light on the way celebrities were used in the PP's social media campaign, we content-analyze 1,117 Twitter messages taken from the party's profile, and conservative presidential candidate Pablo Casado's profile. Analytical variables include frequency of mentions, the strategic axis (rational/emotional) with which celebrities were depicted, the features which were highlighted, and the type of endorsement performed by the celebrities. Message topics and functions were added to the analysis as well. Results indicate a weak and flawed strategic use of celebrities, who were scarcely mentioned, and depicted in a non-innovative, traditional fashion.

Keywords. Political marketing, advertising, celebrity endorsement, celebrity politics, social media campaigning.

Introduction

In a context where marketing tools are routinely employed in political campaigns and parties, and top politicians are branded like products and companies (Newman, 1999; McNair, 2004; Street, 2004; Henneberg and Chen 2008; Marsh, t' Hart and Tindall, 2010), it should come as no surprise that political marketing adopts advertising mechanisms, to the point that, as Marshall notes, 'The product advertising campaign provides the underlying model for the political election campaign' (2014, 204). Indeed, its parallels with advertising have been an integral aspect of political marketing (Newman, 1999) and branding since their advent. At the dawn of modern political marketing, it was precisely the advertising man Rosser Reeves who promoted the unique selling proposition technique for consumer products and for its application to the presidential campaign of General Eisenhower (Mayer, 1958; Maarek, 2011).

Throughout history, advertising has provided political marketing with several forms of communication, such as political ads (Nimmo, 2001). Other noteworthy forms of political marketing originating in advertising are testimonials and endorsements, directly linked to the use of celebrities in marketing strategies. From Cadbury's use of Queen Victoria to market its cocoa at the end of the nineteenth century (Erdogan, 1999) to the current Nespresso campaigns starring George Clooney, celebrities have been continually used as endorsers in the evolution of advertising (Fox 1997). Given that a celebrity 'has been manufactured by a process and it is used to sell all kinds of products' (West and Orman 2003, 117), the leveraging of this technique in politics occurred naturally, resorting to celebrities to sell and endorse political candidates and brands. Therefore, celebrity politics simply employs commercial techniques (Street 2004) which are framed in the most general cultural trends, in which politicians manipulate the obsession of citizens with entertainment by appearing on television

shows, or adopting the marketing techniques of film stars (Wood et al. 2016). As a result, it seems relevant to examine more in depth how commercial celebrity endorsement works.

Celebrity endorsement in advertising

The fundamentals of celebrity endorsement are to be found in the testimonial technique, a basic communication asset that, from an advertising strategy perspective (Tellis 1998; Shimp 2003) takes into account marketing strategy (Erdogan 1999) and, above all, brand management (Batra et al. 1996; Balmer 2006; Keller 1997). The definition of testimonial proposed by Arens et al.—'The use of satisfied customers and celebrities to endorse a product in advertising' (2009, 509)—highlights the close link between this concept and celebrity endorsement, hence being possible to claim that an endorsement is the result of the use of a testimonial. According to McCracken, 'the celebrity endorser is defined as any individual who enjoys public recognition and who uses this recognition on behalf of a consumer good by appearing with it in an advertisement' (1989, 310). Regarding celebrity endorsers, McCracken's definition shows that the role of celebrities in endorsement can be considered as being intrinsic to advertising (Segrave 2005). By the same token, this definition involves a semiotic procedure framed in the Meaning Transfer Model proposed by McCracken (1988, 2005). This model focuses on the symbolic content of an endorser and the elements that are transferred to the product: 'The underlying transfer process can be characterised as 'forming of celebrity image' → 'meaning transfer from celebrity to product' → 'meaning transfer from product to consumer' (Henneberg and Chen 2008, 21).

Historically, the idea that a famous person provides testimonials that help selling a brand has always been deeply entrenched in advertising—as a matter of fact, Kaikati (1987) alludes to the first case at such an early date as 1864. More than 150 years later, and notwithstanding its exorbitant cost (Agrawal and Kamakura 1995; Erdogan 1999; Shimp 2003; Dwivedi et al. 2016), the use of this technique is on the increase (Kaikati 1987; Erdogan 1999; Tellis 1998) all over the world (Bergkvist and Qiang Zhou 2016). In addition to reviews (Kaikati 1987; Erdogan 1999; Bergkvist and Qiang Zhou 2016), there are many approaches to the testimonial phenomenon, from economic (Agrawal and Kamakura 1995), ideological (Zhang 2009), intercultural (Choi et al. 2005), and procedural perspectives (Erdogan and Baker 2000), and even based on the life cycle of celebrities (Carrillat and Ilicic 2019) or their posthumous use (Petty and D'Rozario, 2009).

As to their typology, Friedman, Termini and Washington (1976) established four types of testimonial: (1) celebrities; (2) typical consumers; (3) professional experts; and (4) company presidents. This classification influenced subsequent proposals, with slight nuances (Friedman and Friedman 1979), as was the case with Batra et al. (1996), who spoke of (1) celebrities, (2) experts, (3) typical satisfied customers and (4) announcers. All in all, the most systematic taxonomy was developed by Kaikati (1987), focusing entirely on celebrities as endorsers: (1) genuine celebrities; (2) look-alike celebrities; (3) chief executives-founders as celebrities; and (4) celebrities by association. From the viewpoint of the roles of endorsers, celebrities can be experts, have a long-term association with manufacturers, or might not have any special knowledge of, or any association with, the product (McCracken 1989). As to the professional provenance of celebrity endorsers, Tellis (1998) contends that the majority come from the entertainment or sports worlds, or are talk show hosts, politicians, reporters, educators,

consumer advocates, religious leaders, etc. A similar broad vision can also be found in McCracken: 'not only the usual movie and television stars, but also individuals from the world of sport, politics, business, art, and the military' (1989: 310). In this context, our approach focuses on a field in which the use of celebrities awakens a particular interest: political marketing.

From ads to election campaigns: political celebrities

Given that political marketing is conceptually based on the transfer of technical procedures from the marketing world to politics, including of course advertising (McNair 2004), it stands to reason that the endorsement process based on celebrities has also made its way into political communication. In this sense, political celebrities are much more than film or pop stars, and go beyond the constructions of reality shows. As observed by Furedi, the term 'celebrity' should not only be understood as a noun, but also as an adjective which implies that 'someone possesses the quality of attracting attention' (2010, 493). Celebrities are individuals who receive plenty of mass media coverage, attract the attention of the public and possess a constructed public personality (Street 2004; McKernan 2011). According to Marshall, 'The term *celebrity* […] describes a type of value that can be articulated through an individual and celebrated publicly as important and significant' (2014, 7; original emphasis). Therefore, the sources of celebrities can be both manufactured media publicity, and the merits that they have acquired in certain activities, from sports and enterprise to 'scientific discovery or artistic creativity' (McKernan 2011, 197). It is for this reason that the initial careers of political celebrities are varied: multimillionaires, university professors, rock stars, entertainers, artists, sports personalities, etc. (Bartoszewicz 2019; Gencoglu 2019).

When these famous people come into contact with the world of politics, this results in the celebritisation of politics, or celebrity politics (Oliva et al. 2015; Petrovová and Eibl 2019). From a marketing and advertising perspective, celebrity politics also implies the convergence of political campaigns and endorsements. As with commercial marketing, although political fame has taken a qualitative leap forward in recent decades, it is by no means a new phenomenon (McKernan 2011; Giglioli and Baldini 2019), it being traceable in the United States to presidents like George Washington and Andrew Jackson, who had previously gained fame for their military exploits (West and Orman 2003).

The effects of the celebrity-politics connection are the subject of debate. On the one hand, criticism has been levelled at the fact that celebrities have negative effects on democracy, such as the triumph of personality and style over substance, tabloidisation, the primacy of entertainment, the marginalisation of expertise, and the transformation of citizens into fans. On the other, the positive effects that have been observed include the possibility of engaging a wider audience in politics, and fostering in individuals an emotional attachment to politics (Street 2004, 2019; McKernan 2011). At any rate, the contact between politics and celebrities should be understood in purely instrumental terms (Giglioli and Baldini 2019). In the words of Furedi, 'Given the influence of celebrity culture it is not surprising that politicians and public figures have sought to mobilise it to consolidate their position. Politicians self-consciously attempt to either acquire a celebrity image or to associate themselves with individuals who possess this status' (2010, 496). Since celebrities are 'persons who, in the eyes of other members of the society, are especially remarkable and attract universal attention despite the fact that they usually hold limited or non-existent institutional power' (Tsaliki et al., cited in Gencoglu 2019, 2), it goes without saying that electoral politics attempts to exploit that

attention. The characteristics of celebrities that can be instrumental in political campaigns include the popularity of these individuals, their symbolic potential, the media coverage that they attract, the trendy touch, and their capacity to rally people (Gencoglu 2019; Kaal 2018; Furedi 2010). Therefore, the use of celebrities can be included in the context of political marketing management, namely, the processes and tactics developed by political parties and strategists to satisfy voters (Robinson 2012).

The electoral celebrity boom can be explained by the general mistrust of the traditional political establishment, which Wheeler calls, 'the collapse in trust towards the political classes' (2014, 225). Celebrities offer something different from the professionalism of politicians who live *from*, and not *for*, politics: 'Celebrity populism thrives on the premise that the present political elite is detached from reality, corrupted, and malignant by default. It is, therefore, the mistrust, not trust that they coin into electoral success' (Bartoszewicz 2019, 480). Versus this professionalism, celebrities present themselves as amateurs for whom politics is secondary to their real career (Bartoszewicz 2019), hence being capable of engaging sectors of the population who would normally avoid becoming involved in politics, offering them a non-ideological reason for supporting a party (Giglioli and Baldini 2019). This is related to another value of celebrities: authority. After having dilapidated their credibility, the political classes turn to celebrities to exercise authority, insofar as the latter may have acquired a significant level of moral status (Furedi 2010). The source of that authority is the charismatic quality of the role model: although they do not possess special qualities, celebrities can serve as such.

The advertising endorsement technique is another aspect of celebrities which has been taken up by political marketing. This has given rise to celebrity political endorsement, which involves selecting a specific type of celebrity who, as part of the political marketing mix, is integrated into the campaign strategy (Henneberg and Chen 2008). 'Celebrity political endorsement (CPE) is characterised as the use of celebrity endorsement instruments for the purpose of political activities, especially election campaigning'. And, more specifically, CPE 'refers to the use of media celebrities (external CPE) or political anchormen (internal CPE) as part of the communication strategies of a modern political electioneering campaign' (Henneberg and Chen 2008, 4, 5). In the case of CPE, the semiotic procedure of the transfer of meaning is also crucial: the functional qualities of celebrities are transferred from their political person to the cause with which they are associated (Wheeler 2014).

Celebrity politics has awakened a fair amount of typological interest. The first classifications include that proposed by West and Orman, who identify four types of political celebrity, in terms of 'how fame originates and the consequences for our society and culture' (2003, 2): (1) *political newsworthies*, 'the classic celebrities, individuals […] who are skilled on appearing on television and communicating with the general public', and who attract large audiences; (2) *legacies*, who 'include descendants of prominent political families'—such as the Kennedy, Rockefeller and Bush families in the US; (3) *famed non-politicians*, who, in contrast to legacies, 'are responsible for their own prominence' (West and Orman 2003, 3)—for instance, Barbara Streisand and Jane Fonda 'who lobby on behalf of social causes', transferring their prior fame to political life; and (4) *event celebrities*, 'overnight sensations who arise on the local or national scene due to some tragedy or predicament', to wit, people who, owing to special circumstances, are newsworthy and credible when addressing certain topics— examples of this category include 'crime victims, relatives of crime victims, or parties to a scandal' (West and Orman 2003, 4), whose tragedies convert them into spokespersons on a particular subject.

Another basic classification is that proposed by Street (2004), which distinguishes three types of celebrity politician. On the one hand, there are professional politicians who associate themselves with popular culture to achieve their objectives. This first type (CP1) is in turn subdivided into two types: (1) an elected politician or candidate, 'whose background is in entertainment, show business or sport, and who trades on this background […] in the attempt to get elected'—actors like Ronald Reagan, Clint Eastwood and Arnold Schwarzenegger are good examples (Street 2004, 437); (2) an elected politician or candidate 'who uses the forms and associations of the celebrity to enhance their image and communicate their message'. An example of this type of celebrity—also called 'political celebrity' (Petrovová and Eibl 2019)—would be the Japanese Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi singing Elvis Presley songs with the actor Tom Cruise (Street 2004, 437). A second type of celebrity politician (CP2) is the 'entertainer who pronounces on politics and claims the right to represent peoples and causes, but who does so without seeking or acquiring elected office'—exemplified by the show business stars who opposed the Iraq War (Street 2004, 438).

Based on Street's classification, t' Hart and Tindall (2010) distinguish four types: (1) *celebrity advocates*, high-profile, non-political figures who use their fame to express their opinions on political issues, but without seeking elected office; (2) *celebrity activists/endorsers*, who use their fame to support financially or publically a candidate of a party and to enhance the credibility of one or the other; (3) *celebrity politicians*, celebrities hailing from a traditionally non-political sphere and who participate in politics by becoming candidates, thus seeking office; and (4) *politicians-turned-celebrities* or *politician celebrities*—well-established politicians who enter the celebrity sphere, altering their public person beyond the traditional political sphere (Marsh et al. 2010; Petrovová and Eibl 2019). Marsh et al. (2010) add a fifth type to this fourfold classification: (5) *politicians who use celebrities* to achieve their objectives, exploiting their fame to the benefit of their candidacy, party, or policies. Also based on Street's classification, Wood et al. (2016) put forward a dichotomy: the *superstar political celebrity*—in which politicians are presented as exceptional, strong and decisive people—versus the *everyday political celebrity*—namely, authentic or even flawed individuals. Superstar political celebrities tend to appear on one-way broadcast media and are marketed in staged and structured settings, while everyday political celebrities usually appear on two-way, post-broadcast media, and participate in spontaneous and apparently ad hoc activities.

In addition to these typologies, the academic literature has addressed different dimensions of celebrity politics, such as the relationship between celebrities and democracy, the ideological role that celebrities play, the effect of the loss of substance in political processes, the link between the celebritisation of politics and populism, the influence and effects of celebrities on aspects like voting, and the impact of celebrity advocacy (West and Orman 2003; Marsh et al. 2010; Marshall 2014; Bartoszewicz 2019). More specifically, Wheeler (2014) offers a review of celebrities endorsing political candidates in the United States and the United Kingdom. Oliva et al. (2015) have studied how strategies inherent to popular and fame culture, the star system and, in general, show business and entertainment, are implemented to construct the ideal candidate. Starting with the idea that politicians combine the strategies of everyday and superstar political celebrities in different contexts, Wood et al. (2016) have studied Boris Johnson as a case of this type of combination. Regarding the Netherlands, Kaal (2018) observes that the entry of popular culture celebrities into politics started in the 1960s and 1970s. Drawing inspiration from US, British and German election campaigns, practically all of the mainstream Dutch parties recruited sports and cultural

celebrities in the 1970s. Gencoglu stresses how Turkish celebrities have contributed to the predominance of conservative neo-liberalism through the populist rebuilding of 'us versus them' collective identities (2019, 5). In their analysis of the Czech Republic in the period from 1996 to 2013, Petrovová and Eibl (2019) observe, 'The number of celebrity-candidates is slowly growing, as is the number of them being elected' (2019, 14), the endorser being the most frequent type of political celebrity. Of course, the political rise of Donald Trump cannot be detached from his analysis as a celebrity politician (Street 2019). The Italian anti-establishment comedian Beppe Grillo, another striking case, has been studied by Giglioli and Baldini (2019), for whom he exemplifies a celebrity involved in politics, but who shuns the media spotlight.

Research aims and questions

Marsh et al. (2010) note that celebrity politics has ceased to be a marginal phenomenon in many countries to become interrelated with the construction of the public sphere, which calls for its empirical study. Accordingly, this paper provides evidence of the representation of political celebrities in Spain. More specifically, its main objective (O_1) is to analyse the strategic use whereby the Partido Popular (Popular Party, hereinafter PP), the country's main right-wing party, promoted a series of political celebrities in the context of the general elections held in April 2019. Additionally, the intention (O_2) is to analyse the extent to which the political communication of the PP and its leader, Pablo Casado, placed the spotlight on these political celebrities; (O_3) to identify what functional characteristics of those celebrities were exploited by the party's communication, (O_4); to determine whether the strategic advertising approach with which the celebrities were represented was rational or emotional; and (O_5) to examine the celebrities' role as endorsers.

The object of study is the 'celebrity becoming a politician' category—the CP1 type distinguished by Hart—and, within this, the subcategory of *celebrity politician* (Marsh et al. 2010; Petrovová and Eibl 2019), namely, celebrities who participate in politics by becoming candidates. This subcategory—which has already been studied in the literature (Giglioli and Baldini 2019)—is interesting from a political marketing perspective, since celebrity politicians employ marketing techniques to sell themselves or play the role of endorsers (Street 2004)—a role that connects this study with endorsement and semiotic meaning transfer, inasmuch as ex-celebrities are accompanied by the semantic baggage of their non-political activity, which they attempt to transfer to the political brand with which they have associated themselves.

The choice of the Spanish general elections held in April 2019 as a study context illustrates the idea—substantiated in different studies—that the number of celebrities involved in politics has increased as a result of the recent political and social crises (Petrovová and Eibl 2019). In Spain, the electoral cycle between 2018 and 2019 led to the consolidation of a new political landscape characterised by the demise of the country's traditional two-party system, and the establishment of a multi-party system, which in turn had resulted from an economic and social crisis lasting a decade. In this context—and although the use of celebrities and endorsers is not new in Spanish political marketing (Hita 2015)—the April 2019 election campaign was noteworthy for the number and diversity of celebrities entering into politics. The Partido Socialista Obrero Español (Spanish Socialist Workers' Party, hereinafter PSOE) fielded an ex-head coach of the national basketball team as the Madrid mayoral candidate, and appointed an ex-astronaut, Pedro Duque, as Minister of Science, Innovation, and Universities. Spain's right-wing parties also had their fair share of well-known

personalities. For instance, the candidates of the ultraconservative, national-populist VOX included servicemen and the media polemicist Hermann Tertsch, while those of the right-libertarian Ciudadanos (Citizens) featured the former global vice-chairman of Coca-Cola Marcos de Quinto. Be that as it may, if there was a party that stood out in 2019 for the efforts that it put into drumming up celebrity support, and for the number of celebrity candidates that it ultimately fielded, then that would be the liberal-conservative PP. In fact, the press highlighted the intention of Pablo Casado—the party's presidential candidate—to surround himself with media stars to buttress his candidacy (Aduriz 2019). For instance the left-leaning newspaper *eldiario.es* referred to 'the premises that Casado demands from his closest collaborators: a high level of public recognition for their constant participation in the media and an unreservedly libertarian stance that is developed with a provocative loquacity' (Ponce de León 2019).

The choice of the PP as the object of study makes sense in the framework of the celebritisation of politics—according to Street, 'the world of celebrity politics is one in which politicians, acutely aware of their loss of credibility and trust, resort to new forms of political communication' (2004, 436). The loss of credibility and trust was precisely a pressing problem for the PP in 2019. The party had lost power after the tabling of a no-confidence motion in Parliament. To this should be added that it was immersed in cases of corruption, and electorally weakened due to the flight of votes to other parties. As a matter of fact, in April 2019 there were three parties vying for the votes of Spanish right-wing constituents (Mármol 2019), and the official polls were not too encouraging for the PP, with an estimated 17 per cent of the votes (CIS 2019). In this context, it stood to reason that Casado, who had been elected as the party's leader in 2018, attempted to implement an innovative communication strategy by resorting to celebrities.

Our analysis focuses on how five outstanding celebrities—aristocrat Cayetana Álvarez de Toledo, activist and evangelical pastor Juan José Cortés Fernández, economist and businessman Daniel Lacalle Fernández, TV journalist Pablo Montesinos Aguayo, and lawyer and amateur bullfighter Adolfo Suárez Illana—were represented in the official conservative campaign. Albeit not the only ones brought on board by Casado's PP—the list also included professional bullfighters, sports journalists, and media pundits—these five celebrities were chosen because of their popularity and the different types of extra-political fame that they embodied.

Cayetana Álvarez de Toledo (Madrid, 1974), Marchioness of Casa Fuerte, studied modern history at Oxford. As well as having worked in mainstream media outlets, she was a PP parliamentary deputy between 2008 and 2015, a period at the end of which she resigned due to discrepancies with former Spanish president Mariano Rajoy (Diéguez 2016; Rigalt 2019). Álvarez de Toledo identifies with the hard right-wing of the also former president José María Aznar—in fact, the aristocrat had led the international department of the free-market think tank FAES, chaired by Aznar. Her popularity derived to a great extent from a famous tweet ('We'll never forgive you, Carmena, never') directed against ex-mayoress of Madrid Manuela Carmena, criticising the low-budget costumes of the Three Kings in the Epiphany procession. Although Álvarez de Toledo is probably the most low-key celebrity among the five under analysis as regards popularity (Diéguez 2016), the Spanish gossip press have referred to some aspects of her private life—such as her divorce, or her romance with journalist Arcadi Espada (N.G. 2018; Eyre 2019)—and has appeared on the front page of *Vanity Fair*, with the promise of revealing 'the fascinating life of this aristocrat involved in politics' (Bercovitz 2019).

Juan José Cortés Fernández (Huelva, 1969) is an evangelical pastor and activist of Romani ethnicity (Redacción, 2008). Cortés had already been linked to the PP since 2010, the year in which he was hired as consultant in matters of justice to work on a reform of the Spanish Criminal Code, before being subsequently placed by Casado at the top of the list of national parliamentary candidates for the province of Huelva (Agencias 2010; *20 Minutos* 2019). Cortés' popularity is the result of his role as family spokesperson after the murder of his daughter Mari Luz in 2008 (Rincón and Vallellano 2011). Receiving huge media coverage in Spain due to the judicial and media controversy that it caused (Rincón and Jiménez 2009; Marciá Barber 2014), the 'Mari Luz case' inspired the TV series *Días sin Luz*, in which Cortés himself collaborated (Europa Press 2009a). This led to Cortés becoming an activist, whose activities have included a signature campaign aimed at toughening the Spanish Criminal Code (Rincón and Jiménez 2009) and the publication of an autobiographical book (Europa Press 2009b). Cortés has not been free from controversy, such as the compatibility of his disability pension with his salary as a member of parliament (Agencias 2019), and his involvement in a shooting resulting from a family dispute (EFE 2011).

Daniel Lacalle Fernández (Madrid, 1967), who had previously worked at relevant companies like Repsol, Enagás and Citadel, was appointed as senior vice-president and portfolio manager of the Pacific Investment Management Company (Cotizalia 2014). A opinion columnist for mainstream Spanish newspapers and international media outlets such as *The Commentator* and *The Wall Street Journal*, Lacalle is also a blogger and the author of several books popularising economics. However, his fame is due to his recurrent appearances as an expert on primetime TV show 'laSexta Noche' (Villena 2019). It should come as no surprise then that leading newspaper *El País* has described Lacalle as 'one of the most high-profile economists in Spain' (López 2014). Lacalle's incorporation in the PP reinforced Casado's commitment to ideological radicalisation, insofar as the economist is considered an extremist anti-government libertarian and climate change denier (Ponce de León 2019; Olías 2019)—an image forged in part by Lacalle himself, who in 2013 expressed his appreciation of Margaret Thatcher's legacy on a blog.

Since 2008, Pablo Montesinos Aguayo (Almeria, 1985) has worked for the ultra-right online-only newspaper *Libertad Digital*, combining this activity with his role as a talk-show guest on different national and regional media (Romero 2019). His association with conservative political culture was strengthened in 2010, with the publication of *El delfín del PP* (*The PP's dauphine*), a biography of PP politician Alberto Ruíz Gallardón. All considered, Montesinos owes his popularity to his numerous interventions on the left-leaning TV channel La Sexta (Libertad Digital 2010, ECOTEUVE.ES 2019). With a moderate profile, Casado placed him at the top of the electoral list for Malaga in the general elections, following which he became a member of the PP government as Vice-secretary of Communication (Junquera 2019c; Lamet 2019; Quirós 2019).

Adolfo Suárez Illana (Madrid, 1964) is a politician, lawyer, and amateur bullfighter—the last frustrated vocation runs in the family (ABC 2014). He has worked in banking, investment consultancy, and the publishing world (Tijeras 2002), founding the law firm Suárez & Illana in 1998. He has also dabbled intermittently in politics, having been a member of the Unión de Centro Democrático (Union of the Democratic Centre) and the Centro Democrático y Social (Democratic and Social Centre)—both led by his father, the ex-president and key figure in the Spanish Transition Adolfo Suárez (EFE 2019)—as well as the PP, for which he stood as a candidate in regional elections (Casqueiro 2002). At any rate, his popularity is precisely due to his father, who was

president of Spain from 1976 to 1981 (EFE, 2019). Suárez Illana's rising star has attracted the attention of the gossip press, especially on the occasion of his wedding, which was attended by the Spanish monarchy and all sorts of authorities (EFE 1998).

In terms of the classification proposed by West and Orman, Lacalle and Montesinos would be political newsworthies, Suárez Illana would fall into the category of legacies, and Cortés in that of event celebrities. According to Street's classification, practically all of them correspond to the CP1 type, specifically to the concept of celebrity politician included in t' Hart and Tindall's classification. From the perspective of Henneberg and Chen's celebrity political endorsement (CPE), this would be a case of external CPE, based on media celebrities. Beyond classifications, all five of them are related to the world of fame and, as a result, facilitate an interpretation in terms of celebrities. For example, an indicator of the celebrity status of politicians is 'their becoming the focus of gossip' (Kaal 2018, 606), which can be associated with the presence of Suárez Illana and Álvarez de Toledo in the gossip press. In the case of the aristocrat Álvarez de Toledo, it is also important to bear in mind that a member of the elite can exert a powerful influence on conservative publics—in fact, society leaders and the aristocracy have acted as testimonials in the field of marketing (Mayer 1958, 93). Suárez Illana, for his part, exemplifies a characteristic: 'Present in popular culture and famous and/or relying on famous parents' (Bartoszewicz 2019, 472). On the other hand, since infotainment encourages celebrities to enter in politics (West and Orman 2003), and talk shows are inherent to the celebrity world (Oliva et al. 2015), it should be stressed that Lacalle and Montesinos have frequently appeared on the aforementioned political talk show 'laSexta Noche', a remarkable example of Spanish infotainment (Sánchez-García and Campos Zabala 2017). In the case of Lacalle, moreover, his role as a media expert in economy has to do with the fact that in the 'celebrity political system, respected stars are often treated as great intellectuals and oracles for society' (West and Orman 2003, 116). Sadly, and due to the horrible murder of his daughter, Cortés could be understood as a celebrity victim, namely, someone who becomes famous for negative reasons, such as misfortunes (Furedi, 2010, 494).

In view of the foregoing, the following research questions were posed regarding the PP's, and its leader Casado's, April 2019 campaign:

PI$_1$. To what extent did political communication place the spotlight on political celebrities?

PI$_2$. To what strategic use did the conservatives put its political celebrities during the Spanish general elections?

PI$_3$. What functional characteristics of these celebrities were highlighted?

PI$_4$. With what strategic advertising approach were celebrities represented?

PI$_5$. What type of political endorsement was performed by these celebrities?

Method

This study implemented the methodology for analysing celebrity politicians proposed by Wood et al. (2016), who resorted to a case study and, to this end, employed diverse materials, such as press releases, speeches, biographies, TV interviews and Twitter data.

In this case, and in addition to the press information collected to obtain data on the PP's celebrities, Twitter was the main source of data on their representation regarding electoral marketing strategy. The selection of a social networking site (henceforth SNS) for empirical analysis is acceptable considering that the characteristics of social media 'may open up opportunities for pushing the "everyday" element of celebrity further and potentially enable a more thoroughgoing democratisation of celebrity in the process' (Wood et al. 2016, 15). In a context in which the new media allow for new forms of emotional engagement between audiences and celebrities (Marshall 2014), the social network boom has been particularly beneficial for the celebrity phenomenon: 'With the rise of new/social media […] celebrities' ability to speak on policy matters directly to the public has become magnified' (Gencoglu 2019, 2).

In this context, Twitter was selected for three reasons. Firstly, it is a fundamental medium for contemporary election campaigns and has been widely studied (Ramos-Serrano, Fernández Gómez and Pineda, 2018; Evans et al. 2019). Secondly, SNSs play an important role in the promotion of celebrities—'Celebrity culture has become even more pronounced than before with reference to the political economy of digital media' (Wheeler 2014, 222)—and Twitter is one of the most important social media. And, thirdly, SNSs are relevant when shaping public opinion in Spain: according to official sociological data, they are the second most preferred channel for keeping abreast of political and electoral news (CIS 2019).

In order to obtain data on the representation of celebrities during the PP's official campaign, a sample was created with messages posted on two Twitter profiles: that of the PP as an institution, and that of Casado as the party's leader and presidential candidate. These two profiles were pertinent for obtaining primary data on the electoral use of the image of the celebrities, as well as to gauge the relevance and characteristics that conservative official communication gave them.[1] The sample's time frame covered the 12 to 18 April 2019 period, corresponding to the whole campaign duration before the general election.

As to data-gathering, a content analysis (Krippendorff 2004) was performed on the Twitter sample using a coding sheet containing different variables. Given that it is interesting to know *what was said* about the celebrities, the content analysis included a variable relating to the topics covered in the tweets, and another pertaining to the functions that they fulfilled (see Tables 1 and 2 for a complete list of the analytical categories). These variables were adapted from the operationalisation proposed by Graham, Broersma, Hazelhoff and Van't Haar (2013) in a study of the electoral behaviour of British candidates on Twitter in 2010. Topics and functions were slightly modified to adapt them to the Spanish context—for instance, thematic categories like 'corruption' and 'nationalism', two essential issues when studying recent Spanish reality, were included in the 'topics' variable.

As to the representation of celebrities, the frequency with which they were mentioned, retweeted, or replied to, on the Twitter profiles of Casado and the PP, was determined. Together with these frequencies, our content analysis also took into account the variable of the *rational* versus the *emotional* psychological axis of the tweets mentioning the celebrities (Joannis 1988). Since, according to Marshall (2014), celebrities are not constructed using rational language, but in terms of affective and emotional power, an attempt was made to confirm whether or not the type of advertising strategy implemented by the PP also adjusted to this emotional dimension. Another key analytical variable operationalised a series of potential functional/strategic

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[1] On the other hand, an analysis was not performed on the Twitter accounts of the celebrities, given that not all of them had one on this SNS.

characteristics of celebrity politicians, on the basis of categories deriving from different celebrity endorsement models—according to the typology proposed by Henneberg and Chen (2008)—to which elements deriving from the literature on celebrities were added (West and Orman 2003; Henneberg and Chen 2008; Marsh et al. 2010; McKernan 2011; Marshall 2014; Wheeler 2014; Wood et al. 2016; Petrovová and Eibl 2019). These categories—essential for assessing how the celebrities were presented—focused on personal issues, credibility, authenticity, authority, charisma, awakening interest, scandals, public recognition, fame, newness, exciting nature, unpredictability, not being tainted by politics, the paradox of being simultaneously unique and ordinary individuals, and the use of hegemonic cultural symbols.

The analysis also included the endorsement technique. In order to determine whether or not the PP sought direct and open endorsements from its celebrities in favour of the party's platform, the coding sheet included the celebrity endorsement typology proposed by McCracken: *explicit* mode (consisting of statements such as 'I endorse this product'), *implicit* mode ('I use this product'), *imperative* mode ('You should use this product') and *co-present* mode (i.e. in which the celebrity merely appears with the product). Obviously, when applying this typology to political marketing, the term 'product' should be substituted with either the PP brand, its ideas and proposals, or the presidential candidate Casado.

The tweets were retrieved using the company Dinamic Área's product OPILEAK, which has registered apps for retrieving public tweets using the programming interfaces of Twitter. OPILEAK continuously monitors the tweets posted on official accounts, using the two endpoints: search tweets and fetch tweet. Once the data had been downloaded during the campaign, a manual verification was performed employing Twitter's advanced search tool, in order to ensure that the list of tweets was complete. Any tweet that had been eliminated at the end of the campaign, was also eliminated from the list, so as to comply with the terms and conditions of the services provided by Twitter. The sample of tweets totalled 1,117—860 retrieved from the account of the PP, and 257 from Casado's. As no additional sampling was performed, these tweets corresponded to the universe of messages posted on both accounts during the election campaign.

Regarding inter-coder reliability, after performing an informal test with some randomly chosen tweets, the first two-coder test was run, resulting in the fine-tuning of one of the variables. This revealed the need for the coders to receive further training in relation to the interpretation of four specific variables, such as the endorsement type. Following a meeting with the coders, during which the variables and categories were exhaustively examined, a second reliability test was run, yielding average percentages of agreement equal to or higher than 90 per cent for all of the variables—except for one, with an average percentage of agreement of 83 per cent—which can considered as acceptable in content analysis. The basic statistic employed in all of the reliability tests was Krippendorff's alpha.

Results

Before examining the data on the representation of the celebrities, Tables 1 and 2 provide an overview of what was posted on the Twitter accounts of the PP and Casado and why. As regards topics, 'campaign and political parties' was the most popular, accounting for 45 per cent of the PP's tweets and 31.91 per cent of Casado's. This was followed at a significant distance by 'economy and business', 'government', and 'nationalism/separatism/independentism', all of them below 15 per cent. There was less

of a coincidence between both accounts with respect to topics such as 'human/civil rights' and 'national news', to which Casado referred much more often than his party. The very little attention paid to relevant social topics like 'education', 'immigration' or 'environment' by the PP and the presidential candidate alike, is also striking.

TABLE 1 HERE

As shown in Table 2, the PP focused on very few functions of the tweets, above all 'news/reports' and 'position taking/own stance (candidate)'. In contrast, Casado's tweets served more functions and had a different degree of relevance: 'party stance' (29.57 per cent), 'news/reports' (20.62 per cent), 'critiquing/arguing' (14.79 per cent) and 'personal' (11.28 per cent).

TABLE 2 HERE

Moving on to the data relating to the representation of the celebrities, as can be seen in Table 3 the PP and its leader resorted to them on very few occasions. Specifically, 93.38 per cent of Casado's tweets and 86.16 per cent of those of the party did not mention, retweet, or open any dialogue with, the celebrities recruited by the conservatives. Álvarez de Toledo was the celebrity receiving the highest number of mentions on the official accounts of the PP and its leader. This is exemplified by a message posted on 17 April 2019, in which the PP retweeted one of the ultraconservative aristocrat's posts in which she stated that the PSOE had pardoned people carrying out coups d'état (Partido Popular 2019f); the same topic appearing in another message, retweeted by Casado on 19 April, where Álvarez de Toledo continued to broach the subject of the alleged coup in Catalonia (Casado Blanco 2019b). The conservative leader also mentioned Álvarez de Toledo in a message posted on 14 April, presenting her as the victim of an attempted physical aggression by radical separatists (Casado Blanco 2019a). The economist Lacalle was the next most mentioned celebrity, albeit to a much lesser extent percentage-wise. As to the other three celebrities, it is striking that Casado did not dedicate any tweet to Montesinos or Suárez Illana, mentioned in 1 per cent of the tweets posted on the PP's official account, respectively. The most extreme case was Cortés, who did not receive any mentions from the presidential candidate or from the PP. By and large, and considering the total percentages shown in Table 3, it should be stressed that nearly 90 per cent of the tweets posted by Casado or his party made no mention of their celebrity politicians.

TABLE 3 HERE

As to the type of advertising strategy with which the celebrities were represented (Figure 1), it can be stated that hybrid messages, both rational and emotional, were the most prevalent, although there were differences between the PP's profile and Casado's. In the tweets posted by Casado there was a predominance of hybrid (over 50 per cent) and emotional (close to 40 per cent) messages, while the rational ones were not statistically significant. The emotional use of Twitter by Casado can be seen in a retweet of his in which he played with the aforementioned promise/threat that Álvarez de Toledo had made to the former mayoress of Madrid in relation to the costumes of the Three Kings in the Epiphany procession: 'We'll never abandon you'; an emotional statement made at the closing campaign rally in Madrid (Partido Popular 2019a). In

contrast, emotional or hybrid messages barely accounted for 20 per cent of the tweets posted by the party in which its celebrities were mentioned. The use of a rational approach by the conservatives is illustrated by a tweet mentioning Lacalle: 'The pensions in #Spain can only increase if we have: more and better companies; more and better jobs. There's no other way' (Partido Popular 2019d).

FIGURE 1 HERE

Also in relation to the depiction of the celebrities, Table 4 provides detailed information on the functional/strategic characteristics of the celebrities that both the PP and Casado leveraged in the tweets where they were mentioned (119 and 17, respectively). The most relevant data indicates that Casado appealed to characteristics like 'trust' and 'credibility' (35.29 per cent in both cases), followed by 'knowledge' (23.52 per cent) and 'charisma' (17.64 per cent). These characteristics did not completely coincide with those highlighted by the PP—except for 'knowledge', which appeared in practically 30 per cent of the tweets in which one of the celebrities was mentioned, and 'credibility', in 10 per cent. So, there were characteristics exploited by Casado—'likeability' and 'human dimension', both above 10 per cent—which the PP referred to very seldom or never. The right-wing party focused more on aspects like 'competence' (19.33 per cent) and 'uniqueness, extraordinariness' (16.81 per cent). On the other hand, it is remarkable that there were functional characteristics of celebrity culture, like cultural symbols, dynamism, and negotiating capacity, that were never leveraged. When observing the data as a whole, the conclusion that can be drawn is that the conservative celebrities were fundamentally represented by appealing to their knowledge and competence, both characteristics in keeping with the rational messages of the PP's communication strategy. An example of the use of 'knowledge' can be found in a tweet, posted on 13 April, in which the PP referred to Lacalle's role as an economic guru by attacking the Socialist government: 'The government of Sánchez has yet again escalated the public debt,' in the context of an interview on the extreme right-wing channel Intereconomía (Partido Popular 2019b).

TABLE 4 HERE

As to the level of endorsement given by the celebrities, some of the general data are also interesting. In the tweets dedicated to the celebrities posted on Casado's account, these only endorsed the PP's brand, its electoral programme, its ideological principles, and the presidential candidate himself 33.33 per cent of the time, which indicates that nearly 70 per cent of their discourses did not redound to the endorsement of its political brand. A tendency that was slightly more favourable as to their endorsements posted on the PP's account, in which they supported the party, its proposals or its ideology above 50 per cent of the time. An example of these messages can be found in a tweet posted by the PP on 15 April, quoting a statement made by Lacalle, which could be interpreted as an endorsement of the conservative brand and its principles: 'The PP has always increased the SMI [minimum inter-professional salary] with the consensus of the social agents' (Partido Popular, 2019c).

Regarding the endorsement mode of the celebrities, nor were there any coincidences between Casado and the PP (see Figure 2). The conservative party leader's tweets reflected an imperative or implicit endorsement mode (40 per cent in both cases), plus the co-present mode to a lesser extent (20 per cent), without ever resorting to the explicit mode. On the contrary, the PP's tweets reflected the co-present mode very often

(the most frequent with 70 per cent), resorting less to the other endorsement modes with which the celebrities displayed their support for the political brand: the implicit mode, imperative mode and explicit mode, in descending order, all with frequencies of approximately 10 per cent. The predominance of the co-present mode—that is, the mere appearance of the endorser with the product—can be seen in a tweet posted by the PP to underscore Spain's intention to attract international investors, with a photo of Lacalle in a thoughtful attitude appearing next to the text, accompanied by the conservatives' logo and slogan (Partido Popular 2019e).

<p style="color:red; text-align:center">FIGURE 2 HERE</p>

Discussion and Conclusions

Advertising conventions define political communication, and the take-up of celebrities and their endorsements by party campaigning is a well-established technique in political marketing. In this context, the April 2019 election campaign in Spain is contextualized in an international trend in which politics revolves around populism, and emphasis is placed on enhancing the appeal of candidates, with the figure of the celebrity gaining political pre-eminence (Bartoszewicz 2019). In this campaign, the PP developed a media publicity strategy based on the inclusion of celebrities in the political system, seeking a transfer of meaning of their status to the conservatives' political offering, and exploiting the fact that those celebrities had become household names thanks to television. However, in retrospect, the PP's choice of celebrities was a failure. Although celebrity populism would, in theory, make it possible 'to coin mistrust into electoral success and infuse policy making with non-political values and habits' (Bartoszewicz 2019, 483), the campaign led to one of the worst electoral results in the party's history, with the loss of millions of votes. Beyond the election results, nor were the celebrities successful individually speaking—with the exception of Montesinos, who won the trust of Casado and was thus able to forge ahead in the PP (Lamet 2019). Álvarez de Toledo shouldered the responsibility for the bad results obtained by the conservatives in Catalonia (Coca 2019); Lacalle ended up resigning his seat in Parliament (Junquera 2019b); Cortés was left out of the Senate, despite the fact that the PP had won a seat for Huelva (Europa Press, 2019)—taking his leave with a statement bearing his hallmark: 'I was already a corpse before entering ICU' (Ok Diario, 2019); and Suárez Illana was displaced in the electoral lists for Madrid, before the subsequent repetition of the general elections (Calleja 2019). In this context, the following discussion of the results obtained may shed light on the reasons behind certain dysfunctions in the marketing management of the five conservative celebrities.

Although the online world has facilitated access to celebrity culture (Marshall 2014), the scant use and mentions of its celebrity politicians implies that the PP neglected them on Twitter. This answers our first research question, namely, the extent to which the political communication of the conservatives placed the spotlight on its celebrities. In view of the empirical evidence, these famed individuals did not play a central role on Twitter. Casado hardly ever mentioned the celebrities who he himself had recruited, and, although the PP's profile put them to greater use in relative terms, the total number of mentions evidences a certain underuse of them in social media campaigning. While it is true that the conservative party resorted to its celebrities on traditional media, their strategic use on Twitter in the campaign was by no means optimal or, in other words, it failed to leverage one of the most important communication tools in contemporary political campaigning (Filimonov et al. 2016). In

this connection, Spanish politics—or at least Spanish social media politics—is not consistent with the idea that celebrities have typically formed part of the '"front-end", or front stage of politics, the communication façade of it' (Giglioli and Baldini 2019, 4). On the other hand, it is paradoxical that celebrities like Suárez Illana and Montesinos were hardly mentioned at all in the PP's digital communication campaign; particularly when 'event celebrities, legacies, and famed nonpoliticos' are among the figures who foster the greatest political trust (West and Orman 2003, 112).

In line with the foregoing, as to our second RQ we have confirmed that there were contradictions between the PP's communication policy and strategic and operational lines, as well as its deficient SNS strategy with respect to celebrity management. In this sense, the conservatives' strategy in relation to the type of celebrity promoted is also striking. Casado referred timidly to Lacalle, while placing the spotlight almost exclusively on the ideologue/polemicist Álvarez de Toledo, and drawing a veil over Montesinos and Suárez Illana. Notwithstanding the fact that it attempted to be more impartial by referring to nearly all of its celebrities, the PP also decided to put the accent on Álvarez de Toledo and, to a lesser extent, on Lacalle. All in all, most significant is that Cortés—a media figure personally recruited by Casado—was not mentioned at all on Twitter, hence signifying that the PP gave precedence to celebrities with a more *political* profile in the traditional sense of the word.

From a strategic perspective, to the scant presence of the celebrities should be added another error: the general lack of coordination between Casado's personal account and the PP's corporate profile. This denotes the lack of a communication strategy channelling the celebrities' potential in a coherent and synergic manner, and of a unified message. Although there was some coordination regarding campaign topics— there being coincidences in only four—the Twitter profiles of the PP and its leader were almost completely asymmetric in the rest of the variables. For instance, with respect to the functions of the tweets, the PP implemented a focused strategy for two key purposes—to serve as a news agenda, and to support the stances taken by the presidential candidate—while Casado opted for a strategy of diversification with very varied objectives, thus giving the impression that each post had a partial objective.

Something similar occurred with the messages representing the celebrities. These allow us to answer the third RQ: except for functional characteristics like knowledge and credibility, those that stood out in the tweets posted on both accounts did not coincide. Thus, Casado's depiction of the celebrities focused on trust and charisma, while the PP highlighted more characteristics, particularly their competence and extraordinariness. In any case, the importance given to characteristics such as knowledge and competence contradicts the notion that, versus the experience of traditional elites, the ideas of political celebrities are not necessary 'rooted in practical knowledge' (Bartoszewicz 2019, 472). The depiction of the celebrities as knowledgeable also contrasted with the notion that in a political system 'important qualities such as experience, knowledge and bargaining are de-emphasized', according to West and Orman (2003, 112). Compared with this, the management of the PP's celebrities was indeed in line with Henneberg and Chen's consideration that 'what seems to be sought in […] political celebrities can be hypothesised as being "expert," "trustworthy" or "interest generating" characteristics, not the classical "celebrity" characteristics like "fame," "lifestyle" or "beauty"' (2008, 6). The PP's famed candidates were not marketed according to those features, as indicated by the scant or non-existent references to characteristics such as 'fame' and 'physical attractiveness'.

According to Wood et al., 'politicians are often marketed as authentic and spontaneous as opposed to rigid and distant from the public, their celebrity arising from

their (apparent) ability to engage in ad hoc settings' (2016, 7). Using post-broadcast, interactive media like Twitter, the PP's celebrity candidates could have been marketed as everyday celebrities, but authenticity and the human dimension were avoided in favour of the image of outstanding political managers. In this respect, that the PP represented its celebrities using values such as competence and knowledge is related to one of the hypotheses put forward by 't Hart and Tindall regarding the adjustment of celebrities to the political system: by using the personal brand of a celebrity to obtain votes, 'conforming to the party line dilutes the perception that they can offer something new and different' (Marsh et al. 2010, 324). Competence, knowledge and credibility, albeit functional characteristics of a rational type, are not precisely associated with 'something new and different'. They are rather characteristics that indicate that celebrities were being promoted as if they were experienced insider politicians, hence being difficult to establish differences between their functionality and those of traditional politicians. In this regard, it is no coincidence that the main topics in the conservatives' Twitter discourse were the economy, criticism of the acting government, or Catalan separatism—namely, the same ones on which the PP had been insisting for months, thus ruling out the possibility that the celebrities might refresh them with others. According to West and Orman (2003), celebrities offer a means of revitalising the political system, they remain aloof from issues that negatively affect conventional politicians, and generate a new energy for the system. In 2019, the PP pursued these same objectives, but did not market its celebrities on SNSs to that end.

The representation of the celebrities was also subject to a strategic advertising approach, the objective of our fourth RQ. Casado placed the accent more on emotional or hybrid communication, practically never resorting to a more rational and objective kind, which can be explained given the subjectivity and the emotional baggage of his messages as an individual. Versus this, on the PP's profile a more rational communication regarding celebrities prevailed, dispensing with the emotional component. Given the frequency of the PP's tweets relating to its celebrities was much higher than that of Casado's, it can be concluded that they were marketed rationally, which is coherent with the relevance of functional characteristics like competence and knowledge. Anyway, this finding contradicts the idea proposed by McKernan (2011) that both politicians and celebrities construct their image by appealing to their audience's emotions, while distancing themselves from the category of 'emotionally-driven celebrity populism' (Bartoszewicz 2019, 470).

Paradoxically, the image of the celebrities as rational managers contrasts with the fact that several of them were involved in controversies for making statements that fostered emotional aspects. All of which indicates that publicity can work against an official online marketing strategy, and that celebrities can fall into habits and errors inherent to professional politicians. Álvarez de Toledo was the celebrity who made the headlines most due to her contentious statements (Junquera 2019a; Abascal 2019; Monforte Jaén 2019b), reaching the peak of controversy when broaching the subject of sexual consent relating to an amendment of the Spanish Criminal Code tabled by the country's left-wing parties in order that only 'yes' should mean 'yes' in sexual relations. Specifically, in a parliamentary debate, Álvarez de Toledo asked, 'Do you truly say yes, yes, yes until you've finished?' (cited in Valdés 2019). For his part, Cortés had already experienced a number of problems before being chosen as a candidate—a move that was not well received in Huelva, the Andalusian province for which he stood for Parliament (Redacción 2019)—and during the election campaign he made quite a few blunders, such as when he repeatedly forgot the name of the party leader (laSexta.com 2019). Suárez Illana turned out to be even more problematic, and his hard-line

Catholicism explains some controversial statements on abortion, which he called 'savagery' (Suárez Illana, cited in Monforte Jaén 2019a) and a practice typical of 'Neanderthals': 'Whoever says that they can be killed before or afterwards … the Neanderthals also did that: they waited until they were born and then chopped their heads off' (cited in eldiario.es 2019). In the same interview, he claimed that in New York they had just enacted 'a law by virtue of which postpartum abortions are allowed'—which could not have been further from the truth, as with many of the statistics that he provided on suicides and abortions (Lourido and Rodríguez 2019). Nor was Lacalle free from controversy due to his economic libertarianism (Olías 2019), making the headlines owing to a statement that he delivered challenging the pension system and proposing drastic cuts: 'The question isn't how much they should be revalued, but how much they should be cut. Twenty, 30 or 40 per cent' (cited in Obregón 2019). More moderate—also ideologically—Montesinos was practically the only celebrity who was not involved in any burning controversies.

Many of these controversies were not commented on either by Casado or by the PP on Twitter, which highlights a certain lack of coordination between the media publicity reaped by the celebrities and the conservative's online strategy. At any rate, these controversies were of an ideological nature, since the celebrities receiving most support from the PP and its leader on Twitter, namely, Álvarez de Toledo and Lacalle, defended ultraconservative and right-libertarian stances, respectively, thus evincing an electoral strategy whose aim was to compete with the extreme right-wing party VOX. Álvarez de Toledo and Lacalle are both examples of what can be called the 'right with no hang-ups' (Segura 2019)—a euphemism describing the PP's shift towards the hard right. This discursive radicalisation via its celebrities was apparently aimed at undecided voters who felt abandoned by traditional politicians—as Furedi observes, 'The relationship between political disengagement and the rise of celebrity culture is not a causal one—rather they both express a trend towards the disorientation of public life' (2010, 495). However, the election results indicate that it was an erroneous marketing strategy: at the time, Spanish society was slightly skewed towards the left—evidenced by the electoral resurgence of the PSOE—and the extremist constituents courted by the PP were not sufficiently rewarding.

In 1977, the Dutch social democrats thought that the recruitment of celebrities was 'instrumental to creating an atmosphere where the public became susceptible to the party's political message' (Kaal 2018, 606). In the case of the PP's April 2019 election campaign, the endorsement strategy on Twitter (the object of our fifth RQ) did not seem to follow any pattern when generating favourable input for the conservative message. As before, the data point to a lack of coordination between the PP's Twitter profile—the frame of a highly passive co-present endorsement—and Casado's—who, notwithstanding the emotional content of his messages, reflected imperative or implicit endorsement modes.

In light of these results, it is impossible to claim that the PP managed to create a beneficial communication atmosphere with its celebrity strategy—at least on Twitter. The aim of its strategy was to seek a media impact that made its messages go viral or, ultimately, publicity, more than a semiotic transfer of values from the celebrities to the conservative brand, thus wasting the potential of celebrity political endorsement for the transfer of meaning. Therefore, among the four forms identified by Erdogan when using celebrities—'as a spokesperson, an endorser, for testimonials, or simply as actors in communication vehicles (e.g., advertisements)' (Henneberg and Chen 2008, 22)—the role of the conservative celebrities would be closer to the first type than to the second. In any case, the array of forms of endorsement implies that media celebrities were

clearly employed as strategic assets. The success of celebrity endorsers lies in the fact that 'the public often idealises celebrities, tries to identify with them and perceives them as a reliable source of information' (Petrovová and Eibl 2019, 6). The PP's campaign evinces that bad management of celebrity politicians can undermine that perception.

It has been noted that celebrity politicians have a greater chance of triumphing in presidential systems than in parliamentary ones (Marsh et al. 2010). Since Spain is a parliamentary democracy, this might have had something to do with the fact that the PP's celebrity strategy was not a success. To sum up, that strategy was flawed by the scant Twitter visibility of the media figures, the lack of unity regarding endorsement types, and a depiction of the celebrities in terms of the rational management of politics and the economy, instead of highlighting features that might have refreshed and renovated the conservative's offerings.

Beyond the possible extrapolations of these conclusions, more research is needed on the political use of celebrities on social media. One line of research would be to compare the Popular Party's use of celebrities with that of the Spanish parties to the left of the political spectrum—or even with that of political parties in other countries where celebrities are also used, thus performing a cross-cultural analysis. Another interesting line would be to determine whether or not minor parties leverage celebrities in the same way as major parties. Similarly, it would be interesting to extend the analytical corpus beyond social media and to examine the management of political celebrities on traditional mass media, and how this relates to political marketing strategies.

Acknowledgement

Disclosure statement / Conflict of interest

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