THE FLOW OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON THE SUBJECT OF THE SCOTTISH REFERENDUM AND THE CATALONIAN SOVEREIGNTY CONSULTATION

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Abstract

Since the origin of the Internet in the late 60's with ARPAnet (Gromov, 1995; Braman, 2011; and Lukasik, 2011), this digital environment gradually started to gain social space. However it was with the appearance of social media -such as Facebook and Twitter- when it was truly a turning point (Carrera et al., 2012; Casero-Ripollés, 2013; Farrel, 2013; Kietzman et al., 2011; Masip et al., 2010; Pérez-Latre, 2011).

In the last few years, has been widely discussed how the emergence of social media and its subsequent profound evolutions have served to dramatically widen the range of journalistic practices (Benevuto et al., 2009; Canavilhas,

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2011; Chadwick, 2011; Del Fresno et al., 2014; Domingo, 2006; Elola, 2010; Feenstra and Casero-Ripollés, 2012; Gallagher, 2014; Kerrigan and Graham, 2010; Lee and Ma, 2012; Meyer, 2012; Schulz, 2004; Waters et al. 2010; Wilson, 2008).

However, what has not been demonstrated is to what extent Facebook and Twitter –the most popular social media platforms– have impacted among political processes and also how media outlets have dealt with this.

In order to determine it, a comparative study-review has been carried out which deals with journalism and social media during two political processes which underwent intense media exposure: the Scottish Referendum (September, 2014) and the Catalonian Sovereignty Consultation (November, 2014).

Through a literature review in this research the main features of both political processes (Scottish and Catalonian) are going to be explained: what happened in Scotland and in Catalonia; how the behaviour of the audience was and what they searched for on social media; the flow of messages on Twitter and Facebook and how the media outlets dealt with those events on social media and finally, what are the political media systems upon which Catalonia and Scotland are based.

Keywords: social media, politics, audience, media, Twitter, Facebook

1. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Spain and the United Kingdom are alike on the issue of identity. Both countries aremade up of multiple regions, each of which has its own sense of identity, and thisfact resulted in several political conflicts that led to the Scottish referendum and theCatalonian sovereignty consultation. Both political processes will be explained,including how Scotland ended up having a legal referendum and why Catalonia ranan unofficial consultation.

1.1. The Scottish referendum

The United Kingdom is made up of four nations: England, Scotland, Wales andNorthern Ireland. Scotland was an independent country until the Union of theCrowns in 1603, just 13-months after Mary, Queen of Scots, was pushed to abdicateto her son and Elisabeth I died with no offspring. However, despite the fact that theUnion of the Crowns took place in 1603, it was not until 1707 that the Act of Unionwas signed. This brought about a unique Parliament of the United Kingdom of GreatBritain at the Palace of Westminster, which was active until 1997 (Dardanelli, 2005;Pattie et al., 1999; Perman, 1980; Soule et al., 2012).

In 1979, Scotland held its first referendum on self-government. The purpose of this wasto ask Scottish people whether they wanted to put into effect the Scotland Act of 1978[2] (Perman, 1980; Soule et al., 2012). Despite the fact that the 'yes vote' (32.9%) defeated the 'no vote' (30.8%), the results did not have any effect because the 'yes vote' constituted less than 40% of the Scottish electorate, the rate imposed by the Government of the age for the results to be considered valid (BBC, 1997; Pattie et al., 1999; Pedersen et al., 2014).

So, it was not until 1997 when Scotland had their first successful referendumrelated to policy. In those days the referendum wasn't about if Scotland should orshouldn't be an independent country. The issues at stake in 1997 were the following:should there be a Parliament? And should there be powers to set taxes? (Pattie et al.,1999). The results were clear: Scots called for more autonomy: 74.3% voted in favourof having a Scottish parliament, while 25.7% voted against it. Regarding tax powers,63.5% of Scottish citizens voted in favour and 36.5% voted against. The 35 votingregions voted in favour of

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[2]The Scotland Act 1978 specified the legislative and executive powers devolved from Westminster. However, it was widely criticized for being confusing, unclear and difficult to understand. Leicester(1996) explains why it was so confusing: "The Act was very difficult to understand. Because of thedetailed listing of statutes and provisions, it is impossible from a reading of the Act alone to gainany clear idea of what precisely is devolved, still less any sense of the principles governing whether matters are devolved or not".

having a parliament. Just two regions (Dumfries andGalloway, and Orkney) voted against autonomous tax powers (MacAskilland Donegan, 2013).

According to Pattie et al. (1999: 307), the political situation in Scotland may have explained the increased nationalist feeling:

> Ironically, the very electoral success of the Conservatives throughout the 1980sand early 1990s helped rekindle demand for a Scottish parliament. Thatcherismwas particularly unpopular in Scotland […] and the Scottish economy did notperform well enough, relative to the south of England, to compensate. The neteffect was to increase Scottish resentment of the Conservative government andto foster demands for a separate Scottish parliament.

Fourteen years later, the Scottish National Party (SNP) won the election with a widemajority, and this resulted in the signing of The Edinburgh Agreement in 2012. TheEdinburgh Agreement is the deal in which the Scottish Referendum was passed. More than 300 years after the union with England (Quinlan, 2013; Burnett, 2014:22-24), Scotland decided to ask their citizens whether they would like to remain as a part of the UK or not.

Of course, this consultation was made with the endorsement of the UK Government.The agreement was signed by David Cameron, prime minister of the UK, and Alex Salmond, prime minister of Scotland. "Under the agreement and its accompanying memorandum, responsibility for managing the referendum was transferred to the Scottish parliament on the understanding that, among other things, the ballot paper would contain a single question (inviting yes or no vote) and the referendum would be overseen by the Electoral Commision" (Walker, 2014:746).

According to López Marcos (2014), Scottish citizens want an independent countrydue to these four main reasons:

1. Scotland's Government fears that the National Health System could be turnover from the public to the private sector due to the reduced budget.

2. The fact that they don't want nuclear weapons in their country.

3. Most of the Scottish people wish they could make their own decisions withoutbeing controlled by Westminster.

4. And finally, because they believe that they will be richer without having to paytaxes to the UK Government.

Since 2012 both sides - those in favour of remaining united (Better Together campaign) and those against remaining a part of UK (Yes Scotland campaign)- started to work towards winning the election. The Better Together camp was supported by the Labour Party, the Conservatives, the Liberals and the government as well, of course, by the people and organizations who defend the "no vote". In Scotland, its leader was Alistair Darling.

The Yes Scotland campaign was led by the Scottish Nationalist Party (SNP) and also by the people and organizations in favour of Scotland as an independent country.

Its visible faces were Alex Salmond, the Scotland First Minister (SNP) at this time, and Nicola Sturgeon, the Deputy First Minister (SNP). Between 2013 and 2014 she participated in a considerable number of debates with the speaker of the Better Together campaign (Pedersen et al., 2014). In the last three months before referendum day, Alex Salmond rose in visibility, and therefore he participated in two out-of-three-last televised debates against Alistair Darling.

Throughout all the campaign both sides defended their positions be they for a yes orfor a no vote. The no campaigners highlighted the risk an independent Scotland would

run for the economy, such as the impossibility of keeping the pound, the limited oilreserves[3] and the difficulties Scotland would probably face in the near future in payingfor its public services. The no side also argued that Scotland would automatically have to exit from the European Union (Brooks and Carrell, 2014).

In contrast, the yes campaigners argued that Scotland is not a single-economy country and that they have other means of sustaining welfare spending (such as on pensions and childcare plans). They also asserted that if Scotland became an independent State, they would finally have the government they vote for. In this sense they complained of being governed by a distant government located in Westminster who imposed several cuts and privatisations. The yes vote side expressed their concern about nuclear weapons, the cost that it involves and the fact that Scotland has to assume as a part of the UK (Brooks and Carrell, 2014).

Since the beginning of the campaign, several debates have taken place as a way of exhibiting the positions of both sides. Nonetheless, the last three debates, broadcast through August 2014 and at the very beginning of September 2014 (the month before the referendum[4]) one on the BBC and the other two in STV, were the most important of all for three main reasons: its close proximity to the referendum dates, the fact that they were the final debates on the issue to be broadcast on television and, finally, the importance of the speakers involved.

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[3]Scotland's main economic drivers are oil and gas industry, whisky and salmon.
[4]The dates were as follows: 5th August, 25th August and 2nd September 2014

Chart 1: Scottish electoral debates (2014)

Debate	Audience	Air time	Channel	Debaters
Debate 5th August 2014	- 350 people at the studio - 765,000 viewers[37] - Plus: 500,000 online viewers[38]	8pm-10pm	STV (commercial television channel)	Yes vote: Alex Salmond No vote: Alistair Darling
Debate 25th August	- 843,000 viewers in Scotland - 1.7 million UK television audience	8:30pm-10pm	- BBC (public television/non commercial channel) - Was also simulcast on Sky News	Yes vote: Alex Salmond No vote: Alistair Darling
Debate 2nd September	No available data	8pm-10pm	- STV - Was simulcast on itvnews.com, as well as the STV website, and then repeated at 10.35 pm on STV's network partner ITV for the rest of the UK	Yes vote: Nicola Sturgeon MSP (SNP), Patrick Harvie MSP (Co-convenor of the Scottish Green party) and Elaine C. Smith, actor and political activist. No vote: Douglas Alexander MP (Labour), Ruth Davidson MSP (leader of the Scottish Conservative party) and Kezia Dugdale MSP (Scottish Labour) for Better Together

Source: Pedersen et al. 2014

1.2. The Catalonian sovereignty consultation

Spain is a country politically structured into 17 autonomous regions (including theBalearics and the Canary archipelagos) and two independent cities in the north ofAfrica (Ceuta and Melilla). In the whole territory the official spoken language is Spanish; however, there are five regions where there are other co-official languages:the Basque Country (Basque), Galicia (Galician), Catalonia (Catalan language),Valencia (Valencian language) and the Balearic Islands (Majorcan), the last threesharing the same linguistic roots.

In Spain there are two strong separatist movements: in the Basque Country andin Catalonia, although in other regions there are minority nationalist movements. Inthe Basque Country, the independent movements seek the independence of the wholeBasque Country and some sectors of the independent organizations also want theannex of Navarra and the French Basque Country. In this Spanish region there aredifferent kinds of nationalist movements. The most moderate are peaceful and areeven integrated into political parties like the PNV (Nationalist Basque Party). Incontrast, there is other sector that for decades has engaged paramilitary operationssuch as those carried out by ETA, a left-wing terrorist organization which until itsdisarmament in 2011 killed 858 people (Escrivá, 2011; LópezRomo and Van derLeeuw,

2013; La Vanguardia, 2011). The current news related to Independence ambitions is centred around Catalonia due to the last sovereignty consultation of2014.

Before the 2014 sovereignty consultation, there are several key dates that explainthe present-day relationship between Catalonia and Spain (Viana, 2014a; Viana,2014b).

In the first decade of the XVIII century, Spain underwent a change of monarchicaldynasty. The King Carlos II (Charles II), from the Austrian dynasty, died withoutdescendants; so, after several conflicts, Felipe V (Philip V), of the French dynasty ofthe House of Borbón (Bourbon), was crowned King of Spain. One of its mostremarkable actions was the establishment of the 'Decreto de Nueva Planta' (the NovaPlanta Act) by which all the regions of Spain that had local laws and languages hadto respect Spanish central government laws and to use the Spanish language inpreference to their local language (Bonell, 2010). More than a century after this, in1873, the independence of Catalonia was proclaimed unilaterally, though it lastedjust two days (Viana, 2014a). In 1913, the Spanish Parliament enacted 'Ley de Mancomunidades' (Commonwealth Law) that allowed the regions to self-govern but just in respect of administrative procedures. Previously, in 1907 Enric Prat de la Riba (the governorof the Provincial Council of Catalonia) tried to integrate Catalonia's four provinces(Barcelona, Gerona, Lerida and Tarragona) as a way to ensure more power. However,in 1913 with those new laws the central government only authorised the union ofthe regions for administrative purposes, although this resulted in the creation of aGeneral Assembly with 96 deputies and a permanent Council but without legislativecapacity and resources (Illán, 2002; Viana, 2014a).

A few years later, in 1919, there was an attempt to create a Catalonian Statute ofAutonomy but with the coup d'état of Miguel Primo de Rivera in 1923 the move wasdoomed to failure (Rodríguez Jiménez, 2008; Viana, 2014a). In 1931

the SecondRepublic was established, and in this period of time[5] Catalonia achieved its Statute ofAutonomy in 1932. With this text, Catalonia had wide legislative and executive powersin finance, economy, education, culture, transport, communications and public order,though in case of crisis the central government could take these powers over. Another

important point concerning this Statute was that the Catalonian language and theSpanish language were both official languages in Catalonia. Nonetheless, a number ofCatalonian nationalists were not satisfied with it, because the Statute consideredCatalonia an autonomous region within the Spanish State, rather than as anautonomous state within the Spanish Republic. This Statute of Autonomywas validuntil the regime of General Franco[6] (Illán, 2002; Rodríguez Jiménez, 2008: 210-213).

In 1977, two years after Franco's death and in the midst of the transition todemocracy, in a massive demonstration Catalonia demanded the return of theirStatute (La Vanguardia, 13th September 1977). A year later, the new democraticgovernment, with Adolfo Suárez as Prime Minister, allowed the reinstatement of theStatute of Autonomy (Puig, 2007).

In 2006, during the government of the socialist José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero, theSpanish Parliament enacted a new Statute of Autonomy for Catalonia with somearticles that were denounced as unconstitutional by the conservative Partido Popular(Popular Party). In 2010, the Constitutional Court endorsed the view of the PartidoPopular and declared as unconstitutional most of the articles that the Partido Popularhad claimed as unconstitutional (RTVE, 2010).

In Catalonia, the separatist movement wanted to establish Catalonia as anindependent country. This group sees themselves as a nation oppressed by the central government. In fact, in 2014 while the economic downturn put increasingpressure on the autonomous regions. The Government of Catalonia, inspired bythe Scottish referendum, asked for a sovereignty consultation, even

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[5]The Spanish Second Republic lasted until 1939 (Rodríguez Jiménez, 2008).
[6]After the coup d'état of General Franco in 1939, Spain had a dictatorship between 1939-1975.

though such apractice was illegal (Ruiz, 2012; Badcok, 2014; Ignatieff, 2014; Little 2014).

According to a report drafted in 2015 by the pro-independence political partyConvergènciaDemocràtica de Catalunya, the party in charge of the Governmentof Catalonia, the reasons why some Catalans demand independence can besummarised in four points: firstly, they consider that there is a lack of dialoguebetween the regional government and the central government concerning Catalans'grievances; secondly, they argue that their regional financing model is unfair,because the proportion between the taxes they pay and what they receive from theSpanish government is not well-balanced; thirdly, according to them, since thePartido Popular (Popular Party, a Spanish conservative-right wing party) is runningthe central government and trying to push back autonomous regions' self-governmentpowers; and fourthly, that Catalonia is a region in Spain, like othersin the country, which has a co-official language, the Catalan language. Theindependence supporters defend the dominance of Catalan over Spanish but thelatest educational reforms legislate for the dominance of Spanish (Cañizares, 2013;García, 2015; Noguer, 2015).

The point is that the Spanish Constitution doesn't allow for the hypothetical independence of a part of its territory:

> The Constitution is based on the indissoluble unity of the SpanishNation, the common and indivisible homeland of all Spaniards, andrecognizes and guarantees the right to autonomy of the nationalities andregions of which it is composed and solidarity among them (Article 2,Spanish Constitution).

Nonetheless, there are three kinds of referendums that are legal. According toDíazRevorio (quoted in Ruiz, 2012):

> The advisory committee, which is the objective of Artur Mas [the currentpresident of the Catalonian autonomous government], has to authorizethe government, so there is already a vice of origin. And in any case, ifauthorization were to be achieved, Mariano Rajoy [by this time President of Spanish Government], would request a constitutional amendment, notdirect independence.

However, Artur Mas claims that he does not care at all whether Rajoy, Spanishprime minister, authorises the referendum or not. In the event that he couldn't counton his permission, he would move Catalonian elections forward and bring about aconsultation (De Gregorio, 2013[7], in La Vanguardia, 2013).

There are three main reasons which explain why Catalonia wants to be anindependent country in 2014 (Lamelas, 2013; Segovia, 2014; Oppenheimer, 2014):

– In the first place, they strongly believe that they have a strong enough economyto allow for a separate state. In line with this, Catalonian politicians argue thatan independent Catalonia will be able to maintain both the Euro andmembership of the European Union.

– In the second place, they believe that the Catalonian crisis was caused by theSpanish Government and that if they become an independent country, theeconomic situation will get better.

– In the third place, the Spanish Government created a new education law knownas Wert's law. One of the most controversial points of this law is the fact thatthe Spanish language should grow in importance in respect to the other regionallanguages such as: Galician, Catalan and Basque.

Foreign newspapers covered the consultation, as happened with the Scottishreferendum. This situation created much interest in media outlets,

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[7]De Gregorio, C. (2013, December 27). Quelrivoluzionario in abitogrigio che vuole liberare laCatalogna. La Repubblica.

although in thepolitical process of the UK, not until one month before the Scottish Referendum tookplace was there an awakening of the interest in the issue among the foreign press.Hence, many foreign media were in Catalonia during consultation day (Kassam, 2014).

The UK and Spainshare similarities insofar as both have secessionist matters governed by a pro-independence party, but in what other ways are Catalonia and Scotland similar? In the chart below, the main points of both campaigns can be observed:

Chart 2:*Comparative chart between Scotland and Catalonia*

Issue	Scotland	Catalonia
Population	5.3 millions	7.5 millions
History	Until 1707 Scotland was an independent country, although in 1603 the Union of Crowns took place.	Catalonia has never been an independent country. Nonetheless, it was a part of the Aragon kingdom. In XV Century with the marriage of the Catholic Kings (Fernando and Isabel) both kingdom were united.
Economy	Contributes 8,2% of GDP with 8,4% population of the whole UK.	Contribute nearly 20% of GDP with 16% of the whole population of Spain.
Official languages	English, Scottish, Gaelic	Spanish, Catalan
Political frame	Staging a referendum is possible	According to the Spanish Constitution, it is not possible to stage a referendum on the independence of a region

Source: *Based on the following authors: Breda, 2013; Oppenheimer, 2014; Pérez, 2014; Vidal, 2014*

On the one hand, there are similarities between Catalonia and Scotland. Both, havenearly the same population and proportionally both contribute to the GDP in directproportion to the population of their respective countries. Also, both possess co-official languages spoken only in their respective territory. On the other hand,historically Scotland was once an independent country which is not true in the caseof Catalonia. With respect to the legislation, the truth is that the realities of Cataloniaand Scotland are quite distinct. The Spanish legislative system does not permit thefragmentation of Spain. Down below, the differences

will be seen between both countries from the perspective of the journalistic practices of the digital age.

2. METHODOLOGY

A literature review was made in order to discover the impact that the Scottish Referendum and the Catalonian Sovereignty Consultation had over social media. To do so it has been considered articles in Spanish and British newspaper as well as papers that have been published as a result of any of these   two   processes. Spanish and British newspapers were selected and their social media messages wereanalysed. In order to be representative enough of the aforementioned cases of study,the chosen media outlets were selected following a geographical criterion, to theirpolitical alignment and to their position in media outlets' survey.

3. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

3.1 How the United Kingdom and the Spanish media work

Traditionally, newspapers have been used as an identity reinforcement element by the audience (Giró, 2002; Rosie et al., 2014). Giró (2002) outlines the role of protagonist that media outlets play, especially when concerning the creation of perception around conflicts:

> If we understand the collective identity as the way a group see themselves as a human collective different from other collectives, we therefore understand that the identification and differentiation in groups take place mainly through conflicts. And if the mental representation that we have about conflicts has been co-constructed by the media, it is not difficult to believe that the media –and particularly daily papers– co-construct collective identity too.

In his explanation of collective identity, Giró (2002) highlights conflict between groupsas a main cause. Therefore, in this case when Giro (2002) refers to "conflict" it can beassociated to the national identity that certain regions have, as with Scotland or Catalonia.Afterwards, conflict is generated when a group, which has their own point of view, createsa conflict by emerging and then defending an alternative set of rules in the social sphere(González and Garrido, 1991: 7). This distinct perspective becomes visible through themedia. Daily papers aware of this fact try to engage with their audience by producing aspecial edition for each location. So, in Spain national newspapers produce one editionper region and in the UK one edition for: England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

This is possible thanks to technological developments, which have made "remotenewsgathering, editing and printing easier" (Rosie et al., 2004). For instance, in Scotlandnewspapers like The Guardian, in order to connect with their Scottish audience, slightlyvary their Scotland edition. Rosie et al. (2004: 440) highlight the importance ofintroducing slight changes in local/regional editions:

> Even when they buy the 'same' titles, readers in England and Scotlandmay find editorial copy quite different. Editorial changes range from theminimal – such as the 'Northern' edition of the Guardian sold in the Northof England and Scotland which changes television programmeinformation and little else – to the creation of a substantially differentpaper, with different news stories, pictures, leader comment and political'line' as in the Scottish Sun.

However, when subjects arise regarding the independence movement as with theScotland and the Catalonia, newspapers deal with this issue in a different manner.

Castelló and Capdevila (2013: 994-995) point out in their research that the approachof the information will depend on the alignment of the daily papers for or againstthe independence movement:

> More positive handling was evident to a higher degree in the Scottish and Catalan owned newspapers (The Herald/Sunday Herald, Avui and La Vanguardia), whereas more negative and symbolic approaches were evident in the English and Spanish owned publications (The Daily Telegraph/Sunday Telegraph, The Guardian/Observer, El País and El Mundo). However, there were also differences in the ideological positions of the state based newspapers and we could distinguish between, on the one hand, publications that were more aligned with conservative and unionist positions (The Daily Telegraph/Sunday Telegraph and El Mundo) and, on the other hand, less conservative but still fairly unionist publications (The Guardian/The Observer and El País) that were more ambivalent and even ambiguous regarding their position.

Obviously, the reports included in daily papers owned by pro-union bosses, willshow the good points of union in contrast to those of independence. This does notmean that all the reports on the independence topic are biased, that will depend onthe ideological position of the newspaper and also in their more or less degree ofsensationalist press. In the screenshots below, it can be observed how The HeraldScotland (pro-independence) and The Guardian (pro union) chose a headline whichclearly shows their position on the Scottish issue.

Screenshots 1: *The Herald Scotland* and *The Guardian*
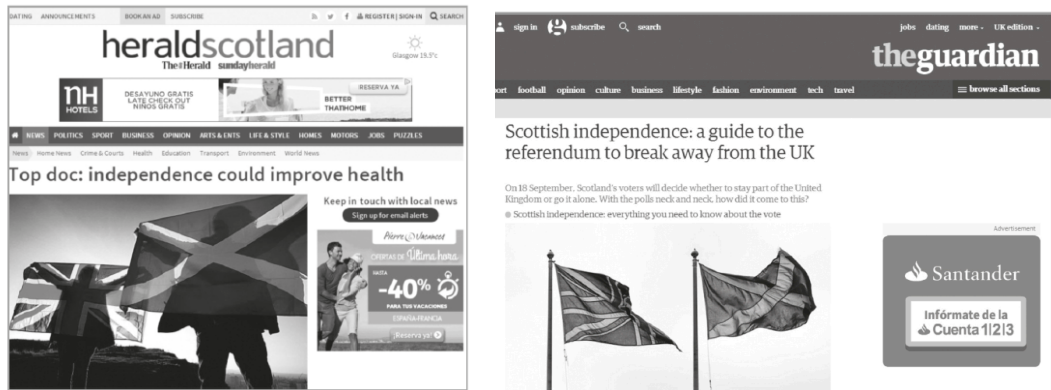
Depending on the country, the media system will be more or less influenced by the government. Based on the relationship between politicians and journalists, according to Hallin and Mancini (2004) there are three media systems: the polarized pluralist model, the corporative democratic model and the liberal model.

In the polarized pluralist model, characteristic of Mediterranean countries like Greece, Portugal, Italy or Spain, the government and political parties have a big influence on the media. The countries which belong to this type of model did not achieve democracy and press freedom at least until the second half of the 20th century, so they have a late media industry development. Spain is clearly framed within the pluralist model because in this country it took too long to: establish a commercial media system (not related to the state and the government) and to allow press freedom (MartínezNicolás et al., 2014). Both elements started in the late 70s with the end of the Spanish dictatorship. Nowadays, this type of political model is also notable for a kind of journalism which focuses its agenda on politicians and even places journalism under political power (MartínezNicolás et al., 2014); in other words, Spain –as with other Mediterranean countries framed within this mode– is notable as having a "sacerdotal journalistic culture" (Van Dalen, 2012: 39). Stömbäck and Luengo (2008:559-560) concluded in their research, regarding the election news in Spain and Sweden, that Spanish articles concerning the political process tend

to be oriented towards a low educated audience and more focussed on the general issue and the political parties, instead of "the conflicts between different political actors". In fact, Van Dalen (2012: 49) claims that despite the "conflictive nature of Spanish politics" the coverage of it is "significantly" low. Hallin and Mancini (2004) explained this situation by saying that this media model is characterized by a "lower degree of journalistic professionalization". MartínezNicolás et al. (2014: 55) found in their research that this relationship between political actors and journalism resulted in a lack of ability "to mediate the political by guiding media coverage of this area from professional criteria not subordinated to the interests, needs and conveniences of the political actors".

The second model, the corporative democratic, is established in the center and in the north of Europe in countries such as Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Holland, Norway, Sweden or Switzerland. In these countries newspapers have high rates of printed copies sold; in fact, this model is characterized by being a "newspaper-centric" system, so much so that in Sweden almost 80% of adults read a daily newspaper at least five days a week (Strömback and Luengo, 2008: 548). It is also notable for its hybrid system where the commercial media coexists with other media which belong to political parties or social groups (Hallin and Mancini, 2004; MartínezNicolás et al., 2014). It has a high degree of professionalism in journalism where the government is plays an active role, despite being legally limited (Hallin and Mancini, 2004).

In contrast to these models, in the liberal model there is less intervention from the government, therefore the media outlets are notable for being more neutral, with a higher degree of journalism professionalization and also by being more independent from government (Esser and Umbricht, 2013; Hallin and Mancini, 2004; MartínezNicolás et al., 2014). Hence, this model, established in the United Kingdom, Ireland, the United States and Canada, has a commercial model of media where the government's influence is really low. This system, also known as the Anglo-American model, is the most valued within the

journalistic profession and also the most studied (Hallin and Mancini, 2004). In fact, this model is clearly linked to UK because their democratic system is older than others –especially when compared with the political systems in Mediterranean countries and therefore, journalism was able to achieve press freedom earlier than in other European countries. Particularly, according to Van Dalen (2012: 39) the most important characteristics of the news corporation in the UK come from the "television market", its "strongly developed commercial mass press" and its higher degree of attention to "the conflicts in the news".

Already seen are the models in which are framed the studied cases but what are the essential differences between both models? Undoubtedly, the development of press freedom was achieved at a different time in each country; in the UK press freedom arrived earlier than in Spain. So, as can be expected, this fact influenced the political media system on which each case study is based. Hence, the UK has a commercial TV and press market, which allow them more freedom from government control (Hallin and Mancini, 2004; Van Dalen, 2012). Another noticeable difference is the fact that in the UK political news tends to focus on "government and parliament actors"; while Spanish media outlets are more likely to cover "political actors outside the government and parliament, such as chairmen of political parties or ex-politicians" (Van Dalen, 2012: 44).

This dissertation analysis has only considered two of the three explored models: the polarized pluralist and the liberal. This is because two dynamic political processes havebeen studied which have a high mobilizing effect, and which were framed in these twodifferent media systems. The way journalists use social media will probably be different in the UK and in Spain and this is, partly, due to their respective systems of media. It is interesting to compare both countries because, according to Van Dalen (2012), in the UK journalists are looking forward to finding conflict in the political sphere -which resulted in giving the opposition the chance to express their ideas; while in Spain, the opposition parties do not have as much media attention as the Spanish government.

Therefore, British and Spanish journalists may use social networks in different ways.

3. 2. The flow of social media on the subject of the Scottish referendum

The number of messages that were registered on Facebook and on Twitter during the referendum campaign was huge: 525,000 messages were posted on the 19th of September[8] and in the last month of the campaign over 10 million interactions were registered on Facebook, of which 8.5 million were made in Scotland (Curtis, 2014; Ridge, 2014). Although among the campaign the highest peaks were registered on referendum day and the day following, there were other days which collected a greater number of tweets. Those were the days of the TV debates. According to research done by Pedersen et al. (2014) at Robert Gordon University, the importance of these debates was reflected in users' responses on Twitter:

> "During Debate 1, a total of 54,811 tweets were collected, with an average of 456.8 tweets per minute. During Debate 2, 64,041 tweets were collected, with an average of 711.6 tweets per minute (over 90 minutes) and during Debate 3, 31,715 tweets were collected with an average of 264.3 tweets per minute over two hours. At the peak of Debate 2 (broadcast UK-wide), over 1300 tweets were collected in one minute".

Although what is said on Twitter and on Facebook is not necessarily linked to the actual results, it is a barometer of what people feel about a topic and a media tool for engaging with them by having this information (Anderson, 2014). In fact, thanks to all the feelings that had been shared on social networks, journalists could focus their reports on this issue while knowing exactly what concerned readers most about the referendum. For instance, according to Anderson (2014) the hot topics discussed onTwitter[9] were: the oil and gas

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[8]It should be remembered that the 19th was the day when the result was announced.
[9]This ranking was made by considering all those readers who had used the hashtag #indyref,between 1st of January and 8th of June 2014. #Indyref was the most important hashtag related tothe referendum.

industry, remaining inside the EU and keeping thepound, therefore journalists could explain to their users, based on what is discussedon Twitter, the trending topics associated with the Scottish process s Some in themedia even wrote news about what users said on Facebook or Twitter (Walsh, 2014).So, what was published on social networks –during the Referendum and about it– became the "news event" itself.

Furthermore, the interesting in the referendum was to grow further as referendum day neared in all those people involved in the issue: politicians, mainstream media, celebrities and of course, citizens. The BBC headlined the campaign during the weekend before as: "Thousands on the streets for weekend campaign"[10]. It was actually true; the campaign intensified the number of meetings and events to show their opinion in favour or against independence.

Furthermore, citizens from every part of Scotland went out onto the streets to voice clearly their opinion. This resulted in widespread media coverage inside the UK and in Europe[11]. The increasing interest of media outlets outside the UK can be explained by the separatist movements located in different parts of the EU. The most remarkable of all of them is located in Spain (with Basque Country and Catalonia), Italy and Belgium (Breda, 2013; Keating, 2004).

In Italy there are independence movements within the country in several locations, but particularly those inspired by the Italian Lega Nord a political party which seeks the independence of the north of Italy. This party was born in the early 90s when the traditional political parties were marred by corruption. In the north of Italy a feeling against the "thieves of Rome" sprang up, which created a demand for the independence of an invented region in the north of Italy: Padania. This would include the regions close to the river Po such as Venice or Milan. This independence movement led by the Italian Lega Nord stands

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[10]Retrieved from: http://www.bbc.com/news/uk-scotland-scotland-politics-29190306
[11]The author of this paper was in Scotland at this time.

against the Italian Government and also the European Union (Egurbide, 1996; Ordaz, 2014).

Belgium is a country founded in the first half of the XIX century with two important regions: Flanders and Wallonia. The conflict there is due to the fact that there is not just one common language (Flanders, Flemish and Dutch is spoken in Wallonia, in Brussels, French and in some small cities the spoken language is German), these regions do not have a common history and finally and mainly, because each region demands more self-governments powers. Brussels, the capital of Belgium and an independent city belonging to Flanders, is at the centre of the conflict because Wallonia would like to annex the capital to their land (Missé, 2007; Martínez de Rituerto, 2010; Abellán, 2014).

### 3.3. The flow of social media on the subject of the Catalonia consultation

Despite the fact that no paper or article was found which can give the exact number of messages on Twitter and on Facebook during the Catalonia consultation campaign and voting day, Scottish Referendum and Catalonia consultation were alike because in both cases media outlets drew on users' interactions on Facebook and on Twitter to build their own stories and to learn which aspects of the political process was of interest to their readers.

Hence, the media used audience messages to write reports based on audience Twitter comments about the consultation. For instance, *El Periódico* published an article showing users' opinions on the process on voting day[12]. In fact, what the public said on social media would even form the basis of a report. That was the case of the hashtag #mierdivots[13]. Some newspapers (*El Mundo*, *La Vanguardia* or *El Periódico*) published a report based on those users who decided to add funny messages to their ballot papers and published a photo about it on Twitter. In the report the media outlets showed some of these users' photos.

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[12]This article is available here: http://www.elperiodico.com/es/noticias/redes/consulta-catalunyatwitter-3599890
[13]In English would be something like: #shitvotes

Screenshots 2: *El Mundo (Spanish newspaper)*
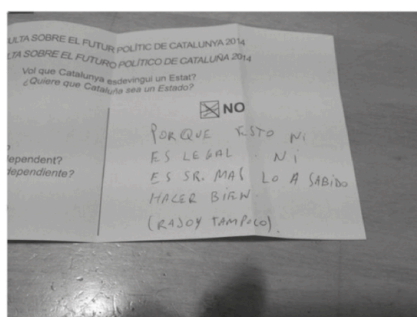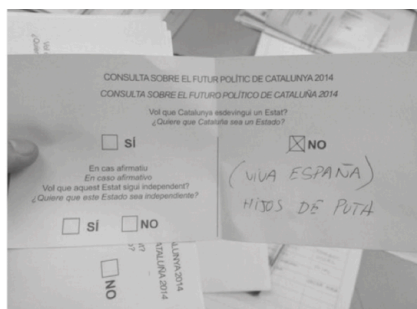
It can be seen in the above picture what users wrote on their ballot papers.In the first one is written: (Long Live Spain!) Sons of bitches! And in the second one: Because this is not legal. Mr. Mas doesn't know how to do things right. (and nor does Rajoy).

Other way Spanish news media dealt with the flow of messages generated on Facebook and Twitter, was by integrating users' comments into their reports as if they had asked them to express their opinion on the process. That was the case of *El Confidencial* which decided to add users' impressions of the consultation day as a part of their live coverage.

Screenshot 3: *Spanish digital newspaper El Confidencial*

However, media outlets used social networks not only as a way to find out what their audience thought and liked, but also to know what was on the mind of the politicians regarding the process. Therefore, it was possible to find reports whichwere based on the different interactions of political party spokesmen on Twitter or Facebook.

In these kinds of reports politicians' priorities related to the political process could be observed. As such, Vera and Saiz (2014) wrote an interesting report published in El Mundo with the headline "El soberanismoarrasaen la Red" ("Sovereignty breaks the Internet"). In this article, they were able to write about

which the hot topics are for the politicians and also what the composition might be of the Autonomic Chamber (see below picture) just by taking into account the most used hashtag about this issue (elections) and the number of followers, interactions and messages of each candidate.

Screenshot 4: Article published on *El Mundo*. Whole article available from here: http://www.elmundo.es/espana/2014/05/03/5364174fca4741bd3b8b4576.html

4. CONCLUSION

When a user approaches Twitter or Facebook they do so with a clear aim. Thanks to these platforms readers are able to reinforce their ideas about certain topics.

Unsurprisingly, social media plays a big part during important events, especially for those linked to a political process, like the Scottish referendum or the Catalonia consultation. It is within this context that Quinlan et al. (2015: 195) claim the importance of social networks as a tool that users have in order to be informed:

> "Social media provides a new avenue where citizens could become more engaged and more informed on an issue, at a relatively low cost and by which geographical boundaries/location can be overcome".

In fact, users can also be influenced by what is said on social networks, especially regarding politics (Law, 2015). Furthermore, with the consolidation of social media as a social communication tool which provides information, the role of the opinion leader re-emerges as an important figure inside the communication process. It could be said that we are seeing a reconfiguration with opinion formers, an as yet unfinished process of change. It is clear that interaction and participation with the audience is now simpler, but it is still too soon to speak about a symmetric model, where there is no group with influence upon the other. This is proposed by Pavlik (2000b: 235) who argues that a symmetric model has emerged. Pavlik (2000b: 235-236) describes it thus:

> "In this model, the flow of communication is much more balanced, much more a dialogue between both or all parties to the communication. No one group dominates the process of persuasion".

Although the essence remains the same –in respect to the configuration of opinion formers in the digital realm– the way in which these opinion formers establish themselves, consolidate their position and interact is different. There are occasions when what is expressed by a citizen may be the prelude to the establishment of a new opinion leader, always when he or she manages to

generate a collective reaction among those that are listening to the message. This is what would happen were the same message to be broadcast by an established opinion former. However, given the short time that these opinion formers in the digital realm have maintained their sway, we do not refer to opinion formers in the classic sense but more properly in that of the

transient –which is to say that they will remain only as long as this information continues to have an impact on society. These situations often come about in the context of an event of great social impact and a result produce a strong reaction in society. Kozar and Zigurs (1992:14, quoted in Luor and Lu, 2012: 33) defined searchers of opinion as those who would seek opinions and clarifications of events within a specific group. Said and Arcila (2011: 81) consider the numbers of followers on social networks as a determining factor to decide whether or not we are dealing with an opinion former.

In the case of the Scottish referendum and the Catalonia consultation, although both processes were similar because of their high news value, how news media covered the political process was different in each country. In Scotland, during the election campaign, media outlets focussed on Scottish independence; while in Catalonia the independence issue "was largely trivialized" (Castelló and Capdevila, 2013). In any case, both process generated media reaction on social networks. Hence several academics went a step further and studied not only the political phenomenon, but also the movement that was generated by news companies on Facebook and Twitter about the electoral process (Anderson, 2014; Curtis, 2014; Perdersen et al., 2014; Ridge, 2014; Walsh 2014).

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[14]Kozar, KA and Zigurs, I. (1992): "Human and machine roles in team product reviews A prescription for change", Information & Management, 23, pp.149-57

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