

Máster en Democracia y Gobierno

Departamento de Ciencia Política y Relaciones Internacionales

Universidad Autónoma de Madrid

Working Papers Online Series

http://www.uam.es/ss/Satellite/Derecho/es/1242658791834/listadoCombo/Working_Papers.htm

Estudio/Working Paper 182/2017

**“Digital Communication Technologies and the Scottish
Independence Referendum: how, why and with what
implications?”**

Ana Ines Langer
University of Glasgow

Michael Comerford
University of Glasgow

Des McNulty
University of Glasgow

Abstract

This paper explores the use of digital communication technologies (DCTs), and more specifically social media, during the 2014 Scottish Independence referendum. The very high turnout achieved in the referendum and the extent to which voters became engaged in political discussion and debate in the run up to the vote has been widely hailed as an invigorating example of democracy in action. Our paper focuses on the contribution of DCTs to that democratic process. There was an explosion in the number of citizens using social media to express their opinions on the issues and personalities, leading to very extensive digital conversations. The way in which technologies were used and the role they played in political mobilization were important factors in creating conditions for a longer term political reconfiguration in Scotland with huge implications for the 2015 General Election.

1. Introduction

This paper explores the use of digital communication technologies (DCTs), and more specifically social media, during the 2014 Scottish independence referendum. The very high turnout achieved in the referendum (84.5%) and the extent to which voters became engaged in political discussion and debate in the run up to the vote has been widely hailed as an invigorating example of democracy in action. Our paper focuses on the contribution of DCTs to that democratic process. The campaigns, (both official and unofficial) used social media extensively and over a much longer period than in a ‘normal’ election. There was an explosion in the number of citizens using social media to express their opinions on the issues and personalities, leading to very extensive digital conversations using #indyref for example. The way in which technologies were used and the role they played in political mobilisation, even though voters rejected independence (55% No, 45% Yes), were important factors in creating conditions for a longer term political reconfiguration in Scotland with huge implications for the 2015 General Election.

Our work draws on the literature about the impact of digital technologies in politics, much of which is based on the US political system. We conducted a series of in-depth interviews with key people in the campaigns. The data from these interviews was supplemented by analysis of over 2.8 million tweets, giving both a qualitative and quantitative dimension to our research. The paper produced using these methodologies has three main aims. Firstly, we compare the strategies adopted by the Yes and the No campaigns for the use of DCTs, focusing especially, but not in isolation, in the use of social media. Secondly, we analyse and explain the key differences in the use of DCTs between the campaigns.

Finally, we explore the tensions between attempts to command and control the use of DCTs by campaign managers, the spontaneous engagement and participation of individuals, and the role of organisations loosely affiliated to the official campaigns but not directed by them. In comparing the two campaigns, we focus on whether, as some commentators have claimed, the Yes campaign assumed some of the characteristics of a movement, and hence could be characterised as a ‘hybrid organisation’ (Flanagin, et al. 2006; Chadwick 2007). We also address normative questions such as whether this higher

level of participation through social media helped make the referendum ‘more democratic’.

Before proceeding to the substance of this paper, it is important to note the context of the Scottish independence referendum and consider the implications of the campaign alongside the SNP gains¹ in the 2015 General Election. The creation of a devolved Scottish Parliament in 1999 was intended as a response to demands for greater self-government which would defuse these pressures while keeping Scotland within the United Kingdom. Far from leading to the marginalisation of the pro-independence SNP, the Scottish Parliament gave the party sizeable representation, increased resources and a platform from which they could extend their appeal. They formed a minority government in Scotland in 2007 and won a majority of seats in the 2011 Scottish Parliament elections.

The middle ground of politics in Scotland means is to the left of that in the rest of the UK. The main protagonists, the SNP and Labour, are not divided on a traditional left-right spectrum but more specifically on the issue of independence. During the run-up to the referendum official campaigns were created; ‘Yes Scotland’, in which the SNP were the dominant force, campaigned for independence, while the UK Westminster parties formed an uncomfortable alliance to put the case for a No vote under the ‘Better Together’ banner. . The assemblage² around the Yes campaign put forward a predominantly positive case for change, led by the SNP leader Alex Salmond and Nicola Sturgeon who were able to mobilise the resources not only of their party but of the Scottish Government in support of their efforts. By contrast, the No campaign consistently focused on the risks/negative consequences of separation, was led by retiring politicians or non-elected officials, relied primarily on the support off the 3 main UK parties, backed up by the UK government.

The two campaigns had very different strategies – the No campaign was intent on winning the vote and concentrated its efforts on ‘swing voters’ rather than communicating with its core supporters. The Yes campaign on the other hand, while fighting hard to secure victory, was consistently trying to build momentum and broaden its base. Arguably both sides succeeded: Better Together won the referendum, but Yes Scotland’s strategy

¹ 56 out of 59 Scottish seats.

² ‘A name for a combination of technologically augmented organizations, groups, and individuals whose combined capacities for actions are brought to bear on a shared project’ (Nielsen 2012)

of building a movement with a positive message for Scotland's future has to be seen as laying the foundation for unprecedented SNP victories in the 2015 General Election.

2. Literature review

As a first step we review the growing literature about the impact of digital technologies in politics, including research about the use of social media in elections. Much of this has focused on the US and most especially on Obama's two campaigns (2008 and 2012) and what is considered its key precedent, Dean's primary campaign (Hindman 2005; Vaccari 2010; Kreiss 2012; Bimber 2014a; Kreiss 2014; Stromer-Galley 2014), although the literature now more often extends to cases elsewhere (Gibson, et al. 2003; Gibson, et al. 2008; Lilleker and Jackson 2011; Cardenal 2013; Chadwick 2013; Enli and Skogerbø 2013; Koc-Michalska, et al. 2014).

Less is known about how campaigners view and use DCTs as strategic tools during elections, and how they try to influence and manage networked political communication, especially outside the US (see Kreiss 2014). Moreover, attempts at understanding differences between campaigns are still surprisingly sparse. In fact, only a few studies have focused on *explaining* differences on the use of DCTs. For this reason, as Vaccari notes, we need more research 'to better comprehend the interplay between political, strategic, organizational, and communication variables' (Vaccari 2010). Moreover, previous studies have rarely analysed the role in elections of those groups not directly involved in mainstream political campaigns, or the interaction between official campaigns and unofficial organisations that work alongside mainstream political campaigns. Our research highlights the importance of these groups and the nature of their activity in the context of the Scottish referendum.

Related to this debate, and crucially for this study, authors have described the emergence of a hybridisation process affecting established interest groups and parties (Bimber, et al. 2005; Flanagan, et al. 2006; Chadwick 2007; Vaccari 2010; Chadwick 2013). This process is 'based on the selective transplantation and adaptation of digital network repertoires previously considered typical of social movement mobilizations' (Chadwick 2007). This model combines features of both types of organisations and is characterised as less centralised, hierarchical and controlled than traditional organisations such as political parties and combine entrepreneurial and institutional repertoires of collective action (Flanagan, et al. 2006). It is vital to emphasise that this is an adaption, rather than a replacement of one type of organisation with another. Campaigns increasingly combine control and participatory elements and these should not be

considered as mutually exclusive organisational forms (Kreiss 2009; Vaccari 2010; Chadwick 2013).

The literature raises a variety of questions about the effectiveness of DCTs in politics and the extent to which they are transforming practice in political campaigning. The notion of hybridity is one we have found especially useful in conceptualising the dynamics of change in campaign organisation resulting from the adoption and use of digital technologies. Like many of the authors whose research we have drawn on, we are interested not only in how DCTs are used to maximise electoral support but also in how these technologies affect the democratic process – how they affect the relationships of power between political elites and citizens, whether the greater participation they make possible enriches the political process or whether the escalation in the use of DCTs enables campaign managers to take a tighter grip in shaping the media agenda and marshalling more effectively the activities of their supporters. There is a general agreement that even the most ‘participatory’ campaigns, such as Dean’s and Obama’s, have in fact ‘harnessed’ citizens’ technology-aided activities for their own purposes (Kreiss 2009). Responses to this range across a spectrum from broadly positive (Nielsen 2011; Bimber 2014a), agnostic (Cardenal 2013; Chadwick 2013), and the more sceptical (Howard 2006; Stromer-Galley 2014). These differences are in part to do with how technology is conceptualised and which platforms are emphasised as well as—crucially—the normative conceptions of democracy that underpin the critique (Chadwick 2009, 2012). Moreover, as Wright (2012) highlights in his critique of the literature, our assessment highly depends on expectations: the ‘managed citizen’ might be far from the ideal but is it not better than the disengaged citizen? We will return to this question at the end of the paper. We will first briefly outline our mixed methods approach before proceeding to the analysis.

3. Methodology

The research combines innovative digital analytics with traditional social science techniques: in-depth interviewsⁱ with key staff as well as ‘big data’ from Twitter, including a network analysis of over 2.8 million tweets. This mixed-methods approach allows us not only to provide a systematic account of the role of DCTs but also to frame it in the context of the overall campaign objectives and dynamics, as well as how they interacted with other elements in the hybrid media system (Chadwick 2013). Fundamentally it will enable us to complement the rich material from the interviews with

robust data on how the campaigns and citizens actually used the technology and its affordances.

Our twelve in-depth interviewees were key staffers from both the official campaigns (Better Together and Yes Scotland), along with leading members of groups that were highly active in the digital sphere during the referendum but were not, at least formally, part of the umbrella organisations. We selected interviewees from the two official campaigns who were responsible for leading the digital elements of campaign activity; but we also included, as far as possible, the campaign managers they reported to as well as people working in other aspects of the campaign, such as message or community. Including the latter group helped us to avoid the danger of overestimating the role of digital relative to other campaign activity and also enabled us to see how the digital component interacted with other dimensions of the overall campaign. The second group of interviewees were mainly from unofficial groups on the periphery of the Yes campaign. This reflected the heavy preponderance of organised unofficial social media activity by Yes supporters - a result of the nature of the campaign, not choices of the researchers. In addition, we interviewed one journalist focused on digital issues, who has been mentioned repeatedly as highly informed and a key person with useful insights into both campaigns.

The quantitative analysis was carried out using data collected from the social media platform Twitter.ⁱⁱ This method provided approximately 2.8M tweets, drawn from c.146,000 unique user accounts, between January and September 2014. Not all these c.146,000 users were resident in Scotland. To construct the dataset for network analysis, the data was transformed such that user mentions in the full text were extracted to provide a dataset of c.1.4M user interactions, i.e. 'retweets', '@mentions', and '@replies'. These interactions provided the nodes (the Twitter user accounts) and edges (an interaction between two users) for the network.

In the following sections of the paper, the standard terminology for network analysis will be used. The degree of a node is the number of edges a node has (the number of interactions a Twitter account has); this can be directional, defined as inbound and outbound degree (mentions of and by a Twitter account respectively). The centrality, or how important a node is to a network, can be measured in various ways. In this analysis we use: degree centrality, using the total and directional degree to rank nodes; and betweenness centrality, which measures the number of shortest paths in the network that

pass through a node (For a more detailed discussion of these concepts in the social science context see (Brandes and Erlebach 2005; Cioffi-Revilla 2013)).

4. Framing the campaigns' use of DCTs

This section sets out a framework for discussing differences in how the campaigns made use of DCTs. In common with previous studies (Howard 2005; Norris and Curtice 2008; Nielsen 2011; Bimber 2014b), we identified three main categories of use of DCTs, set out below.

i) *Getting the message out* – Characterised by more of a broadcast, rather than an interactive, function. This is geared towards the provision of information for journalists/opinion formers, peer-to-peer advocacy, and information for the general public.

ii) *Fundraising* – Raising funds for the campaign, through traditional donations, but also crowd-funding and targeted campaigns.

iii) *Recruitment and mobilisation* – Ranges from the promotion of events, across the logistics of volunteer coordination and through signposting to how prospective campaigners might get involved.

Although all three types of uses were identified, there were not so to equal degrees. The use case for DCTs, specifically social media, in terms of 'getting the message out' was deemed particularly important for the Yes Scotland campaign as it gave them an alternative channel of communication to 'counter-balance' what they saw as a hostile mainstream print and broadcast media:

"So apart from being the counterbalance to the mainstream media, to the anti-independence media if you like, it was also one of the more obvious means through which we could communicate the kind of campaign that we wanted to run and begin to create that national movement." (Interview 1, Senior Management, Yes Campaign)

Fundraising was not a topic raised often by interview participants, although campaign finance issues were highlighted – both sides were acutely aware of the competitive edge that campaign funding could provide. One respondent who had had experience of working for the Obama campaign suggested that fund raising was central to the design of their campaign websites and social media strategies. Another respondent told us:

“There were lots of nice tools [...], which allowed us to target [...], so making particular asks for particular amounts of money to people according the amounts of money they’d given before. So rather than sending out an email around the time of the debate saying, please give us £10 and then sending that to people who’d given you £50, [...] you would,[...] tailor it.” (Interview 2, Senior Management, No Campaign)

Mobilisation of activists and volunteers using DCTs featured strongly in the interviews with both campaigns, with more emphasis from the Yes Scotland side. They described a ‘funnel of engagement’ applied across their digital operations:

“[W]e had a [...] digital sales funnel of engagement. So making sure that if you supported us, would you give us money?; if you would give money, would you become an activist?; if you become an activist, would you go out campaigning, would you go on the doorstep and help to recruit?; and would you to take real world action as much as possible?” (Interview 3, Management, Yes Campaign).

With this framework in place, we compare and contrast the campaigns strategy and use of DCTs. However, it is important that this framework is not imposed too rigidly – the internet, digital technologies or social media are not monolithic entities.

5. Differences

The two official campaigns had different strategic objectives beyond ‘winning’ the referendum. The consequences of these differences in strategy are evident in both interview responses and in the analysis of social media data. The fundamental difference which echoes throughout the campaigns use of DCTs is one of scope – Better Together were not building a campaign that would continue beyond the vote itself, whereas Yes Scotland positioned themselves as catalyst to the formation of a wider pro-independence movement.

This key difference had an important impact on the use of DCTs, demonstrating that key variations in their use across campaigns are driven by the interplay of not only technological and financial resources, but also by the choices made by campaign managers. In this regard it should not be assumed that all actors want to take full advantage of the potential of the internet, even if the resources are available, nor should it be assumed that they have the same understanding of that potential. For example,

although the No campaign employed the services of Blue State Digital³, which could have given it access to tools similar to those used in the Obama campaigns to mobilise core supporters, campaign managers appear to have used DCTs mainly to transmit messages, information and to support fundraising efforts.

“Facebook and Twitter were broadcast rather than necessarily engagement. Because we didn’t want to dilute the message, but also we were not building something to last, you know. We always were conscious we weren’t going to exist the day after, so we could be more, mechanical and have a more instrumental approach.”
(Interview 2, Senior Management, No Campaign)

In contrast, the Yes campaign had a more participatory approach to the use of DCTs. Yes Scotland, and the other Yes groups like National Collective and Women for Independence, consistently claimed that they were trying to create a ‘national movement’ rather than a traditional political campaign. One of the Yes organisations interviewed put this rather succinctly:

“Well, it’s just an umbrella term [movement] to describe lots of disparate groups working for the same goal. It wasn’t an organisation because it wasn’t organised, so what else do you call it? [...] Yes, it was definitely that [very grassroots/bottom-up]. People didn’t wait for instructions or permission, they just got on with doing whatever they thought needed done.” (Interview 6, Blogger, Yes Supporter)

These approaches not only encouraged a diverse use of DCTs but also affected how they were controlled. Better Together used social media (and other DCTs, including their website) mostly for activity corresponding to the first pillar in our framework: broadcasting and getting their message out. This use included a targeted, heavily centralised structure with the aim of pursuing their strategic objectives through relentless targeting of floating voters. Figures across the campaign were consistent in describing this approach: “We were clear that nothing with the Better Together brand would be run without [...] editorial control by staff members” (Interview 2, Senior Management, No Campaign). Moreover, the use of DCTS was, in Chadwick’s (2013) terms, essentially tactical: for attracting the attention of traditional media, versus integration and the embedding of DCTs with the campaign on the ground. “Twitter was never seen as being

³ An external digital strategy agency.

terribly important for direct influence. It was more important for influencing the opinion formers.” (Interview 2, Senior Management, No Campaign)

Better Together’s targeting of floating voters to the exclusion of other activities, including motivating their own supporters meant that there was less integration of its social media activity with the ground campaign than was the case for Yes Scotland. Indeed Better Together took the view that because polling data indicated that emotional arguments were a turn-off for undecided voters, indulging its core supporters in that way would be a strategic error:

“One figure that we used a lot in internal discussions was that 7% of the undecided voters felt an emotional connection to people in the rest of the UK, whereas 70% of them were worried about the economics of independence [...] We knew for those undecided voters, Union Jacks just were not a good idea [...] There were commentators saying to us we should be, [stressing the] emotional, historic ties and bonds with the rest of the UK. Whereas our [message] maybe looked a bit more clinical, but it was because we were just banging on about the economy fairly constantly.” (Interview 2, Senior Management, No Campaign)

Parallels can be drawn here with the 2008 McCain campaign, which “emphasized relatively unidirectional uses of the new media, aimed at distributing carefully controlled messages to targeted audiences and at influencing mass media coverage of the candidate” (Vaccari 2010: 333). However, a notable difference from Vaccari’s analysis was the impact of this ‘unidirectional’ approach on fund raising, the second aspect of our framework.

In the referendum context, despite their consistent targeting of undecided voters, and the focus on the economic arguments, the No campaign received more regulated small donations (£500-7,500) from individuals than the Yes campaign.⁴ This was regarded as a clear mark of success by Better Together. Yes Scotland however explain the difference in terms that perhaps suit the centralised versus movement-building narrative:

⁴ According to the Electoral Commission, the No campaign received £1,442,814 in smaller donations, versus £71,950 for the Yes campaign. Donations over £7,500 were relatively equal for both campaigns. However, the Electoral Commission figures do not include donations smaller than £500, which we assume make up the bulk of the contributions from ordinary members of the public.

“I think quite a lot of people who were on the Yes side felt that perhaps their money would be more useful going towards another part of the Yes movement [...] I felt that we ought not to be fishing in that pond [crowd-funding] because all the other important parts of the Yes movement were dependent on that.” (Interview 1, Senior Management, Yes Campaign)

In terms of the third aspect of our framework, recruitment and mobilisation, Better Together relied on the existing infrastructure of its political parties. DCTs were used to promote events and provide details of local activity but these were controlled by the centre. For example, only staff could post events to the Better Together website, but anyone could create and advertise events on the official Yes Scotland website. This again plays strongly to the objectives the No campaign set out. It was short-term and heavily targeted, using polling data to identify and influence undecided voters.

Figure 1: Most retweeted message in data collected, with the embedded image



Origin (in our data): @YesVoteScots, Text: “It’d be great if everyone who saw this would retweet it. I know some won’t but to those who do thank you #IndyRef”, retweets (collected by project): 3085.

In this respect, Yes Scotland used social media more and, it can be argued, more successfully. Although success has to be defined in terms of the objectives each campaign

set for itself, it is clear that Yes dominated the ‘conversation’, especially on Twitter. In our data, of the top 10 most retweeted messages, seven were pro-Yes and the other three were neutral. Interestingly, the most retweeted message was not from Yes Scotland but from Radical Independence a Yes-aligned, left-wing, campaign group (See Figure 1). The number of retweets or ‘likes’ for a campaign are evidence of tactical success, as defined by Karpf (2010), i.e. Yes have more ‘likes’ and receive more attention on social media. However reliance solely on numbers may be misleading – there is a need to be clear how this activity supports the strategic measure of success which hinges on “a clear theory of how you expect your tactics to make a difference, in turn clarifying which measures actually contribute to a win or a loss” (Karpf 2010:151).

In general, Yes Scotland opted for a less one-directional broadcasting of information and instead emphasised linking social media and DCTs to actions on the ground. This was done both in practical terms by providing information for use on the doorstep, or in conversation with family, friends and colleagues, as well as information for coordinating action at a local level. Yes also focused on creating the right ‘atmosphere’, and feeling of ‘momentum’, which although it could be criticised tactically as an exercise in talking too much to their own supporters, was strategically important for their objective of fostering a ‘national movement’.

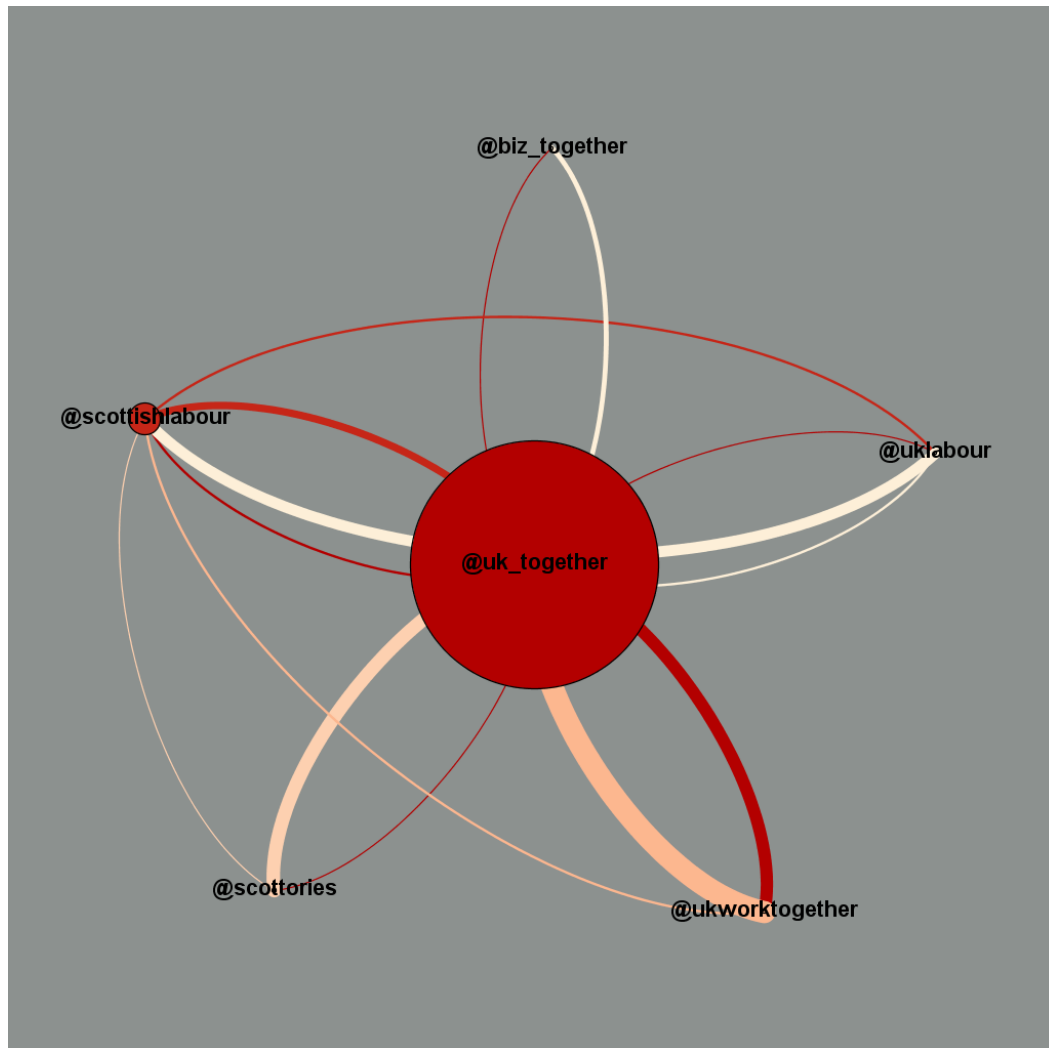
To return to the level of centralisation exercised by the campaigns, consider the approach toward other organisations in their respective campaign spaces. Better Together operated as a centralised hub that either created or co-opted other groups: “We took the decision that Academics [Together], Women Together, all these groups, would be brought in house, they’d be in our funding, we could then work together, but in terms of the work they did it would be independent, it was just they were part of Better Together” (Interview 7, Operations, No Campaign). Yes took a very different approach to external groups, in part because a number of independent Yes organisations emerged during, or even before, the campaign that they had little or no influence over. This also seemed to resonate with their strategic objectives: “The view I always had was that Yes Scotland had to be the core of a national movement which would become much more diverse and many headed than just the one official campaign” (Interview 1, Senior Management, Yes Campaign).

Yes Scotland acknowledged that this approach could be ‘mutually supportive’ allowing many different groups to tailor messages to specific audiences. There was a risk

however that the campaign might struggle to get its core message out given the other competing voices: “There was so much information [out there and the] independence campaign was so broad with Radical Independence [etc.] putting out their own ideas so we had to repeat, repeat, repeat, messages in order to make sure that they were the ones getting through” (Interview 5, Operations, Yes Campaign).

These insights from the interviews are confirmed by our data from social media. The data supports this narrative of a traditional, centralised, top-down political campaign combined with more a more hybrid approach (seen in the Yes campaign). In order to provide a comparison of the Yes and No network traffic, we consider the Twitter accounts that the official campaigns actively interact with (i.e. they retweet them or mention them directly). Further, to address the central analysis of this paper and our discussion of the use of hybridity specifically, compare Figure 2 & 3. These two visualisations show the connection between the official campaign accounts and significant accounts aligned with their side of the campaign. Here we have chosen a subset of accounts that represent groups that either pre-existed the official campaigns, or were created to support their case but are not directly controlled by them. We have excluded sub-divisions of the official campaigns where the official campaigns either created, or exert direct control over their communications (e.g. sectoral groups, Academics for Yes, NHS Together, etc.).

Figure 2: Better Together and intermediate nodes (extracted from out-bound ego network: Nodes = 161, Edges =2014)



The first striking difference is the greater number of accounts identified for the Yes side. Secondly, there is a lack of interconnections between the No-aligned accounts; the connecting lines between accounts are representative of the amount of activity (represented by the thickness of the line) and the source of that activity (colour of the account⁵). The No subnet most closely resembles the hub-and-spoke pattern we would associate with centralised star networks similar to those found by Bennett and Segerberg (2013). Although the Yes subnet still has a dominant official campaign node at its centre, the breadth of interconnections and levels of activity between intermediate nodes shows the hybrid nature discussed thus far in this paper.

⁵ The nodes are coloured based on their level of outward activity, the stronger the red the more activity.

Figure 3: Yes Scotland and intermediate nodes (extracted from out-bound ego network: Nodes = 288, Edges =8192)

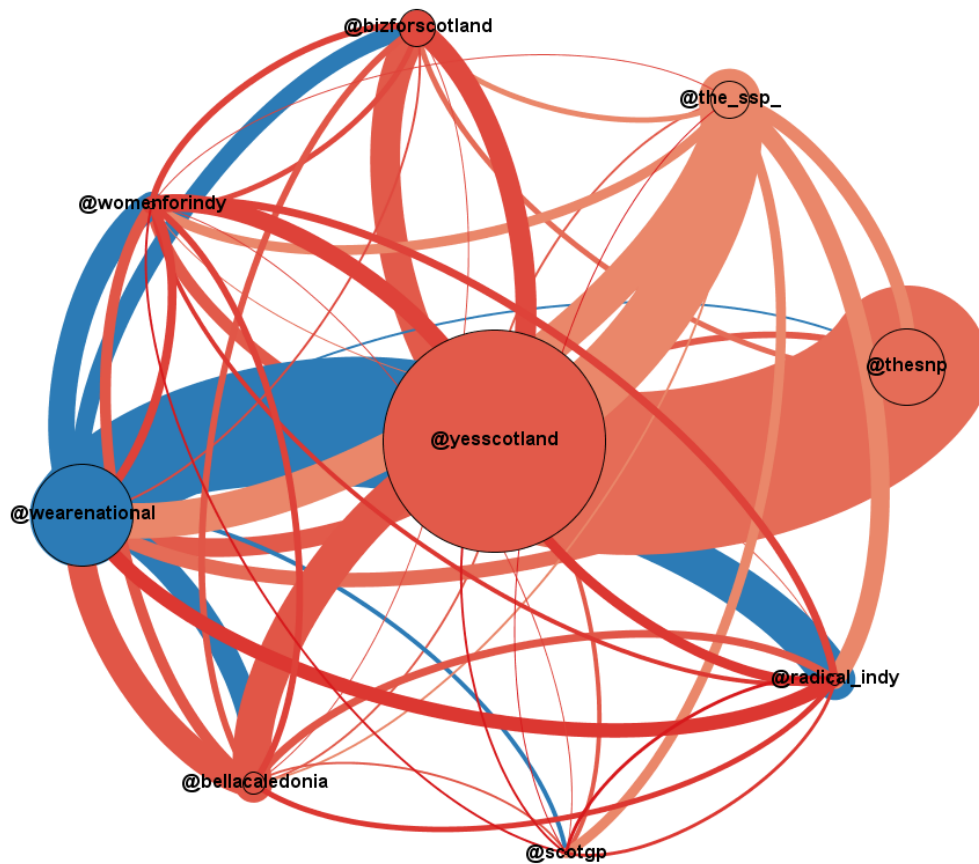


Figure 3 also shows that a number of the Yes-aligned accounts had much higher levels of activity than the official campaign and created their own messages rather than simply echoing those of the centre messages. National Collective (@wearenational): on the red-blue spectrum of activity (red for lower levels, blue for greater levels) is the most active of these accounts. Given the thickness of their edges it is unlikely that this is just the relaying of Yes Scotland's messages. These edges also suggest a different pattern of engagement from the official campaign as they interact more with accounts less well connected to the centre, e.g. Radical Independence (@radical_indy).

The absence of some prominent Yes supporting accounts tells us something of the attitude of Yes Scotland toward different organisations in the wider Yes movement. For

example, Wings Over Scotland, an influential blog, is absent from Yes Scotland's active connections. This was discussed in our interviews as a decision taken not to engage directly with aspects of the wider Yes campaign that were seen as problematic and potentially counter-productive to the main message.

We identified other patterns of activity in the official campaigns accounts that further demonstrates positions on a spectrum of hybridity. Better Together had a significant level of activity that centred on traditional political elites, politicians, and journalists. Whereas Yes Scotland concentrated activity toward a network of local Yes groups that, perhaps despite the campaign's intentions, took on varying degrees of independence from central campaign messages. In fact the data suggests that these local groups developed their own organic connections bypassing the central campaign account.

In this section we have discussed the key differences between the respective campaign's choices with reference to the framework set out previously. These resonate with the literature in terms of tactical and strategic measures of success and the strategic objectives of the respective campaigns themselves. We have also seen how the two official campaigns might map onto a continuum of top-down/bottom-up activity and the potential to characterise this in terms of a hybrid of centralised, yet movement-like, properties. We will now explore explanations for the key contrasts and expand on these notions of hybrid organisations and their use of DCTs.

6. Explaining these differences

Secondly, and crucially for this paper, the variations in use of DCTs also extend to campaigns within the same institutional set up. It would be a mistake to think of these differences—as it is often the case in journalistic accounts and on occasion in academic analysis as well—merely as a result of one campaign being more or less successful than the other. As one might expect, there is variation in resources and implementation but the emphasis on success can lead us to assume that all campaigns have the same intent in the first place. Instead, it is important to recognise that differences are at least partly explained by strategic decisions made by the campaigns as well as by the factors that act as incentives and constraints for these choices.

In this regard, previous studies with a comparative approach have identified a number of factors that appear to explain these differences. We will focus here on the intra-institutional dynamics because our comparison is within the same country. Unlike

previous studies, this paper focuses on a referendum; the campaigns were not single-party or candidate-centred but coalitions. Our paper focuses on social media as opposed to websites. The aim of this analysis was to uncover which factors made the Yes campaign a more ‘favourable environment’ (Vaccari 2010) for the more intensive and diverse use of social media as well as its more hybrid repertoire of collective action discussed above. In so doing, we will explore the validity of previous findings as well as uncovering new factors.

Broadly speaking, previous studies have identified three types of mediating factors that affect the incentives to invest, prioritise and harness the full potential of DCTs, what Vaccari (2010:335) calls ‘micro level incentives’. The first group, which is by far the most tested in the literature, is related to the characteristics of the party. Specifically research has found—in line with normalisation theory—that larger parties tend to make more and better use of DCTs (Vaccari 2013; Gibson 2015).

While, incumbents—because of resources—have an advantage, challengers or insurgents have strong incentives to use of DCTs to counteract their handicaps e.g. funding, access to friendly mainstream media, recognition and position within the party (Kreiss 2009; Cardenal 2013; Enli and Moe 2013; Stromer-Galley 2014). Others emphasise more the impact of the overall organisation and strategic orientation of the party, with less-hierarchical, more loosely organised and grassroots-oriented parties more likely to make more use of technology (Vaccari 2010; Cardenal 2013; Bimber 2014b). Moreover, candidates and parties ideologically on the left are expected to make more intense and effective use of the participatory elements of DCTs (Lilleker and Jackson 2011; Vaccari 2013), although those on the right have also been found to do so, with research highlighting examples of both the libertarian (Ron Paul) (Stromer-Galley 2014) and populist (BNP) types (Lilleker and Jackson 2011; Kreiss 2012; Gibson 2015).

The second group of factors is to do with the characteristics of the candidate, if relevant, and the message and their ability to generate movement-like enthusiasm among supporters (Vaccari 2010; Nielsen 2012). It also helps, of course, if there is already a motivated base and a ‘common desire to change the world’ (Nielsen 2012) as technologies per se are unlikely to spur the enthusiasm required for movement-like dynamics but can contribute to effectively collect and direct these energies (Vaccari 2010:327).

Finally, the third group refers to the organisational structure of the campaign and specifically the role and hierarchy given to the digital/internet division (Kreiss 2014). This will be influenced by the factors above, and in turn shapes the ability of the campaigns to harness the potential of DCTs, reinforcing the advantages/limitations of the different parties.

Given the particular characteristics of the campaigns under study here and our focus on social media, to what extent do these factors help us explain the differences across the two campaigns? What other potential explanations emerge?

If we align the context and evidence from the previous sections with the discussion of possible conceptual explanations outlined above, we can see aspects of Obama's hybrid model described by Vaccari (2010) in the Yes Scotland and wider Yes campaign: a campaign which incorporated activity from different parts of the 'top-down/bottom-up continuum'. However, the effectiveness of the Yes model could not be ascribed the same successes as the Obama campaign, and hence the importance of not just assuming the US model was in effect. It certainly appeared less controlled, hierarchical and centralised than No, but perhaps did not achieve the blend of "movement-like entrepreneurial activism [with an] ability to institutionally monitor and direct it" (Vaccari 2010:331). In addition, if Yes can be positioned toward the bottom-up end of the spectrum, Better Together can be positioned closer to top-down. Both of these positions were adopted with purpose and aligned to the strategic objectives of the campaigns.

However, to avoid defining the campaigns as purely rational actors perfectly aligned with their strategic goals, we can also see the regulatory framework of the referendum playing a role in how the campaigns positioned themselves. Tight regulations on collaborative campaigning saw Better Together assimilate groups on their periphery within their own campaign, which ensured that they could exercise greater control over their message, but also work on common plans and provide resources to support areas of activity. Yes Scotland's less hierarchical structure meant that they operated very close to the wire in terms of being held accountable for the activities of Yes aligned campaigns that they had no direct control over, and ran the risk of being reprimanded by the Electoral Commission.

We would also argue that structural factors pre-dating the referendum had a significant impact on how the campaigns chose to organise. As an organisation heavily

based around the three unionist parties, Better Together operated more like a political party in its media handling and attempt to canvass public support; whereas although Yes Scotland could harness the SNP for aspects of its organisation it was not wholly dependent on it. This type of party/coalition structure, was also clearly demarcated in their respective tag-lines: 'Better Together is the cross party campaign' versus 'Yes Scotland is the main non-partisan campaign'.

The Yes campaign's position as the challenger in the referendum also plays a role here, both in terms of the fact that they needed to counteract hostile coverage and editorial attitudes in the mainstream media and also because their campaign was built on a platform of challenging the status quo and advocating change. Less dependent on party activists and with a narrative of hope and change, to which both activists and voters could pin their own vision of what an independent Scotland might mean, the Yes campaign was able to get more people out to work in the campaign, and to mobilise support in areas where turnout in conventional elections had been declining. If we extrapolate this point further, we can see that Yes Scotland's activity fits, to some degree, with the characteristics of contemporary collective action set out by Flanagan et al (2006). Flanagan suggests that the focus for these organisations is more to do with "what people do and how they communicate rather than on organisation structure per se" (Flanagan et al 2006:39).

The differences highlighted in the network analysis of Twitter data provided a window into the characteristics of the wider networks and campaigns (Seegerberg and Bennett 2011). This idea of a window is important because it emphasises the fact that Twitter was not **the** platform, but **a** platform. This analysis lends itself to the idea of the 'hybrid' movement (Flanagin, et al. 2006; Chadwick 2007). The activity of Yes Scotland account illustrates a model of hybridity that harnessed some of the 'digital repertoires' associated with social movements, repertoires that include "creating, appealing and increasingly convergent forms of online citizen action, fostering distributed trust across horizontally linked citizen groups, promoting the fusion of subcultural and political discourses, and creating and building upon sedimentary networks" (Chadwick, 2007:284).

The quantitative analysis combined with the qualitative interviews suggests that the Yes campaign fits Chadwick's forecast that "groups and parties create and develop subunits that exhibit social movement style digital network repertoires but such subunits are sealed off from the main campaign decision makers, or are strategically channelled

toward specific societal groups perceived as receptive to looser forms of political engagement’ (Chadwick 2007:297).

7. Conclusions

This paper has described and explained key differences between the two referendum campaign groups. We drew on the concept of hybridity to position both campaigns in a more sophisticated space, away from the simple top-down vs. bottom-up dichotomy. In addition, we affirmed that the respective campaign’s use of DCTs cannot be treated in isolation: each campaign is shaped by their strategic objectives, organisational structure, main message and structural issues. This enables us to make better sense of the broad characteristics of the two campaigns. Better Together operated as a more traditional centralised campaign that engaged with newer DCTs (i.e. social media) but in a more piecemeal way, with a reliance on email and websites as preferred communication mechanisms. Twitter was used mainly to communicate with journalists and opinion-formers and its efforts focused on putting across a uni-directional message for undecided voters. For its part, Yes Scotland exhibited some of the characteristics of a social movement which fostered the creation of a wider campaign assemblage (Nielsen 2011) with a number of actors loosely-linked, less centralised control, greater engagement with social media and clear leadership of the campaign by well-recognised and familiar political figures.

The campaigns and their use of DCTs raises normative questions. We need to be clear, however, about the criteria we use to make these assessments. In doing so, we would argue, the repertoires of engagement that citizens find rewarding should not be excluded, even if they do not fit neatly with ideals of normative political theory (c.f. Chadwick 2009). The analysis above indicates that Yes was more of a ‘movement’ style organisation, or at least a hybrid. Although both campaigns appeared to have embraced what Stromer-Galley (2014) defines as ‘controlled interactivity’, they did so to different degrees and in significantly varied ways. Moreover, the role of the Yes-aligned groups on the pro-independence side appears to have been crucial in challenging traditional campaign organisational hierarchies, which was accepted—even if at times ‘grudgingly’—by the Yes campaign.

Winning, or at least maximising electoral support, will always be important for campaign organisations, and it is in some ways counterproductive to deny it. At the same

time, their democratic ‘goodness’ also has to be evaluated and need not to be mutually exclusive with electoral success. In the case of the referendum, the focus for Better Together was very much short-term, on winning and based on polling information concentrating heavily—and in fact almost exclusively—on undecided voters who made up less than 30% of the electorate. The objective of winning the referendum vote and the campaign team’s interpretation of what was required to achieve this determined how they used DCTs, including social media, and the degree of control they tried to exert over it.

The Yes campaign, on the other hand, had a different analysis and different characteristics. Its main goal was also to win the referendum and campaign staff affirmed that they were also focused on undecided voters. But Yes also clearly had a strategic emphasis on trying to reinforce and harness the enthusiasm of supporters by trying to create what one of their campaign managers described as a ‘funnel of engagement’. There was also evidence of a more hybrid type of organisation and repertoires of collective action. Indeed, as discussed, the pro-independent campaign had a much broader network of groups, many of them working in a decentralised manner. It does not mean that they simply let them ‘get on with it’, but that they put much more emphasis on encouraging participation and hence, along with attempts at harnessing the enthusiasm, also relented some degree of control.

To what extent did this make Yes more democratic? Or, from the opposite angle: what types of uses of DCTs, especially in relation to the involvement of citizens, are of higher democratic value? Kreiss (2009) suggests — in line with a lot of the literature, if with different emphasis—that it should include a degree of involvement in “policy, strategy, or the allocation of resources”. In other words, participation per se is not enough, citizens should also have an influential say, hence emphasising the importance of a more equal relationship between campaign officials and volunteers as well as a degree of accountability of the former to the latter. For all the participatory characteristics of Yes Scotland, this was not often the case within the official campaign itself, although much more so in the broader campaign assemblage, demonstrating its hybridity.

What are these criteria of (good) democratic participation and engagement based on? In some ways they are clearly highly valuable. But they are also often quite ‘modernist’ in the sense that they focus on influence over policy, ‘thick citizenship’ and rational discussion, in line with the ‘deliberative turn’ of much political science and communication studies at the end of last century, a paradigm which is still highly

influential especially in regard to the democratic potential of digital technologies (Chadwick 2009). Moreover, even if not often explicitly, there is a tendency towards valuing mechanisms of direct, rather than representative, democracy. These assumptions are not only highly demanding (Chadwick 2009, 15) but also partial. It is not only about whether it is achievable but also whether there is more to be achieved, which lies outside (but not in opposition to, it should be emphasised) the realms of policy, deliberation and rationality. Specifically, it is important to (also) focus on the expressive elements of political participation, which are habitually undervalued: participation for participation's sake, which can also empower. In this sense, Schudson's (1998) pre-Progressive reform 'good citizen' comes to mind, highly motivated by social pleasure (and pressure), strong on spectacle and exuberance, rather than the more rationalistic but often sterile engagement based on ideas, policy and information that has characterised ideals in—and in many ways since—the Progressive era. This is not to over-romanticise DCT-enabled participation but to value it—within its clear limitations—as a positive democratic development. It is also to acknowledge that campaigns can—at best—achieve a combination of strategic aims with democratic value, but not if the latter is conceptualised in opposition to the former.

In the case of the referendum, some of the participation—often sparked via social media—was regarded by campaign managers as a misuse of resources (e.g. low quality canvassing returns and erroneous targets), and even on occasion (e.g. protests against 'BBC bias') as a nuisance with potentially damaging repercussions. But Yes' officials were also able to assess it beyond the narrowly instrumental. Firstly, there was an acknowledgement that it was futile—or certainly far too costly in terms of enthusiasm—to try achieve full control. Secondly, and relatedly, this kind of participation was regarded as a key element for sustaining the passion of the pro-independence campaign as it allowed activists to engage in personal contact and to enact expressive action. In addition, it undoubtedly had an impact on the aftermath, including in the striking increasing in membership for all parties, especially the SNP. The key thing however was the feeling of achievement, especially but not exclusively amongst Yes supporters that Scotland had engaged in a democratic debate which had engaged and energised citizens. Despite the defeat of the Yes campaign in the vote, activists felt empowered and in the aftermath it was the SNP who seized the political momentum. The unprecedented triumph of the SNP at the recent UK general Election where it won 56 out of 59 Scottish seats suggests that

the long term impact of the referendum campaign, and the important role within it played by DCTs, is not finished and in that context our work remains relevant even though the referendum process concluded in September 2014.

References

- Bennett, W. Lance, and Alexandra Segerberg. 2013. *The Logic of Connective Action: Digital Media and the Personalization of Contentious Politics*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Bimber, Bruce. 2014a. "Digital Media in the Obama Campaigns of 2008 and 2012: Adaptation to the Personalized Political Communication Environment." *Journal of Information Technology & Politics* 11: 130-50.
- . 2014b. "Digital Media in the Obama Campaigns of 2008 and 2012: Adaptation to the Personalized Political Communication Environment." *Journal of Information, Technology & Politics* 11: 130-50.
- Bimber, Bruce, Andrew J. Flanagin, and Cynthia Stohl. 2005. "Reconceptualizing Collective Action in the Contemporary Media Environment." *Communication Theory* 15: 389-413.
- Brandes, Ulrik, and Thomas Erlebach. 2005. *Network Analysis: Methodological Foundations*. Vol. 3418: Springer Science & Business Media.
- Cardenal, Ana S. . 2013. "Why Mobilize Support Online? The Paradox of Party Behaviour Online." *Party Politics* 19: 83–103.
- Chadwick, Andrew. 2007. "Digital Network Repertoires and Organizational Hybridity." *Political Communication* 24: 283-301.
- . 2013. *The Hybrid Media System: Politics and Power*. London/New York: Oxford University Press.
- . 2012. "Recent Shifts in the Relationship between the Internet and Democratic Engagement in Britain and the United States: Granularity, Informational Exuberance, and Political Learning." In *Digital Media and Political Engagement Worldwide: A Comparative Study*, eds. Eva Anduiza, Michael Jensen and Laia Jorba. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- . 2009. "Web 2.0: New Challenges for the Study of E-Democracy in an Era of Informational Exuberance." *ISJLP* 5: 10-42.
- Cioffi-Revilla, Claudio. 2013. *Introduction to Computational Social Science: Principles and Applications*: Springer Science & Business Media.
- Enli, Gunn, and Hallvard Moe. 2013. "Introduction to Special Issue." *Information, Communication & Society* 16: 637-45.
- Enli, Gunn Sara, and Eli Skogerbø. 2013. "Personalized Campaigns in Party-Centred Politic." *Information, Communication & Society* 16: 757-74.
- Flanagin, Andrew J. , Cynthia Stohl, and Bruce Bimber. 2006. "Modeling the Structure of Collective Action ". *Communication Monographs* 73: 29-54,.
- Gibson, Rachel. 2015. "Party Change, Social Media and the Rise of 'Citizen-Initiated' Campaigning." *Party Politics* 21: 183-97.
- Gibson, Rachel K., Wainer Lusoli, and Stephen Ward. 2008. "Nationalizing and Normalizing the Local? A Comparative Analysis of Online Candidate Campaigning in Australia and Britain." *Journal of Information Technology & Politics* 4: 15-30.

- Gibson, Rachel, Michael Margolis, David Resnick, and Stephen J. Ward. 2003. "Election Campaigning on the Ww in the Us and Uk: A Comparative Analysis." *Party Politics* 9: 47-76.
- Hindman, Matthew. 2005. "The Real Lessons of Howard Dean: Reflections on the First Digital Campaign." *Perspectives on Politics* 3: 121-28.
- Howard, Philip. 2005. "Deep Democracy, Thin Citizenship: The Impact of Digital Media in Political Campaign Strategy." *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 597: 153-70.
- Howard, Philip N. 2006. *New Media Campaigns and the Managed Citizen*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Karpf, David. 2010. "Measuring the Success of Digital Campaigns." In *Measuring the Success of Digital Campaigns*, ed. Mary Joyce. New York: International Debate Education Association. 151-64.
- Koc-Michalska, K , Darren Lilleker, P. Surowiec, and P. Baranowski. 2014. "Poland's 2011 Online Election Campaign: New Tools, New Professionalism." *Journal of Information Technology & Politics* 11: 186-205.
- Kreiss, Daniel. 2009. "Developing the "Good Citizen": Digital Artifacts, Peer Networks, and Formal Organization During the 2003–2004 Howard Dean Campaign." *Journal of Information Technology & Politics* 6: 281-97.
- . 2014. "Seizing the Moment: The Presidential Campaigns' Use of Twitter During the 2012 Electoral Cycle." *New Media & Society* Published online first, 5 December 2014.
- . 2012. *Taking Our Country Back: The Crafting of Networked Politics from Howard Dean to Barack Obama*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Lilleker, Darren, and Dan Jackson. 2011. *Political Campaigning, Elections and the Internet: Comparing the Us, Uk, France and Germany*. New York: Routledge.
- Nielsen, Rasmus Kleis. 2012. *Ground Wars: Personalized Communication in Political Campaigns*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- . 2011. "Mundane Internet Tools, Mobilizing Practices, and the Coproduction of Citizenship in Political Campaigns." *New Media & Society* 13: 755-71.
- Norris, Pippa, and John Curtice. 2008. "Getting the Message Out: A Two-Step Model of the Role of the Internet in Campaign Communication Flows During the 2005 British General Election." *Journal of Information Technology & Politics* 4: 3-13.
- Schudson, Michael. 1998. *The Good Citizen: A History of American Civic Life*. New York: Free Press.
- Segerberg, Alexandra, and W. Lance Bennett. 2011. " Social Media and the Organization of Collective Action: Using Twitter to Explore the Ecologies of Two Climate Change Protests." *The Communication Review* 14.
- Stromer-Galley, Jennifer. 2014. *Presidential Campaigning in the Internet Age*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Vaccari, Cristian. 2013. *Digital Politics in Western Democracies: A Comparative Study*. Baltimore, Maryland: Johns Hopkins University Press.

- . 2010. "'Technology Is a Commodity': The Internet in the 2008 United States Presidential Election." *Journal of Information Technology & Politics* 7: 318-39.
- Wright, Scott. 2012. "Politics as Usual? Revolution, Normalization and a New Agenda for Online Deliberation." *New Media & Society* 14: 244-61.

End Notes

ⁱ The interviews were carried out between November 2014 and March 2015 and were recorded and transcribed. On average they were an hour long and were conducted face to face, although there were two exceptions: one was done over the phone and another one via Skype. Quotes from the interviews have been anonymised in line with standard ethical procedures, although we have indicated where relevant whether the interviewee being quoted came from Better Together or from the Yes campaign.

ⁱⁱ Twitter data was collected using the public Search API. This was queried three times per day for the hashtag '#indyref'.

The relatively low percentage of twitter users whose tweets are geo-located make it very difficult to estimate accurately the proportion of those who used #indyref in Scotland.

The data consisted of: a unique tweet identifier; a location if known (latitude/longitude); the date and time; the account posting the tweet; and the full text.

For the network analysis, it should be noted that the direction of the interaction, i.e. who mentioned who was preserved. However, loops (or self-referrals) were removed. In addition to constructing this network of interactions, some preliminary work was done to code the nodes into a pro-Yes, pro-No, or neutral classification. This was done by manually coding the most popular hashtags present in the dataset and then scoring the nodes in the network based on their usage of these hashtags.